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**Future Church:
Envisioning the Church of
England in Southern Ryedale
in the Second Decade
of the 21st Century**

A Thesis

submitted for the degree of

Doctor of Theology and Ministry

in Durham University

Department of Theology and Religion

by

The Revd Peter Hugh Bowes

2012

Abstract

Southern Ryedale in North Yorkshire is a rural Church of England deanery in the Diocese of York, with a large number of small villages surrounding a market town. With reducing stipendiary clergy numbers and demographic pressures it faces significant challenges. This study explores what (if any) sort of future might be envisioned for the church in the deanery and the sort of ministry that might be required for that future. Noting that the predominant style of the churches in Southern Ryedale (as in many other rural areas of England) is central, the study explores the nature of central churchmanship as a form of being church that has been - and may continue to be - particularly suited to a rural context. The study seeks to distinguish between the default or inherited form of central that has been prevalent, and a more intentional form that might allow the church to engage with 21st century challenges, not least to grapple with issues of discipleship and mission which may enable it to stem and reverse the decline of numbers which threatens its very survival. A study of two typical benefices within the deanery, one a town benefice and the other a multi-church village benefice, produces evidence that not only matches the central model but also indicates possible hope for the future if embodied in a more intentional model of church. The anticipated further decline of stipendiary clergy numbers will require greater reliance on other forms of ministry, not least that of lay people. The reduced number of stipendiary clergy may well be located in, or based on, the town and, ministering from there to the villages, will have an important role in the oversight and support of lay people in ministry.

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Maps at figures 2 and 3 are courtesy of Ryedale District Council; that at figure 4 is from the Diocese of York Directory for 2010/11¹; that at Figure 5 is based on Google Maps.

¹ Diocese of York, *Directory 2010/11*, (York: 2010)

List of Abbreviations used in this Thesis

In addition to conventional abbreviations, the following are used throughout the Thesis. The terms marked * are explained in the Glossary in Appendix 1.

AWA	<i>A Way Ahead</i> , the current mission initiative of the Diocese of York, explored in several publications. ²
ACORA	Archbishops' Commission on Rural Affairs: The Faith in the Countryside Report ³
ARMPT	The Advanced Research Methods in Practical Theology module forming the preliminary submission for this degree.
BCP	The Book of Common Prayer ⁴
CTSR	Churches Together in Southern Ryedale
CW	Common Worship: Services and Prayers of the Church of England ⁵
fte	Full time equivalent (used in relation to part time clergy posts)
HfD	House for Duty*
NSM	Non-Stipendiary Minister *
ODCC	Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church ⁶
OLM	Ordained Local Minister *
ONS	Office of National Statistics
PCC	Parochial Church Council *
RDC	Ryedale District Council
SSM	Self-Supporting Minister *

My ethnographic present

The position is stated as at 31 January 2011.

² Diocese of York, *A Way Ahead - Mission and Ministry for the Future*, (York: 2008); Diocese of York, *A Way Ahead: Refreshing Worship*, (York: 2009); Diocese of York, *A Way Ahead: Mutual Support within God's Family*, (York: 2010) Diocese of York, *A Way Ahead: Sermons in Stone*, (York: 2010)

³ ACORA, *Archbishops' Commission on Rural Affairs, Faith in the Countryside*, (Worthing: Churchman, 1990).

⁴ *Book of Common Prayer*, (Cambridge: 1662)

⁵ *Common Worship: Services and Prayers for the Church of England*, (London: Church House Publishing, 2000)

⁶ F.L. Cross and E. A. Livingstone (eds.), *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 3rd ed, 1997).

A note about references to interviews

To preserve anonymity, interviewees are referred to by a randomly allocated number; quotations have been edited, where necessary, to remove identifying material. I have been cautious about identifying interviewees by role, by category or by gender in attributing quotations, and have only done so when necessary for the argument and when this would not result in individuals becoming identifiable. The town benefice is generally referred to as Borchester and the village benefice as Ambridge.

Declaration

None of the material contained in this thesis has been previously submitted for a degree in this or any other institution. This thesis is my own work.

Statement of Copyright

The copyright of this thesis rests with the author. No quotation from it should be published without the prior written consent of the author, and information derived from it should be acknowledged.

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- my wife Beryl and family as they have tolerated with (mostly) good humour my squeezing study into odd moments that might perhaps have been better devoted to family life.

Dedication

I dedicate this thesis to the people of Southern Ryedale with the hope and prayer that together, by God's grace, we might find his future for the church in this place.

Chapter 1 Introduction

This thesis is concerned with the viability of the Church of England⁷ in a particular rural context, the deanery⁸ of Southern Ryedale in North Yorkshire. I explore what sort of future, for the rest of this decade, that church in that context has, as institution and as Christian community, and what sort of ministry that future requires.

My research has involved a general study of the deanery and a more particular study of two benefices⁹ which together provide a reasonable sample of the deanery. This study has involved qualitative interviews with a number of individuals from the benefices. It has also involved my own role as a participant observer, known and engaged in the deanery and in the benefices surveyed. The study seeks to identify factors which will influence or determine, positively or negatively, whether the organised church in the deanery has a viable future, and if so what it might be.

The deanery is one of the largest and most rural in the Diocese of York, centred on the small market towns of Malton and Norton. The deanery (like most rural parts of the Church of England) faces not only the impact of secularisation but also other substantial challenges: changing demographics and other factors of social change, a large number of church buildings, reducing numbers of stipendiary clergy struggling with multi-church benefices, declining and ageing congregations, and financial pressures.

The Deanery Plans of 2006 and 2009¹⁰ have helped provide a research framework for my study. Those Plans and recent diocesan documents¹¹ clearly anticipate change to the *status quo* but do not spell out details of the change. One aim of my research is to help engage with change by asking, and seeking to answer, the questions ‘What sort of church?’ and ‘What sort of ministry?’ An extensive literature has emerged over the last 20 years engaging with these and similar questions. However, reviewing that literature confirms my suspicion that much of it describes England south of the Humber, some is more urban or suburban than rural in its focus and much is from an evangelical perspective. My study explores the issues raised by this body of literature for northern

⁷ whilst recognising ecumenical links.

⁸ Appendix 1.

⁹ Appendix 1.

¹⁰ Southern Ryedale Deanery, *Deanery Plan 2006*, Southern Ryedale Deanery, *Deanery Plan 2009*.

¹¹ AWA

rural churches which generally are central in churchmanship. This issue of central churchmanship emerged as an important heuristic tool with which to explore my questions. Rural church remains a major bastion of the concept of parochial Christianity and it is overwhelmingly central in style and ethos. If parochial Christianity is to survive, a revived form of central church may be its best hope. This led me to devise and use the original concepts of default and intentional central churchmanship;¹² these emerged as valuable interpretative concepts which I regard as crucially important to this thesis. In very broad terms I conclude that default central has little future in the villages or the towns. Intentional central, more easily established in the towns but possible for the villages, has a future, but the very quality of it being intentional will lead it to embrace a wider range of expressions of being church.

The market towns and villages of the deanery, being communities with populations less than 10,000, are all classified as rural.¹³ However it has proved necessary to differentiate between town and villages in seeking answers to my questions.

The churches in the deanery are, and have been, predominantly central in style and until recent decades have expected resident clergy in each parish doing a great deal of the ministry and mission of the church and leading its worship. Church reorganisation, particularly in rural areas, over the last 20-30 years, with reducing clergy numbers, parishes grouped into ever larger benefices, increasing emphasis on lay participation at all levels of church life and, most recently, an emphasis on mission, has coincided with the national decline in church attendance and the substantial disappearance of younger adults from many congregations. This has been fuelled, in the eyes of many, by rampant secularisation. It results in small, ageing and beleaguered congregations trying to keep things going much as they have always been, whilst struggling with increasing financial demands from the diocese and increasing costs of keeping buildings insured, maintained and heated. Demographic issues come into play, especially in the villages (affecting not just the churches, of course): house prices in the villages and patchy availability of affordable rented housing and the continuing diminution of land-based work have forced many young families to cheaper housing in the market towns. For many of those younger families who do live in a village it is a dormitory, with work elsewhere. The villages also attract those approaching, or recently entered, retirement who can make a significant contribution to community and church if they wish to do so, and if able to overcome the suspicion with which incomers are often

¹² These terms are more fully discussed at 5.7 below; in short they encapsulate the difference between *going* to church and *being* the church.

¹³ Commission for Rural Communities, *The State of the Countryside 2005*, (Wetherby: Countryside Agency Publications, 2005), 6. See also DEFRA, *Statistical Digest of Rural England 2011*.

viewed.

The deanery faces continuing diminution of stipendiary clergy numbers.¹⁴ Alternative ministerial resources of different kinds: SSM,¹⁵ active retired clergy, or Readers¹⁶ may not be available - there are presently few of them in the deanery. To generate new SSMs or Readers from within the deanery takes a long time; to deploy them from elsewhere often seems problematical. Thus considering the future of the church inevitably involves questions of ministry and whether patterns of being church, less dependent on traditional service patterns and forms of authorised ministry, may be necessary to secure a viable Christian presence, particularly in the villages. This forms part of the wider debate at diocesan and national level about other forms of ministry, lay and ordained, Fresh Expressions of Church¹⁷ and the wider use of locally trained lay ministry. There are theological and ecclesial issues relating to the nature of the church and ministry to be considered if there is to be a principled rather than purely pragmatic response; I can only hint at these in this study, noting them as a topic for future research.

The current reality of church life in Southern Ryedale deanery (located in the present social and demographic reality of Southern Ryedale), the theological values implicit in central churchmanship, understandings of mission and of models of ministry, all engage in dialogue with each other and with other relevant disciplines, such as sociology of religion, to seek to address the many questions that emerge supplemental to my two main questions. Is this apparent diminishing of the rural church a capitulation to secularisation, individualisation and post-modernism? Are the days of central churchmanship numbered? Can people be moved on in discipleship from their initial encounter via family service or cell group to more active participation in church life? Is that a valid objective? How does the church engage with concepts of God's mission in the world? Is seeing the key to the future of the church in this area as mission a possible misuse of the concept of mission? Is the survival and prosperity of the institutional church part of God's mission plan? How do we deal with 'the implicitness of ecclesial life'?¹⁸ Can the church as the gathering of the faithful actually operate for long without some form of organisation and institution? These are some of the questions grappled with in later chapters.

¹⁴ As does the rest of the Church of England: Church of England House of Bishops, *Challenges for the New Quinquennium GS 1815* (London, Church of England, 2011), 8-11.

¹⁵ Appendix 1.

¹⁶ Appendix 1.

¹⁷ Appendix 1.

¹⁸ Martyn Percy, *Shaping the Church: The Promise of Implicit Theology*, (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), 1.

Chapter 1 Introduction

In the next chapter I discuss my approach to the research project and outline the development of my hypothesis. This is followed by an update of the literature survey undertaken for ARMPT and then by a chapter describing the context of the research – the deanery as a place and as an ecclesial setting. A substantial chapter on central churchmanship then follows, providing theological, ecclesiological and sociological underpinnings for the emerging thesis. This is followed by two chapters based on my research findings, one concerned with the images of church suggested by the interviews and the other with the sort of ministry to be experienced in that church. A final chapter highlights some of the conclusions to be drawn. Areas for possible further research are indicated throughout.

Chapter 2 Creating the Research Project

In this chapter I discuss the research methodology and method employed in this project and describe and reflect on the process of qualitative research and subsequent data analysis. I engage in appropriate self-disclosure of factors possibly affecting the research and discuss the development of my hypothesis over the life of the project.

This research project involved a number of stages, easily enough separated in a piece of writing, but in practice overlapping. A major part of the process was investigating Southern Ryedale deanery as it is, initially by identifying the situation and the questions to be researched, then progressing to a more detailed examination of that 'as is' situation, both by literature-based research (about the locality and the churches) and by qualitative research (of the church situations and the people involved). Data emerging from that examination needed constant evaluation against appropriate theological and ecclesiological material (aided by insights of other relevant disciplines¹⁹), and inevitably required further investigation and research before conclusions began to be drawn. The process was cyclical rather than linear, leading to the sensation of overlap mentioned above. I envisaged this process as being a conversation, teasing out a story (or stories)²⁰ of the churches as they now are, in order to help address the questions of what might be, and so it turned out. Importantly, the process allowed views to emerge from the situations and respondents, rather than be imposed.

2.1 Methodology and method

I recognise the desirability of separating the consideration and description of methodology and method²¹ whilst recognising their interdependence. My methodology is discussed in my ARMP submission, reproduced in Appendix 6. I hoped that my anticipated cyclical and conversational approach, reflecting this methodology, would allow a method to be adopted for this project that would be basically that of the pastoral cycle. Thus, employing a questioning and reflective cycle (or spiral), allowed an ongoing conversation to develop between the situation I was researching and theology,

¹⁹ John Swinton and Harriet Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research* (London: SCM, 2006), 200; Elaine Graham, Heather Walton, and Frances Ward, *Theological Reflection: Methods*, (London: SCM Press, 2005), 11.

²⁰ See James F. Hopewell, *Congregation : Stories and Structures* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1987).

²¹ Cf. Helen Cameron et al. (eds.), *Studying Local Churches: A Handbook* (London: SCM, 2005); Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology*, 86.

ecclesiology, history, sociology of religion and other disciplines, with that conversation then further informing the praxis of the observed situation. I hope that the conversation has aspired to mutual critical correlation and critical faithfulness,²² and that my theological reflection has not been confined to one point of the cycle.²³ This approach has been useful because of the way the dialogue it established allowed views to emerge: the analysis of the qualitative interviews saw very interesting views emerging, some certainly not what I had anticipated at the outset. I have found myself exposed to a degree of 'ordinary theology'²⁴ which has facilitated an opening up of the often different perceptions of church held by lay people and by clergy. The early stages of the pastoral cycle, observing and researching, provided knowledge of a different category from that which the theological and social scientific interrogation provided, and led to interesting conversations.

2.2 Research methods

Initially I intended to research all the benefices in the deanery, but quickly realised this would be impossible within the time and resources of this project. Given the nature of the deanery with a market town core, with three parishes, surrounded by a number of multi-church village benefices, I selected two benefices, one a market town parish, Borchester, the other a benefice of several parishes (and rather more churches) covering a number of villages, Ambridge. From my knowledge of the deanery I was satisfied that each selected benefice was typical²⁵ of the others of its category, and the two benefices selected were ones where I had ready access as a participant to facilitate the research process. I concluded that limiting my empirical research to these two benefices would provide an approach that would be viable, realistic and produce results typical of the deanery as a whole.

I first of all developed a rich account of the current demographic, social, economic and ecclesial context of the deanery.²⁶ This, although supplemented by first-hand knowledge, was mainly literature-based, as was my research of central churchmanship (including historical context and perspective),²⁷ theological issues and current thinking on ministry issues. These blocks of research enabled me to refine and articulate my hypothesis, ready to be tested by the data from the qualitative research, and then in

²² Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology*, 93.

²³ James Nieman, 'Practical Theology and Qualitative Research - by John Swinton and Harriet Mowat,' *Reviews in Religion & Theology* 14, no. 2 (2007), 233-4.

²⁴ See Jeff Astley, *Ordinary Theology*, (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002).

²⁵ See Chapter 4.3.

²⁶ Forming the basis for chapter 4.

²⁷ Forming the basis for chapter 5.

turn further interrogated by the theological research.

Carefully conducted qualitative research enabled me to tease out the stories, hopes, fears and aspirations of individuals in relation to the future of their own churches. Much of this was done by semi-structured interviews, as discussed below. I also made use of modified participant observation/critical pastoral presence (discussed below) and journaling (which may be less open to the role-confusion risks that attend the priest-researcher). The usefulness of these latter methods was not as primary research data, but in providing a broad level of background data on the deanery and benefices, and as analytical and interrogating tools. With a similar aim of providing background data, and triangulation of my own emerging views, I also conducted lengthy conversations with six senior church figures with good working knowledge of rural ministry from York diocese and also from several other dioceses in both provinces of the Church of England.

In the research I interviewed three distinct groups of people. The first was the 'insiders', current, or recent, churchwardens, actively engaged in the running of their churches, who might be expected to have some perspective on what the church is, what it has been doing and where it might be going. The second group (a later addition to what was originally to be two groups) was individuals involved in the churches, but not in a leadership category. I hoped (and succeeded) to include some who were moving into (or out of) greater involvement in the church (e.g. adult confirmation candidates, recent joiners or leavers of cell groups). The third group was drawn from those who had 'used' the church for baptisms, weddings and funerals in the benefices over the preceding two years, who regard it as 'their church' to be available for these purposes, but were otherwise (at best) only occasional attenders. Given the nature of the research, I felt it important to assemble interviewees who, between them, had experienced ministry in most of the churches surveyed. I refer to those three groups as categories 1, 2 and 3 respectively.

My knowledge of the benefices was invaluable when it came to selecting interviewees. Whilst category 1 was straightforward and required relatively little choice to be made from the available pool of churchwardens, the selections in categories 2 and 3 were made considerably easier by my knowledge of the people and situations. To that extent I was able to act as my own gatekeeper and avoid the possible distortions that might have resulted from my being dependent on a third party in that role. Within category 2 I was therefore able to identify individuals at different points of involvement in the life of the church. The choice for category 3 was largely dictated by my personal knowledge of individuals for whom I had conducted baptism, wedding or funeral services over the

preceding two years and whom I felt it would be pastorally appropriate to contact in this way. In one or two cases, I had previously raised with the people concerned the possibility that they might at a future date help me with some research.

I interviewed 18 individuals, six from each category. In categories 1 and 2 there were two interviewees from Borchester and four from Ambridge, in each case with a 50/50 gender split. Category 3 being more opportunistic ended up with five interviewees from Borchester and one from Ambridge and a gender split 60/40 in favour of females. Category 3 covered three weddings, two baptisms and one funeral. Of those I approached to interview only one (from category 2) declined, and one was unavailable on the day (so that I interviewed one member of a couple instead of both together).²⁸

Initially I considered using focus groups, interviewing together all the respondents in each category. This seemed attractive, both in reducing the number of interview sessions and benefiting from interaction between participants. However, further thought indicated likely problems, both practical and ethical. Having interviewed one couple together I concluded that individual interviews were in fact more fruitful, and certainly easier to transcribe and analyse.

I intended to conduct a slightly larger number of interviews, perhaps 25, but by the time I had done 15 it became apparent that I was reaching saturation. The extent to which similar information was being given in the interviews and the rapidly diminishing number of new ideas emerging was evidenced as I coded the interviews within NVivo and noted the fall-off of new coding nodes needing to be created.

The interviews were conducted in the first half of 2009 and were structured around six main questions, each having a number of supplementary questions to be used as necessary to ensure full coverage of the main questions.²⁹ I found that in most interviews I needed to use many of the supplementary questions to secure coverage or to restart a train of thought if a particular question proved difficult.

As my research involved interviews with individuals the whole process was subject to the ethical approvals process of the university. My dual role as priest/researcher was, properly, a factor in that, and the invitation and consent processes carefully addressed those concerns. The invitation letter and consent form, and the process followed for each interview, are in Appendix 4.

²⁸ Appendix 4 contains more information about the interviewees.

²⁹ Appendix 3.

Each interview (on average lasting just under an hour) was transcribed more or less in full; some anecdotal material was summarised and referenced for future return if likely to be relevant. An interview memorandum was prepared for each interview, noting salient facts that might be useful in the interpretation and analysis. The transcripts were coded in NVivo using free nodes to identify interesting issues and concepts within the interviews. These free nodes (about 100 in total) were subsequently grouped into a dozen tree nodes reflecting what began to emerge as key concepts.³⁰ Some free nodes were allocated to more than one tree node. The tree nodes then formed the basis of interrogating the data, running various queries within NVivo, allowing material addressing similar issues to be brought together. Reflecting on the results of those queries was the first stage of the analysis and led to my writing memoranda for each tree node. My first attempt at synthesising the interview material was largely a collation of these node memoranda and related interview extracts and proved to be a rather negative and unfocussed piece of work. A subsequent approach, involving the use of images, discussed in the next section, proved much more fruitful and led in a direction which ultimately shaped chapter 6.

2.3 Further reflections on my research methods

I stumbled on the use of images³¹ as part of my process of reflection and subsequently discovered that the use of images had been written up as a practical theology method.³² This provided a helpful insight into the process that I had adopted, and enabled further reflection on that process. The method described in *The Art of Theological Reflection* is a modification of the traditional pastoral cycle, adopting the following sequence. When we enter our **experience**, we encounter our **feelings**. When we pay attention to those **feelings**, **images** arise. Considering and questioning those **images** may spark **insight**. **Insight** leads, if we are willing and ready, to **action**.³³

As part of this cycle the authors stress the importance of an initial listening, or feeling, in relation to the observed situation or experience, allowing this to happen free from interpretation, and particularly from the interpretation that comes from set beliefs or set experiences. They suggest that in exploring the feelings that arise from the experienced (or in my case observed and experienced) situation images arise, and

³⁰ Tree nodes and free nodes within them are in Appendix 7.

³¹ Not to be confused with the use of imagination although there are obvious linkages. Cf. David H Kelsey, *Imagining Redemption*, (Louisville, Ky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005).

³² Patricia O'Connell Killen and J de Beer, *The Art of Theological Reflection*, (New York: Crossroads, 1994).

³³ Killen and de Beer, *Art*, 21-45.

considering and questioning those images sparks insight. That was very much the process that I followed in exploring the views of church emerging from the interviews. Allowing the interviews to generate feelings was an interesting process. The first time I did it, simply by collating interview material, as noted above, was not particularly helpful. Standing back slightly and allowing the experience of the interviews to generate a response within me (the feeling stage, perhaps) generated a number of images. Reflecting on those images sparked a number of insights - and they continue to spark insights and are leading to action, in my case, drawing out conclusions for the thesis. The process of insight requires a conversation with theology and with culture and with positions.³⁴ The process of theological reflection with which I have engaged has been an engagement with the lived narrative emerging from the interviews and my own participant observation, and an engagement in conversation with tradition (that is Scripture and the other elements forming part of the tradition of the Church). There is also a conversation with culture, in this case the surrounding and changing culture of Southern Ryedale (as a place and as a deanery) and of wider society, interpreted and applied through the disciplines of anthropology and sociology of religion. In doing this I have had to be aware of positions (attitudes, opinions, beliefs and convictions), adopted by some of my interviewees as well as my own positions (noted in my researcher reflections and disclosure below). Experience is an important factor. The authors remind us that in order to reflect we must leave the flow of experience and focus on a smaller, concrete event or situation.³⁵ That was a helpful observation in terms of the potentially limitless scope of this project. It is – and can only be - an observation at a period of time (and in practice that has been difficult enough with the change that has occurred during the two or three years of the research phase). I am observing the present situation, as at 31 January 2011, and drawing some conclusions for the relatively short-term future beyond it.

In concluding this section I note that Dulles³⁶ (with whom I engage in chapter 5) explores the use of images and how they might then solidify into models, in his case models of church.

2.4 My dual role as priest and researcher

I was known in both benefices, as indeed in most of the benefices of the deanery, and I was ‘an insider’ sitting on the deanery standing committee and closely involved with the deanery planning process, so I was well aware of possible pitfalls. My role was

³⁴ Killen and de Beer, *Art*, 52-57.

³⁵ Killen and de Beer, *Art*, 59-60.

³⁶ Avery Dulles, *Models of the Church*, (New York: Doubleday, 2nd ed. 2002), 12-15.

certainly not that of an anonymous interviewer nor that of a straightforward participant observer. Due to the constraints and opportunities of the pastoral context, my dual role as priest and researcher, and the values I brought to the task, I was not a neutral or interest-free observer. The role of the priest-researcher is a privileged one, allowing the critical pastoral presence of a professional and reflexive practitioner. Whilst needing to be exercised with care and sensitivity, in practice it offered a valuable and useful method. More than one interviewee indicated that they had been willing to talk to me, and to talk freely, when they may not have been willing to talk so freely, or at all, to a lay, or unknown, interviewer.³⁷ It quickly became clear that my observing role could only be used to provide background and interpretive data (mainly noted in my research journal and other reflective writing) and not primary analysable data. That realisation meant that the otherwise substantial possibilities for conflict and other ethical issues were avoided. The relegation of the observer role to this background status also meant that I was able to avoid the need for possibly cumbersome and counter-productive disclosures and consent-seeking.

My dual role as priest and researcher required careful thought to satisfy the ethical approvals process, but also, as the interviews progressed, I found it beneficial to reflect on the very particular participant observer role in which I found myself. The role is a privileged one, both in terms of relationships (where I have had much more open access than I might have had as an outside researcher) and in terms of the overview it gives me of the parishes, benefices and deanery. There have been times when 'the day job' has felt like 'lived research', a tremendous benefit, even when the data emerging had to be treated simply as background knowledge.

It has enabled my own observations to supplement and test the data emerging from the interviews. Consequently the analysis of the interviews has been a much richer and more valuable experience than if I had simply been a researcher conducting the interviews with no other knowledge of the situation. It has also given me access to key third parties for the triangulation conversations mentioned earlier which were particularly valuable as I worked on the analysis of my main interviews and started forming conclusions.

Some of these benefits do have downsides. Even more than any interviewer/observer would be in such a situation, I have had to be aware of the pastoral sensitivity of some of my research. I have been inhibited in critiquing certain elements of what I have observed because it would be far too easy for the individuals involved in those

³⁷ e.g. 16

situations to be identified, and a critique could have had severe pastoral consequences. Apart from those issues, my involvement in and knowledge of the researched situation exposes me to the risk of prejudice and of imposing my own views. The self-disclosure exercise preceding the interviews, revisited since, and summarised in section 2.5, has been an important safeguard, although I conclude that this reflection on my role as participant observer has proved more useful to the research process as a whole. I have reflected how different my participant observer role might have been if I had come to the task as someone else, for example an urban evangelical, rather than, as I have done, someone committed to the central stance of the rural church. Who I am and where I come from shapes my participant observer role.

2.5 Researcher disclosure

So who am I, where do I come from? I am male, white, married, middle class, and more than middle aged. After a career in the law, during which I was also a Reader, I was ordained in my fifties in the Church of England and have served since ordination in market town and rural parishes. An active and committed Christian and churchgoer for most of my life in a variety of contexts and styles, my theological stance has moved over the years from conservative evangelical via charismatic to liberal and catholic. I have developed a principled attachment to the centre of the Church of England as that which best enables it to serve as the church for the parish, particularly away from urban and suburban situations. Thus I am researching situations with which I am familiar and to which I am committed, leading me to be both sympathetic to the situation and critical of it. My wide experience of a variety of churches, churchmanships and theological positions helps me to appreciate the breadth of viewpoints of the churches and interviewees within this project, whilst also leaving me alert to possible prejudices against certain viewpoints encountered in my past. In the interviews and analysis I was aware of detecting views being expressed by one or two interviewees with which I found myself no longer in sympathy, and also identifying some interviewees expressing their own discomfort with, or bad experience, of such views. I have worked hard to avoid any prejudices distorting the analysis.

2.6 Development of my hypothesis

I conclude this chapter by briefly tracing the development of my hypothesis to demonstrate how the research has shaped it, particularly as the thesis I now present does not differ materially from the hypothesis in my research proposal.

The outline proposal that I prepared before embarking on this project did not contain a formal hypothesis, but the outline of the proposed research can be read as an embryonic hypothesis and, in edited form, read:

My approach to the project would be first of all to develop a rich account of the current demographic, social, and economic, as well as ecclesiastical context. This may need to be supplemented by structured conversations with clergy and selected lay people in the deanery, and will also reflect my own immersion in the life of the deanery.

It is already clear that the deanery is to face continued reduction of stipendiary clergy numbers, without necessarily gaining partially compensating resources of NSM or active retired clergy or Readers The deanery is therefore going to have to address seriously how other ministerial resources and forms of ministry might be provided.

I anticipate that a review of the fairly extensive recent literature on the subject of rural church and 'mission shaped church' may confirm my suspicion, from some familiarity with the literature, that much of it is focussed on the southern part of England, a good deal of it is more urban or suburban than rural in its approach and much, but by no means all, of it is from an evangelical perspective. One of the areas I would wish to consider is the applicability of this body of literature to rural churches which tend generally not to be specifically evangelical, catholic or liberal in their ethos, but solidly central in tradition; and also whether the basis of the published rural literature is sufficiently applicable to the rural north of England with its reportedly higher levels of residual spirituality (if not church attendance). I would also wish to address the significance and effect of the substantial body, especially in villages, who claim 'ownership' of the church but who rarely attend and some of whom may provide little financial support either.

Even at this very early stage the potential significance of central churchmanship had been identified.

That very tentative offering was followed by an intensive year reading and thinking as the research proposal was put together and a much more detailed hypothesis spelt out.

The hypothesis contained in the research proposal for ARMPT read as follows:

The rural Church of England, particularly in Southern Ryedale, is and has been in the past predominantly central in churchmanship. Closer analysis of what is described as central reveals complexity. There are different shades of meaning (and indeed wider changes of terminology) both over a longer period of time and at the present time, between different locations, not least between village and market town parishes. It is arguably the case from both ecclesiological and sociological perspectives that being central is a key element of being a parish church (especially in a rural/market town context) and has been both an integral part of, and an essential element of the survival of, rural church and its appeal to its local community - whether or not that community has regularly attended church, and regardless of the theological questions that might thereby be raised.

Recent changes both in patterns of church going and in the demographics of Southern Ryedale, coupled with ongoing social change, a trend towards differentiation, and reduced ministerial numbers, place severe strain on the viability (in terms of human and financial resources) of these traditional models of church, especially in the villages. The model that has served in the past is unlikely to be viable for the future, unless it can continue to adapt to increasing financial demands linked with reducing ministerial resource and declining numbers of churchgoers to support these demands, and changing patterns of belief. The particular characteristics of central church may lend themselves to adapting to the changes and providing (albeit in a different form) a church that is both viable and vibrant for the future and consistent with normative theological models of church. Central church's lack of firm boundaries and its widely drawn soteriology make it suited to the task in hand, although its lack of differentiation and cutting edge will lessen its appeal to some. I will, therefore, argue that village church is not inevitably condemned to wither to the point where lack of critical mass of support consigns village church to the same fate as village shop and village post office, but that may happen in some places.

My own theological principles, hinted at above, lead me to make the assertion that the church in rural areas has a future. What shape that future might be, ecclesially and organisationally, has yet to emerge. Given the inevitability that the ministry it has will be of a different shape from today's (and yesterday's) ministry, the sort of ministry best suited for that future rural church needs to emerge with the emerging church. For many of the village churches in Southern Ryedale the models of being church that have worked (to a degree) in the past will no longer be numerically or financially viable due to the continuing impact of social and other change. I will suggest that a different model of being church will emerge, less building focussed and seeing fewer formal services held on a regular basis within the villages (but perhaps more informal gatherings), and more coming together for worship on a benefice basis or even centred on the towns. That model of being church will require a different role for both (reduced numbers of) clergy and for lay Christians. The same forces for change will also affect the town churches, but their relatively greater resources of people and money will mean those churches will continue to function, but the manner of their functioning and their ministry will also change.

More than two years later, after completing my interviews and my analysis of them, that essentially still remains my hypothesis, although there have been one or two challenges along the way.

Increasingly I have seen central churchmanship as a key way in and heuristic tool for my investigation. The lack of any significant or serious literature on the subject remains puzzling, and a challenge, as my research interviews and my wider conversations broadly support my conviction of the importance of this concept.³⁸ Increasingly, and this is a major original development within the hypothesis, I saw the need to differentiate between various categories of central and to make a distinction between default central and intentional central.

³⁸ as also does e.g. Douglas Davies, 'Spirituality. Churchmanship and Anglican Priests,' *Journal of Empirical Theology* 6, no. 1 (1993).

The question of viability that surfaced in the hypothesis is a crucial one that has developed into issues of critical mass and sustainability.

Some additional concepts emerged as being important to the project. Concepts of ordinariness and ordinary religion seem to have significance. Issues of sacred space and place surfaced strongly in the interview and analysis process and at one stage (and with less space constraint) might have featured more substantially in the thesis: this indicates an avenue for future research, of particular relevance if widespread closure of church buildings becomes likely. The need to engage with ideas of mission within the life of the church emerged strongly and has influenced some aspects of the articulation of the thesis. Increasingly mission is seen to have close links with concepts of commitment and discipleship.

I had envisaged a wider discussion of ministerial issues; these remain important, and there is interview data in support, but constraints of space have limited the discussion of them that is possible.

So the hypothesis stated in my research proposal remains the hypothesis I explore and, I believe, validate in this thesis.

Chapter 3 Literature updated

This chapter updates my earlier substantial literature survey³⁹ with recently published, and recently discovered, writing in what remains a prolific field of endeavour.

In my initial survey I recognised *God Shaped Mission*⁴⁰ as being probably the most significant, and theologically coherent, contribution to the flood of writing triggered by the publication of *Mission Shaped Church*,⁴¹ certainly so far as concerns rural ministry. That remains my assessment. One of its strengths is its emphasis on the particularity of rural. It is also very positive about the prospects for rural ministry and for developing ministry in a rural context, provided that this is done in an authentic rural manner and eschews the temptation to carry across urban or suburban solutions into a rural context. Parts of the book have been developed in *How to do Mission Action Planning*,⁴² which also recognises the particularity of the rural situation.

Spencer's *Anglicanism*⁴³ provides a basic overview of the three strands of churchmanship in the Church of England although, like Bartlett⁴⁴ he ignores the existence of the numerically predominant⁴⁵ central strand. He barely acknowledges the degree of crossover that exists nowadays between the three groupings, which he seems to regard as almost sacrosanct in their individuality, but interestingly he attaches importance to an experiential strand.⁴⁶

The dearth of writing on central churchmanship continues to be evident. Neither *Evangelicals Etcetera*⁴⁷ (I hoped the 'Etcetera' might say something about central) nor *Anglican Eirenicon*⁴⁸ (in spite of its aim of promoting harmony amongst different viewpoints) provided new material or insights on central church. *Structures for the Church*⁴⁹ also disappointed, but did have the advantage of a northern rural context,

³⁹ For ARMPT, see Appendix 5.

⁴⁰ Alan Smith, *God-Shaped Mission*, (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2008).

⁴¹ Church of England, *Mission-Shaped Church: Church Planting and Fresh Expressions of Church in a Changing Context*, (London: Church House Publishing, 2004).

⁴² Mike Chew and Mark Ireland, *How to Do Mission Action Planning*, (London: SPCK, 2009).

⁴³ Stephen Spencer, *Anglicanism, SCM Study Guides* (London: SCM, 2010).

⁴⁴ Alan Bartlett, *A Passionate Balance*, (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 2007).

⁴⁵ Davies, 'Churchmanship,' 8.

⁴⁶ Cf. Percy, *Shaping*, 9 and cf. Alec Ryrie, 'A Distaste for Definitions', *Church Times*, 18 February 2011, 24.

⁴⁷ Kelvin Randall, *Evangelicals Etcetera*, (Aldershot, Hants: Ashgate Publishing, 2005).

⁴⁸ John Fitch, *Anglican Eirenicon*, (Cambridge: Lutterworth, 2009).

⁴⁹ David L E Berry, *Structures for the Church*, (Malton: Gilead Books Publishing, 2008).

albeit north-west rather than north-east. *Fragmented Faith?*⁵⁰ is another book that whilst not defining central churchmanship does, by its discussion of the destructive effect of party splits within the Church of England, help to clarify what central is not. Percy, in an essay in *Reshaping Rural Ministry* provides some interesting insights into what constitutes rural central church.⁵¹

*Reshaping Rural Ministry*⁵² has proved to be a useful addition to the literature relevant to my thesis, providing a well grounded and well rounded practical and theological overview of rural ministry. Illustrated with stories and examples from rural churches, as well as theological reflection and questions to ponder, it conveys a passion for rural ministry and for helping rural ministry to respond to the myriad challenges of the early 21st century. This is well complemented by the reflective, and aptly titled, *Church and Countryside: Insights from Rural Theology*.⁵³ That book's observations on the nature of rural community make an interesting conversation with those expressed by Billings in *God and Community Cohesion*,⁵⁴ which itself can be usefully read alongside *Faith in Rural Communities*.⁵⁵

Collaborative ministry is a recurring theme of many of the books. A substantial theological reflection on this appears in *Theological Foundations for Collaborative Ministry*,⁵⁶ which also contains useful insights into the changing and developing understanding of the nature of church and ministry. Several other books reflect on the nature of church and ministry. *Ancient Faith, Future Mission*,⁵⁷ *The Human Face of Church*,⁵⁸ *If You Meet George Herbert on the Road, Kill Him*,⁵⁹ *Praying for England*,⁶⁰

⁵⁰ Leslie J. Francis, Mandy Robbins, Jeff Astley, *Fragmented Faith? : Exposing the Fault-Lines in the Church of England* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster Press, 2005).

⁵¹ Martyn Percy, 'A Vision for Initial Ministerial Education', in James Bell, Jill Hopkinson, and Trevor Willmott (eds.), *Re-Shaping Rural Ministry* (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2009), 140-56.

⁵² James Bell, Jill Hopkinson, and Trevor Willmott (eds.), *Re-Shaping Rural Ministry* (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2009).

⁵³ Tim Gibson, *Church and Countryside: Insights from Rural Theology*, (London: SCM Press, 2010).

⁵⁴ Alan Billings, *God and Community Cohesion*, (London: SPCK, 2009).

⁵⁵ Richard Farnell et al., *Faith in Rural Communities: Contributions of Social Capital to Community Vibrancy* (Stoneleigh Park: ACORA Publishing, 2006).

⁵⁶ Stephen Pickard, *Theological Foundations for Collaborative Ministry*, (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009) but cf. Richard Impey, 'Review of Theological Foundations for Collaborative Ministry,' *Practical Theology* 4, no. 1 (2011).

⁵⁷ Steven J. L. Croft and Ian Mobsby (eds.), *Ancient Faith, Future Mission: Fresh Expressions in the Sacramental Tradition* (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2009).

⁵⁸ Sara Savage and Eolene Boyd-MacMillan, *The Human Face of Church: A Social Psychology and Pastoral Theology Resource for Pioneer and Traditional Ministry*, (Norwich: Canterbury, 2007).

⁵⁹ Justin Lewis-Anthony, *If You Meet George Herbert on the Road, Kill Him: Radically Re-Thinking Priestly Ministry*, (London: Mowbray, 2009).

⁶⁰ Samuel Wells and Sarah Coakley (eds.), *Praying for England. Priestly Presence in Contemporary Culture* (London: Continuum, 2008).

Evaluating Fresh Expressions,⁶¹ *Aspects of Anglican Identity*⁶² and *Citizenship, Community and the Church of England*.⁶³ each make very different contributions. A thoroughgoing theological critique of the Fresh Expressions movement (and, indeed, of *Mission Shaped Church*) was long overdue and Davison and Millbank⁶⁴ provide this and in doing so also provide a useful reflection on the role of parish, which obliquely contributes to an understanding of central churchmanship. *Shaping the Church*⁶⁵ also provides a critique of Fresh Expressions as well as an exploration of implicit theology, in the process shedding interesting light on aspects of the contemporary church. A series of essays in a dated, but still useful, Doctrine Commission report⁶⁶ aid reflection on the corporate nature of the church and of Christian believing, providing a corrective to the individualism which characterises so much activity in today's church.

Billings's *Making God Possible*⁶⁷ is a thought-provoking contribution to the current debates on the role of clergy in a rapidly changing church and society, and his assessment of the secularisation debate in relation to the current state of the church makes it a useful bridge with literature on the sociology of religion. Greenwood in *Parish Priests for the Sake of the Kingdom* explores the role of the priest in a much-changed church, with its much greater emphasis on *episkope* and working in *koinonia*.⁶⁸

Supplementing Carr⁶⁹ and Henson,⁷⁰ used in my original survey as tools to tease out attributes of central churchmanship, is Garbett.⁷¹ He provides valuable insights on central churchmanship as it existed in the post-war period (first published in 1947) before decades of rapid change and increasing secularisation. Slightly less dated insights are found in Walker's argument for the *via media*, with its robust⁷² defence of the middle ground, albeit perhaps extending the scope of that middle ground too.⁷³

⁶¹ Louise Nelstrop and Martyn Percy (eds.), *Evaluating Fresh Expressions: Explorations in Emerging Church* (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2008).

⁶² Colin Podmore, *Aspects of Anglican Identity*, (London: Church House, 2005).

⁶³ Matthew Grimley, *Citizenship, Community and the Church of England*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

⁶⁴ Andrew Davison and Alison Millbank, *For the Parish: A Critique of Fresh Expressions*, (London: SCM, 2010).

⁶⁵ Percy, *Shaping*.

⁶⁶ Church of England Doctrine Commission, *Believing in the Church: The Corporate Nature of Faith*, (London: SPCK, 1981).

⁶⁷ Alan Billings, *Making God Possible*, (London: SPCK, 2010).

⁶⁸ Robin Greenwood, *Parish Priests for the Sake of the Kingdom*, (London: SPCK, 2009)

⁶⁹ Wesley Carr, *The Priestlike Task*, (London: SPCK, 1985).

⁷⁰ H. H. Henson, *The Church of England*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1939).

⁷¹ Cyril Garbett, *The Claims of the Church of England*, (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 5th ed. 1955).

⁷² A reviewer thinks it possibly too robust: Leslie Houlden, 'Book Review: Rediscovering the Middle Way by Peter Walker,' *Theology* 91 (1988), 342-44.

⁷³ Houlden, 'Middle Way.'

McLeod's survey of the 'long 1960's'⁷⁴ provides helpful context to the issues that today's church faces as it interacts with the field of sociology of religion. Towler's *The Need for Certainty*,⁷⁵ with its categories of ordinariness, provided an interesting reflection as I analysed my interviews. Now rather dated, it is based on his analysis of letters written following the publication of *Honest to God*, letters he regards as containing views about the religion of ordinary people, not necessarily ordinary churchgoers, an interesting distinction.

Some further reading on mission, in the light of my initial analysis of the interviews, has taken me beyond Bosch's key *Transforming Mission*.⁷⁶ *Christian Mission*⁷⁷ provides a good overview of several approaches to mission, arguably all of which are needed by today's church in complex 21st century society. *Constants in Context*⁷⁸ provides a similarly wide view of how the constants of mission might be experienced in a variety of different contexts. The particular interest of this book is that, whilst written from a Roman Catholic perspective, it draws on key documents from a variety of traditions. Cameron enlists the discipline of practical theology in the service of local churches seeking to engage in God's mission in his world and her *Resourcing Mission*⁷⁹ provides some useful and different models of church to engage in dialogue with those associated with Dulles⁸⁰ and Billings.⁸¹

Overall this literature survey has confirmed there is real contemporary interest in the rural church, in collaborative ministry and in the role of the laity. Engaging with this literature has moved my thesis on, ensured that it engages with current thought and that it is soundly based when it strikes off in original directions. It has also confirmed the dearth of focussed writing on central churchmanship which has spurred me on to explore further and develop my own ideas.

⁷⁴ Hugh McLeod, *The Religious Crisis of the 1960s*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

⁷⁵ Robert Towler, *The Need for Certainty. A Sociological Study of Conventional Religion*, (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984).

⁷⁶ David J Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, N.Y: Orbis Books, 1991).

⁷⁷ Stephen Spencer, *Christian Mission, SCM Study Guides* (London: SCM, 2007).

⁷⁸ Stephen B Bevans and Roger P Schroeder, *Constants in Context*, (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 2004).

⁷⁹ Helen Cameron, *Resourcing Mission*, (London: SCM, 2010).

⁸⁰ Dulles, *Models*.

⁸¹ Billings, *Possible*.

Chapter 4 Southern Ryedale in context

In this chapter I describe the social context of my research, the deanery and, using ideal types, the benefices. I also briefly address the wider context of faith in the countryside.

4.1 The Social Context

Ryedale is, according to a recent BBC survey, among the most neighbourly places in the UK.⁸² It is, broadly, the area covered by the RDC which came into being in 1974 as a second tier local authority within the County of North Yorkshire following local government reorganisation. The County of North Yorkshire replaced the former North Riding of the County of York, also incorporating substantial areas formerly within the East and West Ridings. RDC subsumed the work of a number of smaller local authorities and is geographically the largest of the district councils within North Yorkshire, covering some 575 square miles.⁸³ It is predominantly rural (factually, and in government classification⁸⁴) and includes the southern part of the North York Moors National Park. There are two main centres of population and two smaller market towns. The 2001 census⁸⁵ reported the population of Ryedale as 50,872. This population is skewed demographically compared with the national average. The population pyramid (figure 1) at 2001⁸⁶ shows significantly more people than average in all age groups from age 50, very significantly less than average in the age groups between 20 and 40 and below average in the 0-9 groups (who by now will be the 10-19 group). This demographic skewing is significant both socially and for church attendance. It feels (but without supporting data) as if there is further skewing within Ryedale with older age groups over-represented and younger age groups under-represented in the more sparsely populated country areas as compared with the market towns.

⁸² *Ryedale among 'Most Neighbourly' Places in England*. 2010. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-york-north-yorkshire-11679553> (accessed 7 November, 2010).

⁸³ Background information generally from Ryedale District Council. 2004. *A Profile of Ryedale 2004*. <http://www.ryedale.gov.uk/PDF/Ryedale%20Profile%20July%202004.pdf> (accessed 14 November, 2010).

⁸⁴ Commission for Rural Communities, *Countryside 2005*, 6. Verified and nuanced by DEFRA, *Rural Statistics 2011*, 6-7. This report was published just as this thesis went to press and contains a number of updated statistics supporting assertions in this chapter.

⁸⁵ Helpfully collated in Diocese of York, *Census 2001 Data Related to the Diocese of York*, (York: Diocese of York, 2004).

⁸⁶ Office of National Statistics. *Census 2001 Ryedale Population Pyramid*. <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/census2001/pyramids/printV/36UF.asp> (accessed 9 January, 2011).

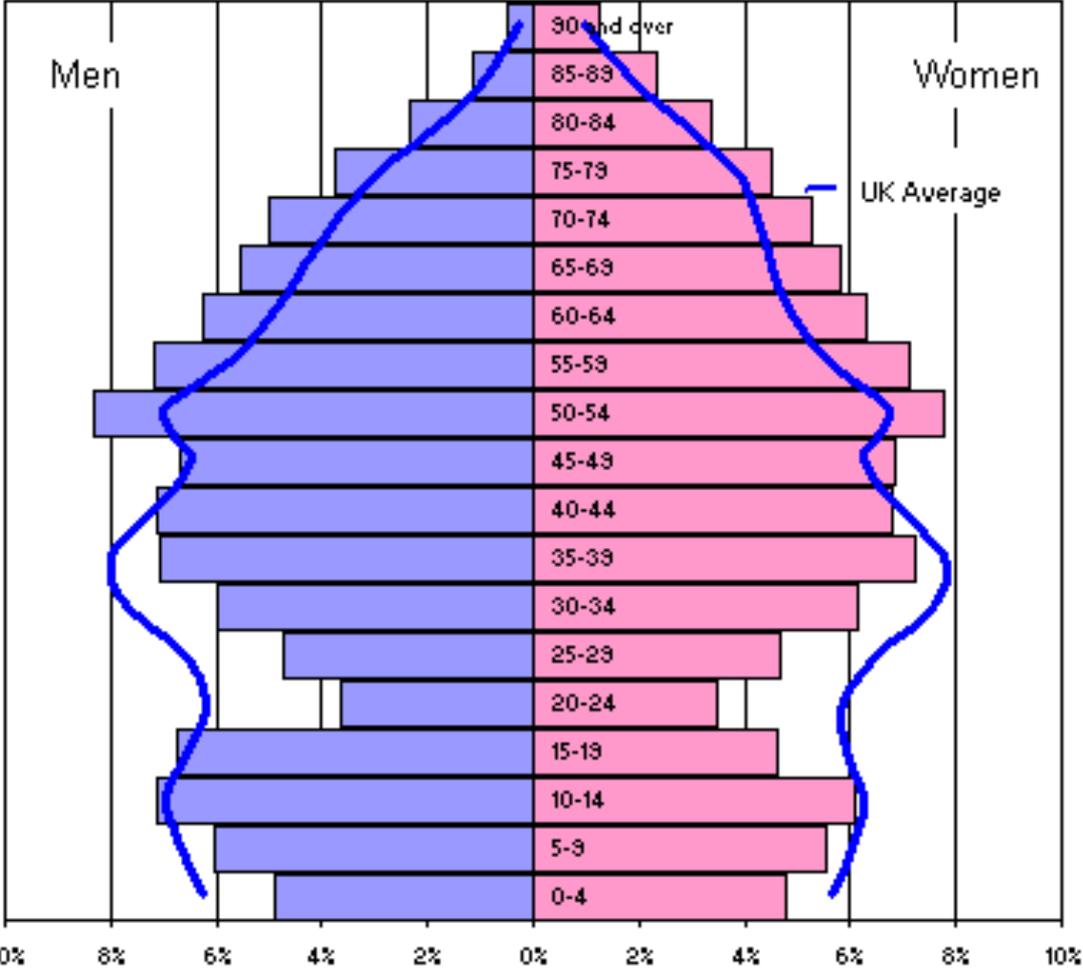


Figure 1 Population pyramid for Ryedale



Figure 2 Ryedale in relation to the UK



Figure 3 Map of Ryedale District Council Area with Southern Ryedale highlighted by red oval.

The maps show (figure 2) the location of Ryedale within the UK and (figure 3) the area of Ryedale, together with the few main roads, the York-Scarborough railway line, and

the significant areas accessed only by a network of minor roads; major geographical features are also shown. The area with which this study is concerned, Southern Ryedale Deanery, is the southern half of Ryedale, approximately contained within the red oval. It will be noted that this area encompasses part of the Vale of Pickering, and also substantial parts of the Yorkshire Wolds and the Howardian Hills AONB, very beautiful, but very sparsely populated, areas.

The population of the area covered by Southern Ryedale deanery is approximately 22,500. This total population splits approximately 12,000 in the towns of Malton and Norton and 10,500 in the thinly populated rural hinterland. Estimates of population in 2007 show Ryedale had increased by about 4% (to 53,300) since 2001, most of this in the northern part of Ryedale.⁸⁷ The rate of increase of population of Ryedale was at its highest in the period 1961-71 and has slowed since then, and is consistent with the general rate of increase in the rural population across England and Wales (triggered by large scale moves from town to country and high rates of new house building).⁸⁸ The population of the southern part of Ryedale has remained largely static since 2001, although substantial housing developments are planned which some fear might double the population of Norton and lead to significant increases in Malton and several larger villages. These developments, originally planned for 2010-2015, remain an aspiration in the Local Development Plan currently in consultation, but the economic difficulties since 2008 have caused delay.

Ryedale had 23,663 households at 30 March 2008.⁸⁹ Detached dwellings make up 41.1% of the housing stock, nearly twice England's average figure of 22.5%. The percentage of those owning their homes outright is higher in Ryedale at 37.8% than for England as a whole at 29.2% and a lower percentage of Ryedale's population has a mortgage or loan, 31% compared with 38.9% for England.⁹⁰ Both are good indicators of an older demographic. About 3% of the houses in Ryedale are second homes/holiday cottages.⁹¹ It is surmised that many of these are likely to be in the country areas and villages rather than the towns and therefore that the percentage of second homes/holiday homes in the villages may be rather higher.

⁸⁷ Ryedale District Council. 2007. *Ryedale District Council Statistics and Census Information*. http://www.ryedale.gov.uk/council_and_democracy/statistics_and_census_informat/census_information.aspx (accessed 18 October, 2010). Most of the statistics in this section of this chapter are from this source unless otherwise indicated.

⁸⁸ Commission for Rural Communities, *The State of the Countryside 2004*, (Wetherby: Countryside Agency Publications, 2004), 7.

⁸⁹ Ryedale District Council, *Statistics*.

⁹⁰ 2001 Census, ONS cited in Ryedale District Council, *Statistics*.

⁹¹ Ryedale District Council, *Statistics*.

In the 16 to 74 age group, Ryedale had, at 30 March 2007,⁹² 64.8% of the population in employment; the figure for England and Wales was 60.6%. The percentage of retired people in Ryedale is 17.3% compared with 13.6% for England and Wales.⁹³ One might therefore conclude that there is a fairly high level of employment and a rather older population. The number of younger people – about 18% of the population - fell between 2001 and 2006, save in the 10-14 age group (a 2.1% rise) and in the 14-19 age group where there is a much more significant 30% rise, tracking the population pyramid noted earlier.⁹⁴ More recent statistics are awaited to see if that is a trend or a blip. In 2001, whilst the town parishes had a fairly consistent 9-10% of their populations in the 20-29 age group and 18-19% in the 30-44 age group, the villages were very different. In the surveyed village benefice the percentage in the younger age group was much more variable, between 4 and 8%, and in the higher group between 15 and 22%.⁹⁵ This supports the anecdotal comments of younger families moving out of the villages to the towns due to housing cost and unavailability. It will be interesting to see the 2011 Census statistics on this point when available, as commentators point to the housing crisis having become much worse over the decade.⁹⁶ This trend has clear missional and ministry implications for both town and village benefices.

Wholesale and retail trade and repair of motor vehicles together employ the highest percentage of Ryedale's population, 16.5%. Next at 16.2% is manufacturing, then agriculture, forestry and hunting (including a substantial racehorse training industry centred on Malton/Norton) at 9.6%. Perhaps more striking is that rearrangement of the statistics which shows that 30% of employment in Ryedale is derived from tourism (which attracts 16 million visitors per year and generates £389 million income for Ryedale).⁹⁷ In Ryedale nearly a fifth of the employed, 17.9%, work mainly at or from home, whereas for England as a whole the figure is 9.2%.⁹⁸ For such a rural area the small number engaged in agriculture is striking. A 2010 press article claims that wages in Ryedale are the lowest in North Yorkshire and responsible for many young people moving out of the area, and also that Ryedale has the second highest unemployment

⁹² These are pre-recession statistics; changes possibly due to the recession are noted later.

⁹³ Ryedale District Council, *Statistics*.

⁹⁴ <http://ryedale.gov.uk/pdf/2006RyedaleAgeStructureEst.pdf>

⁹⁵ Statistics drawn from Diocese of York, *Census Data*.

⁹⁶ e.g. Mark Shucksmith, 'Planning and Housing: Power and Values in Rural Communities' (paper presented at the Faith and the Future of the Countryside, Swanwick, 3-5 November 2010).

⁹⁷ Ryedale District Council. 2010. *Tourism Commissioning*. http://www.ryedale.gov.uk/news_and_press_releases/tourism_commissioning.aspx (accessed 10 November, 2010). Slightly older statistics at *Travel and Tourism in Ryedale*. 2007. http://www.lmiyny.co.uk/prac_uploads/Travel___Tourism_in_Ryedale.pdf (accessed 11 November, 2010). indicate somewhat lower figures, whilst still underlining the significance of tourism for the area.

⁹⁸ Ryedale District Council, *Statistics*.

rate in North Yorkshire.⁹⁹ That same article cites a senior officer of RDC recently reporting that Ryedale's population in the 15-24 age group was the lowest in England at 9.3 % compared with the national figure of 12.2 %, while the number of 75-year-olds and over was well above the national average – 20.4 % compared with 15.8%. This seems to indicate worsening employment due to the recent recession and also suggests that many of those in employment are in relatively poorly paid work, whilst the large number of the retired may indicate fixed incomes and relative poverty. A local charity, Home-Start Ryedale, asserts that there are significant levels of disadvantage in Ryedale and argues that

the problems are aggravated because of low educational attainment – 30 per cent of those aged 16-74 have no qualifications – and 24 per cent of residents have poor numeracy skills, while literacy is the sixth worst level of the 22 local authorities in the Yorkshire and Humber region.¹⁰⁰

In the 2001 Census there was a very high level (82.3%)¹⁰¹ of self-declared Christians.¹⁰² Non-Christian religions are barely present (0.4%) and the District is overwhelmingly white. What little immigration there has been has until recently largely been from Eastern Europe, and now from the Philippines.¹⁰³

The figures in this part of the chapter are based on the 2001 census, with population estimates brought up to 2007 (the latest figures available in late 2010), and are adequate to describe the location of my study and the major demographic trends.

So, to summarise, Ryedale is demographically skewed, with a relatively higher number of older people, and with a proportionately higher number of older people in the villages, and a proportionately higher number of younger people and young families in the towns. Ryedale, contrary to common assumptions (by the diocese amongst others) is not particularly wealthy. The relatively high level of employment conceals a relatively low level of wages and a largely unskilled workforce, and a 'brain drain' of the more able youngsters away from Ryedale. There is a high level of dependence upon tourism which, at a time of economic stringency, is a vulnerable income stream. All these factors are material to considering the position of the church in Southern Ryedale and will resurface as the interview data is analysed and interpreted in later chapters.

⁹⁹ David Jeffels, 'Ryedale Exodus of Young People Is Creating 'Brain Drain'', *Gazette and Herald*, 9 June 2010.

¹⁰⁰ Reported in David Jeffels, 'Home-Start Ryedale Highlights Picture of Rural Need', *Gazette & Herald*, 24 November 2010.

¹⁰¹ https://www3.northyorks.gov.uk/census2001/pdf/keystats01_rye.pdf

¹⁰² Cf. Lynda Barley, *Christian Roots, Contemporary Spirituality*, (London: Church House, 2006).

¹⁰³ Personal observation and conversation with local RC priest.

4.2 The Deanery

This study is concerned with the Church of England deanery of Southern Ryedale, centred on the towns of Malton and Norton, which is (broadly speaking) coterminous with the southern half of Ryedale. Southern Ryedale deanery results from amalgamations of three former deaneries: Buckrose, Bulmer and Malton. Malton and Bulmer amalgamated in 1978 then later, for a number of years, shared a Rural Dean with Buckrose before the deaneries merged to form Southern Ryedale in 2002.

The dividing line that separates Southern Ryedale from other deaneries is, to the north and east of Malton, more or less the course of the River Derwent, and to the north and west more or less the course of the River Rye which flows across the Vale of Pickering from west to east before joining the Derwent a few miles north of Malton. North of these rivers, still within the area of RDC, lies the deanery of Northern Ryedale, itself a 2009 amalgamation of two deaneries: Helmsley (centred on the small market towns of Helmsley and Kirbymoorside), and Pickering (centred on the market town of that name). That deanery is in the Archdeaconry of Cleveland, whereas Southern Ryedale is in the Archdeaconry of York. Thus, in ecclesiastical terms, there is very little day-to-day contact between the deaneries of Southern Ryedale and Northern Ryedale. Ecumenically there is a similar separation, with Roman Catholic Parishes based on Pickering and on Malton (that at Malton being largely coterminous with Southern Ryedale deanery) and Methodist Circuits (Southern Ryedale being mainly covered by the Malton Circuit, with part of the Sherburn Circuit in the extreme east of the deanery and part of the York East Circuit in the south).¹⁰⁴

The deanery of Southern Ryedale, covering approximately 200 square miles, is amongst the largest, geographically, in the Diocese of York. Its location at the centre of the diocese is shown on the plan at Figure 4.

¹⁰⁴ Proposals are currently in consultation for the Methodist Circuits throughout Ryedale to merge into a single Circuit in 2012. Networking Task Group, *Mapping the New Circuit* (Malton, The Methodist Church York & Hull District, 2011). There is also the possibility of the two Roman Catholic parishes merging.

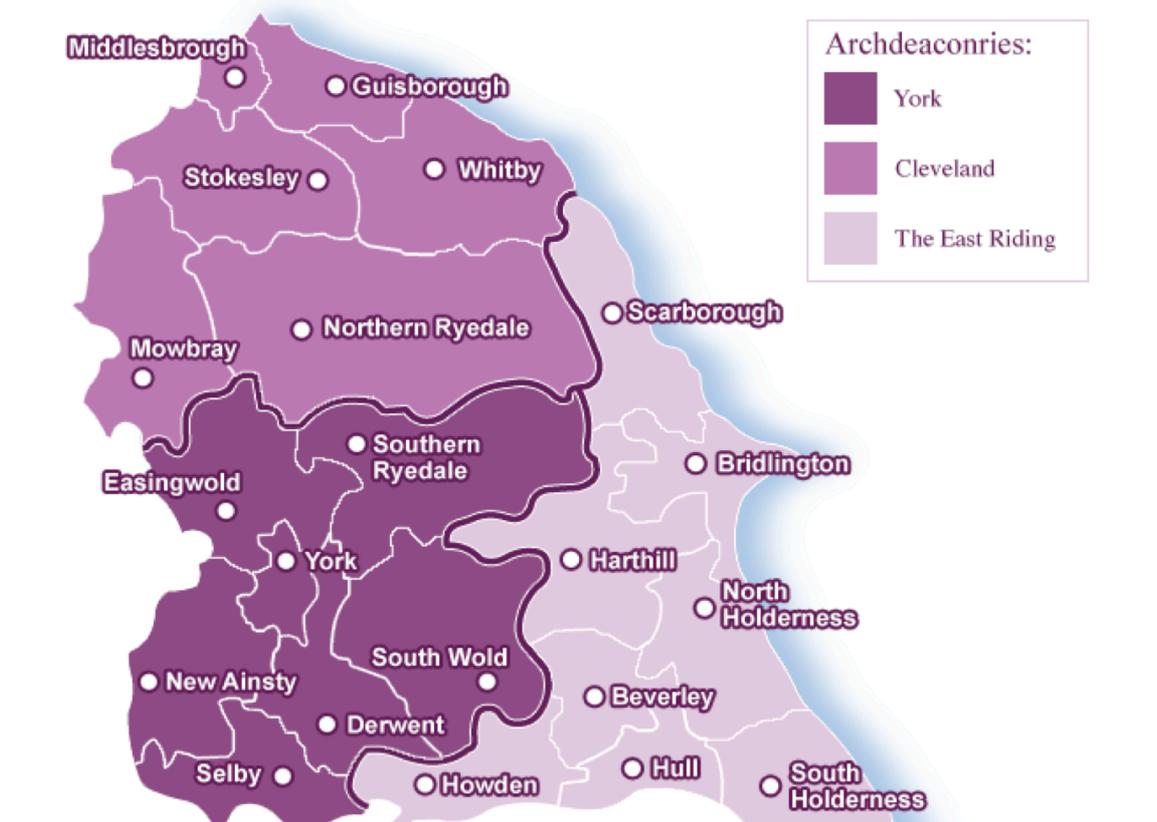


Figure 4 Southern Ryedale Deanery in context with the Diocese of York

The deanery encompasses the nine benefices¹⁰⁵ identified on the plan at Figure 5. The red crosses on that plan indicate the location of (most of) the 45 church buildings in the deanery. Five of those benefices consist of several parishes; only three benefices have a single church building.¹⁰⁶ The benefices are covered by the following Wards of RDC, although the Wards are far from coterminous with ecclesiastical boundaries: Amotherby, Derwent, Hovingham, Malton, Norton East, Norton West, Sherburn, Rillington, Ryedale South West and Wolds. Part of one benefice falls within the City of York.

As well as the Church of England churches, in the deanery there are seven Methodist Churches, one Roman Catholic Church, one Baptist Church, one Friends' Meeting House, one Salvation Army Citadel and one Elim congregation, all linked by the ecumenical CTSR. All these, apart from four Methodist churches, are in the town; only the Church of England has a comprehensive network in the country areas.

¹⁰⁵ Appendix 1.

¹⁰⁶ Appendix 2

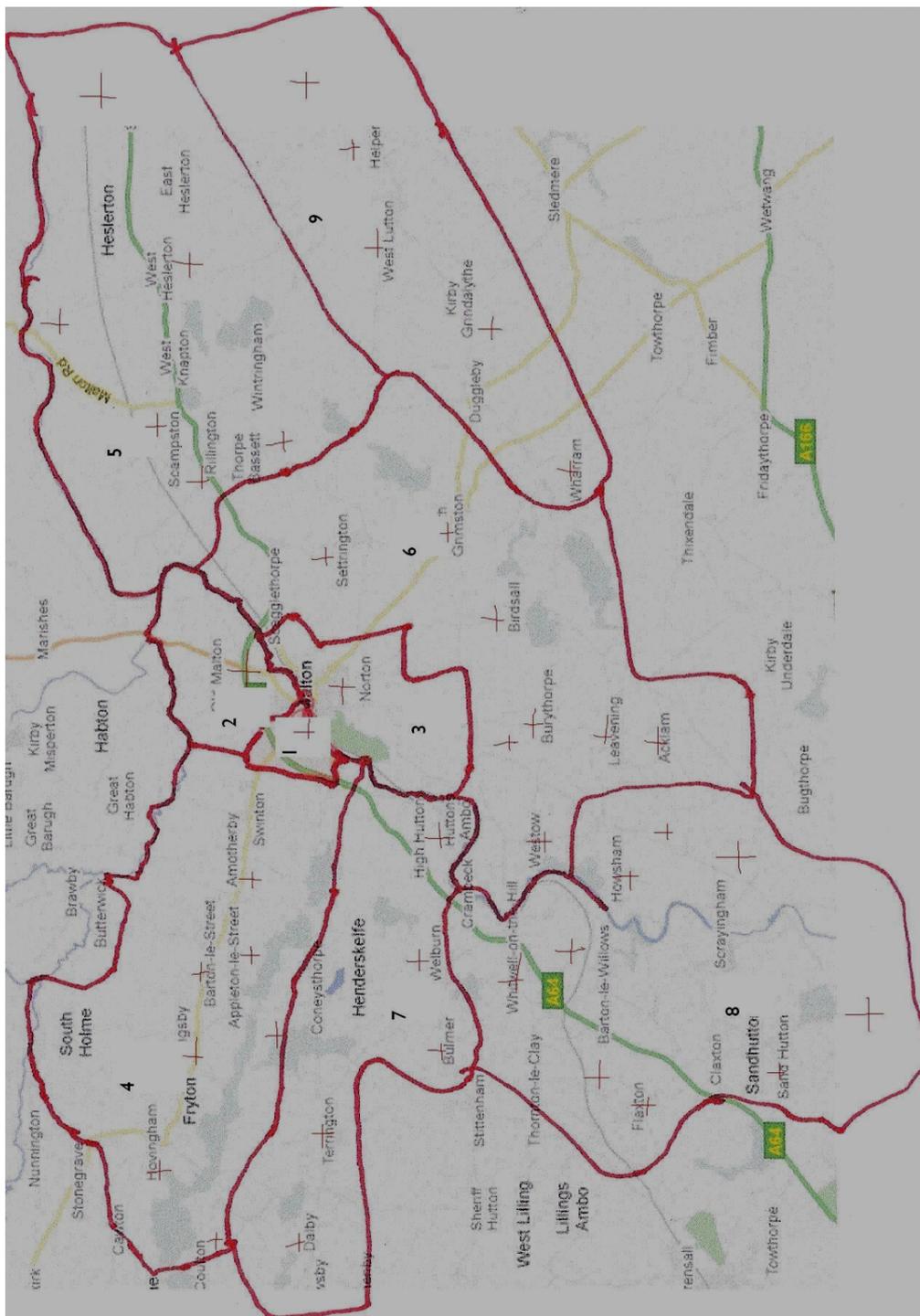


Figure 5 Southern Ryedale Deanery

Key to benefices: 1 New Malton, 2 Old Malton, 3 Norton, 4 The Street, 5 Buckrose Carrs, 6 West Buckrose, 7 Howardian, 8 Sand Hutton, 9 Wolds Valley.

Given the large number of parishes and the extraordinarily large number of church buildings it is worth noting that almost all the church buildings in the deanery are of ancient foundation (albeit most were rebuilt by the Victorians). For example, in the two benefices surveyed, all but one of the church buildings predate the 18th-century, two have Saxon origins and at least four others have Norman origins. We are not dealing here with the Victorian proliferation of churches which is such a feature of towns and cities, but with the evidence of Christian settlements, mission and worship dating back many centuries.

As compared with a deanery civil population of 22,500, the aggregate numbers on Anglican electoral rolls shown in the 2006 Deanery Plan¹⁰⁷ is 1512 and the usual Sunday attendance 749, 6.7% and 3.3% respectively. By the time of the 2009 Deanery Plan¹⁰⁸ those figures were 1334 and 587, 5.9% and 2.6% respectively. For York diocese as a whole usual Sunday attendance rose by about 2.5% between 2007 and 2008 (the last year for which full statistics are presently available), but for the Church of England as a whole fell in the same period. Provisional 2009 figures show a continuing fall nationally, and in York a slight increase for Sunday attendance but a marked increase in weekly attendance.¹⁰⁹ The accuracy and consistency of the deanery figures is questionable, particularly those for Sunday attendance.¹¹⁰ It should be noted that the statistics collected now take some account of mid-week services which in many of the benefices seem to be at least maintaining numbers, if not increasing, indicating a trend away from Sunday worship as well as a trend away from weekly to regular, but less frequent, attendance. Deanery Statistics in Appendix 2 reflect some updating of the figures that appeared in the 2009 Deanery Plan and portray the situation in mid-2010. They seem to show a reversal of decline in attendance and electoral roll figures, but also show increased population, apparently due to rounding up populations to the nearest 500. This, together with the known inaccuracies and inconsistencies in average Sunday attendances means that the figures need to be treated with caution – it would be unwise to place undue reliance on apparent trends, up or down, or on comparative levels of attendance either within the deanery or against national statistics. The deanery clergy discussed these figures in autumn 2010 and felt that Sunday congregations are smaller because people come less often on a Sunday, but may come at other times; and that occasional offices and occasions such as

¹⁰⁷ Southern Ryedale Deanery, *SRDP 2006*

¹⁰⁸ Southern Ryedale Deanery, *SRDP 2009*

¹⁰⁹ Church of England Research and Statistics. *Church Statistics 2008/9*.
<http://www.churchofengland.org/about-us/facts-stats/research-statistics/parish-attendance-affiliation.aspx> (accessed 30 January, 2011).

¹¹⁰ due, mainly, to issues regarding calculation of numbers for benefice services and when services are not held weekly in particular churches. These issues have resulted in some overstating usual Sunday attendance which may explain the apparent increases.

Remembrance Sunday continue to be well attended. Thus it is not possible to identify whether levels of church support are more or less in these towns and villages than elsewhere and if so why.¹¹¹

As noted in chapter 2, for practical reasons the empirical research for this thesis is limited to one town benefice, Borchester, and one village benefice, Ambridge. These two benefices are sufficiently typical of, in the one case the other town parishes and in the other the village benefices, to make the conclusions valid for the deanery as whole. Given the relatively small interview samples involved and the need to preserve the anonymity of respondents I have not identified the benefices used, and therefore have not provided detailed descriptions of them in this chapter. Suffice it to say that the descriptions of Ryedale and the deanery in this chapter apply *mutatis mutandis* to the chosen benefices and neither seems to be exceptional compared with the generality.

4.3 Ideal-Types of the Churches surveyed

To preserve anonymity of the researched benefices (and individual interviewees) I use ideal-types¹¹² - a description that is typical of, but not necessarily precisely identical with any of, the churches surveyed.¹¹³ I do this separately for churches in Ambridge and for Borchester.

4.3.1 Ambridge

- Serves a small to medium-sized village of between 150 and 500 residents. It may also serve adjoining villages which lack their own church building, or have only a chapel of ease.¹¹⁴
- The stipendiary priest serving the parish probably resides in another village up to 10 miles away. The stipendiary priest may be assisted by a retired priest or a Reader or local lay assistants, but many villages lack a resident minister of any sort.

¹¹¹ Another Deanery Plan seems to show similar, and no doubt similarly questionable, figures. New Ainsty Deanery, *New Ainsty Deanery Plan 2009*, 2009.

¹¹² A concept used by Max Weber, *The Sociology of Religion*, (Boston: Beacon, English Translation 4th ed. 1963), 184-206 in discussing types of salvation, and commented on by Talcott Parsons in his Introduction on pp lxx-lxvi. See also Spencer, *Mission*, vii, and further references there.

¹¹³ See further re ideal-types in Chapter 5.4 in relation to Central churches.

¹¹⁴ Appendix 1.

- It is part of a benefice of as many as 10 churches, assembled over a protracted period of pastoral reorganisations, many historically having little or no connection with each other.
- Except in the handful of villages that also have a Methodist chapel (and even then only to a limited degree) there is little ecumenical dimension to church life and little engagement with CTSR despite that body's attempts to engage with the village churches.
- One Sunday a month there is no service in the church because there is a benefice service in one of the other churches of the benefice. Once every four months or so the benefice service is in the village church. Less than half of the regular Sunday congregation travel to the benefice service when it is held in another village.
- The village has services on some of the other three Sundays of the month. It is unlikely to have more than two eucharists a month, including the benefice eucharist. There may be a service of morning or evening prayer (typically according to BCP with variations) and there may also be a Service of the Word (CW) and/or a family service.
- The church building lacks modern facilities. Its heating system is ineffective or expensive to run, or both. It has no toilet. It has some facilities for serving refreshments, but often only by water being brought in, together with kettle or flasks, as it may have no running water. It lacks sound system or deaf loop, but has tried to address disability access issues as far as it can
- The church building, which is listed Grade 2 or higher, is in a reasonable state of repair and generally kept fairly clean and tidy, both internally and externally. The churchyard, which may still be open for burials, will be reasonably well maintained, possibly a conservation or wildlife group takes an interest in it, or, if closed, it is maintained by the local authority.
- The churchwardens, often one rather than two, will have been in office for a very long time,¹¹⁵ far longer than they would have wished, and despair of finding a (suitable) successor. The churchwardens may well have been pressed into taking on the office without proper information as to what it involved and how onerous, in practice, it is.
- Whether or not the church is actually paying in full, the burden of the diocesan share and of the necessary fundraising, falling on a relatively small number of people, is an all-consuming and ever-increasing burden. Reserves are more or less exhausted and the prospect of defaulting on share payments is very real, with implications for future levels of stipendiary ministry in the benefice.

¹¹⁵ The 'six year rule' will have been disapplied to make this possible. *The Churchwardens Measure*, 2001, ss.33-36.

- On a 'normal' Sunday the congregation may approach 20 or it may be less than 10. Many of the congregation have family or other responsibilities away, so are often missing on Sunday, often without offering apologies. Sometimes it is a struggle to find people to do the necessary duties to enable the service to take place, and burdens are often passed to the clergy.
- The congregation is not representative, proportionately, of the age profile of the village, being generally older. Although most social groups from the village are present, they are not present in proportion to the social mix of the village.
- The congregation has a high level of engagement, as individuals, with the wider life of the community. Where there is a primary school in the village (whether or not a Church of England school) there are good school/church links, largely maintained by the clergy.
- The church has a PCC¹¹⁶ that typically consists of a good proportion of the regular congregation as well as, perhaps, one or two who very rarely attend church.
- There is a small nucleus of people prepared to read lessons and a much smaller group prepared to lead intercessions in a service or administer a chalice. There are one or two, mainly, but not exclusively, churchwardens, willing to lead a service of morning prayer or service of the word when no clergy or Reader is available. There is an organist available to play for many, but not all, services and a benefice-wide choir or music group.
- The church has no midweek activity, service, or study group serving only its own parish. The midweek benefice eucharist draws a small amount of support from most of the churches. Study courses, mainly at Lent, draw sufficient support from across the benefice to be viable.
- The church may (but may well not) be a strong supporter of the concept of benefice and of the monthly benefice services.
- The church is open in daylight hours (but may not advertise the fact) and may make some effort to be welcoming and of interest to visitors.
- The church has an open baptism policy, welcoming any who ask for baptism; often requests come from families who previously lived in the village but have moved to the town.
- The church receives relatively little demand for home communions for the sick and housebound.
- The church is the first port of call for funerals for most people in the village and village funerals are generally well attended.

¹¹⁶ Appendix 1.

- Weddings are often for those who have a qualifying connection, i.e. have previously lived in the village but no longer do so but wish to return to their roots for their wedding.
- In style and churchmanship the church is Central¹¹⁷

4.3.2 Borchester

- The parish has a single church. Historically, over the last 30 years, it has been fairly self-contained, but now interacts reasonably well with the other town parishes, the deanery and ecumenically, having united services and participating in CTSR. There is now some degree of shared ministry between the parishes.
- The church has a full range of Sunday services, typically an early communion service, a main mid-morning service, and such weekly, or less regular, evening service as it requires.
- The parish has at least a half-time stipendiary priest. Other ministerial resources are available in the form of retired clergy (of varying ability and willingness to participate regularly) and a Reader.
- The parish has lay people involved (to differing degrees) in lesson reading, intercessions, administering chalice, lay pastoral work, and, in one church, as lay deacons.
- The church, listed Grade 2 or higher, is in a reasonable state of repair. It has refreshment and toilet facilities either in the church or in an adjacent hall. It has a sound and deaf loop system and has made efforts to cope with disabled access.
- The church does not have an open churchyard and all burials take place in civil cemeteries.
- The church pays diocesan share substantially in full, but to the detriment of being able to invest in mission related activities (employment of youth/family worker) which it would wish to engage in. However, payment of share has been achieved in recent years at the expense of parish reserves which are now depleted and the prospect of defaulting on payments is very real, with implications for future levels of stipendiary ministry.
- The church has a usual aggregate Sunday attendance of between 70 and 100, with more for special services. It has a midweek service. It runs study courses from time to time and participates in the ecumenical lent course.

¹¹⁷ See chapter 5.

- The church has a representative PCC (although there is rarely competition for elected places) that is becoming more aware of its statutory duty to co-operate with the clergy in the whole mission of the church, pastoral, evangelistic, social and ecumenical.¹¹⁸
- Two of the churches have strong musical traditions with robed choir; the third has a music group
- The congregation is not representative, proportionately, of the age profile of the parish, being generally older; and although most social groups from the parish are present, they are not present in proportion to the social mix of the parish.
- The congregation has a high level of engagement, as individuals, with the wider life of the community.
- The church has some engagement with local schools.
- Two of the churches are (and advertise themselves as) open in daylight hours and actively minister to visitors
- The church is broadly of Central¹¹⁹ churchmanship but each is nuanced in the style it offers and therefore has a different appeal.

4.4 The Deanery Plan

The Deanery Plan is very much part of the context of this thesis. In 2005 the Bishop asked all deaneries in the diocese to prepare a Deanery Plan to serve as a factual statement of the present situation, issues and aspirations of the deanery and as a means of planning how, over the ensuing 5 years, the Deanery intended to adapt to reducing stipendiary clergy numbers. Southern Ryedale Deanery submitted its Deanery Plan in mid-2006. In 2009 the Plan was updated, the updating initially being anticipated as substantial due to the provisional projection of reduced stipendiary clergy numbers for 2013. However, following a reassessment that maintained clergy numbers, the Deanery decided on a modest rework of the 2006 Plan, whilst recognising that by 2012/2013, at the next review, more fundamental restructuring might well be required. The Executive Summary of the 2006 Deanery Plan sets the context not only for the Deanery Plan but also for this project:

The deanery aims to maintain an active Christian witness and mission across its whole area. Each of the five¹²⁰ rural benefices has invested considerable energy in recent years in growing together (albeit in different ways and at different speeds) as a benefice working as a single ministry unit. Those benefices each see their future as being in their continued growing together as a benefice (and dealing within each benefice with issues which may arise regarding unsustainable buildings and congregations) with a ministry that is

¹¹⁸ *Parochial Church Councils (Powers) Measure 1956*, s.2.

¹¹⁹ See chapter 5.

¹²⁰ Two benefices were temporarily held in plurality.

identifiably linked to that benefice. They see a sharing of resources within the deanery as valuable, and realistically recognise that much of this will be based in or centred on Malton and Norton. The three town churches recognise the need to work more closely together with each other (and with the rural benefices) and that this may well lead to some form of collaborative or group ministry, especially between the two Malton churches, whilst recognising the particular styles and appeal to different types of people of the distinct churches and congregations and forms of worship. The town churches are keen to develop a vision of resourcing for themselves and the deanery, both at the practical level of office and administrative facilities and at the level of mission in seeking to finance and support a mission or youth worker based in Malton and Norton. All recognise the vital importance of reaching the young with the gospel, something that is presently not happening to any great degree

We envisage retaining vibrant and growing congregations in New Malton, Old Malton and Norton; a deanery administrative, mission and resource centre; and rural benefices that serve the dispersed Christian communities, providing worship and witness in as many as possible of the communities and maintaining as many of the network of church buildings as is realistic and that the communities are prepared to support.¹²¹

At the time of the 2006 Plan the Deanery was staffed by eight full-time stipendiary clergy, two HfD clergy and one SSM curate and the Plan envisaged the stipendiary figure reducing to seven fte. In January 2011 there are seven fte stipendiary clergy in post. Both HfD clergy have retired and attempts to replace them have not yet succeeded,¹²² the curate is now incumbent of a parish in the deanery, but another SSM¹²³ curate has been appointed. The current projection of the number of stipendiary posts in 2013 remains at seven fte, but this seems increasingly doubtful and the benefices are being advised to plan ahead, particularly as several of the present deanery clergy may retire by 2013. Much of what was said in that Executive Summary remains aspirational, but some steps have been taken towards the stated goals, most of them since completion of the 2009 Plan. Recognising slow progress, the 2009 Plan omitted any grand aspirations but, perhaps more realistically, settled for a short paragraph entitled 'Food for Thought' containing this quotation from Rowan Williams' essay in *Praying for England*¹²⁴:

'The proclamation of the Christian good news tells us that this place doesn't have to be constantly reinvented or cleared afresh: it is a secure place, both in the sense that it is indestructible and in the sense that it is safe for the most vulnerable.....faithfully occupying the area where divine and human action decisively overlap in Jesus, and making sure that the human world knows there is such a place'.

The deanery has not been inactive since the 2009 Plan. In the town two of the parishes are working more closely with each other (with mutual licensing of clergy) and with their

¹²¹ Southern Ryedale Deanery, *SRDP 2006*, 2 .

¹²² One seems likely to be filled by mid-2011.

¹²³ becoming stipendiary in mid-2011.

¹²⁴ Wells and Coakley (eds.), *Praying* 176.

ecumenical partner churches. The deanery has been engaging, as individual parishes/benefices and collectively through deanery synod, with the diocesan *Mutual Support*¹²⁵ consultation process.¹²⁶ There seems to be an increasing sense of reality, that things cannot continue as they are. The combined challenges of reducing stipendiary clergy numbers, unsustainable financial burdens to pay for them, and ageing congregations which may not be able to provide sufficient lay people to fill the gaps, will inevitably drive (possibly quite radical) change. The outcome of the diocesan consultation process is awaited to see if there is a willingness to be more radical. There are hints that some deaneries¹²⁷ are proposing rather more radical deanery plans than Southern Ryedale. Perhaps we shall see the end of the attitude “While we have just sufficient money and just sufficient clergy to continue in the old way, we’ll keep the ship afloat”.¹²⁸

4.5 The Wider Context: Faith in the Countryside

Any attempt to set Southern Ryedale in its context must take account of the wider context of faith communities in rural areas. Following the significant impact of the report *Faith in the City* in the 1980s, the Archbishops of Canterbury and York set up a commission to do for rural areas what the original report had done for urban areas. That commission reported in 1990 and *ACORA* became the *vade mecum* of anyone wishing to address issues of rural church seriously. Much of the flood of writing about the rural church in the last two decades has been inspired more by the publication of *ACORA* than *Mission Shaped Church*. The theological reflection in chapter 2 of *ACORA*, engaging with concepts of creation and personhood, still provides an excellent and relevant theological underpinning for today’s reflections on rural faith and ministry. Those theological insights led the commission to explore at some length the concept of community, and the extent to which communities can be built in the rural context – questions to which I advert later on.¹²⁹ But a report presented in 1990 and drawing on work done in the previous few years now has a somewhat dated feel to it – as does the other seminal writing of that period by Russell¹³⁰ and by Davies¹³¹ and, from a more sociological perspective, Gill.¹³² Things have moved on both for rural life

¹²⁵ Diocese of York, *Mutual Support*.

¹²⁶ Preliminary analysis of that consultation is at: Diocese of York, *Mutual Support within God’s Family. Analysis of Responses to Diocesan Consultations* (York, 2011).

¹²⁷ e.g. New Ainsty Deanery, *NADP*.

¹²⁸ Greenwood, *Parish Priests*, 10.

¹²⁹ *ACORA*, *Countryside*, 23-24. See also 5.9 below.

¹³⁰ Anthony Russell, *The Country Parish*, (London: SPCK, 1986), 23-24.; Anthony Russell, *The Country Parson*, (London: SPCK, 1993).

¹³¹ Douglas Davies et al., *Church and Religion in Rural England* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark 2nd ed. 1991).

¹³² Robin Gill, *Beyond Decline*, (London: SCM Press, 1988).

and for the rural church. So far as the church is concerned, the pace of reorganisation has accelerated with more and larger multi-parish benefices served by fewer stipendiary clergy (in Southern Ryedale stipendiary clergy numbers have halved in the period) and attended by rather fewer people. In rural life the pace of decline of rural facilities has accelerated with the loss of most shops, garages and post offices, many pubs and many Methodist churches. The influx of those seeking their rural idyll has forced up house prices; the loss of council and social housing under the right to buy legislation has greatly diminished affordable housing (for purchase or rent) at a time when the earnings multiples needed to obtain mortgages to match rocketing house prices became unsustainable on average rural wages. The consequence has been a flight from the villages to the towns of many younger families and many traditional village residents, resulting in the real risk of an 'ever more socially exclusive countryside'.¹³³ Such movements may also have implications in terms of diminution of community and loss of social capital, two substantial aspects that other researchers may wish to explore.¹³⁴

In 2010 a national conference to mark the 20th anniversary of the publication of *ACORA* produced recommendations for church and society¹³⁵ and will lead to a book which may help guide practitioners in rural ministry through the next 20 years. The opening address at that conference by Bishop Alan Smith made a number of assertions about rural ministry, emphasising its importance and that it has a future, as well as the problems it faces, not least those of too many buildings and difficulties in finding officers. Those assertions encourage me to think that what I describe in this thesis in relation to Southern Ryedale will have a more general applicability. The problems faced here are those faced elsewhere in England, and the possible solutions identified in this thesis are ones that may well apply elsewhere too. Crisis needs to be leavened by hope!

¹³³ Mark Shucksmith speaking at the Faith and the Future of the Countryside Conference in November 2010.

¹³⁴ Billings, *Community* provides a useful initial discussion and Gibson, *Countryside*, ch 3 provides rural insight.

¹³⁵ Church of England. 2010. *Faith and the Future of the Countryside Conference - Final Recommendations*. <http://www.churchofengland.org/media-centre/news/2010/11/faith-and-the-future-of-the-countryside---final-recommendations.aspx> (accessed 30 January, 2011).

Chapter 5 Central Churchmanship: fact or chimera?

I have referred at several points in the preceding chapters to the importance of central churchmanship in this study. However, stating the importance of central churchmanship immediately provokes questions. What is churchmanship? Does this concept of central churchmanship actually exist? If it does, is it capable of definition or useful deployment? This chapter therefore seeks to explore this enigmatic feature of the Church of England to see whether it can be described, if not defined, or whether it is a mere chimera. It will also try to understand what, if it exists, central churchmanship has to offer to a study of the future of the rural church. Thus in relation to central churchmanship (hereafter 'Central' unless the context otherwise requires) this chapter will:

1. Consider the term 'churchmanship'.
2. Reflect on the existence of Central.
3. Consider the ubiquity of the term Central, its lack of definition and possible reasons for that lack of definition.
4. Consider and evaluate an ideal-type of Central.
5. Examine and evaluate some of Central's apparent characteristics.
6. Engage Central in conversation with some theological models of the church.
7. Consider whether the term Central has a multiplicity of meanings.
8. Consider what factors shape Central.
9. Consider the place of Central in the countryside.

In what follows description and analysis are in constant conversation with each other and with theology and ecclesiology, leading, by the end of the chapter, to some sense of the synthesis of those elements, and an answer to the question posed by this chapter's title.

5.1 The term 'churchmanship'

To use the term 'churchman' to describe a member of the Church of England (as distinct from a member of a non-conformist church) came naturally to writers of the 19th and early 20th centuries. Garbett, writing in 1947, uses the word frequently to describe the person in the pew, or the person in the pew's experience of the Church of England.¹³⁶ But he also uses it to describe the theological or ecclesiological stance of

¹³⁶ Garbett, *Claims*, 23-24.

clergy: he describes his father as a 'broad churchman'¹³⁷ and speaks of his own 'inherited churchmanship', on which he later reflected in order to understand 'the grounds of my churchmanship'.¹³⁸ Clearly he is here using the word to describe the place in the range of views and practices encompassed by the Church of England that he and his father each occupied. The fact of a range of views and practices within the Church of England is nothing new. Cranmer's Preface to the *BCP* whilst not referring to churchmanship as such, certainly referred to the diversity of use and belief within the church of his time. Whilst the clear agenda of the *BCP* and the Elizabethan Settlement, and in particular the *Act of Uniformity*,¹³⁹ was to impose a degree of uniformity, it seemed also content to tolerate within that uniformity a range of views and practices that were not extreme in any direction.¹⁴⁰

ODCC makes no attempt to define the terms 'churchman' or 'churchmanship'. It refers to parties or traditions, and contains entries for the major parties or traditions: evangelical, anglo-catholic, broad and liberal (but not Central, although it might be argued that its entry for Anglican¹⁴¹ goes some way towards this). The Wikipedia entry for Churchmanship is, on its own admission, sketchy, but describes the term churchmanship as 'sometimes used to refer to distinct understanding of church doctrine and liturgical practice by members of the Church of England'.¹⁴² It cites another website¹⁴³ on Anglicanism which, hiding behind a *nom-de-plume*, contains a narrative description of churchmanship, and links to a further site¹⁴⁴ containing a comprehensive, albeit subjective, guide to Anglican churchmanship. It succeeds in illustrating the diversity of views comprehended within the Church of England (and Anglican Communion): churchmanship seems, at root, to be the means of identifying where, within that diversity, the individual church member finds their sense of belonging. I therefore distinguish between the churchmanship (that is the views and standpoint) of the individual church member or clergy, and the style or churchmanship of the local church that is attended, or ministered to, by that individual. But I also recognise that those differences are frequently very closely intertwined, as will become apparent as this chapter unfolds.¹⁴⁵

¹³⁷ Garbett, *Claims*, 7.

¹³⁸ Garbett, *Claims*, 8.

¹³⁹ *Act of Uniformity*, 1662.

¹⁴⁰ *Book of Common Prayer*, The Preface and Of Ceremonies.

¹⁴¹ Cross and Livingstone (eds.), *ODCC*, 65.

¹⁴² *Churchmanship*. Wikipedia, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/churchmanship> (accessed 14 November 2010).

¹⁴³ Spiritus Temporis. *Churchmanship*. <http://www.spiritus-temporis.com/anglicanism/churchmanship.html> (accessed 15 November, 2010).

¹⁴⁴ John Beeler. 2006. *Field Guide to Anglican Churchmanship*. <http://home.comcast.net/~acbfpc/churchmanship.html> (accessed 14 November, 2010).

¹⁴⁵ Cf. Davies, 'Churchmanship,' 6-7.

5.2 A reflection on the existence of Central

Begging, for a moment, the question of defining Central, I assert, both from my own observation and research, and from a number of sources, oral and written, that the form of Church of England most commonly found in rural and market town locations is what can reasonably confidently be called Central. This contrasts markedly with town, city and suburban manifestations of the Church of England where, increasingly in recent decades, differentiation into a more party-orientated or theologically particular form of church has become the norm, and a more Central manifestation of the Church of England in those locations seems increasingly rare. At one level this difference can be readily explained. In rural and market town locations where there is only one Church of England church, in order to serve, and be acceptable to, as wide as possible a range of church attenders and wider community, a broadly central stance in doctrine, rites and ceremonies and an openness and inclusiveness becomes almost a necessity. By contrast, in a larger town or city, or their suburbs, there will almost always be a number of other churches within easy reach so that if the local church does not suit a worshipper for whatever reason, it is a relatively easy task to travel to one that does. Sociologically this is an example of differentiation¹⁴⁶ at work, churches developing their own unique selling points in order to differentiate themselves from their neighbours and to attract worshippers, and of post-modern consumerism exercising choice.¹⁴⁷ This differentiated church is akin to a gathered, associational or eclectic church and is a somewhat different concept from the church rooted in the parish system, a church for all the people, that still largely prevails (albeit under increasing pressure) in the rural and market town situations.

But it would be wrong to suggest that Central is something unchanging, standing in contrast to the changing differentiated churches around. Today's church occupying this middle ground has changed significantly in recent decades, perhaps not as much as some of the more differentiated churches of evangelical, catholic and charismatic forms have changed, but nevertheless very significantly. Literary snapshots of the Church of England taken in the middle of the 20th century,¹⁴⁸ at the beginning of the 20th century,¹⁴⁹ in the middle of the 19th century,¹⁵⁰ and at the beginning of the 19th

¹⁴⁶ See Paul Heelas, 'Introduction: On Differentiation and Dedifferentiation', in Paul Heelas (ed.), *Religion, Modernity and Postmodernity* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), 1-19.

¹⁴⁷ Grace Davie, *The Sociology of Religion*, (London: Sage, 2007), 89-96.

¹⁴⁸ Drawing on Garbett, *Claims* or Henson, *Church*.

¹⁴⁹ Drawing on Kenneth Hylson-Smith, *The Churches in England from Elizabeth I to Elizabeth II* (London: SCM, 1996) or Owen Chadwick, *The Victorian Church*, 2 vols., vol. II (London: A & C Black, 2nd ed. 1972).

¹⁵⁰ Drawing on Trollope or Chadwick, *The Victorian Church*.

century¹⁵¹ reveal massive change, even in the supposedly unchanging rural church. All the major movements that have affected the Church of England over that period (evangelical movements, the Oxford Movement, the charismatic movement, ecumenical movements, liturgical reform, the ordination of women, biblical criticism and the rise of science) have, to some degree or other, and by a variety of routes, found their way into virtually every rural and market town church. The aspiration of a resident vicar in (almost) every parish was a change introduced in Victorian times, lasting less than a century.¹⁵²

Altar candles and crosses, the use of vestments, reordering in line with Victorian liturgical tastes,¹⁵³ some adoption of modern liturgy and modern Bible translations, the widespread role of women in the life of the Church as lay officers (churchwardens), lay ministers (Readers) and clergy, can now be found in the vast majority of rural churches. Most rural churches now relate with friendship rather than hostility to churches of other denominations. The liturgical pattern has changed, especially within the last 40 or 50 years, from mattins and evensong with relatively rare celebrations of holy communion to (influenced by the parish communion movement and the development of family services) a much more diverse pattern of worship with much more frequent eucharists. Whatever else they may be, neither central church nor rural church is unchanging, even if they are still, by the standards of many urban and suburban churches, somewhat traditional.

However simply by acknowledging so much change, one is forced to conclude that there is now no single form of central Church of England. Of course, it may be the case that there never was a single form: the form that rural Church of England took at a time when many rural communities were very isolated and travel was difficult would be different from the form taken in the towns and cities where there was greater exposure to other ideas and societal changes. The massive social changes in England with industrialisation and the movement to the towns and cities inevitably affected church life, possibly resulting in a diminution of support for the rural church and certainly exposing the failure of the churches in the cities to cope in any meaningful, or timely, way with the influx of population. The transforming and rejuvenating effects of various church movements tended to be more felt, and perhaps more lastingly felt, in the towns, cities and, later, developing suburbs.

¹⁵¹ Drawing on Frances Knight, *The Nineteenth-Century Church and English Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

¹⁵² Chadwick, *The Victorian Church*, 248-51.

¹⁵³ Cf. Stephen Games (ed.), *Trains and Buttered Toast: Selected Radio Talks of John Betjeman* (London: John Murray, 2007), 243.

There have been long spells in the life of the Church of England when it has been far from inspiring or life giving.¹⁵⁴ But, as already noted, the many movements that have influenced the life of the Church of England over the last two centuries have, to varying degrees, eventually influenced the Central core – that which prevails in rural areas. Nevertheless that prevalent form of church has not been renowned for its vitality or its willing embrace of change, even if it has been marked by other characteristics that have ensured its survival as an important element of rural life.

Whilst I argue that Central is more than just a style of being Church of England, where a Central style has survived and prospered in a town or city this may, arguably, be because it has become as differentiated in that style¹⁵⁵ as have other competing churches with their various styles and emphases. Differentiation is largely a consequence of the availability of choice and where there is scope for several churches within a locality, there is inevitably differentiation. People choose between denominations or within a range of styles or emphases within a particular denomination, or on such features as music or the preacher. Where there is only one church in a community, generally long established and ‘inherited’, while some will still choose to travel a distance to a church that better meets their theological, spiritual, social or family needs or denominational sympathies,¹⁵⁶ many will gravitate to the single inherited church in the community which, in welcoming all comers, is undifferentiated. Some (including at least two interviewees) may do both, and support local church and travel elsewhere to a more differentiated church.

Can this undifferentiated inherited church survive and prosper in a post-modern era when differentiation and choice are key concepts for so many people? Perhaps, even at the purely pragmatic level, the key to the survival and success of rural church is for it to seek to maintain its broad appeal and open welcome whilst at the same time being rather more intentional and thereby, in a sense, differentiated, than might hitherto have been the case.¹⁵⁷ This points to my key concept of intentional Central to be set over against default, (traditional or inherited) Central, a concept involving a substantial shift of approach for those who adopt it, which is explored later in this chapter.

¹⁵⁴ Examples in Roy Strong, *A Little History of the English Country Church*, (London: Jonathan Cape, 2007) and Knight, *Nineteenth-Century*, and interesting glimpses in Garbett, *Claims*.

¹⁵⁵ Civic is an example of differentiated central church – see 5.7 below.

¹⁵⁶ To some extent, churchmanship is in the eye of the beholder: one person’s High Church is another’s Central.

¹⁵⁷ e.g. churches within a benefice playing to their strengths (BCP or all-age or Taizé services) is differentiation, also possibly supplementary forms of church life such as cell groups.

5.3 Ubiquitous but undefined

Although the adjective 'central' applied to churchmanship is little mentioned in literature until the 20th century, it has been much used in recent decades.¹⁵⁸ Walker uses 'middle way' rather than 'central' but seems to broadly describe the same area of church life as I do, albeit possibly from a more liberal perspective.¹⁵⁹ Defining, rather than merely describing or using, the adjective is problematical.

There is a widely held assumption that today's Central is the same as, or in direct succession to, the 19th century Broad church.¹⁶⁰ However, I suggest that Broad does not describe what is meant today by Central; there is a clear distinction between Broad churchmanship and the Central of the late 20th and early 21st centuries. Broad is perhaps rather the ancestor of today's liberal. Central does, however, share some characteristics with Broad. For example, in avoiding using theological convictions as a means of separation or differentiation from the wider community, in giving doctrinal issues, especially doctrinal distinctiveness, a less prominent place than do evangelicals or anglo-catholics, and by having a wide conception of what is appropriate for the church (e.g. wide community links), there are similarities with the Broad church and a sympathy with the views of F D Maurice. But Central is not, in my view, to be equated with the theologically more radical liberal thought associated with the Broad church movement.¹⁶¹ Central is, especially for the laity, doctrinally relatively conservative; many people in Central churches would be as out of sympathy with (or as uncomprehending of, for they tend to be passive rather than active theologians) a Cupitt as a Calvin.¹⁶² Central churches, perhaps reflecting their understanding of soteriology and mission, are more likely to support social causes than theological positions or church parties.

Maurice, already mentioned, and in many ways more radically liberal, can be seen as an advocate of pragmatic Anglicanism, in the spirit of today's Central, and as such hostile to boundaries, and in particular to the parties that claimed ownership of the boundaries.¹⁶³ At the same time he is seen as warm-hearted about faith and the views that inhabit those boundaries, seeking to hold those different views in tension. He can

¹⁵⁸ e.g. Garbett, *Claims*, 13. Also numerous job advertisements in *Church Times*.

¹⁵⁹ Peter K Walker, *Rediscovering the Middle Way*, (London: Mowbray, 1988).

¹⁶⁰ As described in Paul Avis, *Anglicanism and the Christian Church*, (London: T&T Clark, 2nd ed. 2002), Stephen Sykes, *The Integrity of Anglicanism*, (London: Mowbray, 1978); Stephen Sykes, *Unashamed Anglicanism*, (London: Darton Longman & Todd, 1995); Stephen Sykes and John Booty (eds.), *The Study of Anglicanism* (London: SPCK, 1988).

¹⁶¹ Hylson-Smith, *Churches*, Vol 3, 31 & 39.

¹⁶² As representatives of extreme liberal Anglicanism of the 20th century, and extreme conservative Protestantism.

¹⁶³ Jeremy Morris, *To Build Christ's Kingdom*, (Norwich: Canterbury, 2007), 11,118, but cf. Spencer, *Anglicanism*, 166.: a 'dubious argument'.

be seen as stressing the importance of orthopraxis and the peculiarly English character of pragmatic Anglicanism.¹⁶⁴ All those traits resonate with Central. Sykes, somewhat critically, describes Maurice's appeal as a 'non-partisan refuge for that large body of central Anglicans who properly speaking belonged to no party, neither evangelical, nor high church, nor yet in any committed sense to the more radical of the liberals.'¹⁶⁵

Not only do I distinguish Central from Broad churchmanship, I suggest that prior to, and indeed alongside, that Victorian usage of Broad it is possible to identify within the life and practice of the Church of (or in) England that which might anachronistically be called central churchmanship. So, for example, might one wonder¹⁶⁶ whether the church in Morebath¹⁶⁷ or the church George Herbert describes¹⁶⁸ display characteristics of Central? Might one see Central as Anglicanism in the spirit of Hooker? Hooker as a 16th century protestant had a stronger dominant theology than Central would now own, but his vision of God at work in the whole of society, not just in the visible church, is very consistent with Central's approach. These churches of an earlier age were of, and for, the people and deeply embedded in the communities they served, as well as being heavily shaped theologically, ecclesiological, sociologically and politically by their times.

Recent researchers use Central as a category, without attempting to define it. Davies¹⁶⁹ asserted in conversation that whilst not specifically defining central churchmanship he and his fellow researchers were clear what they had in mind in using the term. Brierley, in his research on religious trends,¹⁷⁰ uses the term 'broad' rather than 'central' for his 'middle' category, explaining¹⁷¹ that as his research spanned all denominations the term 'broad' was more widely known. However, where he gives explanation of his terms confusion surfaces. 'Middle of the Road' is posited as being 'neither high nor low, catholic or evangelical', but with suggestions that it is a 'liberal' position. He indicates that 'broad' was a category used by many clerical

¹⁶⁴ Morris, *Kingdom*, 12-18.

¹⁶⁵ Sykes, *Integrity*, 19.

¹⁶⁶ along with Percy, *Shaping*, 57-60.

¹⁶⁷ Eamon Duffy, *The Voices of Morebath: Reformation and Rebellion in an English Village* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2001), describing a parish church in England before, during and after the Reformation.

¹⁶⁸ George Herbert's British Church, 'neither too mean nor yet too gay' cited in Sykes, *Integrity*, 14; see also Ronald Blyth (ed.), *The Priest to the Temple or the Country Parson by George Herbert* (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2003).

¹⁶⁹ Davies et al., *Rural*, Davies, 'Churchmanship.', Douglas Davies and Mathew Guest, *Bishops, Wives and Children: Spiritual Capital across the Generations* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007).

¹⁷⁰ P. W. Brierley, *Painting by Numbers: An Introduction to Church Statistics*, (London: Christian Research, 2005) and his annual church census reports.

¹⁷¹ P. W. Brierley, Personal Communication, 20/12/ 2007.

respondents to his survey to describe their position, often as a qualifier to some other position, indicating, for example, an evangelical with 'liberal' views of the bible.¹⁷²

So are 'middle of the road' and 'central' interchangeable categories? In my interviews the terms were used interchangeably by the two or three interviewees who touched on this subject. Both terms, as indeed Walker's middle way, have a similar spatial sense to them, of a normative position mid-way between extremes. But this is not a mid-way position for its own sake.¹⁷³ Rather it suggests that the essence of this central position is its moderation of other positions, or its point of tension, rather than balance, between them. This is explored further in section 5.5, and in section 5.8 with the question how far that moderation (or shaping) is theologically driven and how far sociologically driven. Sykes argues that there is no such thing as a separate liberal tradition, just liberal evangelicals or liberal catholics¹⁷⁴ and might possibly also say there is no Central but that it is simply the middle ground between evangelical and catholic. Whilst that is one way of viewing Central, I think that the history of the Church in England sustains an argument that the Central position is the authentic and normative one (even though the norm itself shifts at various points in the history of the church) and that the extremes are the deviations from the norm. This assertion, that concentrates on the middle ground within Anglicanism, needs to be distinguished from the classic (but possibly politically driven) description of the Church of England as *via media*,¹⁷⁵ which refers to its mid-point between Rome and Geneva, between unreformed Catholicism and reformed Protestantism.¹⁷⁶

Brierley's definitions are unhelpful, but his idea of using qualifying terms is interesting. Davies in his rural church research found the use of a qualifier important as a fine tuner.¹⁷⁷ This supports my suggestion of a range of meanings of Central.¹⁷⁸

Baker's essay on Churchmanship¹⁷⁹ brings no greater clarity than Brierley. Initially only recognising catholic, evangelical and liberal (which he equates with 'moderate'), he later recognises sub-species within each, and within what he then calls 'central or

¹⁷² Brierley, *Painting by Numbers*, 116-7. Even more so in P. W. Brierley (ed.), *U.K. Christian Handbook Religious Trends 6: Pulling out of the Nose Dive* (London: Christian Research, 2006) where he reports (page 5.12 and 5.13) on the result of using 'ethos' rather than 'churchmanship' for his 2005 survey: many respondents had selected multiple descriptive terms of which 'central' was one of many, often used in conjunction with some other descriptor.

¹⁷³ Cf. Houlden, 'Middle Way,' 342.

¹⁷⁴ Sykes, *Integrity*, 32.

¹⁷⁵ often attributed to Newman and used by Henson, *Church*.

¹⁷⁶ Cf. Houlden, 'Middle Way,' 7..

¹⁷⁷ Davies et al., *Rural*, 102 fn1, Davies, 'Churchmanship,' 12-16. and conversation with him.

¹⁷⁸ See 5.7 below.

¹⁷⁹ Jonathan Baker, 'Churchmanship', in Ian Bunting (ed.), *Celebrating the Anglican Way* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1996), 110-24.

broad church' he recognises liberal as one element. Liberal and central seem to be confused in his approach – but in that he is not alone. *ODCC* describes 'Liberalism': 'In theology it has been used with many different shades of meaning..... Hence the confusion which surrounds its use',¹⁸⁰ and one can imagine a similarly worded entry for Central! In the light of that entry, pursuing the meaning of liberal is too far outside the scope of this thesis. Perhaps one is bound to concede (without being at all apologetic about it, for there are positive and persuasive values of liberalism¹⁸¹) a degree of overlap, but certainly not a total identity, of Central and liberal.

The foregoing highlights the difficulty of defining Central and perhaps explains why, so far as I can ascertain, nobody has yet published a comprehensive definition. Perhaps its very diversity makes definition difficult. The concepts of deuterio-truth¹⁸² and vagueness¹⁸³ may provide illumination, or comfort, at this point. Perhaps those who inhabit this undifferentiated Central world see no need to define themselves over against others, and do not see themselves, or their faith, in terms of parties and positions: 'the great mass of English Churchmen who are content to describe themselves as churchmen without any further label'.¹⁸⁴ At most, any attempt at definition is in negative terms – what they are not. Indeed, some might seek to criticise the Central position on just such grounds, arguing that this lack of definition extends to its theology and its lack of clear-cut commitment to verbal formulae as tests of authentic faith.¹⁸⁵ But perhaps Central's response to that might be that this is less about self-definition, rather a modesty¹⁸⁶ about too precise and bounded a definition, something that respects the provisionality of human understanding about anything to do with God. Perhaps Central sees itself as more performative than some other traditions?¹⁸⁷

If the notion of Central eludes precise definition, might it be accounted for in some other way, for example by means of an ideal-type?

¹⁸⁰ Cross and Livingstone (eds.), *ODCC*, 977-8.

¹⁸¹ e.g. Martyn Percy and Ian Markham (eds.), *Why Liberal Churches Are Growing* (London: T&T Clark, 2006) and Marcus Borg, *The Heart of Christianity*, (New York: Harper Collins, 2003).

¹⁸² 'Deuterio-truth', explained by Roy Rappaport, as a concept that is held and used for general communication, but is understood until an attempt is made to define it, when it disappears. Roy Rappaport, *Ritual and Religion in the Making of Humanity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 304-5.

¹⁸³ Davies and Guest, *Bishops*, 37-38, 178-9.

¹⁸⁴ Garbett, *Claims*, 23-24.

¹⁸⁵ Walker, *Rediscovering the Middle Way*, 7.

¹⁸⁶ Cf. William Marshall, *Scripture, Tradition and Reason: A Selective View of Anglican Theology through the Centuries*, (Dublin: Columba Press, 2010), *passim*.

¹⁸⁷ Percy, *Shaping*, 17. Cf. Walker, *Rediscovering the Middle Way*, 92-93.

5.4 An ideal-type

I briefly introduced the concept of ideal-types in chapter 4, where I saw one of its advantages as contributing to the anonymity of the benefices described there.¹⁸⁸ However, whilst successfully giving a working, but anonymous, description of the researched benefices, that was a rather extended use of the concept. In particular, the descriptive characteristics there attributed to Ambridge and Borchester included a number which, whilst applicable to those benefices, might have been equally applicable to other churches of different churchmanship. We might even suggest that Henson's *Via Media*,¹⁸⁹ Garbett's Church of England¹⁹⁰ and Carr's model church and ministry¹⁹¹ are each using ideal-typology in a rather similar way to describe the church of their time. However, if ideal-typology is to be helpful in this chapter as we seek an understanding of the meaning and nature of Central it must now be applied rather more rigorously.

In this section, therefore, we approach the ideal-type as a conceptual and analytical tool. The concept is often associated with Weber, who expressed an

overriding concernto explain the 'cultural meaning' of historical facts in order to establish some conceptual order in the 'chaos', not to undertake a reconstruction of the past with the help of lists of facts and data.¹⁹²

An ideal-type is formed from characteristic elements of the observed phenomenon, whilst not intended to account for all the characteristics of any single case. Thus 'it releases from a collection of attributes those that are regarded asessential for certain 'cultural meanings' '.¹⁹³ 'Ideal' in this context refers to the world of ideas rather than to any sense of ideal perfection or the like. Ideal-types do not describe any particular concrete situation, although any particular situation will be recognisable through the ideal-type. Ideal-types do not describe some utopian perfect form of the observed situation, but they do provide constructs that help bring some sort of order out of the complexity of social reality. This helps focus attention on that which is most distinctive of the phenomenon in question.¹⁹⁴ Although an ideal-type is not a hypothesis, it can be a tool towards the creation of a hypothesis and formulates possible 'view points for interpretation'.¹⁹⁵ So in using an ideal-type to describe Central,

¹⁸⁸ Chapter 4.3 above.

¹⁸⁹ Henson, *Church*, ch.3, 57-89.

¹⁹⁰ Garbett, *Claims*.

¹⁹¹ Carr, *Priestlike*.

¹⁹² Dirk Käsler, *Max Weber: An Introduction to His Life and Work* trans. Philippa Hurd (Cambridge: Polity Press, ET 1988), 182.

¹⁹³ Käsler, *Weber*, 183.

¹⁹⁴ See generally Käsler, *Weber*, 180-4 for a discussion on the development of Weber's use of ideal types.

¹⁹⁵ Käsler, *Weber*, 183

I am not describing any particular church, nor any ideal or perfect church. Rather, I am seeking to identify the most distinctive characteristics of the Central form of church organisational activity. Thus, when I list ideal-typical features of Central I include only those features which are characteristic of, and, to a large degree, confined to, Central churches. Inevitably those churches will also possess a large number of other characteristics, many of which may be held in common with churches of other styles of churchmanship. Equally inevitably, given the diffuse nature of churchmanship, there may well be churches that are of a predominantly different churchmanship than Central that nevertheless display one or other of these characteristics, but not the aggregation of them which seems to be characteristic of Central.

So in the light of the foregoing we might articulate the ideal-typical features of Central in the context of a parish church organisation in terms of:

- An inclusive and open perspective upon group membership and its associated view of soteriology.
- An open baptismal policy.
- Not being sharply defined nor differentiated in a 'party' sense.
- Accommodating to elements of evangelical, catholic, liberal or charismatic theology and liturgical practice whilst not being determined by them
- Being doctrinally orthodox but also open and inclusive in terms of doctrinal development and practice e.g. on women's ministry and on gender issues.
- Seeking to be age inclusive in its worship and activities.
- Being involved with the wider parish community in various ways, and with a high level of community involvement by church members, reflecting an open-boundaried approach to the wider community.¹⁹⁶
- Being institutionally committed, engaging with deanery and diocese and supporting local ecumenical endeavour through Churches Together notwithstanding the diversity of viewpoints and practices of other participants.
- Being quite building focussed in preserving and offering accessible sacred space to all who seek it, and in being open to the wider community.

Running throughout these characteristics is an emphasis on openness and welcome, on inclusivity rather than exclusivity. It might be appropriate to treat this emphasis, picking up a phrase from above, as a view point for interpreting Central and contributing to the testing, if not the construction, of my hypothesis. But before doing so in the following sections of this chapter, some further exploration of these ideas of

¹⁹⁶ Billings, *Community*, 38 describes a typical example.

inclusiveness and openness might be helpful. How inclusive does Central have to be for the characterisation 'inclusive' still to be appropriate?

Weber is noted not only for his conceptualisation of ideal-types, but also for his sociological attempts to classify religious movements, and in particular his distinction between church and sect as forms of social organisation, ideas taken up by other writers, and noted elsewhere in this thesis.¹⁹⁷ Weber saw church as being inclusive and sect as exclusive based, largely, on their different approach to membership, and the observed difference in the commitment of members.¹⁹⁸ While that is useful background to this present consideration, it may be of only limited utility when considering different forms of churchmanship within the single Church of England rather than comparing aspects of the Church of England (undoubtedly 'church' within Weber's classification) with other Christian bodies which might be regarded as sects within his classification. Whilst there might be a temptation to regard some of the more extreme differentiated and exclusive forms of today's Church of England as tending towards the sect classification, that goes beyond the scope of this thesis, which is concerned to examine the centre ground, which is certainly inclusive within Weber's classification.

The ideal-typical characteristics listed above draw out openness and inclusion in a variety of contexts including liturgy, theology and gender. Earlier in this chapter¹⁹⁹ I discussed the diminishing number of Central churches in a town/city context in the face of increasing differentiation, but the survival of Central in rural/market town contexts, where its inclusiveness is of key importance. In those rural contexts Central is seen as accommodating a wide range of viewpoints, experiences, and practices within the worshipping life of a church. It is experienced as a place where individuals from a variety of prior churchmanship experience might find themselves sufficiently at home theologically and liturgically to be able to worship in, and participate in the life of, the church alongside others from different backgrounds, and alongside those for whom no other tradition formed part of their background, who were 'just Church of England'. That speaks of liturgical and theological inclusiveness and a common fellowship. It perhaps leads to further reflection on the particularly rural Central approach to theology which is inclusive both in its breadth and acceptance of various viewpoints and also in its relationship to (and shaping by)²⁰⁰ social context: what is it possible to believe in this

¹⁹⁷ See e.g. p88 referring to Martin *Sociology* although it seems Martin has developed and changed the use of the church/sect typology and uses it somewhat differently. Also p154/5

¹⁹⁸ Alan Aldridge, *Religion in the Contemporary World: A Sociological Introduction*, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000), 42-44.

¹⁹⁹ In 5.2 above.

²⁰⁰ Discussed more fully at 5.8 below.

place at this time, and why?²⁰¹ These questions perhaps lead to an understanding of the rather incarnational and traditional approach of much rural Central theology.

The question might, however, be raised whether that openness and inclusion extends, particularly in a rural context, to other arguably more contentious issues. Like a number of other words, inclusion and inclusivity have become almost politicised in today's church and for some, at least, carry other, narrower, meanings such as inclusion within the church of all forms of difference: gender, sexuality, race, disability, mental health and poverty.²⁰² Certainly for the northern rural deanery that I study in this project, there is some evidence that in describing churches as inclusive this does to some degree comprehend the wider meaning of inclusiveness. In terms of gender and the ministry of ordained women, four of the nine benefices currently have female clergy and a further two, in vacancy, have indicated a willingness to accept the ministry of women and to appoint a woman priest. Deanery Synod in 2011 voted almost unanimously in favour of women in the episcopate. At least half the churchwardens of the deanery are women. In terms of sexuality, one of my interviewees²⁰³ confirmed my own observation that sexuality issues were not a major concern in Borchester. A couple in a civil partnership are actively engaged in the life of that church (and there are other examples in village benefices elsewhere in the deanery). At the last two clergy vacancies at Borchester the PCC took care to include statements about inclusiveness, in its widest sense, in the parish profile. In conversation, the incumbent of Ambridge indicated similar levels of acceptability of sexual difference in that benefice. The same incumbent commented that, if there were likely to be problems with inclusiveness in any of their churches, they might be more to do with issues of race (and particularly colour) than sexuality.²⁰⁴ Rural conservatism cannot be overlooked, but nor can the fact that much of the opposition in the church to certain of these inclusive issues is to be found in the more differentiated theological viewpoints that tend to be less evident within Central.

I discuss later in the chapter other issues of Central in relation to the countryside, but at this stage, concluding this section on ideal-typology, I suggest that this concept of Weber's is extremely useful in pointing to a characteristic of openness and inclusiveness, understood quite widely, that applies as much to the Central church in North Yorkshire rural situations (which are, of course, the ones specifically researched for this project) as to town and city manifestations. Consequently I now carry openness

²⁰¹ See also pp. 69 and 73 below.

²⁰² E.g. the group *Inclusive Church*. www.inclusive-church.org.uk/about (accessed 5/3/12)

²⁰³ 2

²⁰⁴ Reflecting the predominantly white British constituency of the area, particularly the villages, noted in chapter 4

and inclusiveness forward both as characteristics of Central and as viewpoints to help interpret some other characteristics of Central which we now examine and evaluate.

5.5 More Central characteristics

5.5.1 Anglican balance?

Bartlett's *A Passionate Balance*²⁰⁵ with its concept of the three tribes²⁰⁶ of Anglicanism (catholic, evangelical and liberal) makes no mention of Central, even though it represents possibly the largest number of churches in the Church of England.²⁰⁷ That omission helps us consider the characteristics of Central by exploring whether Central is the norm which needs no description as compared with the upstart tribes that have arisen around it, or is the point of equilibrium of the three tribes. Bartlett is cautious about equating Central with the place of balance, suggesting that Central is close to liberal catholic and thus part of his three tribes, or alternatively is a type (or tribe?) in itself. Certainly, if Central is not the point of balance between the tribes, the incarnation of Anglican balance, its omission from the tribes should be challenged and the three tribes become four. An alternative to seeing Central as the point of balance between the tribes might be to see it (as suggested above) as the point of tension.²⁰⁸ These images need to be interrogated with some vigour. Is this mid-point something passive (the lowest common denominator, watering down the distinctive views of the extremes²⁰⁹) implied by ideas of balance, or something active, positively holding views in creative dialogue, as implied by ideas of tension? Like much else in Central it could be either - or both.

Such ideas inevitably lead to asking whether there is a driving passion about Central (as there is about some of the extremes) that gives it a vitality and a *raison d'être* for today. They might also lead to asking whether, just as it is possible to identify the distinct spiritualities of Bartlett's three tribes, is it equally possible to identify a distinct Central spirituality (or range of spiritualities)? If so, what might it (or they) be? That question demands a thesis of its own, but is nevertheless worth bearing in mind. All these ideas further fuel my contention that Central is now a portmanteau term, that there are several different types of Central which require different answers to these questions.²¹⁰

²⁰⁵ Bartlett, *Balance*

²⁰⁶ I use his terminology in this chapter

²⁰⁷ Spencer, *Anglicanism* also concentrates on the extremes and ignores Central.

²⁰⁸ See p.54 above. Sykes, *Integrity*, 16 drawing on Maurice's thought.

²⁰⁹ See Sykes, *Integrity*, 32.

²¹⁰ See Davies, 'Churchmanship.'

Using some of these foregoing concepts it is tempting to portray Central as the classically balanced Anglican position, the middle way, (nuanced for the 21st century) and to make connections with classic English understatement. Central, adopting one of Bartlett's phrases, seems to be the epitome of Anglican modesty. I would argue that it provides a model that has a particular appropriateness for our time, counter-cultural to the lust for certainty prevailing in, for example, 'successful' conservative evangelical churches.²¹¹

5.5.2 Implicit and ordinary

Implicitness²¹² is a characteristic of Central – it does not, generally, feel the need to define itself against others. Nor does it feel the need to champion its cause in the way that other church parties and viewpoints do.²¹³ Those at an extreme look to that extreme for their status and self-definition and to justify their differentiation. Most of those who are Central do not, although possibly some who are self-consciously and intentionally Central may. Perhaps linked to this implicitness is a recognition of the muddle and 'mixed-up-ness' of life: Central is an incarnational expression of the Christian faith,²¹⁴ 'working within the mess and making the best of what we have'.²¹⁵

Another characteristic of Central, closely linked with implicitness, is its affinity with what Astley calls ordinary theology²¹⁶ and what others have variously called subterranean theology²¹⁷ and common religion,²¹⁸ and also that it engages positively and constructively with 'folk religion'.²¹⁹ This is consistent with the already noted tendency of Central not to be tightly bounded (or, in another phrase, to have porous boundaries), which has implications for a Central church's understandings of mission and evangelism and soteriology, discussed later. There is scope for further research around the area of (different levels of) ordinariness – in which personality type, temperament and English reserve, all have their parts to play.

²¹¹ Walker, *Rediscovering the Middle Way*, 91 and cf. Ryrie, 'A Distaste for Definitions.'

²¹² Implicitness is reflected in several places in Bell, Hopkinson, and Willmott (eds.), *Reshaping Rural* and in Percy, *Shaping*.

²¹³ It lacks the equivalent of Reform, Forward in Faith or Modern Church.

²¹⁴ Church of England Doctrine Commission, *The Mystery of Salvation*, (London: Church House, 1995), 111 and cf. Percy, *Shaping*, 19 on the importance of context.

²¹⁵ Greenwood, *Parish Priests*, 71

²¹⁶ Astley, *Ordinary Theology*.

²¹⁷ David Martin, *A Sociology of English Religion*, (London: Heinemann, 1967), 74.

²¹⁸ Grace Davie, *Religion in Britain since 1945: Believing without Belonging* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), 75-77.

²¹⁹ Douglas Davies, 'Natural and Christian Priesthood in Folk Religiosity,' *Anvil* 2, no. 1 (1985). and Douglas Davies, *Anthropology and Theology* (Oxford: Berg, 2002) also Paul Heelas and Linda Woodhead, *The Spiritual Revolution: Why Religion Is Giving Way to Spirituality* (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 2005) See also Church of England Doctrine Commission, *Believing*, 149-53.

5.5.3 Levels of commitment

A challenge of my research has been to allow the religion of the churches to describe itself and thus possibly clarify some of the characteristics of Central. The analysis of the interviews furnished images of church²²⁰ that are largely consistent with the ideal-type in section 4, not least with their emphasis on openness and inclusiveness, and yet pose significant questions and challenges for the future. Amongst them has been what I call issues of 'faith temperature' (but might equally well call discipleship or commitment) and as this may shed some light on the characteristics of Central, I introduce it here.

As a matter of experience and observation, there are differing levels²²¹ of Christian experience and commitment: 'It's so much part of [clergy] lives. We, however small or great we are involved, it's only part of our lives.'²²² For descriptive convenience, certainly not judgementally, this might be expressed in terms of faith temperature (cool/warm/hot).²²³

As already noted, within larger towns and cities as church life tends to be differentiated many churches will therefore be 'badged'. People will often attend the church best suiting their style/temperament/theology rather than their nearest parish church. Those churches thus become eclectic. It is likely that the faith of those who choose to attend such an eclectic church may assume a higher importance in their life, they may appear to be operating at a 'higher faith temperature'. But others will attend that church simply because it is their nearest church (or for other reasons not associated with faith or commitment), so they may appear to operate at a 'lower temperature' than the 'keen'. Rural/small market town churches by their very inclusiveness generally contain a much higher proportion of those who attend because it is their local church. Those who are really committed to a particular expression of the Christian faith may travel to a church of that type. Some may, however, discern a Christian calling to support their local parish church, and so they may well help 'raise the temperature' of Christian life and experience in the local church by their contribution to the life of the church and/or by their encouraging other members in their growth as Christians. There will also be some who, strongly influenced in the past by a differentiated (and more exclusive) church, no longer identify with its position and see their calling to support the local church. These two categories contribute to the concept of intentional Central discussed

²²⁰ See chapter 6.

²²¹ There may well be two parallel scales here: one measuring personal faith and commitment and the other commitment to the organisation. Often the two will run together, but not always.

²²² 14.

²²³ It could also be expressed in terms of the percentage importance of a person's religious commitment to their life. For simplicity I limit discussion to the faith temperature scale.

later. Some of those people may have a very high degree of Christian commitment: their faith temperature may be very much at the warm/hot end of the range. Due to this mix of types, the average 'temperature' within an inclusive Central church may appear to be somewhat lower than in a more exclusive differentiated church, depending on the mix.²²⁴ Lower temperatures may be expressed in not particularly regular or committed churchgoing (they will come if the social calendar allows, 'if they are not doing anything more interesting'²²⁵), in the lack of desire to become involved in the running of the church or to attend study or fellowship groups. Others, at a higher temperature, attend church very regularly, and participate fully. Whether there comes a point where the difference between the opposite ends of the scale is such that they are actually expressing a different form of religion may be a moot point.

5.5.4 Missional

Finally in this section I need to ask whether being missional is a characteristic of Central, with its open soteriology and inclusiveness, not least because of the way ideas of mission arise in the interview material. Traditionally Central has not been actively missional, at least in the overtly evangelical sense of that word that has dominated mission discourse in the Church of England for the last two decades or more. Arguably it has been in the much wider sense of mission described by the five marks of mission, explored in some recent writing²²⁶ and, from a more liberal perspective, by Saxbee²²⁷ and Percy.²²⁸

5.6 Conversing with theological models

Space constraints preclude a comprehensive discussion of models or images of church, not least as there are so many of them,²²⁹ but some conversation with models of church is necessary. My assertion that Central churchmanship is a form of church that seems particularly appropriate for rural church, needs to be informed by a wider context. Part of the context of this thesis is the diocesan AWA initiative which draws on one particular understanding of one theological model of church. The brief discussion in this section will inform the discussion of the interview material in the following chapters.

²²⁴ See Percy, *Shaping*, 26: worship 'for Anglicans is often cool, reflective and apparently detached (when compared to the 'warmer' language...of charismatics).'

²²⁵ 22

²²⁶ Bosch, *Mission*, Bevans and Schroeder, *Constants*, Spencer, *Mission*.

²²⁷ John Saxbee, *Liberal Evangelism*, (London: SPCK, 1994).

²²⁸ Percy and Markham (eds.), *Liberal*.

²²⁹ James D.G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*, (Cambridge: Eerdmans, 1998), 536 cites a reference to as many as 95 "images" and himself settles for examining a mere 4 of them.

Perhaps the best known relatively recent discussion of models of church is that of Dulles.²³⁰ He suggests and discusses five models of the church: institution, mystical communion, sacrament, herald, servant. At the end of his discussion, as he seeks a more vibrant model of the church for the future, he tentatively adds a sixth: the community of disciples. Within mystical communion he discusses two images which have gained particular recent currency, the Body of Christ and the People of God, 'the two models both illuminate, from different angles, the notion of the Church as communion or community'.²³¹ Dulles writes from a Roman Catholic perspective and is drawing on the insights of Vatican II. Whilst those same insights will undoubtedly have influenced views within the Church of England, the charismatic movement within the Church of England has also influenced the prominence of the model of the Body of Christ, interpreted in particular ways, not least as a justification for, and encouragement to use, the gifts of the laity.²³² It is not the only form of the model,²³³ but it is in this particular form that the model appears in *AWA*.

My observation of the benefices surveyed, particularly Ambridge, is that this particular model or image is one with which they have struggled to engage.²³⁴ My interview questions did not specifically address this, but it is noteworthy that only two interviewees mentioned the phrase 'the Body of Christ'. None mentioned 'the People of God'. My guess is that the Dulles model of church with which most of them would most readily engage might be that of the institution. 'It seeks to save souls precisely by bringing them into the institution'²³⁵ is perhaps an overly Catholic description of the importance of getting people into church, but there may nevertheless be resonances with the interviewees' frequently voiced aspiration of 'getting people into church'. And some of Dulles' wider descriptions of church as institution seem to resonate with the formal and structured approach of Central church and its institutional commitment. Sadly that also means that some of the drawbacks of that model of church that Dulles perceives (such as its aridity²³⁶), as well as its benefits, can also be seen in Central. Amongst the drawbacks, and adapting from Dulles' Roman Catholic context,

²³⁰ Dulles, *Models*.

²³¹ Dulles, *Models*, 47.

²³² Church of England Doctrine Commission, 'The Mystery of Salvation', *Contemporary Doctrine Classics* (London: Church House Publishing, 2005); Michael Harper, *Let My People Grow*, (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1977); Church of England Doctrine Commission, 'Holy Spirit'; Church of England, *The Mission and Ministry of the Whole Church*, (London: Church House Publishing, 2007).

²³³ See e.g., the challenging view expressed in Yung Suk Kim, *Christ's Body in Corinth*, (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2008) and also that expressed in John A.T. Robinson, *The Body: A Study in Pauline Theology*, (London: SCM Press, 1952)

²³⁴ Beryl Bowes, 'What on Earth Is the Church For?' (MA Dissertation, Leeds, 2006). came to similar conclusions in two benefices she surveyed.

²³⁵ Dulles, *Models*, 34.

²³⁶ Dulles, *Models*, 42.

'concerned with maintaining right relationships with...bishops, they attended less than they should to God, to Christ and the Holy Spirit'.²³⁷ Dulles seeks to work to a more vibrant model of church for the future, the Community of Disciples, and my argument for intentional Central can be seen as having the same aim, maintaining the best of the past but linking to a greater content and commitment to God. Resonances of this can also be seen in Dunn's studies of the People of God image of Church.²³⁸

Cameron²³⁹ adopts a somewhat different approach in her attempts to understand the church in order to help the church facilitate its mission obligations. She argues that the church cannot escape a relationship with rapidly changing contemporary culture, and the form that the church takes will inevitably communicate its message in a particular way, not least to those who are within the particular cultural form of society with which the church most closely identifies. She identifies five types of church and links them to five cultural forms. So, Parish Church is linked to public utility; Gathered Congregation to voluntary association; Small Group Church to book groups and party plan. Third-Place Church is linked to secular third places and Magnet Church is linked to parental choice of school.

Clearly these are different classification concepts from those Dulles uses, and indeed from those I have used, but they are nevertheless useful. Cameron asserts that many churches will not fall conveniently into a single category (for example many parish churches will have small groups that exist within the church structure). Clearly her linkage of parish church with public utility resonates both with what I have already written and with the interview material discussed later. There is a clear identity of Central rural church with her parish church model. Similarly, her linkage of gathered congregation with a voluntary association has a number of resonances with the differentiation that is apparent in many urban churches. Similar characteristics are apparent in the gathered churches of other denominations in the deanery, with which the deanery churches interact. Quite a lot of what Cameron says about small group church and its cultural linkage (with book groups and party plan) has relevance to the presence within the researched benefices of the study groups and, particularly, the cell groups.²⁴⁰

Billings's approach²⁴¹ is different again: he is looking, as an Anglican priest, more at models of ministry than at models of the church, although there are, inevitably,

²³⁷ Dulles, *Models*, 36.

²³⁸ Dunn, *Paul*, 537-48.

²³⁹ Cameron, *Resourcing*, 24-39, writing from a Salvation Army perspective.

²⁴⁰ See chapter 6.

²⁴¹ Billings, *Possible*.

connections between models of ministry and the models of church in which they are most often, or most likely, to be found. His four models of ministry are classical (the parson), evangelical (the minister), anglo-catholic (the priest) and utility (the social activist/personal therapist). Traditional Central falls mainly within his first category, the model of ministry to a very large degree shaping the church. However Billings, like Cameron, suggests that more than one model of ministry may be seen to be at work in a particular church situation. What I explore in this chapter about my perception of intentional Central sits well with Billings's concepts of different models of ministry informing the present life and ministry of a church (indeed his book arises from his own experience of working with colleagues whose churchmanship differed from his own).

Almost all whom I interviewed accepted the involvement of lay people in the ministry of the church. The interview questions were not directed to teasing out the rationale for this, but there seemed to be an underlying sense in some of the interviews that lay involvement was a second best, necessitated by reduced clergy numbers, rather than a whole-hearted acceptance that the ministry of the laity had an intrinsic validity of its own. This may tie in with the lack of engagement with the model of Body of Christ to describe the church – and it is perhaps significant that the two interviewees who referred to the Body of Christ did so in contexts which demonstrated that they had some principled understanding of the role of the laity. Nevertheless it fell a long way short of the reasoned theological foundations for collaborative ministry which Pickard creates in his book of that title,²⁴² and the vision of collaborative ministry reflecting the Trinitarian model expounded by Greenwood.²⁴³ If, increasingly, lay ministry is to be part of the future of the church in this deanery this is an area that will have to be addressed.

5.7 Multiple meanings for Central?

I have referred in several places to seeing multiple meanings comprised within the term 'Central' church or churchmanship. I suggest several different categories:

1. There is (historically and still, certainly in rural areas) standard, **default** or traditional CofE, that which I referred to earlier as undifferentiated inherited church. Strong²⁴⁴ paints a pretty depressing picture, both historically and more recently, of

²⁴² Pickard, *Theological Foundations for Collaborative Ministry*. cf. Impey, 'Review of Theological Foundations for Collaborative Ministry.'

²⁴³ Greenwood, *Parish Priests*.

²⁴⁴ Strong, *Country Church*.

some of this. It is described historically by Knight,²⁴⁵ in the middle of the 20th century by Garbett²⁴⁶ and later in the 20th century by Jenkins.²⁴⁷

2. There is the point of balance – the individual appreciating and drawing on the riches of the various church traditions and trying to hold them in some sort of tension or balance. This is a deliberate and **intentional** stance and may be one adopted by someone who has had previous experience of one of the more differentiated positions.²⁴⁸ Its very intentionality means it is a churchmanship describing the active and positive views of the individual

3. Overlapping with intentional, but not quite the same, is the '**parish church**' that intentionally seeks to be open, inclusive and accommodating to those of all traditions who live in the parish and seek to worship there, as distinct from the gathered eclectic model.²⁴⁹ This may be balance (and thus intentional), or may be simply the lowest common denominator (and thus tending to default).

4. **Civic church**, the 'mother church' of a town or city, at which civic services are held and from which civic duties are performed has a number of characteristics in common with Central but is linked to a wider geographic base than the parish.²⁵⁰ It might also be noted that a church that is not usually thought of as Central may well adopt the characteristics of Central when performing its role as a civic church.

5. There is what might be viewed as **public school/armed forces religion**. Whilst having affinities to one or more of the preceding categories this can be distinguished because it does not operate within a parish setting but within a community (school or services base); although offered to the whole of that community (and until relatively recently compulsory for that community) there is little connection with people outside that community. Religion as taught in (some) primary schools may also fall within this category.

²⁴⁵ Knight, *Nineteenth-Century*.

²⁴⁶ Garbett, *Claims*.

²⁴⁷ Timothy Jenkins, *Religion in English Everyday Life : An Ethnographic Approach* (Oxford; New York: Berghahn, 1999).

²⁴⁸ Cf. Discussions of changing churchmanship Davies and Guest, *Bishops*, 35-38. Also Walker, *Rediscovering the Middle Way*, *passim* in his insistence on a principled search after truth.

²⁴⁹ Cameron, *Resourcing*, 24-28 helpfully draws out the distinction between parish and gathered models. Similarities may be drawn with the role of the MP, as representative of all his constituents, or the Bishop as representative of all Christians of whatever 'tribe' within the diocese.

²⁵⁰ Paul Bayes and Tim Sledge, *Mission Shaped Parish*, (London: Church House Publishing, 2006), 91-98.

6. **Cathedral** worship tends to share many characteristics of Central, again drawing on a much wider area than the parish (even where the cathedral is itself a parish church) and arguably eclectic, albeit in a different sense from that in which a 'party' church is eclectic. Perhaps for the cathedral its parish is the diocese and so it needs to reflect the diversity within the diocese. Cathedrals do, of course, perform civic roles from time to time and the comments noted above for civic might equally apply in this case.

So Central as a term (like so many other churchmanship labels) encompasses a spectrum of viewpoints and practices which need to be assessed separately. There can be a passion and a conviction to categories 2 and 3, and a sense of ecclesiology and soteriology that have a theological integrity; I'm less sure about category 1. Categories 4 and 5 might fall anywhere on the spectrum. Category 6 is *sui generis*. Increasingly there seems to be a difference between intentional Central and that Central which represents 'default C of E'. We may conclude that default is undifferentiated, whereas intentional is actually very differentiated both from the extremes of the three tribes and, indeed, from default. It may be the case that differentiated intentional Central is a relatively recent phenomenon arising in reaction to the increasing differentiation of the three tribes; this will probably be the case where a Central church exists as one of the several different styles of church in a town or city. Things may be much less clear cut in rural situations and default and intentional may exist alongside each other within a single church, reflecting perhaps the inherited style of the church and the attempts by clergy or laity to give the church a greater clarity and purpose to ensure its future survival. This co-existence points to there being a continuum between the views, and was noted within the research interviews. I suspect that much of what I want to argue positively for in relation to Central will apply to intentional (categories 2 and 3) and much of what causes me concern about Central and its future viability will be found to be default (category 1). Nevertheless there will be those who will still defend and see value in category 1.²⁵¹

Knight's study of 19th century country Church of England²⁵² appears sympathetic to a central position inasmuch as central means neither high nor low, evangelical nor tractarian (thus defining by what it is not). But the overwhelming impression of the Victorian church she describes is of something very different in almost every respect from today's church, so that comparisons are of limited help. What she describes seems to be default (category 1) rather than intentional (category 2 or 3) and certainly not a church that is in balance or tension.

²⁵¹ Some of Gibson, *Countryside*, and Davison and Millbank, *Parish*, can be read in this way.

²⁵² Knight, *Nineteenth-Century*.

Intentional Central (i.e. category 2 or 3) can certainly span a range of churchmanship and many intentional Central clergy find themselves able to minister anywhere within that range. In doing so perhaps they synthesise Maurice and Bartlett, holding the three tribes in tension, but not the parties that represent aspects of those tribes. The principled or intentional Central position will hold these positions in tension or balance, seeking to draw on the strengths of each.

So, one might ask, how far is the perception of churchmanship to do with the minister and how much the church? There is anecdotal evidence within the deanery surveyed of clergy who have tried to change the churchmanship of their church from Central, usually without lasting success, and of parishes that remain resolutely default Central in spite of intentionally Central clergy. Whilst in a town, where there are several Anglican churches, or churches of varied denominations, the possibility of differentiation and eclecticism arises, it is far less likely in a small town or village.²⁵³ This takes us back to the interface of theology and sociology. Even if the minister has strong views, the social context of a village or market town church with that inclusiveness identified in my ideal-type strongly militates against the possibility of being able to become sharply bounded. The question 'What is possible here and why?' is one that shapes Central in its context. One conversation partner suggested that Central is the contextualised version of the Church of England for the countryside – an interesting suggestion, but perhaps an overstatement, as he subsequently acknowledged.²⁵⁴

5.8 What shapes Central Church?

Broadly we might say that Central is shaped by the need for a form of Church of England religion in certain social and institutional contexts. How much is that shaping influenced by sociological issues and how much by theological issues? This section addresses these questions, and also touches on whether it is capable of being systematised as a theological 'system'.²⁵⁵

5.8.1 Sociologically

In past centuries the rural Church of England has been massively shaped by numerous factors, not least contemporary power structures, the role of the local landowner, and

²⁵³ Cf. the deanery surveyed and also Kendal, described in Heelas and Woodhead, *Spiritual Revolution*, 61.

²⁵⁴ 18

²⁵⁵ On this generally see Church of England Doctrine Commission, *Believing*.

the alliance in the 18th and 19th centuries of the parson with the squire, sometimes in the one person of the 'squarson'.²⁵⁶ Even today the Church of England's role as a major agricultural landowner (although generally regarded as a good landlord) can bring back bitter memories of tithe payments, more than 70 years after final abolition.²⁵⁷ The church may have changed in recent decades but old memories linger to shape attitudes. An interviewee commented on the tie-up between landowners and the church and the exercise of power over people that was implicit in that relationship.²⁵⁸ That led me to wonder whether (a strand of) Central has been (or may be) about preserving the power structures of the *status quo*.²⁵⁹ If so (that strand of) Central is inevitably in decline due to the dismantling of many of those structures and the widespread loss of deference. On the other hand there is evidence from another interview²⁶⁰ of the disapproval of the church as it is now by the landowners in one village, so perhaps they see the church being no longer part of that alliance and power structure. Undoubtedly changes in agriculture, massively reduced agricultural employment and the diminished power and status of the local landowner, once closely linked with the church, have contributed to the apparent decline of the rural church, to the change of the rural church, and arguably to the reshaping of the rural church. The result is a rural church that is in many ways very different from what it has been in the past.²⁶¹ Social and cultural issues²⁶² continue to shape Central – the change of rural demographics, the changed nature of much village life, the changed (and much reduced) role of the clergy in society, the much changed role of the laity and, of course, overlaying all that, particularly in the last 50 years, the impact of secularisation and the general and substantial decline in church attendance.²⁶³ Relevant, too, is the change in the forces that have bound church and society in the past, but no longer bind them in the same way, not least the changing nature of the Establishment of the Church of England.²⁶⁴

How far is Central a theological concept and how far is it a creation of social forces within and outside the institutional church? If my analysis of varied forms of Central is correct there will be several answers to that question, with the more intentional forms attracting a greater degree of theological primacy. The relationship of theological

²⁵⁶ See Anthony Russell, *The Clerical Profession*, (London: SPCK, 1980). See also Games (ed.), *Bejtaman Radio Talks*, 35.

²⁵⁷ Tithe Redemption Act 1936.

²⁵⁸ 17

²⁵⁹ And perhaps also clerical hopes of preferment?

²⁶⁰ 14

²⁶¹ ACORA described massive change to rural church, which has accelerated over the following 20 years.

²⁶² including those discussed in Chapter 4.

²⁶³ See McLeod, *Religious Crisis*.

²⁶⁴ Davies and Guest, *Bishops*, 37, 178-9 provides some insights into this unbinding.

movements to their social context is at one level straightforward and at another immensely complex, so often depending on the particularities of each context.²⁶⁵ That relationship also needs to be considered alongside the equally complex question of spiritual capital and its transmission.²⁶⁶ History makes options available but can remove options too, and just as many previous events and movements in the history of the church opened or closed options of belief and practice, so too do the events and movements of the present day, including the sociological context of the life and form of the church. This presents a real challenge to the Church of England's sense of self-identity as being the church in England, in continuity from the earliest times, and leads to an emphasis being placed on continuity rather than on precise and unchanging identity.²⁶⁷ The history of the church in England over the centuries (and of the Central element within it) has been predominantly one of change and renewal rather than death and resurrection. In the present changed, and still rapidly changing, circumstances where, arguably, the challenges to the church are greater than at any time in its history, some may argue that renewal is no longer possible and that the only hope for the future of the church lies in its death and its resurrection in some new form.²⁶⁸

5.8.2 Theologically

5.8.2.1 Liturgy and Creeds

Traditionally what defined the Church of England was its Common Prayer, its liturgy, as reflected in *BCP*. One of *BCP*'s defining characteristics seems to be right living in community,²⁶⁹ and this might be seen as influential in shaping Central. However, other sections of the church, far removed in viewpoint from Central, would also claim to be inheritors of *BCP* and place a heavy emphasis on right belief.²⁷⁰ The move from *BCP* to *CW* in many churches over recent decades may well have been one factor that has shaped where they now stand on my default/intentional Central continuum. It may be hard to be intentionally Central and remain firmly and totally wedded to *BCP*.

The Church of England unlike many of the other churches of the Reformation, chose not to define itself by confessions of faith. Like the Church from which it emerged at the time of the Reformation it was content to use the great Catholic creeds of Christendom.

²⁶⁵ This is evident even between the individual villages of Ambridge.

²⁶⁶ See Martin, *Sociology*; Davie, *Religion in Britain*.

²⁶⁷ See Podmore, *Aspects of Anglican Identity, passim*.

²⁶⁸ Cf. Davison and Millbank, *Parish*, 9, who argue cogently for the changing and adapting parish church that survives over the centuries.

²⁶⁹ Cf. Douglas Davies, 'Anglican Soteriology: Incarnation, Worship and the Property of Mercy', in Roger R. Keller and Robert L. Millet (eds.), *Salvation in Christ: Comparative Christian Views* (Provo, Utah: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2005), 53-67.

²⁷⁰ Viewpoints summarised in Spencer, *Anglicanism*.

Central church remains content to use those Catholic creeds (although how those creeds are heard and understood today may differ somewhat from previous generations, and possibly from other traditions within the Church of England). *BCP*, *The 39 Articles of Religion* and other formularies of the church provide a historic link to the emergence of the Church of England through the turbulence of the Reformation. In the 21st-century all these matters now 'bear witness' to the truth of the gospel which the church is bound to 'proclaim afresh in each generation.'²⁷¹ All these matters have shaped the Church of England, and all these matters have shaped the Central core of that church which, in these previous pages, I have been seeking to establish as a, if not the, normative manifestation of the Church of England. But that shaping is not overly bound by precise adherence to words and meanings: Central is likely to sit light to exact meanings of words (and therefore to be less excited than other parts of the church by the nuances of meaning inherent in liturgical revision, especially of the eucharistic prayers). Central is more likely to be concerned to leave a service of the eucharist changed by a divine encounter within it,²⁷² than by deep theological discussion on the nature of what happens in the eucharist.

5.8.2.2 Soteriology

Theological shaping factors tend, by the very nature of Central, to be implicit rather than explicit, but undoubtedly are located in the area of soteriology, and thus ecclesiology. What is it to be saved? Who is a member of the church? Central churches (in clear distinction from evangelical ones) tend to be not very tightly boundaried or narrowly theological in terms of who is saved or what it means to be saved, exemplifying the openness and inclusiveness noted earlier in the ideal-typology. Although they may well be prepared to wrestle hard with difficult questions such as 'what is good news for this community?' or 'what does salvation mean in the context of this community?', they may show little enthusiasm for formulaic approaches to 'being saved' or 'making decisions'. Understandings of salvation may often be expressed in moral rather than conceptual or theological terms and a Central church may often therefore be content to be a church of influence in society.²⁷³ But if Central is characterised by a generous soteriology and an open boundary ecclesiology, what sustains it? Several possible answers come to mind. Love? Being incarnational? A faith in a God who is both in, but also (perhaps more than for other traditions) beyond, the church?²⁷⁴ Indeed for Central there may be no single distinctive ecclesiology or

²⁷¹ Church of England, 'C15 of the Declaration of Assent', *Canons of the Church of England* (London: Church House Publishing, 6th ed, 2000).

²⁷² Like Hooker, according to Percy, *Shaping*, 59.

²⁷³ See categorisations used in the Kendal Project: Religion of Humanity rather than Religion of [Experiential] Difference. Heelas and Woodhead, *Spiritual Revolution*, 17-23. This might also properly be drawn from Bartlett, *Balance*, and reflects conversation with him.

²⁷⁴ Cf. Towler, *Certainty*.

single distinctive soteriology, but multiple versions of both. Many, perhaps all, those factors are likely to be part of the complex DNA of the Central church, often more implicit than explicit. The history of much rural religion, whether it be in its response to rural Methodism or to the attempts of a partisan incumbent to transform the parish church into his own favoured style, is of a stolid and effective resistance, based largely on an idea of what is believable in rural communities, of what sort of religion is possible in this context at this time - an interesting mix of theological and sociological concepts.

Central church's soteriology will generally eschew the extremes of evangelical 'gathered' and catholic 'sacramental' theology. Both those extremes would have definite answers to the questions whether different models of soteriology matter (they would generally say they do matter) and whether one model of soteriology and/or ecclesiology is as good as any other (they would generally say that only their model was acceptable, demonstrating the exclusivity which contrasts with Central's inclusivity). Central church is likely to take a much more open (but arguably no less principled) view and can claim the weight of the Church of England's Doctrine Commission in support.²⁷⁵ Nevertheless the questions remain, and will be answered differently by some who share Weber's concern that the shape of salvation differs in social settings, so many different needs for salvation met in so many different ways.²⁷⁶ People can only believe what is available to be believed, and is believable, in their social context, but there is always the temptation to try to extrapolate from the particular to the general.²⁷⁷ Merely to articulate these questions in relation to Central is to recognise that a full answer to them is beyond the scope of this thesis.

Part of the 'success' of growing churches in post-modernity is alleged to be their distinctiveness, exclusivity or differentiation.²⁷⁸ So how is inclusive and undifferentiated Central to be evaluated? It appears to be especially suited to the more inclusive nature of village or market town life - perhaps that is in itself a form of differentiation. Some will suggest its lack of 'edge' is unsustainable in a competitive age, others that its lack of edge is in fact a strength, a form of differentiation. There is always a trickle of people leaving the hard edged 'success' of some differentiated churches, although sadly this often results in an abandoning of church altogether rather than a move to a more Central church.²⁷⁹

²⁷⁵ Church of England Doctrine Commission, *'Mystery of Salvation'*, 300-22.

²⁷⁶ Weber, *Sociology*, 164-5.

²⁷⁷ Billings, *Possible*.

²⁷⁸ Cf. Heelas and Woodhead, *Spiritual Revolution*, 139-47 arguing that undifferentiated church has little hope for the future but cf. a critical response to their analysis in Smith, *God-Shaped Mission*, 37-40.

²⁷⁹ Philip J. Richter and Leslie J. Francis, *Gone but Not Forgotten: Church Leaving and Returning* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1998); Leslie J. Francis and Philip J. Richter,

5.8.2.3 Mission and Kingdom

These questions of soteriology and ecclesiology inexorably shape Central church's understanding of mission. The *Mission Shaped* books²⁸⁰ published from 2004 onwards urge that the future of the Church of England is inextricably linked with mission, albeit often a concept of mission limited to particular forms of evangelism. Smith argues for a primacy of mission.²⁸¹ So, too, does Hull who, whilst critiquing *Mission Shaped Church*, links the primacy of mission with an understanding of kingdom; church, for him, comes last in the triad of kingdom, mission, church.²⁸²

To speak of the kingdom of God in the same paragraph as Central church may seem odd to some. Kingdom theology seems recently to have become the preserve of particular theological viewpoints, which might wish soteriologically to link kingdom with personal conversion as a natural response to the question 'what is it to be saved?' But kingdom is not the sole preserve of such viewpoints. It was a concept dear to Maurice, exemplified by the title of his 1838 book *The Kingdom of Christ*, and picked up in Morris' recent, *To Build Christ's Kingdom*.²⁸³ There are a number of references in *The Mystery of Salvation*²⁸⁴ to the Kingdom of God. Kingdom and varied understandings of soteriology do go together. It is often easier to see how, pre-welfare state, the church in the parish was an agent of the kingdom, working for the good of all and especially of the needy. In today's welfare state Britain most of those functions have been taken over by the state or other charities, stripping the church of a major role and area of ministry and point of connection with the wider community – and possibly also of a major focus of its mission. Whether the severe spending cuts and the much vaunted (but yet to appear) 'Big Society' of the 2010 Coalition Government will reverse this trend and increase the role for the church remains to be seen.²⁸⁵ For today's church identifying the areas in which working for the kingdom might happen can be challenging, as can engaging with the community in which the church is located and answering the question, at the heart of the soteriological questions, 'What is good news to these people in these communities?' Put another way, where is God at work in his mission to this place? And what about the role of his church which is 'missionary by

Gone for Good? Church-Leaving and Returning in the 21st Century, (Peterborough: Epworth, 2007); David Tomlinson, *The Post Evangelical*, (London: SPCK, 1995).

²⁸⁰ Church of England, *MSC*; Bayes and Sledge, *Parish*; Sally Gaze, *Mission-Shaped and Rural*, (London: Church House Publishing, 2006) and others.

²⁸¹ Smith, *God-Shaped Mission*.

²⁸² John M Hull, *Mission-Shaped Church: A Theological Response*, (London: SCM, 2006), 5.

²⁸³ Morris, *Kingdom*.

²⁸⁴ Church of England Doctrine Commission, *The Mystery of Salvation*.

²⁸⁵ Cf. Stewart Dakers, 'Church Volunteering Has Little to Do with the Big Society', *Guardian*, 25 May 2011.

its very nature'?²⁸⁶ Can it regain its calling to model mission as the practice of good news?²⁸⁷

So, Central has meaning and is shaped both sociologically and theologically, although there will always be scope to question how well the theology articulates the values implicit in social practice and how well it keeps up with the changes in social practice.

5.9 Central Churchmanship in the Countryside

Broadly speaking, the characteristics of the Central church outlined above can be observed in the churches in Southern Ryedale. Those wanting something other than this, if Anglican, travel to York and if not Anglican may join Methodists, Baptists, Quakers, Elim or Roman Catholics locally. Different Anglican churches within the deanery have different nuances around a broadly Central position but none is gathered or eclectic on doctrinal grounds; people do - especially within the town – tend to travel to the church that best suits their style and temperament, best provides for their children, or is where their family roots are.

There are two linked aspects particularly relevant to the Central church in the countryside, the parish system and the idea of community. Both are vulnerable at the present time. Community no longer exists, even in rural and village areas, as it once did (or is thought to have).²⁸⁸ There are numerous references to 'community' in my interviews, the term being used loosely and interchangeably, referring both to the church community and to the wider community of the town or village served by the church.

The parish system has been at the heart of the church in England for over 1000 years. It is very much a Christendom model of church, and a model that for many centuries combined social and political control with religious observance and pastoral provision. During the 20th century the remaining elements of political and social control disappeared, along with many of the aspects of pastoral care previously provided by the church (education, some measure of health care, much of what is now subsumed under social services). Throughout this period the church has been continually adapting and changing, and still continues to adapt and change.²⁸⁹ There is still a sense in which the wider community calls on the church to provide rites of passage,

²⁸⁶ Second Vatican Council cited in Church of England, *Mission and Ministry*, 106.

²⁸⁷ Greenwood, *Parish Priests*, 60

²⁸⁸ 'Community' is now used in a rather different sense – community cohesion, something on the agenda of current governments and the faith contribution to which is controversial. See Billings, *Community*, Gibson, *Countryside* and Farnell et al., *Faith*.

²⁸⁹ Church of England, *"The Big Society" and the Church of England GS 1804* (London, 2010).

baptisms, weddings and funerals, and the law of the land gives everyone access to their parish church for those rites, regardless of church commitment: 'A Christian Presence in Every Community'.²⁹⁰ But increasingly the question is raised whether the parish system is any longer realistic or sustainable, certainly in its traditional form.²⁹¹ Archdeacons have been heard to proclaim quite openly within church circles that 'the parish system is broken'. Clergy are exhausted and burnt out in an attempt to maintain some semblance of traditional parochial ministry across a dozen or more villages or an urban parish of many tens of thousands. Yet many of them are reluctant to see the link with parish ministry totally broken. It still provides valuable pastoral, ministerial and missional contacts through the occasional offices and through acting as some sort of public focus for community celebration and community grief.²⁹² Central, with its stress on inclusiveness, clearly attaches a great deal of importance to the parish system. It might perhaps be argued that Central *is* parochial Christianity. But if it is, and the space it occupies is collapsing, what of the attempt to create intentional Central? Must that intentional Central inevitably become more differentiated and more like a gathered church than a parish church? Or might intentional Central provide a mechanism (at least in some places) for maintaining a realistic and worthwhile parochial presence? And is that the case in Southern Ryedale?

Davies, drawing on his research in the late 1980s, observes that Central is strongly represented amongst rural clergy, who tend to be older and to have trained on courses where churchmanship issues are less evident than in a 'party' college. He also suggests that the life experience of clergy is relevant and that, with age, their churchmanship tends to become more Central and inclusive.²⁹³ This observation broadly matches the case in Southern Ryedale (but not in an adjoining, equally rural, deanery). Discussing churchmanship issues with one of the deanery clergy (who matched Davies' model), she was firmly of the view that Central refers to liturgical approach and parish inclusiveness rather than a doctrinal stance, and that Central was of the nature of rural ministry; it encapsulates the inclusiveness of a parish church that has to accommodate a range of styles and viewpoints.

In looking at the shaping factors of Central we noted the sociological influences and the significant changes that have affected the whole community. Jenkins²⁹⁴ in

²⁹⁰ Church of England. 2010. *A Christian Presence in Every Community*.

<http://www.churchofengland.org/about-us/facts-stats.aspx> (accessed 30 January, 2011).

²⁹¹ Steven J. L. Croft (ed.), *The Future of the Parish System* (London: Church House Publishing, 2006) is one of several books addressing this issue. See also Graham Earney, 'Everyone on Board,' *Country Way*, February 2011.

²⁹² A view strongly endorsed by Billings, *Possible* and by some of my interviews.

²⁹³ Davies et al., *Rural*, 68-69.

²⁹⁴ Jenkins, *Religion* 44-73.

describing the church in Comberton suggests that community only lives on in the mind of the clergy, and that feeds the continuation of the parish system. That may be a slightly harsh judgement, but it contains more than a grain of truth. Community is still very much present in the clerical mind in continuing the parish system, and in diocesan strategies for maintaining ministry and mission in multi-parish benefices. One reason for the unsustainable workload of rural clergy is precisely the pressure to try to maintain community. Nevertheless, if Central is, at least in part, about making visible what is there – community – then it should come as no surprise that it may struggle when what is there – community - stops being there, or is substantially diminished, or redefined.²⁹⁵ Nor should it come as a surprise that the diminution of community, the social model on which Central has been based and has operated for a long time, results in great difficulty in sustaining the model of church built around community. This is borne out by the frequently repeated observations in the interviews of the diminution of the necessary numbers to provide critical mass to sustain this form of church.²⁹⁶

Others might wish to conduct research to see whether evidence supports what is reported anecdotally that not only are there now fewer believers/church attenders but that those who remain are often at the extremes of belief, and thus more likely to gravitate to a distant eclectic church. Put crudely, are there enough people around in the middle ground that the Central parish model requires for survival? Arguably the position is slightly better in the town, but in the villages maintenance of a critical mass is much harder. It can be argued that social and demographic change have gone a long way towards taking the heart out of rural Central church, and this may well limit its future options. Viability depends on critical mass – and church is not the only aspect of rural community to experience this hard lesson.

Issues of declining church attendance and the impact of secularisation have been extensively written about in recent decades, not least by Brown.²⁹⁷ His argument hinges on a big change in the 'long 1960's' and in particular the flight of women from church attendance and from passing the Christian message to the next generation. That argument is much debated,²⁹⁸ although the diminution of numbers is beyond question, as also is the reduced role of women in passing on the faith to the next generation. This becomes very evident in villages where demographic shift is affecting

²⁹⁵ Cf. John Drane, *After Macdonaldisation*, (London: Darton Longman Todd, 2008), 31ff.

²⁹⁶ See Chapter 6.3.2.

²⁹⁷ Callum G. Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain: Understanding Secularisation 1800-2000* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2nd ed. 2009), ch 8 .

²⁹⁸ e.g. by McLeod, *Religious Crisis*, and Brown himself engages with his critics in the Postscript in the 2nd edition of his book. See Jenkins' dialogue between Davie and Brown: Jenkins, *Religion* 25-39. But cf. Robin Gill, *The Empty Church Revisited* (Aldershot, Hants: Ashgate, 2nd ed. 2003).

the 'norm' population mix, and numbers of children reduce.²⁹⁹ The social context of Central church cannot be ignored.³⁰⁰

Do all these factors point to Central church disappearing from the countryside? The more extreme or sectarian expressions of religion tend to be limited to the cities, and in particular university cities (where the influence of student Christian bodies and churches focussed on serving them can be significant). There is little evidence of extremes of churchmanship in the villages of North Yorkshire, and even in the market towns, where there are churches of various denominations, styles and theological viewpoints, there is still a sense of identity with the wider community which tends to militate against the gathered and distinct community more prevalent elsewhere. So perhaps there remains an important role for Central in the rural setting, provided that it can show itself able to adapt to the many challenges that confront it. One of those challenges is the changing nature of church membership, making casual attendance without financial or institutional commitment harder, as the Church of England moves to what other churches have always experienced, the living church (rather than previous generations) paying for its own ministry.

Some might say that Central has a particular place to play in the lives of the rural English, indeed encapsulates Englishness. It provides some measure of connection with the past and with the community whilst also seeking to make connections with the present. It reflects those characteristic English traits of modesty³⁰¹ and reticence and implicitness. It acts as custodian of beautiful buildings that for many convey a sense of the sacred or the numinous.³⁰² Perhaps it is also about making judgements about the nature of divine interaction with human beings, that it is a mysterious and modest process – on both sides – and that the claims of the more differentiated churches to greater clarity can be self-deluding and even dangerous. The focus is on living life at a low faith temperature (with the challenges that brings to the concept of discipleship) because that is the reality of how God is with human beings.

And what of those who minister in this rural Central context? The Central parson was (perhaps still is?) able to bridge the different degrees of relevance of religion. But what happens when the Central parson is spread so thin (as is increasingly the case) that

²⁹⁹ Chapter 4.1

³⁰⁰ Ernst Troeltsch's work on the social context of the Christian church whilst dated is still a useful analytical tool. Julian Gotobed. "Ernst Troeltsch (1865-1923)." In *The Boston Collaborative Encyclopedia of Modern Western Theology*, ed Wesley Wildman. (Boston, 2004), <http://people.bu.edu/wwildman/bce/troeltsch.htm> (accessed 22 November 2007); Gotobed. "Ernst Troeltsch (1865-1923)." (Place Published) (accessed).

³⁰¹ Rylie, 'A Distaste for Definitions,' 24.

³⁰² John Inge, *A Christian Theology of Place* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003). Also see chapter 6.2.7

he/she ceases to be able to engage realistically with the community and simply becomes a chaplain to the congregation? Will Central find a way of reinventing (perhaps a lay version of) the Central parson to enable those connections with a wider community to be maintained? ³⁰³

5.10 Fact or chimera?

I set out in this chapter to explore whether Central churchmanship does exist, or is a mere chimera. I believe that I have established beyond reasonable doubt that Central churchmanship and Central church do exist, that (in a variety of forms) this still represents the middle ground of the Church of England, especially in rural areas, and that, certainly in those areas, it remains the normative form of the Church of England, characterised by an openness and inclusiveness. I have discussed those factors which shape and influence the Central church and by exploring different manifestations of it I have identified a more intentional form. It is this intentional form which I believe holds the greatest likelihood of providing a viable form of rural church in the future.

Armed with this exploration of the church I now move on to examine the interview material to see what it says about the shape of the future rural church, and, in the following chapter, the sort of ministry that rural church requires.

³⁰³ See chapters 7.3 and 8. Greenwood, *Parish Priests* offers insights on this question.

Chapter 6 Imagining the Church

6.1 Introduction

In this chapter, using the image method described in chapter 2, I explore how the church in Ambridge and Borchester appears, and might be imagined for the future, in the light of the interviews. I seek to engage critically, theologically and reflectively with this data.

The first interview question invited people to envision a future for the church: Looking ahead, what sort of church do you want to be available for your children/grandchildren? It was clear from the replies that most interviewees wanted the church to have a future (although in some cases they did not envisage their children/grandchildren being part of it) and expressed hopes for it. Some, especially in categories 1 and 2, were realistic that the future could not be taken for granted.

I hope we have a church, which may sound a very negative statement... but knowing what goes on to keep the church going, you know, financial matters, dwindling congregationswe hope there always will be one there, but who knows so the first thing is to say that I would like to see the church to be there³⁰⁴

It was against that background that the interviews progressed and ultimately these images emerged of what the church might be, because of what it presently is. I explore first the positive images and then the less positive ones, in each case concentrating on the dominant characteristic: many of the images have a less dominant opposite characteristic.

6.2 Positive images

6.2.1 Joyful worship

This was, rather to my surprise, the first image that came to mind. Whilst Borchester offers a reasonable size congregation, good music and joyful worship, reflected in interview comments like '...my feeling is that everything within the church is done at its best for God, in the architecture, in the liturgy, in the way we dress',³⁰⁵ worship in Ambridge, with small congregations and limited musical resources, can sometimes, despite the best efforts of worship leaders, seem less than joyful. Yet one interviewee spoke positively and enthusiastically about worship in her village church:

³⁰⁴ 3
³⁰⁵ 4

I love it. I love the friendship and the enjoyment and I also love those times that are different, times to stop and to worship together and that is a qualitatively different activity when you are worshipping with other people and for me that is wonderful to have that opportunity.³⁰⁶

and even more when the numbers were enhanced by the benefice service:

... what is our average congregation? Maybe 15? I think if you've got a dozen then it makes it a good experience. I think when you get a smaller number [quotes previous parish which had 4 or 5], I know 'when two or three are gathered in my name' but it is just depressing I think..... wouldn't it be better to do one service of the day when you could be totally there and totally enthusiastic and invigorated and have time to meet people. I would be happier with that.³⁰⁷

A similar comment from another village bears this out:

I think regular worship is, to me, a very important cornerstone in the life of the church, it is where the members come together not only to worship but to have fellowship and it is an opportunity, or should be an opportunity, for those members to invite people from the community to come and join in the worship.³⁰⁸

Even a small or traditional service receives an uplift if the organist is a retired cathedral organist,³⁰⁹ as several parishes in the deanery have discovered! So, in places and on occasions, throughout Ambridge there is joyful worship; there is also the far from joyful worship ('depressing'³¹⁰) of a handful of people scattered around a large, cold, building struggling to sing, apparently not relating much to one another or to the worship, insisting on a full service. As one interviewee observes:

That's the biggest problem about the church, it's such a big barn of a place for day-to-day events, for the majority of the year it's not used to its potential.³¹¹

In Borchester the early Sunday and midweek eucharists take place in a warm side chapel with a degree of informality and with the congregation close to one another and to the president, creating joyful and engaging worship for those who attend. The main Parish Eucharist is a textbook piece of 'central' worship which meets the needs of those who attend. It may well not meet the needs of those who do not attend but might possibly do so, as one interviewee observes:

We are very much a eucharistic church, very focused on the eucharist in all our services, which I enjoy but it is not necessarily what the outsider would enjoy. They might find it difficult to come in and dip their toe in the water at the eucharist. They might find a family service or a Songs of Praise or those sort of

³⁰⁶ 13

³⁰⁷ 13

³⁰⁸ 10

³⁰⁹ There are at least three of them in the deanery.

³¹⁰ 13

³¹¹ 3

services easier to come to.³¹²

Afternoon/ evening alternative services - songs of praise, celtic style services, choral services - have, since that interview, begun to offer that wider appeal, although as yet little of the worship seems to connect with anyone aged 18 to 35 (apart from parents bringing young children for Christingle and Crib Services at Christmas).

The general importance of worship as a prime purpose of the church building and the Christian community was recognised by almost all interviewees. One interviewee put it clearly:

Primarily for the worship of God. That's what it was built for and obviously if we don't do that we are nothing. There's no point. That must be the most important purpose, worship for the glory of God.³¹³

A category 3 interviewee was surprisingly robust given their own lack of attendance:

Well, if you don't use it, it's not there for anything. Worship is going to be a big part of what the church is doing because it underpins everything else that they want to achieve I think. You can't get the message across without bringing people together and sharing it.³¹⁴

Social activity (e.g. after-service coffee) accompanying the worship and the life of the church, is an important element.

Certainly I think it's got quite a wide appeal. From when we were there, there seemed to be quite a lot going on. You've got various groups, there was a discussion group one night while we met with you, there's Sunday school. One of the Sundays we came was Mother's Day and the lady who was doing that was very enthusiastic and doing a great job with the kids.³¹⁵

and:

It's there as a place for those people who go to worship, but also a social thing as well, the children and the stuff that they can do, then you just had the Valentine event as well, stuff like that.... a central focal point for everyone.³¹⁶

6.2.2 Family service has an important place

This follows from the previous image. For Ambridge, family service is one of the occasions when worship can be described as joyful. A category 3 interviewee³¹⁷ spoke of her daughter enjoying family service in the village church she now attended (contrasting that worship with the worship in the village church her family traditionally

³¹² 2. However contrast Anne Richards, 'The Future of Faith in the Countryside' (paper presented at the Faith and the Future of the Countryside, Swanwick, 3-5 November 2010). stressing the potentially transformative effect of any experience of worship.

³¹³ 5

³¹⁴ 12

³¹⁵ 8b

³¹⁶ 7

³¹⁷ 15

attended). Positive comments about family service in another church convey an image of joyfulness and involvement '...people come and enjoy it and don't find it threatening....'³¹⁸ There was widespread agreement amongst interviewees in Ambridge that family services were very important, reached people who didn't otherwise attend church and allowed some engagement with children and their parents. At the time of the interviews there was a monthly family service in two different churches. The future of one has since been in question due to lack of families to support it (the cyclical effect often experienced in such services, accentuated by the small numbers of a small village), but seems to have gained a new lease of life, rebadged as Morning Praise. Each is highly dependent on input, in one case from clergy and in the other from a gifted and dedicated lay person. Both leaders involve as many people as possible in the services, particularly youngsters, as one interviewee comments:

...she is a person who relates keenly with young people and involves people, ... if she's got 10 children coming to church she'll do as much as she can to find 10 jobs for them to do when they are there so that they feel involved. Things like that are important, but it's also I think the informality of the service, you see if people come and enjoy it and don't find it threatening, it is all in simple language, even the readings and the talk....I think the parents get as much from that as the children do, I don't think you can explain the gospel too simply.³¹⁹

However, these services are very dependent on those two individuals and very time-consuming in terms of issuing invitations and reminders and working with people to prepare the service. Even after several years, neither has a team of regular and reliable helpers and is therefore vulnerable to the non-availability of the key personnel. Attendance at the services is not, generally, a priority for those who attend: they come when it is convenient and suits them; it has not drawn many of them into wider committed support for the church in that place (for example regular committed giving, PCC membership, willingness to serve as a church officer) nor, generally, encouraged them to attend the services held on other Sundays in the month. A category 3 interviewee comments on this divergence between family and traditional services:

I've been to a couple of the services that aren't family services and there aren't many younger people there but you get different age groups there at the family service and the all-age group services are very good at accepting everybody. I think that's what I like about it, its close-knit family group really.³²⁰

³¹⁸ 10

³¹⁹ 10

³²⁰ 15

On the occasions when a eucharistic family service has been held, numbers attending have been noticeably less, perhaps reflecting the level of Christian commitment of the attendees and that many have not been confirmed.

Borchester does not have a regular family service. Until recently it had all-age services on special occasions, perhaps every 6/8 weeks on average, which were well received by the regular congregation. More recently, coinciding with the suspension of the Sunday School for lack of support, the all-age services have largely ceased, due to the lack of families with children attending Sunday worship. That church's effort is presently put into mid-week activities for children. Whether it is possible (or even desirable) to re-build a connection with the Sunday service remains to be seen, but working with the young and their families is a priority.

6.2.3 Cell group thrives

Cell groups,³²¹ like family services, are an important feature of Ambridge. This is borne out by several interviews, even where the interviewee was not involved in cell groups. Some of those engaged in the cell group may be key to Ambridge's future, not because they are a member of the cell group *per se*, but because they take their faith seriously (display commitment and discipleship) and support the cell group as a means of nurture, sustenance and service. For that reason I discuss cell groups more fully than some of the other images.

A key feature of the cell group is that it is a lay initiative and lay led. Furthermore, the leadership of the meetings is shared. Overall leadership and planning lies with four people. A couple who had experienced cell groups in another church introduced cell groups to Ambridge and subsequently drew in two other leaders from within the group membership. I interviewed two leaders; four other interviewees attended (or had attended) cell groups.

Although one individual takes responsibility for, and thus leads, each group, within each group on a meeting-by-meeting basis tasks (hospitality, worship, study) are widely shared. This aims to encourage people to move beyond their comfort zone and perhaps thereby recognise and use the gifts that they have (implicitly, if not explicitly, adopting a Body of Christ model of church). The general pattern of cell meetings follows the formula of the cell church movement.³²² From one perspective the material

³²¹ Appendix 1.

³²² Administry. *Explaining Cell Churches*.

<http://www.acpi.org.uk/articles/explainingcellchurch.htm> (accessed 8 February 2011).

might be seen as simplistic, but, recognising the stage of spiritual growth of some of those who attend, it may be appropriate to introduce them to material, concepts and experiences of Christian living that they may not have previously encountered.³²³ The ethos of the cell group embraces the concept that cells divide and multiply. Thus the initial cell subdivided to form two groups and subsequently a third group was formed, and then briefly, but prematurely, a fourth. The majority of the membership is female (reflecting the church as a whole) but there are some male members. Running alongside the cell groups, but not part of the cell structure, is a monthly men's discussion group, led by a cell group leaders. Fairly recently, the benefice choir has been relaunched, led, and mainly supported, by cell group members. Within that spirit of multiplying, the cell group drew initially from those within the fairly active core of the churches, then reached out to those nearer the fringe, or lapsed, and some who had no recent connection with the church. The potential for new members from these sources may now be largely exhausted. It seems to be a much greater challenge to bridge the gap between cell and the never-churched than that between cell and the de-churched or semi-churched. A leader comments:

I think with cell one of the most difficult things is getting the growth and that is the whole principle of cell, that is one of the reasons for the name, you know cells multiply. I feel that is an important and difficult thing. In our case cell has grown from a start of five people to just under 20 now but we are seeking a way ahead that is more difficult because we feel that we have now soaked up the possibles so we now have to be looking beyond that.³²⁴

One feature of the cell groups is that, when the group takes a particular role in running or leading a church service, most members attend the service and many take a role. But otherwise, most of those joining the cell from a de-churched background have not started to attend church regularly, although one or two have, and one or two others attend family service, but otherwise it is as if the cell group meets their spiritual needs and they feel no need to attend more traditional services or receive communion. That poses questions which doubtless also arise for Fresh Expressions, and require further research. How (if at all) do such activities feed into and strengthen (and provide finance and leadership for) the more established and traditional institutional church, particularly where the links with the parish are not strong?³²⁵

Although one interviewee had withdrawn from the cell group she appreciated its value for many of those who attend:

It has been an enormous benefit for some people, and they would go to cell where they would not go to church. From that point of view, because it is

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³²⁵ The critique of Fresh Expressions in Davison and Millbank, *Parish*, particularly its separation from the parish, is relevant here, as also Percy, *Shaping*, 67-80.

servicing their need and drawing them into the Christian faith it has to be applauded.

She summarised what she found helpful and some of her concerns:

When I first went I thought they were a most welcoming group, it was wonderful to feel that you were part of this warm base community, there was a meal, we looked at Bible passages and discussed what it meant to us, and I thought this is wonderful. Then, as the weeks went by, I felt a, I can't quite put my finger on why I felt uneasy about this, I don't know whether it is because it is more detached from the church building, whether it's because it is individuals who are asked to lead it and I felt it was almost like the blind leading the blind in some instances. You have really very difficult Bible passages to try and interpret. I think for me personally, I can understand why house groups are an important part of church because they are small, they are more personal, they are intimate, they are a safe environment in which you can talk about things that you wouldn't necessarily want to talk about it church in front of a load of strangers, so I can understand why groups work, but personally I would like to think that there was either some clergy involvement or a person who is actually leading it had some sort of training if you like.³²⁶

For cell groups, as with so much else, there are positive aspects and negative aspects, or at least concerns. So what are the positive aspects of the cell structure? There is a considerable degree of loyalty to the cell group. Members send apologies if unable to attend, and give the meeting a reasonably high degree of priority. This contrasts with the attitude many people adopt to Sunday church attendance. The fact of cell meeting for a 'term' of 6-8 weeks and then breaking must be helpful in this regard. The social element of the meetings is important. No doubt some attend because it gives them a sense of belonging and a sense of friendship at a rather warmer and more personal level than they might experience in church. Part of each meeting is devoted to the social (refreshments, general conversation, sharing of news and concerns), and each term's programme normally contains some social activity - a shared meal or walk, open to members of all the groups, and indeed to their friends (attending a social activity might, for some, lead to attending a future cell group meeting). Meetings involve worship, prayer and Bible study, all elements that can contribute to Christian growth. Meetings are planned, conducted and followed up (and doubtless prayed for by the leaders) as being intentionally means by which those with no, or little, faith might come to faith and Christians will grow. In other words some important elements of Christian discipleship are recognised. There is also a strong underpinning of mission, seen primarily in encouraging other people to join cell, come to faith or start coming to church. The cell group also has a caring dimension, particularly for its members, but also for members of the wider community. Whilst one might not expect to find all five marks of mission there,³²⁷ mission seems wider than just evangelism.

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³²⁷ Church of England, *MSC*, 81,99.

And what are the negatives? By some measures what is done is stereotyped and simplistic and, like other process evangelism courses, is not the whole story. The fact of prepared material and, sometimes, the inexperience of the study leader, can lead to a very prescribed approach that limits wider ranging discussion and exploration.³²⁸ But, underlining the comment made earlier, these meetings may work best when seen as a fairly early stage in the process of making disciples – and, like similar courses, raise the question what is to follow? The groups tend to encourage a particular view of the Christian faith, as this interviewee comments:

Quite a lot of those I went to seemed to raise in one form or another the sheep and goats and who is going to be saved and I did from time to time get a feeling within the group that we as a group are fine, we are saved, we are all right, and we have got to try and bring others in, otherwise they will be judged.³²⁹

The social element of the meetings might be excessive for some tastes. One recent joiner commented how difficult she, as a newcomer, found coping with the extended social element, in spite of being made very welcome.³³⁰ That same interviewee, whilst agreeing that a home was the best place for such a meeting, commented on the issues raised for new attenders if they weren't taken to the meeting by an existing member. Another conversation asserted that meeting in a home is off-putting and excluding to more traditional rural folk, as, in all probability, is the idea of having to speak and share in front of others.³³¹ There is an issue here about the difference between rural and suburban contexts for cell to operate in and the transferability of the experience from an urban eclectic church to a rural parish context. Something like a cell group, which meets in people's homes, seems to be acceptable to a substantial minority of the village churchgoing community. There is another substantial minority which, for a variety of reasons, does not wish to become involved, and one of those reasons might be an unwillingness to meet in other people's homes. Similarly, considerable reticence has been expressed about the Bishop's suggestion of church services being held in a home during the cold winter months rather than trying (inadequately) to heat a church building. There remains an unresolved tension.

Cameron's description of small group church, of which cell church is a key example,³³² provides insights. Her analogy, in the secular world, is with party-plan selling, with its rather top-down approach. Her comment that the small group as a cultural form offers the benefits of highly relational and experiential religion in the privacy of the home³³³

³²⁸ The recently issued Leaders' Notes alert leaders to these dangers.

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³³² Cameron, *Resourcing*, 29-30.

³³³ Cameron, *Resourcing*, 31.

warrants careful reflection in considering the cell group as an important image for the future of the rural church, and might be a topic for future research, part of the wider issue of cell groups in relation to cell churches and parish churches.

I am aware of a number of concerns having been expressed about the cell groups in Ambridge. These concerns are particular to the manifestation of the cell groups in Ambridge and do not detract from the applicability within the deanery of the general principle of much of what they are doing.

Cell groups are, for a significant minority of Christians in Ambridge a positive aspect of church life in terms of sustaining spirituality and encouraging people to grow as Christians and to think about sharing their faith. Some of those in leadership are less sympathetic than others to traditional rural church life and, given the roots of cell group in the cell church movement, it will be important not to allow cell to become an independent expression of Christian life rather than a potential source of life and invigoration for more traditional forms of church. The sect/church typology divide identified by Martin³³⁴ serves as a warning of the dangers of separation from the life of the parish.

There is nothing in Borchester corresponding to a cell group; periodic study groups take place (usually in a home) and are well received and supported. One or two individuals have raised the possibility of cell groups being formed and the church's mission committee has explored whether this may have a place to play in the life of the church, so far without reaching a conclusion, other than that study group and cell are rather different concepts.

6.2.4 Aspiring to children's and youth work

The aspiration to reach out to children and young people, apparent in many of the interviews, must be seen as a positive image for both Ambridge and Borchester, but set against this must be the reality that present progress is distinctly limited.

Ambridge has the two family services noted previously. There is also, emphasised by several interviewees, the potentially more important (mainly clergy) contact with three schools, one church school and two community schools with committed Christian head teachers. Consequently there is good church contact with all three schools which any reshaping of ministry in the deanery would need to recognise and seek to maintain as

³³⁴ Martin, *Sociology*, 79ff . See also Davison and Millbank, *Parish*, expressing concerns when activities are not rooted in the life of the parish.

strategically important. There are occasional church-based activity days publicised through the schools, and school services and activities in church. None of Ambridge's churches has a Sunday School or a church sponsored youth activity, except in one village where the Methodists run children's mid-week activities with – in theory – support from the parish church. One interviewee comments on the situation in a village where there is a Church school:

I can't remember when there used to be a Sunday School whether there was a family service then..... So maybe the family service in some ways is a Sunday School. And of course the children go there [s.c. church, for assembly] every Thursday morning don't they, so again you could say that was a Sunday School couldn't you? So thinking about it there could almost be a Sunday School happening now in all but name.³³⁵

'Sunday School' seems to be used here as shorthand for the Christian nurture and education of children in the faith, but carries with it the implicit question - does the interviewee think Christian learning is only for children? That interviewee also recognises that what that school does in the way of Christian teaching is significant. In Borchester, with the suspension of the Sunday School, major importance attaches to the midweek children's activity launched in 2008. An interviewee described it soon after launch:

The way in which the Club is coming about is really positive and that gives me a lot of hope. It started off very slowly with five in number but it has now grown to 15, it is a vibrant club where the gospel is taught in a simple way, for five to 10-year-olds, I think it very positive, it is fun but it's serious as well.³³⁶

This group attracts a reasonable, manageable, number of children. Potentially it could attract more, but the leaders have been wary of going for numbers for numbers' sake. There is also some contact with parents.³³⁷ It has been noted above that making links between what goes on midweek and what goes on in church on a Sunday is problematical, not least due to patterns of Sunday family life, especially in families with broken marriages/relationships . At present the club caters for children only up to the end of primary school and this is a concern, as articulated by one interviewee:

But it does concern me that when [daughter] gets to age 10 or 11 she'll think that she is too old for Club and then there's a gap. I know you can't suddenly do everything for everyone but I think perhaps there's a gap for like teenage years. I don't think there's particularly anything there to attract them to become involved in the Church. Maybe something for older ones will emerge from Club. You can't just set up something for 12-year-olds, probably nobody would turn up whereas if they get to that age in Club they might happily move on.³³⁸

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How to provide for the next age group is a current concern for Borchester. Other work with young families is being addressed, partially, ecumenically. Borchester, with ecumenical partners, is involved in the local primary and secondary schools taking assemblies and hosting school services and activities in the churches.

6.2.5 Breadth of ministry

The ministry of Readers is widely accepted, particularly in Ambridge, where they take non-eucharistic services. The ministry of ordained women and female Readers is fully accepted in all the churches surveyed. One interviewee comments:

I was brought up a very high Anglo Catholic but I have no problem with, for example, accepting women priests. I've certainly never thought that we have had any particular problem in that respect.³³⁹

There is wide acceptance in Ambridge of lay people taking active roles in services: reading lessons, leading intercessions, reading the whole service and giving a homily. Some who do this do it very well indeed. Few have had any formal training though some have attended training arranged locally by the deanery. A major concern for Ambridge is that people able and willing to take on these roles are not evenly spread across the churches, and as those presently doing this work get older, issues of succession become acute.³⁴⁰ The benefice-wide lay ministry group delivers only a very limited amount of ministry in such matters as house communions and visiting.

Borchester welcomes lay people in a number of active roles: choir, servers, eucharistic ministers, lesson readers, intercessors. But problems may lie ahead:

Many people think they are too old to take on responsibilities I think more lay involvement would be a good thing but on the other hand I know how difficult it is to find people to do simple duties.³⁴¹

Lay people do most of the routine house communions and sick visiting. Several people in Borchester have received training in lay worship leading and pastoral ministry. Opportunities for involvement in funeral visiting, wedding preparation and baptism preparation are limited, not least by the relatively small number of these occasional offices.

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³⁴⁰ A problem not limited to Southern Ryedale – see Philip Hughes, 'Lay Leadership in Sparsely Populated Rural Australia,' *Rural Theology* 8, no. 1 (2010), 20.

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6.2.6 Community engagement

Virtually all interviewees spoke positively about the relationship between church and community and its importance. One interviewee from Borchester saw it as an intrinsic part of the challenge of Christian discipleship:

Yes, we might not want to, but we have to do it, we have got to be seen to be there and in everything, I mean church has not got to be separate from the rest of our lives, it's got to be part of our lives, it is part of our lives, it isn't a Sunday activity, it's 24/7 isn't it?³⁴²

There was a strong sense of the church being there and available when needed, demonstrated, amongst other ways, by being open for people to use for quiet and prayer. One interviewee expressed it thus, a bold statement of intent linked with a tinge of reality, theory and practice not quite meeting:

It is there for the whole community, the church in the market place, that is how you would sum it up. But if you were to start out working out whether we actually are there for the whole community some very awkward questions will arise because we are not really, to a certain extent..... Anyone in the community can come for assistance or help, we are there should we be wanted.³⁴³

There was a recognition, in Ambridge and Borchester, that there were many community activities in which church people played a very active part, but very few activities that the church actually ran. The days of separate church youth organisations (Scouts, Guides, etc.) is largely past, not least because of the widespread difficulty of finding leaders, church-linked or otherwise, but this was felt to be not necessarily a bad thing. Borchester sees an important part of its mission, with its strategic location in the centre of the community, as being visible and engaged with community activities and available to host services for the community and for groups within the community.

Particularly in the small villages there is an intertwining of church and community life as individual church members play a role in both, not always seen as 'the church' being involved. There is also a separateness. One village interviewee expressed it like this, echoing a number of other comments:

I think in some ways they [the community] take it [the church] for granted the fact that it is there and it has always been there. If for any reason, weddings or funerals, they want it to be there for them but I think in between they don't think a lot about it at all they just take it for granted that it is there.³⁴⁴

Another interviewee spoke of the same village and church communities in these terms:

In [village] all the responsibility of maintaining that building is falling on a small body of regular attenders who probably in the real Christian sense would be happy to meet anywhere as long as mission and worship continued.

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Although they dearly love the church and will work hard to support it their sense of community is more important. It is ironic it would be the wider community who would be more horrified if the church closed.

I think one of the interesting things about [village] is the church is right in the centre of the village and especially in the summer people are passing going to the community centre or the pub. People are so used to passing it by. The church porch is where the teenagers meet

Yes, I see people going in and out of the church and the churchyard, the graves are tended, or just going past and acknowledging it. I do see a relationship but I think it is not one of use but one of affectionit does not have the sort of everyday use that I see at the community centre or even perhaps the village hall.³⁴⁵

One very honest interviewee from another village observed:

I think [the church] is mainly there [for the] benefit of the regular attenders, but I think it should be the benefit of the wider community. I don't think that we have the impact that I would like the church to have and I think its influence is waning as each year passes by..... I think that it is incumbent on the church members, the Christian community, to take part in all [s.c. community/village] activities.³⁴⁶

It is noticeable that in some villages (including that one) the initiative for community activities has passed away from church people. That may be a function of the increasing age/decreasing energy of the congregation, but its consequence is the lessening of the church profile and the diminution of that mission aspect of the life of the church. It is also noticeable that in the villages where there seems to be a degree of antipathy towards the church, the scale of church/church member involvement in village life seems to be relatively low.

6.2.7 Important buildings

The importance of the church building to churchgoers and to the wider community,³⁴⁷ it being the focal point, something which people would want to support as a building even if they did not attend very much, is a key image for the future.³⁴⁸ Almost all interviewees expressed views about it. Interestingly, whilst the most committed people could readily contemplate carrying on worship and the life of the church from a substitute or temporary building, the more peripheral interviewees were to the active life of the church the more important they felt the building to be. So a category 1 interviewee:

I think it is very important the church building, but it is not the be all and end all, things could quite easily get by without one, or using some alternative.³⁴⁹

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³⁴⁷ Also borne out by recent Community Plans for some of the villages.

³⁴⁸ But cf.6.3.3 below

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A category 3 interviewee:

I think it is always important to see a church there and to have it there for you and well kept. I think it's quite an important structure there.³⁵⁰

Ideas of sacred place/space featured strongly in the interviews, again most strongly held by those most peripherally involved. Is this because their personal faith experience finds limited (if any) nurture through private prayer, bible reading or regular worship and it is the engagement with the known and familiar (building or vicar) that creates an engagement with the divine for them?

The number of people who come into the church and say that they can feel a presence there, they can feel the warmth it's quite surprising, gratifying but I think it obviously is important³⁵¹

.... for some people, the buildings are important and there are some churches that I go in to where you get a tremendous feeling of being part of a continuation of hundreds of years of worship...³⁵²

The thought of the loss of the building either through destruction or closure was alarming to many.³⁵³ Clearly it has a role as a sermon in stone, a parable of the presence of God, a means of keeping the rumour of God alive. But, as already noted, maintaining the building and keeping it open is very costly in money and time, and most of that cost is borne by the active church community. A view, typical of several others, on the cost and purpose of the building:

Apart from the fact that the church building is extremely expensive to maintain and run, the church is the people, definitely the people. Without the people it would just be a pile of stones, wouldn't it? It's a useful space, but it's the people.³⁵⁴

6.2.8 Changing

Almost without exception the interviewees felt that the church had changed in recent years and decades: 'It's definitely more open and welcoming than it was 20/30 years ago'.³⁵⁵

Some were forthright in their view that the change was very necessary, exemplified by this exchange with a category 3 interviewee.

I think it wanted to change from what it was years and years ago, it desperately wanted to change. To me it has changed from being really strong and powerful to not so strong and powerful. Do you understand what I mean?

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³⁵³ 13 and 14 highlighted the very negative impact of closing church buildings, especially if perceived as imposed by the diocese.

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Interviewer: It has to earn its place now rather than impose it?

Yes, but it did impose it then didn't it? Let's face it, that's one reason why places were built so big isn't it, so people went in with a real feeling of we have to behave in here.³⁵⁶

Some felt that it had not changed enough, and quite a number felt that it lagged somewhat behind the changes in society: 'Three or four decades behind'.³⁵⁷ Most viewed the changes positively, feeling that the church was much more accepting, welcoming and accessible. But alarmingly for the future, in Ambridge there were mixed views on how incomers to the village church might be treated. Whilst in some villages their experience and insights would be welcomed and the local congregation be likely to learn from them, in other villages, if people want to join: 'we expect them to fit in with our way'.³⁵⁸

A typical comment, illustrating both the fact of change and some of the problems that change has to address:

[Church] has changed enormously over my lifetime the importance of trying to cater for different people. You couldn't have just one type of service, you have to have different types of service especially in a village like ours, and I'm sure our village is not unique either.....You are splitting your congregations up aren't you, you are getting a few at each service, but you wouldn't have all those people going to one service.³⁵⁹

6.2.9 Missional but confused

There was a question about understandings of mission in all the interviews. Several interviewees (mainly, but not exclusively, in category 3) felt unable to answer the question. The answers that were given disclosed a limited and confused understanding of mission. Several equated it with overseas mission, which they felt to be an out-dated concept, with which some of them felt quite uncomfortable. For several others it was equated with a rather evangelical 'in your face'³⁶⁰ approach to evangelism from which those interviewees clearly had suffered. One or two were able to express some understanding of mission as sharing the love of God and proclaiming the good news. One of the more articulate, and clearly personally held, views:

I think the mission of every single Christian is to go out and, what Jesus said, go out into the world and make disciples of all nations..... I think we all have a mission to people that we are normally with, people that we are alongside day by day, to not push it down people's throats but to be willing to share our

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³⁶⁰ 12, 13

beliefs, about the love of Christ with them. It might be that we are doing it by deed rather than by word, in fact more often than not it is..... we are becoming more focused in the mission group about what we can do, we need to be more concerned, it is very easy to become a holy huddle, coming to church once or twice during the week and not thinking about people outside, but that isn't our purpose, nor should it be.³⁶¹

This comment typifies the dilemma felt in many of the churches in relation to mission:

If I am really honest those who are within the church and support it will have very conflicting views, very traditional attitudes as to why the church is there, to do and to provide and would be reluctant to be evangelical or to have a mission, it's not how things have been done in the past, it is not what they remember. I think there would be reluctance...the danger then is that you end up alienating the people on who you rely and who actually do most work.³⁶²

But, perhaps underlining the problems of religious vocabulary, quite a few of the interviewees did describe, at various points in their interviews, activity which was undoubtedly mission, but which they would not think of so categorising. The family services in Ambridge, and the cell groups with their aim of multiplying, are mission; so too is the children's club in Borchester. Providing an open, welcoming, church building as a place for prayer, quiet reflection and freely available Christian literature is an expression of mission.

The building itself is useful, has become more useful, has become more mission orientated and needs to become more mission orientated with its displays and its literature and its space for prayer, these are all things that encourage people to seek, particularly the literature. Going back to the Club, that is demonstrating mission, the extra services that we're having such as the Back to Church Sunday which was very much encouraging people in, in mission, the Service of Light again people who would not normally come into church coming in for a reason, they are all mission. The individual mission is difficult to assess really, to put your finger on, but as a church I think we are trying very much to look outwards.³⁶³

The importance of a mission (or ministry) of presence - being available when called upon - was articulated by several. For many, such idea of mission as they had was implicit rather than explicit, and depended to quite a high degree on the clergy (or other religious professionals) performing the explicit role. They still saw the clergy as doers of mission on their behalf, not as leading them in mission. 'It is a huge step to move from a congregation of occasional worshippers to being a mission community'.³⁶⁴

Given the focus on mission by the diocese in recent years, carried through to Ambridge

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³⁶⁴ Greenwood, *Parish Priests*, 79.

and Borchester, the lack of understanding was quite salutary.³⁶⁵ The old Christendom models have deep roots!

6.2.10 Prayer

This interviewee understood the importance for the church of prayer:

We have to be prepared to do what God wants us to do, not what we want to do, ...we've got to be prepared to change, because he doesn't stand still, we don't stand still. We're going to listen to him and be prepared to act on what he says as opposed to thinking something is a good idea to do ourselves. It takes time and it takes prayer.³⁶⁶

There was little explicit reference to prayer in the interviews, but it was clear that prayer was at the heart of both benefices – a positive image for the future. Two significant new ventures, one in Borchester and one in Ambridge, had emerged only after considerable prayer, reflection and discernment: 'The Club was set up ... having had a whole year of preparation and prayer'.³⁶⁷ The importance of church buildings being open for people to go to pray and reflect emerged time and again in the interviews, both in Ambridge and Borchester.

I think it's very important that worship is available when people need it really. Even if some people need it on a daily basis they could pop along and just pray for themselves or go with a friend. It's nice to have it and to use it daily, weekly, monthly.....Church is there to pray and to be close to God.³⁶⁸

The importance of public worship, including prayer, was widely accepted in the interviews. In Borchester there are several prayer initiatives and the prayer corner in church is well used. Although the prayer breakfast/afternoon are quite well attended, most of the praying is silent (and this seems to be an attraction). Weekday Morning Prayer is regularly attended by up to 7 people. In Ambridge the main focus for prayer outside services is in the cell groups. In one village a few parishioners join the vicar for Morning Prayer once a week, and the benefice midweek eucharist includes a substantial period of silent prayer. In both benefices the willingness of lay people to lead intercessions in public worship is an indication of their being comfortable with the idea of prayer. Several individuals in both benefices are involved in prayer groups beyond the parish.

³⁶⁵ Cf. surprise expressed in Diocese of York, *Mutual Support Analysis*, 21, 10. at the extent to which mission featured in the replies – and the suspicion that the term 'mission' wasn't well understood.

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6.3 Less positive images

6.3.1 Financial struggle

The incessantly rising demands of the diocesan share is a challenge to all the churches, particularly the village ones with small congregations. How long they can continue to pay more or less in full remains a big question. In addition, maintaining listed buildings is extremely expensive. All the buildings in Ambridge would benefit enormously from even relatively modest sums being spent to upgrade heating and lighting, install sound systems, refreshment facilities, and a toilet. Over a ten-year period Borchester has provided these things but the fundraising has been a substantial burden, requiring significant grant help, legacies and donations. It is only due to a legacy, now largely depleted, that the year-to-year expenses and share have been met. Financial pressure has prevented the town churches from jointly pursuing employing a youth worker, which would have been a significant mission opportunity.

This comment from a category 2 interviewee from one of the village churches is typical, both of the problem and of the misapprehension where the share goes:

In sheer terms of how much we are being asked to raise there's no way that the number of people who worship in [village] on a regular basis have that kind of money to give to the church. I know in other churches they say everybody gives 10%, but even if everybody did give 10% it wouldn't be enough for that small group who go. So I don't think this is sustainable any more for the Church of England to expect this small community of believers to be paying for the way the quota is working at the moment. What the solution to that is, I'm sure there is radical thinking going on, if for example villages became responsible for their church, it stood or fell according to their contribution, and they were also responsible for paying as a benefice a vicar,³⁶⁹ and they weren't paying a huge top slice to the Church of England for whatever we pay for. I think it's a huge problem and the answer is not to give vicars more and more parishes to look after because actually the problem is... I think we can't keep all our churches going. The upshot is that we are going to have to say that some of them are going to have to be declared redundant. Nobody in a benefice is going to want to be the one who loses their church and if they don't want to lose their church then they will have to fight for it and that will make them take some hard decisions I'm sure.³⁷⁰

In some, perhaps all, of the village churches meeting the financial demands seems to be the dominating feature of church life. 'For many of us in [village] the main question is survival to the next year and the next year and the next year....'³⁷¹ They seem to be struggling to survive for another year, simply in order to be able to struggle for another year! Lack of finance stifles mission, vision and initiative.³⁷²

³⁶⁹ The total share paid by this benefice is actually rather less than the full cost of the vicar!

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³⁷² Cf. Robin Gill, *A Vision for Growth*, (London: SPCK, 1994)

One interview raises the question of value:

At the end of the day people give what they are happy giving..... some people if you ask them to give more might decide they don't want to give more and give nothing at all.³⁷³

He also raised the issue of informing people:

If you actually went up and down the village and asked people if they knew how much it cost to keep the church going I think most people wouldn't have a clue. I really don't think they would, and probably have no idea how much the quota is – and whether that's something that ought to be publicised. How much did we spend on the church? This is how much we physically have to get in to cover the costs. I think this should be publicised more. It costs this amount to keep the church running and whether you put it in £ per day or £ per week or however you just have to do it. Folks ought to know. I think it would shock a few people.³⁷⁴

The wider community might help in maintaining the churchyard or contribute to a limited extent to a financial appeal for the building, but the day-to-day practical and financial burden of keeping the building insured, maintained, opened, heated, lighted and cleaned (as well as paying for ministry) falls on a very few people.

6.3.2 Concern about critical mass

All the churches surveyed face the same problems, due partly to the demographics of the area, and partly the national declining trend in church attendance.³⁷⁵ Critical mass is a key concept and operates at two levels. There is a critical mass for survival, below which the church cannot continue. But long before that point is reached, but virtually guaranteeing that it will be reached, is the critical mass to be attractive. Some of Ambridge's churches no longer have the critical mass to be attractive. What they offer is unlikely to attract new people to join them. Others are quite close to that figure. Some may be approaching the critical mass for survival, and a recent benefice review takes a fairly gloomy outlook on the ability to recruit successors to the present church officers and lay worship leaders. One village churchwarden expressed it like this:

Apart from a perennial problem of finance, which has become very serious recently we have also got a problem which I suspect it is fairly widespread that we have very much an ageing and declining congregation.³⁷⁶

And another like this:

I am very fearful for the time I no longer feel able to continue as churchwarden who might take my place. Having no churchwardens would to my mind be the beginning of the end of the church.³⁷⁷

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³⁷⁵ See chapter 4.

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But even with those gloomy prognostications on the diminishing pool of church officers and 'stalwarts',³⁷⁸ several of Ambridge's churches have seen new members, not just for family service, over the last few years. Some have come and stayed. Some have stayed for a while and then moved away again. One or two are even relatively young or active. They go some way to offset numbers lost by age/infirmity/removal/death.

Borchester started from a much higher numerical base. It still has the critical mass to be attractive, but in certain areas issues of critical mass are very apparent, Sunday children's work being one key example. The age profile is far older than is healthy, although there is still a reasonable proportion of people aged 40 to 60. A category 1 interviewee:

we appear to be having an increasingly elderly congregation and one wonders what the future holds but that's not for us. We don't know what God has got in mind for such things.³⁷⁹

Those moving in (mostly older people, including some active and gifted people) more or less offset losses by age/infirmity/removal/death. Given the lack of people aged under 40, there must be a question whether this church has the critical mass to be attractive to younger adults. Whilst at one level it is encouraging that older people are joining the church, moving into the town for retirement or returning to church in late middle age, the demographics of two generations lost to the church will increasingly limit the number of those returning to the church later in life. This cannot be relied on as a mission strategy.

Different levels of critical mass might be found to be applicable to the traditional institutional church, to the family service, and the cell structure. A cell group may work quite well with five or six members present, and once over a dozen is getting too big and needs to divide. On the other hand, a family service needs a rather higher critical mass in order to be attractive to other 'fringe' church attenders: for family service attraction and survival are perhaps rather more closely linked than for traditional institutional church. So whilst it is clear that critical mass issues are crucial, precisely what constitutes a critical mass in a particular manifestation of church life will require interpretation, as will different local settings and the sort of people comprised within those settings.

³⁷⁸ Cameron, *Resourcing*, 127.

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6.3.3 Expensive unsuitable buildings

The obverse of the positive image noted earlier,³⁸⁰ it is particularly the case in Ambridge with its large number of buildings which are difficult to heat adequately, expensive to insure and maintain and, for most purposes, too big. 'It's an expensive obligation'.³⁸¹ Arguably unsuitable for week-to-week village church worship, yet for some people worship must take place in the 'proper' church building. Some buildings could, with funding, be imaginatively adapted for wider community use as well as worship. In most cases the funding is not there even to provide the basics for comfortable and sensible use. In some villages the problem is compounded by the existence of the Methodist church as well as the parish church, so that resources and numbers are divided.

Borchester is comparatively better placed, partly because it has a larger congregation, more resources, and only a single building to maintain. Considerable work over the last 10 years has, at a cost, maintained the building, and improved it as a place for worship and mission. But it remains costly, in time, effort and money, to run.

6.3.4 Struggling to survive

The overriding impression from some interviewees from Ambridge, as seen in earlier paragraphs, is of a real struggle to survive, of a lack of vision, of a failure to recognise what the church is there for.

But there is also a sense in some interviews that the margin between where they are now and where they might feel relatively positive about the future is quite a small one. If they retain (or regain) a critical mass to be attractive, the arrival of one or two committed people could make a transformative difference to a village church.³⁸² It could add new impetus to the worship, the finances and the mission. It could reinforce a concept of a Christian focal point in the village as a first port of call for pastoral and other needs.

6.3.5 Traditional

In Ambridge worship has long moved from *BCP* to largely *CW*. One village fought to retain a greater number of *BCP* services and some of the congregation vote with their feet if the service they want is not offered (but often don't come even when it is!). There

³⁸⁰ 6.2.7

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³⁸² As exemplified, from another deanery, in Caroline Gaden, 'Reader Training - a Real Life Story', *York Diocesan Training Team Pathways for Discipleship*, March 2011, 4.

is anecdotal evidence in one village of a few people having ceased to attend because they no longer get the service they want. One interviewee told an anecdote about the controversy caused 30 years ago by the reordering of a local church by the 'feudal family' and the numbers who ceased attending church as a consequence:

Deep down people are very conservative about the church; for many people this was too radical a change.³⁸³

Compared with other local benefices things are far less traditional in Ambridge than elsewhere, but in some respects traditional attitudes remain. There is a reluctance in some quarters to think in terms of benefice and to travel for services, even to the Methodist church in the same village. One interviewee expresses it well:

It is very difficult to get folk to travel, no matter how short the distance can be. Getting them to travel between the Methodist and Anglican in one village can sometimes be a little bit difficult. Getting them to travel between [two villages a mile apart] you'd think at times they were in different time zones because the effort to get there seems to be too much for some people.³⁸⁴

There is some reluctance to move beyond traditional models of ministry and a great deal is still expected from clergy who now have several other villages to look after.

By comparison with Ambridge, Borchester might seem less traditional, but 'traditional' was an adjective used by several interviewees to describe it. By that I think they might mean recognisably Anglican and having recognisable continuity with the remembered past.

6.3.6 Religious expectations differ from suburbia

This image is not drawn directly from the interview material but from participant observation and from my reflections on the external conversations. Rural church has very different expectations from suburban church. This is very true in Ambridge and at least partly true in Borchester. The Central nature of the churches and the fact they are parish churches means that they seek to accommodate as wide a range of views and experience as possible and that renders likely a wide range of 'faith temperatures' within each church.³⁸⁵

One interviewee put it in slightly different terms:

...even people of faith have less faith than they did have. But I think the whole question of faith, faith means different things to different people.³⁸⁶

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³⁸⁵ See 5.5.3 above and 6.3.8 below.

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There will be those whose faith seems 'cool' and perhaps a few whose faith seems 'hot' but most might seem 'tepid'. This might differ quite significantly from an eclectic urban/suburban church where those who choose to travel and attend embrace its more differentiated viewpoint and style, and where there are mechanisms by which people can demonstrate their commitment to the particular ideals of that style of church. It does not work like that for rural church and leaves the question whether, and if so how, rural churchgoers might be motivated and how they might engage in mission.

Is their reticence about using religious language and speaking about God due to modesty, or to a feeling that speaking about God is properly left to the experts (primarily, in their view, the clergy)?³⁸⁷ Does this lie behind the feature, noticeable in the interviews, of the discomfort felt by some interviewees in speaking about mission, and the few references to God and prayer? Religious language/discourse may be part of the problem, but so, it seems, are the underlying concepts. Is this how ordinary theology manifests itself? A conversation partner from another diocese spoke of working with a group which initially refused outright to contemplate that they might have to speak about God,³⁸⁸ suggesting that such reticence is not confined to my interview parishes.

How much of this reticence is to do with being rural and how much is to do with being Central, i.e. the prevalent form of rural church? How does it relate to the limited appeal of cell group, study groups, etc. in all benefices, the widespread dislike of small group work, even among those who do attend cell or study group, and a preference for a lecture type approach? Perhaps it is more a manifestation of the English character.

I have already noted the apparent lack of engagement of the interviewed benefices with a Body of Christ model. I wonder if this is because that model seems inconsistent with what is experienced in such 'cool' and reticent rural and Central situations, or rather that it is happening, almost implicitly and unrecognised, expressed in natural and widespread networks of care, concern and support. In other words, has the Body of Christ imagery, which has been variously understood in its history, now been hijacked by the 'higher temperature' differentiated churches, and given nuances of meaning to support their particular agendas?³⁸⁹ There are constant references in the interviews to 'being there', 'being available if and when needed' and also to the wide network of community activities with which many of the interviewees are naturally

³⁸⁷ See Percy, *Shaping*, 25-26 and his reference to 'the deeply coded ways in which people speak about God'.

³⁸⁸ 21

³⁸⁹ Cf. Robinson, *The Body* whose exploration of this imagery certainly does not come from these standpoints. See also Kim, *Christ's Body*, Dulles, *Models*, 47, and Dunn, *Paul*, 548-64.

engaged because of their involvement in the community. These all speak more of the characteristics of rural than of urban/suburban church.³⁹⁰ They might also be seen to speak of an implicit understanding of being 'one body' and the mutual interdependence that flows from that.

There is the potential for an almost inevitable clash of cultures when urban/suburban Christians move to rural areas. The religious expectations of incomers may be very different, and may not always be welcomed, as the interviews noted above reflect, and they may find themselves struggling to adapt to the rather more implicit nature of rural religion after the more explicit urban/suburban variety.³⁹¹ The clash, can, of course, be in the opposite direction when incomers, seeking their rural idyll, resist any change to the village church and its life.³⁹²

6.3.7 Implicit congregationalism

What emerges from the interviews is a picture of churches that do not see themselves to any great degree as part of the wider universal church, as reflected by the concepts of diocese, deanery or benefice.³⁹³ This is particularly so in the villages and is seen in a number of ways.

First, by a less than enthusiastic embracing of the concept of benefice services. Generally only the 'host' church is well represented at a benefice service and the number travelling from other churches is often small, some villages being worse than others at supporting benefice services. Some churchwardens set a poor example. A similar lack of enthusiasm is shown for united services with the Methodists in those villages that have both church and chapel: Anglican attendance at services at the Methodist church is always lower than Methodist attendance at services in the Anglican church. To try to put a positive face on this lack of enthusiasm for benefice, one might argue for the concept of the local church serving its own community, and the (very real) fact that whilst the wider community might attend a service in the village church they are unlikely to travel to a service in another village. One of my conversation partners³⁹⁴ commented that benefice services disenfranchise fringe and occasional attenders. An interviewee encapsulates this well:

I think it's important to [village] to have as many local church services as possible even if that has to involve local leadership. It's important to [village]

³⁹⁰ See Gibson, *Countryside*.

³⁹¹ Percy, *Shaping* whilst arguing strongly for the implicit nature of much that shapes the church, would not limit that implicitness to the rural church.

³⁹² Cf. Jenkins, *Religion*.

³⁹³ In some respects little changed from 1578: Percy, *Shaping*, 54-55.

³⁹⁴ 19

because otherwise the fringe elements of the church would cease to attend.³⁹⁵

Secondly, by a difficulty in finding people willing to serve as parish representatives to deanery synod, to take the role seriously, to contribute to synod and to report back meaningfully to the PCC. The fact of deanery synod meetings not always being exciting, interesting or well run does not help. If people do not see the importance or significance of deanery synod, do not see the importance of electing good people to serve, then however hard the leadership of synod might try, meetings risk becoming unimaginative and uninspiring. For most congregations deanery synod has little impact on the life of the parish, even the deanery plan process is treated with little seriousness because, I suspect, parishes feel that whatever they say will ultimately make no difference to what 'them at York' decide. And, perversely, it often seems they want 'York' to decide rather than engage with the challenge of working out their own futures.

Thirdly, by a reluctance to contribute to diocesan share. In spite of much explanation to Ambridge that their aggregate contribution to the diocese is less than the cost of providing their stipendiary clergy they are convinced they are paying a substantial 'top slice' to the diocese or the Church of England generally, both regarded as profligate bodies. The financial burden on small village congregations is significant, as noted earlier, but their lack of realism about the real cost of providing even their own ministry, never mind a degree of support to more needy places, is apparent.

Fourthly, by a lack of engagement with diocesan policy and initiatives regarding mission and the future shape of the church. For example, *AWA* lays substantial stress on the increasing role to be played by lay people. The parishes respond by pointing to their ageing and declining congregations and the substantial load already carried by a small group of active members in maintaining the existing church, and the near impossibility of finding younger, active people with the commitment and time to take on these roles. This is also exemplified by the reluctance of people to take on the office of churchwarden. In some cases people will indicate a willingness to do (some of) the work concerned, but not to hold the formal office. There is a perception in some, if not all, village churches that diocesan structures and strategy are largely concerned with maintaining the institution, whereas all the villagers want to do is to maintain their local church. In future this may prove to be possible only by using unpaid ministry, ordained or lay, with consequent reduction of financial payment to the diocese.

³⁹⁵ 6

These matters raise questions of the identity of the local congregation as against the wider church and their sense that time and again resources are being diverted away from rural church to other parts of the church. That is quite true, taking a relatively short view - Ambridge, now served by one stipendiary cleric had, until recently, two (albeit one part-time); 20 years ago there were three. 50 years ago there were four - but 150 years ago ministry was probably very sketchy. The diminution in church attendance of the last few decades has coincided with a massive shift in the way the cost of ministry is borne from historic resources to current congregations. They have had to come to terms with contributing realistically towards the cost of church just at a time when the visible element - paid clergy - was diminishing. So not only identity is involved, but also a sense of value for money. They are being asked to pay more and more for, apparently, less and less. They can no longer have what they want (their own vicar to look after their own village) so why should they pay? And the concept of value applies not only to financial contribution, but also to the very significant contribution of time and effort made to keep the church open and working. The question facing many congregations now is whether there will be sufficient people in the future to keep the church open, both financially and practically. One interview illustrates several of these points:

I do think it is actually a matter of resourcing. ... every member of the church is rushed off their feet. In the very small communities that they serve there is no way that they have the time to go out and knock on millions of doors. I know the Bishop thinks that's a job that the people of the community should be doing but I think there's a bit of tension about that. Those who give up their time and effort in the church, and they are a small group, often feel beleaguered, put upon, they are doing a lot already and although we know that we should just give and continue to support it there's a sense in which, not at the local level at all, but higher up the church, you think where are the resources and surely this, the coalface, is the most important part of the church and how to get that mission going at local level. I think it's one of the biggest challenges there is.....I think the church has some really hard decisions to make, you know, I don't know that much about how quotas work to know what happens with the money.³⁹⁶

6.3.8 Variable commitment

This image was added later following reflection on some aspects of the earlier images such as critical mass, the age profile, the reluctance of people to take on jobs and the comments about 'faith temperature'. It was also informed by several conversations on such topics as 'Why are 'ordinary people' not participating in church so much? Religion seems to be taking a different place in their ordinariness.' 'What proportion of religion in an individual's life constitutes the individual's identity?' In relation to the latter

³⁹⁶ 13. That interview continued in terms cited on p 95 that are also relevant here.

question, one suggestion was made that 'high temperature' equated with keen evangelicals, but an interviewee robustly rebutted this:

I dispute this if 'high temperature' means evangelical. 'Ordinary Christians' can be keen and driven and sincere without being labelled evangelical. Members of a central church can be 'keen'. Indeed maybe they are at the local church because that is where they believe God wants them to be - it could be much easier to go with like-minded people.³⁹⁷

This rebuttal challenges the conventional assumption that loss of critical mass leads to unsustainability so that in the future church has to be seen in terms of gathered (and therefore differentiated and 'keen') churches. It also challenges any easy categorisation or measurement of faith in rural churches, as well as providing useful empirical support for my argument for intentional Central.

This conversation also highlighted that one of the (many) problems of this project is that of language, its limitations, its hidden pejorative meanings, and the danger that religious professionals use shorthand language all too easily. It made me realise that across the range of the interviews and my participant observations there was demonstrated precisely that range of faith temperatures discussed at 5.5.3 above. With that range of faith temperatures comes also a range of levels of discipleship or commitment (real or apparent). The two concepts are closely linked.

6.4 Summing up the images

My overriding impression of the images of church presented by the interviewees, of the church imagined in the preceding pages, is what I have identified in chapter 5 as Central. Several interviewees described it as 'middle of the road' or 'traditional', welcoming of a range of styles and traditions. So from Borchester:

I'm trying to think of some other phrase to middle-of-the-road, but basically that's really what we are. I suppose we have quite a variety of things, at one stage there was quite a large charismatic group and there are still one or two..... we use Common Worship, and it's a broad form of worship with music and a choir, that's an important part of itwe are not singing and dancing in the aisles and there's no desire to get rid of the choir and organ and have a band and we do things in, I think, in a traditional manner....³⁹⁸

The interviewee went on to comment that the 'middle-ness' of the church allowed it to accommodate people of different theological and ecclesiological views and practices. From Ambridge:

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³⁹⁸ 4

I suppose it just boils down to the fact that we are fairly middle-of-the-road really, you know I can't really say any more than that.³⁹⁹

Several interviewees used the adjective 'traditional' to describe church, and in three or four cases contrasted it with experience elsewhere of a more evangelical style of Christianity.

In terms of my default/intentional Central continuum explored in chapter 5 I detect both elements in Ambridge and Borchester. Intentional is certainly present, but it is partial. Default is also present. In most of the churches both elements co-exist but one or the other is dominant, and may well determine the future for that particular church.

6.5 Ranking the images

The images appear in this chapter in more or less the order in which they came to mind, and that may be a subliminal reflection of the order in which I rank them and the significance that I attribute to them. Only the last image, which is more of an *ex post facto* reflection, was added later.

Worship must be at the heart of what the church is about. A concern to reach out to children and young people and thus to seek to fill the gaps in ageing congregations is, at its lowest, a survival instinct that might help address the looming problems of critical mass. I rank the cell group fairly highly, not for what it is *per se*, but for what it represents as a means by which some Christians within Ambridge are growing in their faith, a means by which those on the fringe are being drawn into a more lively faith, and an expression of mission. As such, notwithstanding potential problems noted earlier, it provides a contribution to a model of how the church might survive, and even flourish, moving into an uncertain future. The acceptance of a wide range of ministry is important in a situation where, inevitably, the local vicar is unable to take all services and a variety of forms of ministry provided by a variety of people is crucial. I rank engagement with the community more highly than the building itself, whilst attaching importance to the building. I group together prayer, mission and change and collectively rank them highly as reflecting life and hope for the future of the church - provided it is willing to engage with them. Those are my personal judgements, not a precise reflection of the interviews, and they are an indication of the theological values with which I approach the question 'what sort of future does rural church have'? Where these positive images are present and buoyant I believe (and two interviewees⁴⁰⁰

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⁴⁰⁰ 5, 6

assert) that they have the capability to outweigh almost totally the negative images. A congregation that has stemmed the tide of declining numbers and increasing age will have largely addressed the issues of finance and building, even if they remain challenging issues. So my personal theological conviction, driving my ranking, is that intentional concerns for worship, prayer, mission and the willingness to engage with change both in church and society (all of which together might be called discipleship) is at the heart of the prospects for survival of the rural church and will shape what it becomes. It may well become something rather different from the inherited default central church of the past.

6.6 Further reflections on this chapter

This reflection covers first the practicality of the images and aspirations described; and second the theological values implicit in the engagement that I had with the interview materials to draw out these images.

6.6.1 Practical issues

I have produced a fairly positive set of images from the interviews (supplemented by my observation) and in 6.5 above expressed the view that if issues of age profile and critical mass could be addressed, the other issues, challenging though they might be, could undoubtedly be addressed and the church would have a future. How realistic is the prospect of the age/critical mass issues being addressed? As parish priest I see this as a crucial question for my own parish to address if it is to have a future. It is a question currently on the agenda of Borchester's PCC. For Ambridge the combination of declining critical mass, ageing congregations and financial pressure is a life-threatening one, even more so when the traditional rural village links between church community and wider community become strained or disappear.

The positive images show that there is the potential for a viable church but that potential is crucially contingent on the improvement of the age profile which, linked with the other positive images, will address the question of critical mass (both to be attractive and to be viable). But can the age profile realistically be improved by the introduction of younger people to attend and to become involved in the running of the institution? Is there anything in the life of the churches as they are at present to attract younger people, particularly younger people without a church background? The realistic answer is that there is probably very little, particularly in the smaller village churches. Contact with such people may well have to be away from church, as in Ambridge's pub discussion group for men (albeit no younger men attend). What the church ideally needs in such circumstances is for a practising Christian younger family

to move in and commit themselves to the life of the village (or town) church and to become the focus for the future growth and development of that church. That asks a great deal of such a family, not least because of the limited opportunities for activities within the church to support and encourage their children. It also asks a great deal of the church in terms of acceptance of, and support for, such people.

A quick overview⁴⁰¹ of the researched churches raises questions about the practicality of the aspiration, based on performance over the last five years. Ambridge has had some new members, many of retirement age or older, some of whom have stayed and become involved, but they have not fully offset losses by age/infirmity/removal/death. A number of younger families are involved in the monthly family services and one or two now serve on the PCC, but there is no move from family service to attending other services. Whilst most of those who have joined the churches over the last few years are willing to think in terms of benefice, to travel to services outside their own parish, and are involved in cell groups, none of those who attend only a family service have become involved in a cell group, and they tend not to travel to other services: their involvement is purely with 'their' family service. It is as if there are parallel tracks.

Borchester's age profile is not as unhealthy as Ambridge's. There are some reasonably regular attenders in their 40s and 50s who play an active role, but they are in a minority. There is virtually no one in their 20s or 30s. There has been a steady trickle of new members each year, most in their 50s or 60s (or older). These new arrivals have compensated for losses by age/infirmity/removal/death but have done little more than hold numbers approximately static. More encouraging has been the fact that some of the new joiners have become increasingly active both in the institution and in the ministry/mission/outward looking of that church and the wider church community in the town. A concern for mission, both as engagement with the community and drawing people to faith is more apparent. It is those factors that seem, generally, to be less evident in Ambridge.

Ambridge's churches generally seem to lack the vision, motivation, energy or resources to engage actively as a Christian presence in their communities; they are seen to be (and for the most part are) inward looking and concerned for survival. They remain very clergy-dependent in many ways. That came across clearly in the interviews. The fact that they are, largely, in survival mode perhaps explains the ambiguous and uncertain message emerging from the village interviews on how worship should be delivered in the absence of sufficient clergy.

⁴⁰¹ from personal knowledge.

6.6.2 Theological Issues

Some of the implicit theological issues at work are undoubtedly similar to those implicit in my understanding of Central church. One major theological issue is the nature of the church, and the models of church that might be used to evaluate and inform the fruits of the interviews.⁴⁰² I knew from the reported lack of response of Ambridge to *AWA* that its use of a Body of Christ model of church had not widely engaged people in Ambridge (apart from the cell group leaders). That model was more readily recognised and engaged with in Borchester (and was mentioned by at least one interviewee from that church), not least because of charismatic influences in the past both in the life of the church and in the experience of some of its current members. The Body of Christ model of church carries with it strong implications of mutual interdependence both as between the congregation and God and between the members of the congregation; it carries with it an understanding of gifts given by God to the individual members to be used for the benefit of the whole body. It carries with it, therefore, an implication of ministry being that of the whole people and not just of the clergy, and that as a matter of principle rather than of necessity.⁴⁰³ A widespread involvement of lay people existed in all the parishes surveyed, both in the services and pastoral work and in engagement with the wider community. However, especially in Ambridge, it seemed that much of that involvement in services and pastoral work was of necessity, or duty, rather than of theological principle, had emerged (or even been imposed) with a minimum of training and support, and lacking accompanying theological teaching that the God who calls to service and gives gifts also gives the grace to use them. In my assessment of interview materials I was, I suppose, using that model of church as an implicit rather than explicit theological conversation partner. I was aware of the limited recognition of that model by the congregations, but it certainly formed part of my reflection, perhaps more so after the event than in the initial analysis. Certainly, in looking at issues of age profile and critical mass, that particular theological model provides a sharp question, if it is used to argue that the local congregation exists as the local manifestation of the Body of Christ. Using that theological model (or, perhaps more accurately, that particular variety of that model), which carries with it (or is often asked to carry with it) an implication that God will provide for that local body the gifts and graces needed to perform its role, it becomes difficult to see that as a viable or justifiable model in the case of an elderly congregation struggling to find succession to keep the building open and 'the show on the road' – other, perhaps, than as an argument to justify closure. It is easier to see that model at work in, for example, the structure of the cell group where there is positive encouragement for all the members to participate in the group and to

⁴⁰² See 5.6 above.

⁴⁰³ It is easy to see why this model is used in the diocesan initiative.

discern the gifts that they have.⁴⁰⁴ When cell groups have made a contribution to a service, individuals have used their gifts in this way. Perhaps therefore within the cell groups operating across the benefice there is some modelling of how this image of church might work. Nevertheless, other models need to join the conversation alongside the Body of Christ (in its various forms⁴⁰⁵) to reflect the diversity of the experience of church, even though those other models may be no more generally applicable and acceptable. So the model of church as institution, resonating with much of default Central, is, as my comments on implicit congregationalism⁴⁰⁶ suggest, clearly a failing model in the rural context. Dunn explores an image of church as the people of God⁴⁰⁷ which might be worthy of further exploration and research to see how applicable it might be in a rural context, or whether in fact it might provide a means of bringing fresh insights to a Body of Christ model. Those insights might be held alongside a Community of Disciples model such as Dulles proposes, engaging with the concepts of intentionality and discipleship to which I refer in this thesis. Overall, there is a scope for fascinating further research into models or images of church in a rural context.

I was engaging, to some degree, with a theology of mission, not least in reflecting on the lack of understanding of mission that was apparent in most interviews and the almost total absence of any sense of the *Missio Dei*, of a God of mission, at work in his world, and inviting his church to join in with what he is doing.⁴⁰⁸ But I was also struck by the implicitness of some of the mission that was going on, often unrecognised by those who are doing it. Implicitness seems to be a characteristic of Central, as we saw in chapter 5. Right across the categories of interviewees, but particularly those in categories 1 and 2, there was a strong sense of the importance of working with children and young people, of teaching the faith to children. The role of the family services in Ambridge, and the role of the Club in Borchester, were all seen as very important. There was a sense of wanting other people to be drawn in, although it was not always clear how far this was just to get people to keep the show going, do the jobs and give the money, rather than a concern for the spiritual well-being of those being drawn in.

Maybe that points to some of the other theological issues and values in the interviews, mirroring an understanding of Central. In terms of soteriology this was a porous boundary model, certainly encouraging belonging before believing, opposed (in some

⁴⁰⁴ as exemplified in Kate Giles, *Cell Spring 2011* 2011

⁴⁰⁵ e.g. the different models explored by Robinson, *The Body*, Kim, *Christ's Body* and Dunn, *Paul*,

⁴⁰⁶ 6.3.7 above.

⁴⁰⁷ Dunn, *Paul*, 537-48

⁴⁰⁸ Bosch, *Mission*, and also Bevens and Schroeder, *Constants*, and Spencer, *Mission*.

cases strongly and expressly) to 'in your face' conversionism.⁴⁰⁹ I suspect that most interviewees would have wanted to articulate Christian doctrine in traditional terms, but I observed in some cases an openness to engage with questions like 'What does it mean for these people to be saved?' and 'What is good news for these people?' These questions, and the values that underlie them, seem to be normative of Central. Perhaps it is for these reasons that concepts like discipleship and the Body of Christ do not readily come to their minds as models and images, even if, poking around under the surface, they might be found to exist and need encouragement and nurture.

⁴⁰⁹ E.g. 12,13

Chapter 7 Ministry for the Future Church

In this chapter I assess attitudes expressed by the interviewees on ministry issues that may help identify the sort of ministry the future church requires. Some of the interview questions expressly addressed these issues; other relevant data emerged in discussion about the cell groups and family services. As in chapter 6 I seek to engage critically and theologically with the material. I look first at the use of lay ministry,⁴¹⁰ then at the question of local or combined services and finally at the perceived role of the clergy. I add some brief further reflections about the role of cell groups and family services, and on discipleship, and conclude with a look beyond the deanery.

7.1 Lay ministry

Some category 1 interviewees in the village benefice were aware of the real likelihood that when the present clergy retired they may not be replaced.

Well, I can see that before [current vicar] came we were told that things would have to change and that it was probably after [current vicar] would go that we might not have anyone else, we were told. So I have always had that in mind, that we would need to use Readers and people doing things, so that wouldn't be a surprise.⁴¹¹

And even with category 2 and 3 interviewees there was a widespread recognition that clergy numbers, particularly stipendiary clergy, were much reduced and likely to reduce further with significant implications for service patterns now, and particularly in the future.

I'm not sure that the church will be able to support providing [a service] in every village every week in the future and maybe if it wasn't able to be provided in every village every week then we would learn to travel and go where it was.⁴¹²

Well I don't see how it can get any more thinly spread, I think we're already at the edge of what's possible at the moment I don't honestly think with the number of churches under the umbrella that [present clergy] has to look after and reliant on retired clergy or lay ministers ... coming to take services. I don't see how they can expect it to be spread any thinner.⁴¹³

⁴¹⁰ Aware of the dangers of devaluing the word 'ministry' by its overuse. Church of England, *Mission and Ministry*, 114.

⁴¹¹ 9

⁴¹² 13

⁴¹³ 3

What emerges from many interviews is the unspoken assumption that it is really only stipendiary clergy who can (or perhaps should – a lingering recollection of the old order of things) properly deliver ministry, although some category 1 interviewees⁴¹⁴ were emphatic - and explicit - that this is not the case. Others - Readers, SSMs, retired clergy, lay people - are generally seen as helping out the incumbent and filling gaps. There is little sense that these people provide a legitimate form of ministry in their own right which ought to be exercised even if there were more clergy. It is, however, clear that the ministry of these supplementary people is much appreciated, so there is clearly a conceptual divide not being crossed at this point. Interestingly, the cell group which is such a feature of Ambridge has been entirely lay-sponsored and lay-led and that lay leadership seems well accepted. There seems to be a gap in perception between what is proper for things done in church as formal acts of worship and what is acceptable in other contexts. Clearly an educational process is needed to help people move forward from simply accepting and appreciating lay ministry as a 'stop gap' to something intrinsic to the future church.⁴¹⁵

Are there differences between town and villages as to the acceptability of lay ministry? The three town churches are each different. One, over recent years, has developed its use of lay ministry both within the formal worship of the church (including 'lay deacons' taking a very active role, for example) and also in aspects of the pastoral work of the church. Another has a Reader conducting Evensong and preaching, but otherwise no lay involvement in public worship other than reading lessons. The third (the one surveyed for this project) has a reasonably active involvement of lay people, although (except for all-age services) only Readers take a role in actually leading public worship or preaching. The hitherto relatively high number of clergy serving the town parishes and the largely eucharistic worship pattern in two churches has, at least until now, reduced the need for widespread lay leading of services such as is encountered in Ambridge. A Borchester interviewee commented that under previous incumbents Readers rarely had opportunity to preach.⁴¹⁶

A Borchester category 3 interviewee said it wouldn't bother her that a service or a pastoral visit was conducted by a lay person: 'Well I mean they would really be coming on behalf of the church, so I don't see anything wrong in that'.⁴¹⁷ Would that be a typical Ambridge response? The pastoral ministry of the Reader in Ambridge is well accepted in the village where he is well known, that of other lay people rather less so.

⁴¹⁴ 5, for example.

⁴¹⁵ Cf. Stephen Cook, 'Worshipping Locally,' *Country Way*, February 2011, 21.

⁴¹⁶ 4

⁴¹⁷ 17

So what makes lay ministry acceptable, perhaps more particularly where that lay ministry is not a publicly authorised ministry (e.g. Reader)? There was a fair consensus on the qualities that made an individual's involvement in a lay ministry acceptable (respect, sincerity, approachability, Christian faith, all featured strongly). Even with an authorised ministry there is the need for the individual to relate to the congregation: 'it isn't every Reader that gels with the populace It is important the person gels.'⁴¹⁸ Several interviewees commented on the importance of training for informal lay ministry (lay worship leaders or lay pastoral assistants).

If you're going to encourage the laity to get involved they have got to be trained and they have got..... to understand what they're doing, otherwise it's very dangerous simply to hand over responsibility for those people.⁴¹⁹

As the use of lay ministry increases the requirement for adequate and appropriate training - and support and supervision - needs to be taken seriously.⁴²⁰

Rather as with views about sacred space and the visibility of the vicar, so it seems to be with ministry issues – and possibly for similar reasons.⁴²¹ Those closest to the core (category 1) seem much more willing to accept a wide range of ministry. They not only recognise that it is impossible for the stipendiary clergy to do everything, but also that it is a welcome feature of church life that others lead worship.

I think it is useful if it is done properly, or reasonably well, just to keep that building ticking over and that congregation ticking over.⁴²²

Some in categories 2 and 3 expressed a much greater sense that full-time paid clergy is the real form of ministry; one interviewee stated a strong preference for united worship for several parishes taken by stipendiary clergy rather than separate lay-led services in the parishes:

Yes definitely come together with the minister. I think if you step away from having a paid vicar I think it is definitely a step backwards, I think it is a step away from what you want to achieve. I would rather pair up with other parishes and share one rather than make do with other people.⁴²³

Another category 3 interviewee,⁴²⁴ drew analogies with the police context, and, familiar with the drawbacks of part-time special constables and police community support officers who have limited functions and authority, saw similar issues for ministry delivered by people other than full-time clergy. But he also recognised the reality:

⁴¹⁸ 4

⁴¹⁹ 13

⁴²⁰ Greenwood, *Parish Priests* is relevant here.

⁴²¹ See 6.2.7 above and 7.3 below.

⁴²² 5

⁴²³ 12

⁴²⁴ 16

People don't get the service that they want and expect, but if it meant that the local churches could stay open and people go to their local church, yes I can see it being a good idea to have local part-time people.⁴²⁵

A category 2 interviewee⁴²⁶ also used the police analogy to illustrate limitations in lay ministry. But, as noted earlier, some category 3 interviewees felt totally relaxed about the concept of suitable lay people leading worship enabling continued local delivery of services. They felt that local delivery was important and one made this rather perceptive comment: 'I don't think there is a reluctance to travel, I think there is a reluctance to relinquish their claim on their local community church'.⁴²⁷ Another category 3 interviewee⁴²⁸ speculated on ways modern technology might be used to deliver services locally, before conceding that using lay people might be more practical.

The interviews revealed a significant lack of understanding, even amongst some village churchwardens, about SSMs, Readers and retired clergy and what each was trained and authorised to do. Perhaps because they had greater exposure to untrained lay ministers they had a slightly better understanding of their role and its limitations. The reality in Ambridge is that if someone is prepared to take a service for them in their church, who is even halfway competent, but sincere and respected, they and their ministry will be welcomed with open arms. As already noted, the big problem is succession to those already doing the job, as the congregations age and decline in numbers.

The biggest worry to my mind is that we don't have that many people around who could come forward and do that.⁴²⁹

Younger people who have the potential to take on these roles (and there are a few) are often too busy with work and family commitments, or other church commitments.

7.2 Local or combined services

The interviews tried to tease out people's views on the relative merits of trying to keep services going locally using lay worship leaders versus getting together in bigger groupings in services led by clergy. Various views were expressed on both sides of that argument. This exchange between two category 3 interviewees is to the point:

8b Yes. I think it's very hard for an older generation who have always gone to a particular church, there may be only 10 of us who go but this is what we do,

⁴²⁵ 16

⁴²⁶ 13

⁴²⁷ 8b

⁴²⁸ 8a

⁴²⁹ 4

8a What do people do if they can't get to that central point, do they miss out?

8b Yes, valid point....I don't think there is a reluctance to travel, I think there is a reluctance to relinquish their claim on their local community church.

8a Losing the personal touch needs to be avoided. One of the reasons for going to church is, as you do, to have a tea and coffee after the service and have the chance just to have a chat. You might have said something in your sermon that pricks somebody's conscience or whatever and they want to have a word about it.⁴³⁰

Given enough clergy or other resources it is clear that people would prefer to be able to keep their own village worship wherever possible, but they increasingly wonder about the resources to do so. As one churchwarden commented:

Well, I think it will have to come to an end because whenever a vicar or rector has left we have always assumed another one will come. I think that's very presumptuous and we are very lucky with who we have at the moment, but that will come to an end and who then will come and take over 7 churches? Or it might be up to 14 by then. So it will have to come to an end. I envisage, when someone has the courage to make these decisions, that [my church] will close for regular services and just be there, maintained by us and used for weddings and funerals occasionally. And for regular services off we go to [town].⁴³¹

The interviews disclosed wide divergences of views on the relative merits of maintaining services locally and combining for benefice services, with no clear-cut answer emerging. Comments from the village benefice:

I think there are advantages and disadvantages of having something wider like a benefice service. We have had one at [another village] yesterday and the fellowship was wonderful, but it's always, or nearly always, a hard-core of parishioners from the benefice that go..... certainly [present clergy] has done wonders really in promoting the benefice services, they have certainly improved, we do get better attendances and they are certainly very, very much appreciated by those who go but we still find a difficulty in getting certain ones ever to go to them. And so it depends how important we think that attendance at church is, we do lose attendance by doing away with local services in every parish.⁴³²

I always think that it's better with the clergy. I don't know why, rather than have lots of little services in different places with lay people, it's better to have one good service.⁴³³

A category 2 interviewee expresses a different view (although elsewhere in the interview also spoke of the benefit of the larger benefice gathering):

My experience of services here that are delivered by lay ministry is very positive indeed, they are very good and people like them, people like going to their local church and people like having something every week⁴³⁴

⁴³⁰ 8a and 8b

⁴³¹ 14

⁴³² 5

⁴³³ 9

Another category 2 interviewee:

I see..... rationalisation of services....I think that one minister trying to provide services in [all the] churches is ridiculous, to be honest. There should be more benefice services and fewer services overall.⁴³⁵

There is a strong managerial and pragmatic assumption that grouping together for a larger service makes a lot of sense both in terms of the dynamics of that service and the reduction of the (generally perceived as excessive) clergy workload. It also assumes that services really ought to be taken by clergy. On the other hand there is the very strong attraction to villagers of having services in their own church, an attraction which makes some reluctant to travel to benefice services: 'We are not benefice people.'⁴³⁶ There are wider issues. At the lowest (but nevertheless significant) level, if people have to travel to church outside their own village, why not travel to one they really want to go to in the town, or the cathedral, rather than just to the next village? Those observations fuel my emerging concern that a managerial solution is not the right one; ways need to be developed, as far as practicable, of maintaining local churches and some degree of local worship services. This may link with the role of a cell group (or equivalent) operating across a benefice, which has certainly energised some services in Ambridge, both at the level of the individual village churches and in forming a nucleus for benefice services. But as already noted, for some members of the cell group, attendance at the cell replaces attendance at church.⁴³⁷ There are some quite complex issues there.

In Borchester there is a recognition that some measure of collaborative working, both between parishes and ecumenically, will be an essential feature of the future of the church: 'I think the only future, particularly in this area, is ecumenically'.⁴³⁸

7.3 Clergy role

There is a widespread recognition⁴³⁹ that the present workload of the clergy is too great and unsustainable. At the same time there is also a very important role that the clergy should be playing in terms of leading the whole church community, being a leader in mission, planning, supporting - essentially an oversight role.⁴⁴⁰ A number of interviews support this role:

⁴³⁴ 13

⁴³⁵ 10

⁴³⁶ 6

⁴³⁷ See 6.2.3 above.

⁴³⁸ 1

⁴³⁹ In the interviews and in e.g. Diocese of York, *Mutual Support*. Many other professions are also under great pressure: it is a feature of contemporary British society.

It's really to tie things together, to organise really.... I think they have to take the lead..... able to coordinate things.⁴⁴¹

I would say they are incredibly important because they are at the heart of mission and ministry and they need to be freed up from the day-to-day grind of sitting on PCCs, filling in forms, there should be secretarial and office support.Actually it's for spiritual guidance and presence and often the talking and visiting and celebrating, they are a precious resource.⁴⁴²

To oversee it all.⁴⁴³

To keep the hand on the rudder so to speak and to keep order in the running of the church.....the obvious person is.... the paid clergy.⁴⁴⁴

At least one interviewee asserted that the clergy role still attracts respect and linked this with a wish to 'see clergy around the place'.⁴⁴⁵ The role of the representative Christian presence did not feature much in the interviews although it may be implicit in the clear wish, expressed by several interviewees, for a traditional clergy role in services and in the wish, expressed by some, for greater clergy visibility in the community: 'I can remember as a child I think there were more vicars and they were more visible.'⁴⁴⁶ Like the church building, clergy are part of the visible presence of the church and other ways may need to be found to produce that visibility. An important insight about the sort of qualities that make lay ministry acceptable (especially in a village community) would apply *a fortiori* to clergy:

I think it probably has to be the example that they live by. Obviously they need to be a respected person, a person who is perceived as being caring and honest and confidential, a guardian of confidence, and then I think lay ministry will develop and people will over the years come to accept that they don't have to see a person in a clerical collar walking around the village or down the street to know that they can go up to that person or ring that person to talk, but it could be a lay person. But the layperson has got to assume, if you like, the mantle of the ordained person.⁴⁴⁷

⁴⁴⁰ Robin Greenwood, 'Practising Episkope: Priests in Rural Mission Today' (paper presented at the Faith and the Future of the Countryside, Swanwick, 5 November 2010), 114. and Greenwood, *Parish Priests* are both relevant here as also Steven J. L. Croft, *Ministry in Three Dimensions: Ordination and Leadership in the Local Church* (London: Darton Longman & Todd, 1999).

⁴⁴¹ 5

⁴⁴² 13

⁴⁴³ 9

⁴⁴⁴ 3

⁴⁴⁵ 16

⁴⁴⁶ 8a

⁴⁴⁷ 10

The strong emphasis on the traditional stipendiary clergy role that emerges at several points in the interviews, and noted in several places earlier, is at odds with contemporary understandings of the ministry of all God's people, increased dependence on SSMs and the thrust of AWA. This may reflect the traditional and hierarchical model of inherited default Central, but it may also speak of the essential nature of parochial ministry. Changing the model of church may be a key part of the move to a more intentional Central future and a more explicit grappling with the realities of the Body of Christ, People of God or Community of Disciples. But perhaps in these situations seeing the clergy as leaders in mission may be a healthy way of bridging the gap between these different perceptions, Certainly much greater involvement of the lay people is essential, but equally essential is that supporting, enabling, oversight role of the clergy as leading in mission, a shared task rather than a task simply abdicated by clergy in favour of laity. The parochial model needs local leadership and to the extent that it is not by a resident cleric finding other ways of providing a Christian focal point for the community becomes a priority.

To complete this section I refer to the earlier discussion⁴⁴⁸ about family services and cell groups. It is significant, I believe, that these two aspects of church life and ministry which presently seem to hold out hope for the future in Ambridge are not overly dependent on clergy input. The cell structure is lay led, clergy supported. One family service is almost entirely lay led. The second family service is more clergy dependant, due to the reality of lack of a lay leader. Nevertheless, looking forward to when stipendiary clergy input into Ambridge will inevitably be reduced, it seems to be a positive sign that these active and growing parts of the church might continue to be essentially lay led, with encouragement and support from the clergy. That provides a healthy model for the future.

7.4 Discipleship

I briefly pick up a thread from earlier⁴⁴⁹ to reflect on comments made by several people at various stages in this project, most recently by two colleagues, one lay and one ordained. They can perhaps best be summed up by the word 'discipleship', although earlier I have referred to 'faith temperatures'. To what extent are those whose views are reflected in the interviews, and therefore contribute to my analysis of the possible shape of the future church, formed by an active and committed Christian discipleship? To what extent will that discipleship enable them to play their role in making the future

⁴⁴⁸ 6.2.2 and 6.2.3.

⁴⁴⁹ 5.5.3 and 6.3.8.

church reality? Those are difficult questions to answer, not only because it is always difficult – and dangerous - to try to assess the discipleship and commitment of others, but also because in terms of empirical data my research interviews did not ask questions which directly addressed that issue. Such inferences as I might draw are based on my observations, on my knowledge of the individuals or on tangential matters referred to in the interviews. And, of course, to define precisely what I mean by the phrase ‘committed Christian discipleship’ would require a further thesis, for it is a phrase that does not immediately come to mind when thinking of rural Church of England. That does not mean, of course, that discipleship or commitment is absent, but it certainly means addressing the questions raised earlier about ‘faith temperatures’. But with those caveats, the underlying questions remain: has rural church largely existed without any real sense of committed Christian discipleship, is a lack of real committed Christian discipleship a current issue for rural church life, and can the church survive and prosper in future without a real sense of committed discipleship? Can the rural church grapple with the Great Commission ‘Go therefore and make disciples’?⁴⁵⁰ Are these questions at the heart of the move from default to intentional Central? At this stage I can do no more than pose the questions as crucially important questions for further research.

7.5 Looking wider

The data discussed in this chapter has connections with current thinking in the diocese, and in the wider Church of England, regarding the future shape of ministry. Some of the footnotes hint at connections, in terms both of official publications and relevant literature. For the diocese, thinking in terms of a much larger role for lay ministry is consistent with its current strategic documents, *AWA* and the *Mutual Support* paper currently under consultation,⁴⁵¹ as well as its Leadership Training Programme to equip clergy to work collaboratively. As to what is going on in the Church of England generally, whilst I lack sufficient data to give an unequivocal answer, there are strong hints of policy (‘there is some serious thinking to be done if the rhetoric about the role of the laity is to be turned into reality⁴⁵²) if not always of practice.⁴⁵³ My impression⁴⁵⁴ is that the use of lay ministry will be widespread in the more remote dioceses of the north,⁴⁵⁵ the west⁴⁵⁶ and the south-west,⁴⁵⁷ rather less so

⁴⁵⁰ Matthew 28.19

⁴⁵¹ Diocese of York, *Mutual Support*.

⁴⁵² Church of England House of Bishops, *Challenges GS 1815*, 11.

⁴⁵³ E.g. Church of England, *Mission and Ministry*

⁴⁵⁴ Supported, *inter alia*, by conversation 19 and by papers presented at the Faith and the Future of the Countryside Conference, 2010.

⁴⁵⁵ Conversations 21,22 and 23

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in the better resourced dioceses of London and the home counties. It will also be reflected in many parishes, wherever situated, which have been influenced by the charismatic movement, with its strong emphasis on every-member-ministry. This wider view also suggests that lessons might be learnt from the experience of overseas churches coping with ministry in sparsely populated rural areas.⁴⁵⁸

⁴⁵⁶ Mark Rylands, 'Multichurch Ministry: Pioneering Leadership for Today,' *Country Way*, October 2010.

⁴⁵⁷ See Cook, 'Worshipping Locally.' and Earney, 'Everyone on Board.'

⁴⁵⁸ Hughes, '*Lay Leadership*,' 9-21.

Chapter 8 Conclusions

In seeking to envision the future church in Southern Ryedale deanery I have been exploring two questions. What sort of future does the church in the deanery have? What sort of ministry will that future require? From the preceding chapters it will be apparent that there are rather different answers for the village churches and for the town churches, but also that these answers – and their futures - are linked.

In brief, a Christian church in the Anglican tradition will continue in the deanery, but a rather different church from that which exists today. The role of healthy town churches will be crucial to this future to support ministry in the villages. Ministry will be provided to a much greater extent than at present by lay people, as well as by SSMS and retired clergy, with reduced numbers of stipendiary clergy providing oversight, leadership, support and resourcing.

Rather than summarise the research of preceding chapters, I draw on that research to set out in the next seven paragraphs an imaginative, but realistic, construction of how the deanery might appear in late 2015.

The current seven full-time stipendiary clergy posts have reduced to five, much of the change taking place in 2012/13 when several current clergy retired. That coincided with significantly reduced numbers of stipendiary clergy in the diocese, in part due to the national clergy demographic (with rather more retiring than entering stipendiary ministry), in part due to increasing difficulty in filling clergy vacancies in the northern province, and in part due to financial pressures restricting the number of clergy the diocese could pay.

The process of change started in late 2011 when the diocese invested a 0.5 stipend to fill a long-vacant HfD post in the deanery, arranged in such a way that the ministry there was linked to two town parishes for mutual support and resourcing. This built on the collegiality that had been developing between those town parishes over the preceding 18 months and began to demonstrate how mutual support could operate between very diverse parishes. In the light of this the deanery began to have confidence, in preparing its next deanery plan, that such models of ministry could have wider application between the town and village benefices as vacancies arose. It was clear for all to see that this did not involve a takeover by the town, but a genuine sharing and mutual ministry, that the village benefice came to appreciate as a very

positive model. Consequently, when two other village benefices became vacant in 2012/13 there was a readiness on the part of those benefices to explore revised ministry models linking them much more closely to the town parishes whilst also providing them with some identifiable local leadership in the form of part-time, SSM or HfD clergy.

Two town parishes are held in plurality, sharing a single stipendiary incumbent assisted by a curate, the deanery being an ideal training post. Those parishes act as a hub for adjoining village churches.⁴⁵⁹ When the stipendiary incumbents of those village benefices retired, they were not replaced by full-time stipendiary clergy, but by part-time or HfD clergy. Although having day-to-day responsibility for the village benefice in which they live, the HfD clergy are also associate priests in the town parishes and the town parish incumbent has overall responsibility for the enlarged ministry area. At the same time some restructuring of the village benefices took place: two were merged and one or two villages were transferred to an adjoining deanery

The third town parish has developed close relationships with the other town parishes. It is also working towards a shared ministry arrangement with an adjacent village benefice, with a view to that becoming fully effective on the retirement of the incumbent. The deanery hopes that when that retirement occurs a replacement stipendiary appointment will be made to the deanery as a whole, acting as a resource for the whole deanery and in particular to develop the training and support of lay people.

A deanery office has been established in one of the town churches with a part-time paid administrator, funded by the deanery churches. This administrator deals with much routine administration relating to church buildings (including insurance, faculties and routine maintenance). The administrator liaises with PCC treasurers and secretaries and is helping to implement a major simplification of the deanery structure with fewer parishes, and many church buildings becoming chapels of ease. The administrator also administers the service rota, seeking to ensure that the commitment made to maintain a measure of regular worship in village churches is honoured and appropriately staffed. That requires juggling not only the stipendiary clergy, but all the other ministerial resources available: several HfD, SSM and active retired clergy, two or three Readers and quite a large number of lay worship leaders who are willing to take services, mainly in their own villages, perhaps once a month. Some of them rely quite heavily on resources produced for them by the clergy, and the administrator

⁴⁵⁹ Loosely, but inaccurately, referred to in the diocese as a minster model.

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ensures they receive these in adequate time. The administrator also acts as the point of contact between the clergy and the lay pastoral visitors who are the front line of pastoral contact in many of the villages. Some of them have started to emerge as the Christian focal point in the villages where they live. The administrator also manages the organisation of funerals and weddings for the deanery.

The renewed confidence of the deanery has enabled funds to be raised, working with ecumenical partners in the town, to support two part-time workers, one with youth and one with young families.

During this period some villages (mainly those characterised as default Central in the terms of this thesis) have concluded that they cannot keep their churches open either for regular services or at all, but that decision has been theirs, it has not been imposed on them. A few churches have been made redundant, others have become chapels of ease at which occasional services are held. In one or two cases strategic mission reasons (perhaps a link with a village school) predicated keeping a church open and resourced by the deanery. Other villages, demonstrating the developing intentionality of their Central, parish-focussed form of church, have developed patterns of services, both in their own village churches and shared with others, that make full use of the variety of resources available. There is a diverse pattern of worship, some eucharistic led by clergy and some non-eucharistic led by laity, but all involved in delivering ministry are supported and resourced as part of the ministry team. The whole ministry team (around 20 in total) meets on a regular basis for mutual support, prayer and sharing information.

Time will tell how far this imaginative construction becomes reality, but based on the research it seems to be a real possibility. I shall be in the thick of finding out, for just as the writing of this thesis drew to a close I was appointed Rural Dean for Southern Ryedale. An outcome in praxis for this thesis if ever there was one!

The greatest risk of the construct not being realised is if ministerial resources are moved away from the town churches to prop up failing churches in the villages. A strong centre to the deanery is key to the future health of the deanery as a whole, and of a substantial number of village churches. A number of factors (some noted in interview, some from observation) will influence what sort of future individual village churches have. The roles (positive or otherwise) of certain individuals, the styles and approaches, acts and omissions (positive or otherwise) of previous and current clergy, the relatively small, ageing and diminishing pool of able lay leadership, indifference to the church by some attenders, almost feudal attitudes and the influence of dominant

families in some villages, antipathy towards the church in some villages are all significant. Above all there is a feeling, widespread in the village churches, of being on a financial treadmill (driven by ever increasing diocesan quota and building maintenance costs), lacking purpose, hope or vision, and any sense of real support from the diocese. There is at present far too much of the default Central, and not enough of the intentional Central necessary for the survival and prosperity of church life in the villages.

For all the churches, halting (and then reversing) numerical decline is a key to the future. If that is not addressed the survival of the church in any meaningful form, particularly in the villages, for more than the next 10 years must be very doubtful. Unless the churches grasp the nettle of thinking more explicitly in terms of mission, and unless those elements of church life currently generating interest and some measure of growth and commitment do actually bring people to faith, and growth in faith and active discipleship (that is, those churches become intentionally Central), there is a real risk that steps taken now may do nothing more than manage decline. Theologically it matters very much that church should not decline and disappear, for the assertion of Central church is that it *is* parochial Christianity,⁴⁶⁰ the Christian faith rooted and grounded, incarnated, in that locality. If it disappears individual Christians who live in that place may travel to worship in some distant gathered congregation, but the visible presence of the local church as the embodiment of the risen Christ in that community has been lost, with its concomitant immediacy of worship, mission and ministry. Inevitably that incarnated role will change, but its disappearance will be a tragedy. The loss to the local community would be great: the presence and quasi-sacramental nature of the resident Christian presence, Christian ministry at times of need and for occasional offices, the building as sacred space and sermon in stone.

To minimise the impact of low numbers some people support their village church even though they might prefer to worship elsewhere, either in the town or in York. In some cases this support is from duty or obligation, but in some cases a matter of Christian commitment, sometimes supplemented by church attendance elsewhere. Some of these latter people are at the heart of those activities in the village churches which give hope for sustaining a viable Christian presence in the future. But they (even more than other church supporters) must also be regarded as a potential vulnerability if for reasons of age, health or disaffection, or simply moving away, they withdraw their support from the local church.

⁴⁶⁰ p.73

For the town churches, changes to ministry and service patterns are inevitable. The clergy serving the town parishes will increasingly also have a role in relation to the villages, crucially a role of support and oversight of other ministers serving the villages.

The interviews suggest a church that lacks an understanding of, or full commitment to, mission. Generations of the church engaging in an implicit and incarnational mission model, leaving explicit mission to the clergy, have shaped the views of this generation of church people. Many are struggling to come to terms with the much changed mission emphasis of the church at the beginning of the 21st century. Mission needs to move from merely trying to get people to come to church to helping people come to Christ and grow in Christian discipleship and engagement with the world. The attempts of the diocese to convey this message and this commitment in a 'top down' way have had only limited success so far, as has any 'bottom up' approach from the parishes. The idea of *Missio Dei*, of what God is doing in his world, seemed foreign to most of the interviewees. Being alert to what God is doing and being prepared to join in may sound a grand and pious strategy, but it certainly not an easy one – if it were, more churches would be doing it! Nevertheless, if God is at work in his world, including each part of that world, each local village community, then his church, if it will join with him in that work, must have a future in that place. As one interviewee said: 'Without God we cannot; without us God will not'.⁴⁶¹

That statement, whilst requiring nuancing, raises the question how ready are churches, and particularly churches in Southern Ryedale, to do this? And how willing are the churches to contemplate (possibly very substantial) change? There are things going on in the churches which can be identified as mission both as part of, and over and above, an incarnational 'being there' model. In all the churches surveyed, baptisms, weddings and funerals generate worthwhile, sometimes lasting, pastoral contacts; all the churches are open and available for tourists and pilgrims. Church people are heavily involved in local community and charities as individual Christians (some more explicitly Christian than others). Some mission activities show signs of hope, although few yet show sign of boosting regular church attendance, or giving, to sustain the church as institution. Might it be that what God is doing is not that much concerned with the institutional church, at least as it currently presents itself and operates? Default Central has perhaps taken the church as institution for granted. Intentional Central will perhaps grapple with the challenge that comes from a deepening Christian discipleship that allows both individual and corporate Christian life to change in response to the dynamic encounter with the God who is at work in his world. This thesis can only hint

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at answers to these questions and encourage further research.

Christian nurture and mission will increasingly operate across the benefices or deanery. The benefice/deanery may thus appear to attain a higher profile. But care must be taken not to marginalise fringe attenders or provide other attenders with excuses to miss church, or travel to church elsewhere. The benefice/deanery must not be divorced from the local visible presence of the village church as an open, cared-for building in which worship is offered from time to time at clearly advertised times, and which provides a focus for pastoral ministry to all. The presence of church and chapel in the same village will force hard choices: which building will be retained, can the worship of the formerly separate communities be combined?

The challenge if the churches in the town are to prosper and resource the whole deanery is substantial. Whilst weekly Sunday worship will be offered, their age profiles are such that, combined with service styles, it cannot be assumed that what is on offer is attractive to younger people seeking a church. Indeed there must be a question whether central style churches are particularly attractive to younger people, certainly to those whose faith has been formed in more eclectic urban/suburban churches or as students in Christian Unions. It is perhaps only when they begin to find such churches unsatisfying⁴⁶² that a more open and central style might appeal – if, by then, they have not left church altogether. But in Southern Ryedale the vast majority of youngsters from the locality who go away for higher education do not return. A few graduates or professionals move into the area in connection with their employment, but rather more commute from outside the area. The real challenge is the substantial group who leave school without progressing to further education, and seek employment locally. Few will have had much meaningful contact with the Christian faith during their formative years. For the established, institutional, rather formal and elderly church to engage with them (beyond the usual – and sometimes valuable - opportunities of weddings and baptisms) and be attractive to them presents a massive challenge for the future of the church. Unless the church engages successfully with that challenge its future prospects are bleak. If it does engage successfully its future shape may well be rather different.

The cell structure in the researched village benefice, whilst raising certain issues and vulnerabilities in its present context, models one sort of structure that may be an important part of a future viable church, not least by its combination of lay leadership, provision of nurture, and contribution towards attractive worship in church. As such it

⁴⁶² Percy, *Shaping*, 82.

(along with other models of nurture, for several models will emerge) might be part of establishing and maintaining a credible Christian presence, especially in individual villages. Establishing what might be such a credible presence will require effort, and a regard to the particularities of each village. But in whatever form, the goal must be a Christian presence in each village, worshipping, witnessing and serving, keeping the Christian story alive and vibrant in that place. Ideally (but challenging to achieve in practice) that Christian community might be focussed on someone who becomes the 'parson', a representative Christian presence in that place. Possibly ordained, a Reader, or a churchwarden but more likely just an 'ordinary' lay Christian.

The notorious reluctance of village people to worship other than in a recognised church building in their own village, remains a significant obstacle to the realisation of that flexible future and ideal credible presence, and may drive the continued maintenance and use of church buildings, and the consequent pressure on ministerial and financial resources, to an extent greater than might seem logically, economically or managerially defensible. But the financial challenges for all the churches are significant and growing, and, for the village churches in particular, seem to be all consuming. There are clear signs that the situation is becoming unsustainable, with implications both for the maintenance of ministry and the maintenance of the buildings, and this will drive change.

Throughout this project I have used the heuristic tool of central churchmanship and have developed an original model which distinguishes between default Central and intentional Central. The difference might be articulated as being the difference between *going to church* and *being the church*. The evidence from the interviews and from my observation is that default Central church is struggling and within the next few years will have totally died out in some places. However, where a more intentional form of Central churchmanship (or Christian commitment) has been, or is being embraced, which carries with it a willingness to change and adapt (which has, after all, been a characteristic of Central church over the past centuries) it seems possible that some form of institutional church, still inclusive and welcoming, might well survive. That survival seems to be rather more likely in the towns than in the villages, although the evidence of the interviews suggests that, in Ambridge, there is intentional Christian commitment, particularly focused in the cell groups.

Those elements in Ambridge that showed the greatest signs of spiritual life and vigour, and to hold out hope for a pattern of church life which might prosper in the future, were not over-dependent on 'hands on' leadership by stipendiary clergy. Some other village benefices are seeking to build up their team of lay worship leaders for similar reasons

of reducing dependence on clergy. All current church structures are fragile and vulnerable to personnel changes, but it is possible to see that, if current lay personnel remain available, the presentation of some services on a regular basis and the provision of some means of Christian nurture could well survive a clergy vacancy and whatever future ministry arrangements might follow it. They model the sort of ministry, much less dependent on the active participation of stipendiary clergy, that will be necessary for the future. But survival depends not just on leadership but also on membership, something that the cyclical nature of some activities, and an ageing demographic, sometimes struggles to deliver.

The interview material evidenced (from regular church members) a sense of the church 'being there' for the wider community when needed, and (from fringe users), a sense of it being a public utility, there for them to use when they needed it. Arguably, all really meant 'the clergy' rather than 'the church'. There must therefore be real questions about the sustainability of that (essentially parish-based) model for the future, in the face of reduced clergy numbers, particularly in the villages, unless it can be linked with ideas of Christian presence and the 'parson' discussed above. Without clergy the maintenance of that level of availability (and the implicit model of mission that it carries with it) requires a number of people with a significant level of commitment to the future of the church and the continuity of the Christian gospel. That might be described by the use of the word discipleship. At its very least the word carries with it concepts of intentionality and commitment and thinking seriously what is involved in being a Christian and an active member of the church, and links to the discussion on 'faith temperatures'. Without some sense of the commitment implied by the word discipleship, how far will the laity do what is required of them for the church to survive, let alone prosper? And without discipleship will they realistically engage in mission?

The pace of change in society, and in the church, seem to increase inexorably. Whether or not this is a manifestation of secularisation is both debatable and irrelevant. The challenge for the church for the future lies in its ability to proclaim the faith 'afresh in every generation'.⁴⁶³ That has always been a challenge for the church which it has met, or failed to meet, in different ways at different times and places in its history. Arguably it has never met, and will never meet, that challenge simply by looking back to supposed glory days of yesteryear (although it will be wise to learn the lessons of the past). The challenges of the present must be met, and perhaps the extent to which church people are willing to change and to meet those challenges is a direct function of

⁴⁶³ Church of England, '*Canon C15*'.

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their commitment not just to the church, but to the Lord of the church, in other words, a measure of their discipleship.

Even from the relatively small number of interviewees used in this project, there was a wealth of material. Other researchers might draw out other aspects of that material and handle it differently. A number of areas for possible further research have been noted: theological and ecclesial issues relating to use of local lay ministry (p12), education on principled use of lay ministry (p66) and wider discussion of ministry issues (p24); sacred place/space (p24); diminution of community and loss of social capital (p46) and meanings of 'community' (p75); distinct Central spirituality(ies) (p 60), different levels of ordinariness and other related factors (p61) and the validity of different soteriologies as shaping features of Central (p73); are fewer believers in total distributed more towards the extremes of belief, taking away the centre? (p77); connections between cell groups/fresh expressions and traditional church (p85), transferability of cell church and similar concepts from an urban/suburban context to a rural one (p87), and wider issues of cell group relative to parish (p 88); models of church appropriate for rural contexts (p 111); 'Faith Temperatures' and discipleship in rural churches (p121); and mission and the future of the institution (p 121 and 127).

There is no doubt that the Christian church, wherever it is placed, is a complex organism, reflecting the complexity and difference of the individuals who make up the church in that place, and Southern Ryedale is no exception. For that reason, no one single model of church can do it justice. I have expressed the view that other models of church may need to be explored alongside that of the Body of Christ, but that model (particularly in its open and inclusive,⁴⁶⁴ rather than exclusive and boundaried, manifestation with its emphasis on mutuality, inter-connectedness and collaboration) undoubtedly has value for this deanery moving forward, and is certainly an appropriate place to end, quoting a frequently used introduction to The Peace from the *CW* Eucharist:

We are the body of Christ;
in the one Spirit we were all baptised into one body.
Let us then pursue all that makes for peace
and builds up our common life.⁴⁶⁵

⁴⁶⁴ Intentionally Central!

⁴⁶⁵ *Common Worship: Services and Prayers for the Church of England*, 290.

Appendix 1 Glossary of terms

This glossary contains a brief explanation of terms used in the thesis with links to further information. A fuller description of some terms referring to the Church of England appears in Appendix H of *ACORA*.⁴⁶⁶

Benefice

Under canon law the word ‘benefice’ describes an ecclesiastical office, and in the context of parochial ministry the holding of one or more parishes as Rector or Vicar.⁴⁶⁷ Benefices are now increasingly multi-parish or multi-church and typically a clergy person will now be the incumbent of a multi-parish benefice consisting of several parishes, or possibly a united parish that covers the area of several formerly separate parishes. (See further below under Parish).

Chapel of Ease

This phrase is used to describe a secondary church within a parish that is not a parish church but has been provided for the convenience of parishioners residing at some distance from the parish church. Chapels of Ease very rarely have their own separate clergy, and are generally exempt from the requirements to appoint churchwardens and comply with the other legal formalities of parish life, this being subsumed within the obligations of the parish church.⁴⁶⁸

Cell Groups

At their simplest cell groups are small groups meeting within a church to provide an opportunity for fellowship, worship, study and prayer. In that they share characteristics with more traditional home groups or home-based study groups. However, that equivalence is confused by the existence of the cell church movement which attaches a far greater significance to the cell structure as an alternative form of being church, and as such has links with Fresh Expressions (q.v.).⁴⁶⁹ A hybrid form appears to have developed in a number of places where the cells are seen as an important feature of the life of a parish church but remain part of the life of the parish. The cells will adopt some of the key characteristics of the cell church, in particular the concern for drawing

⁴⁶⁶ *ACORA, Countryside*, 389

⁴⁶⁷ Cross and Livingstone (eds.), *ODCC*, 187

⁴⁶⁸ Cross and Livingstone (eds.), *ODCC*, 319

⁴⁶⁹ Administry, *Explaining Cell Churches*.

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in others and multiplying. That seems to be the status of the cell group in the Ambridge, which describes itself in these terms:

CELL(S) stands for:
Christ at the centre
Every person ministering
Learning and growing
Loving one another
Seeking to multiply

The purpose of CELL

Cell is designed to allow members from different parishes and communities to come together to grow and develop in faith. It is more than a prayer group in that it seeks to provide an opportunity to discuss and share ideas about particular aspects of scripture and faith in depth. But it also seeks to provide prayerful support for its members and to act as a witness for God in the wider community.⁴⁷⁰

Deanery

The benefices of a locality are grouped together in a deanery for the purposes of organisation and mutual support and to facilitate participation in the lowest level of church synodical government, the deanery synod. The deanery is led by a **Lay Chairman** elected by the lay members of **deanery synod** (themselves nominated by the parishes) and a **Rural Dean** (appointed by the Bishop of the diocese, usually from among the clergy of the deanery).⁴⁷¹

Fresh Expressions of Church

The Fresh Expressions movement offers this definition:

A fresh expression is a form of church for our changing culture, established primarily for the benefit of people who are not yet members of any church;

- It will come into being through principles of listening, service, incarnational mission and making disciples.
- It will have the potential to become a mature expression of church shaped by the Gospel and the enduring marks of the church and for its cultural context.

The important things to notice are that fresh expressions have an emphasis on mission, that they are culturally appropriate, that they come into being only after a time of listening to the local community and that one day, as disciples are made, they will become a mature expression of church.⁴⁷²

House for Duty

An arrangement whereby a SSM clergy person occupies a parsonage house free of rent etc. in exchange for a commitment to work unpaid in a parish, usually for Sundays plus 2 or 3 other days per week. Whilst not cost free to a diocese (which loses the opportunity of renting out the spare house) it is substantially less costly than paying a stipendiary cleric (even a half time one) and has the benefit of providing a resident

⁴⁷⁰ Giles, *Cell Spring 2011*, 3

⁴⁷¹ Cross and Livingstone (eds.), *ODCC*, 1425

⁴⁷² Fresh Expressions. *How Do You Define a Fresh Expression of Church?* , <http://www.sharetheguide.org/questions/01> (accessed 20 October, 2010).

cleric on the ground. However, such posts are often far from easy to fill satisfactorily and often end up taken by clergy who have retired from full time ministry and are seeking light duty (or financial assistance) to ease them into retirement.

Parish

An area under the spiritual care of a Church of England clergyman (the 'incumbent' or, in the correct meaning of the word, the 'curate'), to whose religious ministrations all its inhabitants are entitled.⁴⁷³ Whilst, at least for the last 150 years, the ideal has been a clergyman resident in every parish, this ideal is rapidly disappearing, both in the rural areas and in the towns and cities. Increasingly a single clergy person will have the spiritual care of several parishes. These may be held concurrently ('in plurality') or by virtue of a scheme of pastoral reorganisation under the Pastoral Measure 1983 or the Dioceses Pastoral and Mission Measure 2008 they may be grouped together in a united benefice or a single united parish. To facilitate prospective pastoral reorganisation a clergy person may be licensed as priest in charge of a parish rather than made the incumbent. The coming into effect of the Clergy Terms and Conditions of Service Measure, with the introduction of common tenure for all clergy from 31 January 2011 (save for those who already have freehold, who may retain this) and the phasing out of the clergy freehold, will remove one traditional clergy/parish link, but in other respects the relationship continues.

PCC

The Parochial Church Council is the legal administrative body in the ecclesiastical parish. Its lay members are elected by the Annual Parochial Church Meeting which all members of the parish electoral roll are entitled to attend and cast their vote; the incumbent and any other clergy licensed to the parish are also members, and the dual clerical and lay membership gives substance to the PCC's statutory duty to co-operate with the clergy in the whole mission of the parish.

Reader

A Reader is a lay minister of the Church of England who, after selection and training is admitted to the office of Reader and licensed by the Bishop of the diocese to minister in a parish or deanery. Reader ministry is covered by the canons of the Church of England. Functionally Readers are ministers of the word rather than the sacraments, so may not perform baptisms or preside at the Eucharist, nor (not being clerks in holy orders) may they conduct weddings. They may, however, be licensed to conduct funerals and to perform services of holy communion by extension. Often, but inaccurately, described as Lay Readers, a number of dioceses have now adopted the

⁴⁷³ Cross and Livingstone (eds.), *ODCC*, 1221

more accurate descriptive title Licensed Lay Minister (abbreviated to LLM) in place of (or sometimes in conjunction with) Reader.⁴⁷⁴

Self Supporting Ministers

Since the 1960s increasing numbers of ordained clergy have been unpaid by the church, supporting themselves from earnings in secular employment or, if retired, pension income. They are also known as Non-Stipendiary Ministers, and a locally licensed form of this ministry (not used in York diocese) is known as Ordained Local Ministry (OLM). By the beginning of the 21st century more than 50% of those being ordained each year are SSM. Many continue to work full-time or part-time in a secular job and are therefore limited in the time they can devote to the work of the church; for some their secular work becomes the primary focus of their ordained ministry and they are known as Ministers in Secular Employment.

⁴⁷⁴ Cross and Livingstone (eds.), *ODCC*, 1370 ; Gordon W. Kuhrt and Pat Napin (eds.), *Bridging the Gap: Reader Ministry Today* (London: Church House, 2002)

Appendix 2 Deanery Statistics

The table on the following page is closely based on the deanery summary as at August 2010 used by the Bishop for management and overview purposes. It is derived from the annual statistical returns submitted by parishes to the diocesan office together with additional information held in the diocesan office and/or provided by the parishes. An earlier version of this same statistical information was used as the basis for the deanery planning exercises. Certain columns of information have been omitted from the table reproduced here to preserve confidentiality. The accuracy of some of the figures is in doubt, as discussed in chapter 4, and some of the information is at least a year out of date, but the table nevertheless provides a broad statistical overview of the deanery.

Appendix 2

Benefices of Southern Ryedale Deanery	Stip Clergy Incumbent	Stip Clergy Asst	Clergy NSM	House For Duty	Readers	Church Buildings	Population	Attendance	Electoral Roll	Baptisms	Marriage	Church Funerals	Crem Funerals	No. Church Schools	Parish Share
Buckrose Carrs <i>Rillington, Scampston, Sherburn, Thorpe Bassett, West Heslerton, Yedingham</i>	1	0	0	0	0	6	3000	102	122	22	9	15	5	2	40186
New Malton	0.5	0	1	0	1	1	3000	63	132	2	1	11	4	0	41270
Norton	1	0	0	0	1	1	7000	97	153	31	5	38	2	0	48044
Old Malton	0.5	0	0	0	1	1	2500	80	175	28	11	38	5	0	39653
Sand Hutton w Bossall, Gate Helmsley, Whitwell w Crambe, Flaxton & Foston	1	0	0	1	1	11	2500	137	156	6	6	5	5	2	44796
Howardian Group <i>Bulmer, Dalby, Huttons Ambo, Terrington, Welburn</i>	1	0	0	0	1	5	2500	70	168	9	6	9	3	1	40663
The Street Parishes <i>Amotherby, Barton-le-Street, Hovingham, Slingsby</i>	1	0	0	0	1	7	3000	61	184	11	9	13	5	1	40993
Wolds Valley <i>Weaverthorpe/ Helperthorpe, Luttons Ambo & Kirby Grindalythe/ Wharram</i>	0	0	0	1	0	5	1000	37	78	2	2	5	1	1	13032
West Buckrose <i>Acklam, Birdsall, Burythorpe, Langton, Leavening, North Grimston, Settrington, Westow</i>	1	0	0	0	0	8	2500	47	217	19	3	10	2	1	41363
TOTAL	7	0	1	2	6	45	27000	694	1385	130	52	144	32	8	350000
AVERAGE	0.8	0	0.11	0.22	0.66	5	3000	77	157	14.5	5.7	16	3.7	0.9	38888

Appendix 3 Interview Questions

The interviews were semi-structured. They broadly followed the format of the questions set out below, always starting with the first question and generally moving through the others in order unless the answers given in an earlier part of the interview had already taken us further forward to a later question area. Note: the questions marked ❖ are the opening questions of each topic. The following questions, marked ○, are supplementaries which may or may not be required in order to elucidate initial replies and/or ensure the discussion is as wide as possible and/or bring the discussion back on track. In practice I found that in most interviews most of the supplementaries were needed in some form or other in order to get as wide as possible a coverage of the subject.

- ❖ Looking ahead, what sort of church do you want to be available for your children/grandchildren?
 - Do you think that is a realistic and achievable hope?
 - Why/why not?
- ❖ What do you think your local church is there for?
 - Is your church mainly for the benefit of the regular attenders or mainly for the wider community?
 - What is the relationship between the church and the local community?
 - Do you think the local church considers it has any obligations to the community?
 - Do you think the local church should adopt a role in local issues (esp. ecological issues)?
 - Do you think the local church should be involved with the community's more 'secular' activities - charities, scouts, theatre/dance groups, etc.?
 - Do you think the local church should play a role in community celebrations as well as rites of passage?
 - Do you think the local community see your church as 'their' church?
 - A lot of people talk about the mission of the church – what do you think they mean by it?
 - Do you think your local church is concerned about mission?
 - How is this concern demonstrated?
 - Do you think your local church is concerned about friendship/support?
 - How are those concerns nurtured?
 - What place should regular worship have in the life of the church?

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- Does the local church nurture your faith, and if so in what ways?
- Do you think the local church should nurture the faith of the following generation? If yes, how?

- ❖ How important do you think the church building is in your community?
 - how important is the actual church building/the place?
 - Does the church have a role in preserving sacred space?
 - Is it possible to distinguish between the church as building and the church as people?
 - In what ways?
 - Could your local church continue without its present building?
 - In what forms?
 - Might this be a second best or might it be an advantage?
 - How should the financial burden of running the local church and maintaining the local church building be borne?

- ❖ In thinking what the church is there for do you think there are different views held by the clergy and the congregation and the wider community?
 - What do you think these differences are?
 - Are they important/significant or merely matters of detail and emphasis?
 - Do you think the clergy have different expectations from the congregation and from the wider community of what the church is for?

- ❖ Given the present shortage of paid clergy, that is unlikely to improve in the foreseeable future, how do you see ministry being delivered in your church?
 - What do you see as the role of the ordained minister?
 - What role might unpaid/part-time clergy play?
 - Are fewer services/ more services shared with other churches a way forward?
 - Is it better to keep local services with local lay ministry?
 - What makes lay ministry acceptable?

- ❖ Thinking about how your church is at present, do you think it caters for all types of people?
 - Does it welcome of a range of views and practices or does it expect people to fit in with its way of doing things?
 - What is the relationship between the church and the local community?

Appendix 4 The Interviewees and the Interviews

1 The Interviewees

18 individuals were interviewed using the questions in Appendix 3. There were three categories of interviewee:

- Category 1 were individuals closely involved in the life and administration of the church – in practice all were current or recent churchwardens.
- Category 2 were reasonably regular church attenders, some being PCC members.
- Category 3 were occasional church attenders, mainly for the purposes of weddings, baptism and funerals. Category 3 user services comprised three weddings, two baptisms and one funeral.

There were fuzzy boundaries between the three categories, not least reflecting my late decision to have three rather than two categories: in particular some Category 2 interviewees might possibly have been included in Category 1.

There were 6 interviewees in each of the three categories.

Overall there were 10 female interviewees and 8 male.

Within Category 1 the gender split was 3 male, 3 female

Within Category 2 the gender split was 3 male, 3 female

Within Category 3 the gender split was 2 male and 4 female.

The split of interviewees between Borchester and Ambridge (with its greater number of churches) was

Category 1 Borchester 2 Ambridge 4

Category 2 Borchester 2 Ambridge 4

Category 3 Borchester 5 Ambridge 1

Within Ambridge there was at least one interviewee from each of the parishes making up the benefice, so that the voice of individual villages as well as the wider benefice could be heard.

Interviewees were not asked their age, but from my knowledge of them I would say that the interviewees fell roughly into the following age bands:

25-35	3
35-45	5
45-55	0
55-65	2
65-75	8

Appendix 4 The Interviewees and the Interviews

All six of the Category 1 interviewees and three of the Category 2 interviewees were in the age 55-65 or 65-75 bands, reflecting the generally high age profile of the regular congregations. Category 3 interviewees, being recently married or bringing children for baptism would clearly be younger, the only over 65 Category 3 interviewee being someone who had used the church for a funeral. The younger age of most of the Category 3 interviewees is interestingly reflected in some of their replies to the questions, and one Category 3 interviewee specifically drew attention to the likelihood of age affecting some of the answers.⁴⁷⁵

The process of selecting interviewees is discussed in chapter 2.

One husband and wife in Category 3 were interviewed together; all other interviews were conducted on a one to one basis.

Each interview lasted, on average a little less than an hour.

2 The Interview Process

The letter of invitation issued to each interviewee and the form of consent signed by each interviewee are set out in the following pages, as also is the Interview Process, namely the script that I read at the beginning of each interview setting out the process to be followed in each interview. The invitation and consent forms were specifically approved by the Departmental Ethics Committee as part of the university ethical approval process. That process also required me to justify my role as priest/observer and to explain the safeguards to be employed (as related in the following documents and processes).

2.1 The Invitation Letter

From: The Revd Peter Bowes, [address and contact details included] [date]

Dear

I am writing to ask if you would be prepared to give up an hour or so of your time to help me with some research for my Durham University Doctor of Ministry degree. This research project is carried out under the auspices of Durham University and has been given specific approval under the University's stringent ethical code for research involving interviews with individuals.

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Appendix 4 The Interviewees and the Interviews

The aim of my research is to consider how the churches in Southern Ryedale may develop and serve their communities over the next 5-15 years. Part of this research depends on my being able to have conversations with a number of people who use the church in different ways. I am approaching approximately 20 people, some because of their experience as church wardens, some 'ordinary' church members, and some because within the last 2 or 3 years they have utilised the services of the church for a baptism, wedding or funeral. I think you will recognize yourself in at least one of those categories.

The conversation will involve a number of open-ended questions covering a number of areas that I need for my study. I anticipate that it will last about an hour. You will not need to prepare in any way for the conversation and we can stop at any time if you wish.

The conversation will be recorded to help my records but this will not go beyond me and those who are supervising and assessing my work at Durham University. I shall anonymise the records so that nobody other than me will know the identity of any individual, and all information relating to you will remain confidential. I shall take all necessary steps to maintain the security and confidentiality of the data you provide and to comply with relevant data protection legislation.

The conversation can take place at your home, at my Rectory or at my church office or any other suitable location – the choice is yours and the main factor is that we should be undisturbed during the conversation to avoid distraction. We can arrange a suitable time and place for the conversation when you reply to this letter.

If you have any questions or concerns about this project please do ask me and I will do my best to answer these. You may also contact my supervisor, Professor Douglas Davies, Department of Theology and Religion, Abbey House, Palace Green, Durham, DH1 3RS, tel: 0191 334 3940. It will be necessary, to comply with the University procedures, to ask you to sign a consent form regarding the conversation, in the form attached. I trust this will be self explanatory, but do please speak to me about it, and the project, if you have any queries at all or would like further information.

I do hope you will feel able to help me in this way, and I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely

2.2 Participant Consent Form

TITLE OF PROJECT: Envisioning the Future: the Church of England in Southern Ryedale in the second decade of the 21st Century

RESEARCHER: The Revd Peter Bowes

I confirm that I have read the Participant Invitation Letter. I have had an opportunity to ask questions and to discuss the study, have received enough information about the study and have received satisfactory answers to my questions.

I consent to participate in the study and I further consent to audio tape recordings being made of the interviews. I understand that I am free to withdraw from the study at any time and without having to give a reason for withdrawing. I understand that I will not be identified in the final written thesis and that the information relating to me will remain confidential.

I understand that information gained during the study will only be used within the context of a Doctor of Ministry thesis and emerging publications within the researcher's ministry and that if further use of this information is required at a later date for a different project, then my consent will be sought for that further use. I understand that the information I provide will not be stored in any way that makes it freely available to any party beyond the researcher responsible for conducting the project and the academic staff responsible for supervising and assessing the piece of work.

I understand that if I have any questions or concerns about this project I may contact the researcher and/or the academic member of staff responsible for supervising the project whose details are in the Participant Invitation Letter.

I understand that in the interviews the researcher will be acting as researcher and not as parish priest and that if any issues should arise in the interviews which require conversation as priest a separate meeting will be arranged to pursue these.

Signed Date
Name (IN BLOCK LETTERS)
Address.....
Post Code.....Telephone.....
Email

2.3 The Interview Process

Words of greeting/welcome and, if appropriate, thanks for allowing the interview to take place in their home. Switch on the recorder and check it is working.

This is an interview by Peter Bowes with XXXX on YYYYYY at ZZZZZZZ for the purposes of D Min research

By way of confirmation of what is in the invitation letter may I explain that a degree of formality is required so far as the process is concerned, as the research ultimately forms part of a doctorate, with a significant levels of supervision and examination, and approval by the Durham University ethical approval committee for research. That approval has been obtained.

I confirm that confidentiality will be maintained, that I shall be the only person who knows who the individual interviewees will be and in making the transcripts of the recording I shall take care to protect anonymity. Recordings and transcripts will be kept secure.

I hope that the process can be relatively informal and that once we get started we quickly forget that the recorder is running. There are a number of areas which I hope we can cover in the conversation. I have half a dozen or so primary questions and it may be that for each question the conversation will simply flow and cover all the areas I have in mind; sometimes I may ask supplementary questions to tease out areas which have not been covered or to obtain clarification. For the purposes of the research I'm primarily interested in your views, and therefore this is a conversation where I very much want you to do most of the talking. I want to emphasise that there are no right or wrong answers to the questions. You should not therefore be in any way inhibited in what you say by any perception that what you say might be the "wrong" answer. The more freely and honestly you can express your opinions in relation to these questions, the more useful this conversation will be to me. Do not be put off if I do not engage in the detailed discussion with you, as that is not the purpose of the interview. My role in the conversation is to ask questions and steer the discussion in directions that will enable the questions to be answered as fully as possible.

I anticipate the conversation might last for about an hour. If it looks as if it is going to go on beyond that time I will explicitly seek your approval. You are at liberty at any time to bring the interview to a close for any reason, or to request a break before resuming.

Can I also reiterate what was said in the consent form – for the purposes of this interview I am acting as researcher and not as parish priest. If anything should come up in the interview which you think you want to discuss with me further in my role as priest I shall of course be happy to do so either when the interview has finished or on a separate occasion.

Appendix 5 ARMPT Literature Survey

(to be read in conjunction with chapter 3)

Note: This is the literature survey submitted for ARMPT, edited only to incorporate the extended reviews of Henson, Carr and Martin into the main text. The bibliography of the original piece of work has been incorporated into the bibliography of this thesis.

Literature Survey

My research into rural church in North Yorkshire takes me into a field surrounded by existing literature, whose writers may have looked across the fence at my field, may even have crossed my field, but have not taken up residence. Some of what they write provides an excellent aid to mapping my field, but some of the attempts from over the fence to map my field prove on closer examination to be partial, misleading or even to be describing a different field altogether. Much has been written in the last 20 years on rural church and ministry, but none relating to North Yorkshire. Much has been written in the last 5 years on mission shaped church and the church's mission in general, but none relating to rural church in North Yorkshire, and relatively little from a perspective that is not evangelical. The sociologists of religion have paid a little more attention to the north of England, albeit the north-west. This survey therefore considers, from a rather larger range of literature, some of the literature that may help my research; by implication I demonstrate the lack of literature relating precisely to my work. For simplicity I will look in turn at theology and ecclesiology, then at some of the social sciences, returning briefly to theology before concluding with two fuller reviews.

Theology and Ecclesiology

Looking first at academic studies of the rural church, *Church and Religion in Rural England*⁴⁷⁶ is the main work, based on research done in the late 1980s. It now feels outdated in a number of respects, not least as the shrinkage of ministerial resources in rural parishes, and the general sharp decline in church attendance, has resulted in today's church being in a rather different situation from that of 20 years ago.

Nevertheless it remains a significant piece of research. Leslie Francis through *Church Watch: Christianity in the Countryside*,⁴⁷⁷ and more recently *Changing Rural life: A Christian Response to Key Rural Issues*⁴⁷⁸ has added to the academic study of rural

⁴⁷⁶ Davies et al., *Rural*, 18.

⁴⁷⁷ Leslie J. Francis, *Church Watch: Christianity in the Countryside*, (London: SPCK, 1996).

⁴⁷⁸ Jeremy Martineau, Leslie J Francis, and Peter Francis (eds.), *Changing Rural Life: A Christian Response to Key Rural Issues* (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2004).

ministry. The recently published *God-Shaped Mission*⁴⁷⁹ straddles the divide between academic and practical with its aim to produce theological and practical perspectives from the rural church. In doing so it attempts a much needed critique of *Mission Shaped Church*⁴⁸⁰ particularly relative to the rural situation. Even more recently *Mission-shaped Questions* attempts a review and theological evaluation of what has been happening since *Mission Shaped Church*,⁴⁸¹ albeit without reference to the rural situation.

There is a rather larger literature on rural church from an ecclesial perspective, some of it well researched, but also tending to date quite quickly. Both Russell's books, *The Country Parish*,⁴⁸² written in 1986 and *The Country Parson*,⁴⁸³ written in 1993, were important at their time in starting to draw attention to issues of rural ministry. However, whilst they – particularly the latter - tried to set out a new vision for rural ministry, they now seem less relevant to much of the present situation, which has moved on from what they describe and envisage. Undoubtedly the publication of *Faith in the Countryside*⁴⁸⁴ in 1990, intended to do for rural church what *Faith in the City* had done a decade previously for urban church, provided an impetus for the steady stream of literature that followed. Early in that process was Bowden's *Ministry in the Countryside*⁴⁸⁵ and rather more recently Osborne's *The Country Vicar*.⁴⁸⁶ The titles show that the focus of many of these books is on the ministers and the ministry they deliver. Bowden's book, originally issued in 1994 and reissued with a 35 page updating Introduction in 2003, argues strongly that rural churches flourish when freed from an obsession with paid, seminary-trained, ministers. Osborne explores other ways ministry might be provided. From a Roman Catholic perspective, *A Priestless People?*⁴⁸⁷ grapples with the impact on ministry, not least in rural areas, of declining ministerial resources and argues for a mobilisation of the gifts of all God's people. That rallying cry is echoed in later Anglican publications. *The Parish*⁴⁸⁸ reflects on the role of the parish as people, place and focus for ministry but, like *Mission Shaped Church*, is written largely from an urban perspective.

⁴⁷⁹ Smith, *God-Shaped Mission*.

⁴⁸⁰ Church of England, *MSC*.

⁴⁸¹ Steven J. L. Croft (ed.), *Mission-Shaped Questions* (London: Church House Publishing, 2008).

⁴⁸² Russell, *The Country Parish*.

⁴⁸³ Russell, *The Country Parson*.

⁴⁸⁴ ACORA, *Countryside*.

⁴⁸⁵ Andrew Bowden, *Ministry in the Countryside: A Model for the Future* (London: Mowbray, 1994).

⁴⁸⁶ David Osborne, *The Country Vicar*, (London: Darton, Longman & Todd 2004).

⁴⁸⁷ Vincent McLaughlin, *A Priestless People?*, (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 1998).

⁴⁸⁸ Malcolm Torry (ed.), *The Parish* (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2004).

Further impetus has been added by the publication of *Mission Shaped Church*, its widespread adoption into the thought processes of the Church of England and its reinforcement of a culture of mission within the church in response to perceived numerical decline. The method, if not the motive and aim, of that book has been well critiqued by John Hull⁴⁸⁹ and it is interesting to note that the various spin-off '*Mission-Shaped...*' books that followed have not been uniform in their approach. Some have helped move the debate from the essentially urban perspective of the initial report. Most relevant are *Mission Shaped and Rural*⁴⁹⁰ and *Mission Shaped Parish*,⁴⁹¹ the latter noteworthy for its attempts to spell out mission-orientated ways of doing traditional church well, something that is undoubtedly important in rural and market town situations. Its reference to the church where someone goes once and never wants to go again is starkly familiar, but the immediately following positive statement warrants deep reflection:

The parish church that is genuinely open to God's mission and accessible to its community, and where people with unlike life stories can encounter one another as friends in our highly compartmentalised society, is an ancient idea that is always fresh.⁴⁹²

The book stresses the importance of asking the right questions and usefully explores 'Preferences versus God's will'. In the discussion on civic church much is made of the different perceptions of the job held by congregation and clergy.⁴⁹³ That applies in many other situations too. The downsides of civic church are discussed (privatised spirituality, limited involvement: similar issues are noted by David Martin⁴⁹⁴). This raises for me the question whether, and how, does this 'civic' church differ from 'central' and why, which I discuss elsewhere. (An important part of my thesis argument is an exploration of central churchmanship in relation to rural church). The discussion on 'four generation knowledge and nurture gap'⁴⁹⁵ is salutary and reinforces my long held question about Davie's⁴⁹⁶ work – how long can people believe without belonging? She herself is now responding to that question, albeit ambiguously.⁴⁹⁷

Mission Shaped and Rural, whilst not an academic work, is well researched. Although coming largely from the author's own experience in rural Worcestershire and Norfolk, it draws on examples from elsewhere both geographically (including North Yorkshire)

⁴⁸⁹ Hull, *MSC Response*.

⁴⁹⁰ Gaze, *Mission-Shaped and Rural*.

⁴⁹¹ Bayes and Sledge, *Parish*.

⁴⁹² Bayes and Sledge, *Parish* vii.

⁴⁹³ Bayes and Sledge, *Parish* 91.

⁴⁹⁴ Martin, *Sociology*.

⁴⁹⁵ Bayes and Sledge, *Parish* 100.

⁴⁹⁶ Davie, *Religion in Britain*.

⁴⁹⁷ Davie, *Sociology* 140. In the Ebor Lecture on 13 Feb 2008 she hazarded a guess of 50 years.

and in terms of churchmanship. The book engages with the question 'What is mission?' and offers some interesting insights without explicitly answering the question. There is a clear concept of being sent, of the church/Christian community looking outwards into and engaging with the wider rural community, and of understanding 'a God of mission who has a church rather than a church that has a mission'.⁴⁹⁸ The emphasis of the book is more on doing mission than on what mission is, and reflects the considerable influence on missiological thinking of Bosch.⁴⁹⁹ *God-Shaped Mission*, already mentioned, sees itself both continuing the process started by Gaze, and critiquing some of her assumptions. Much of the book explores how mission might work in a rural context, establishing principles for mission in the rural church. The book is recently published and there must be the possibility of further work in this field emerging in the near future.

Finally in this section, and briefly, *Mission Shaped Spirituality*⁵⁰⁰ discusses a model of spirituality that might be appropriate for churches beginning to reorient themselves to mission as a means of facing a different future. In my judgement the book lacked a degree of rigour and consistency of approach, not least in its sometimes indiscriminate and inconsistent use of the key terms mission and evangelism.

Moving on from mission, but remaining with faith and spirituality, and definitely academic in its approach, is *The Spiritual Revolution*,⁵⁰¹ the 2005 report of a large research project into the churches and other forms of spiritual expression in Kendal. This book is relevant to any church survey, particularly one in a market town/rural context, although not without its problems. Its research methodology is instructive but the approach to surveying the actual churches might well be argued as flawed, reducing the value of the research. The book is interesting for its study of religion versus spirituality, although (as the authors admit) it defines those terms in particular ways to suit its own purpose, cutting across established usage, and so arguably limiting the value of the research. There is also an interesting discussion on sacralisation and secularisation which usefully interrogates Billings' work⁵⁰² written out of the same town and church situation. Numerous questions arise, not least in the manner of classifying the churches, and indeed whether its characterisation of much of the Christian church is correct. The lumping together of all 'humanity' churches⁵⁰³

⁴⁹⁸ Steven J. L. Croft, "The Changing Role of the Evangelist in Britain," in *Thornleigh Lecture on Evangelism* (2006).

⁴⁹⁹ Bosch, *Mission*.

⁵⁰⁰ Susan Hope, *Mission Shaped Spirituality*, (London: Church House Publishing, 2006) .

⁵⁰¹ Heelas and Woodhead, *Spiritual Revolution*.

⁵⁰² Alan Billings, *Secular Lives, Sacred Hearts*, (London: SPCK, 2004).

⁵⁰³ Heelas and Woodhead, *Spiritual Revolution*, 64-66,154.

seems rather harsh and 'broad brush'. I was left wondering the extent to which this category might equate to the 'central' church I study elsewhere – and if it does then, given the prevalence of central church in rural/market town church situations, the authors' future scenarios leave little hope for the church or ministry in those situations.⁵⁰⁴

In the same field is *Predicting Religion*.⁵⁰⁵ The editors acknowledge the difficulty in the current climate of predicting the future, but nevertheless ambitiously seek to predict 20-30 years ahead. Wilson in his essay⁵⁰⁶ 'focuses on the way in which the decline of traditional forms of close-knit community goes hand in hand with that of the religion which sustained them and undergirded their moral and social economy.'⁵⁰⁷ This essentially bears out Jenkins' study of a rural parish, noted later.⁵⁰⁸

One of the big questions this book addresses is, if the institution is in decline, what of the faith that underlies the institution? How long will non-churchgoers still 'say their prayers at night'⁵⁰⁹ if there is no sustaining institution and no family encouragement to learn these habits? In this connection Hirst⁵¹⁰ posits that it is generally (some – not all) children of church-goers who form the next generation of church-goers, so there is gradual decline. Bruce suggests that conservative churches will last longer.⁵¹¹ This is a conclusion that is questioned by the editors in their introduction,⁵¹² and one which usefully interrogates the Kendal survey. It is a conclusion that might also be challenged by *Why Liberal Churches are Growing*⁵¹³ and also the generally more optimistic viewpoints of Martyn Percy.⁵¹⁴

⁵⁰⁴ Heelas and Woodhead, *Spiritual Revolution*, 148.

⁵⁰⁵ Grace Davie, Linda Woodhead, and Paul Heelas (eds.), *Predicting Religion: Christian, Secular, and Alternative Futures* (Aldershot, Hants.: Ashgate 2002).

⁵⁰⁶ Bryan Wilson, 'Prediction and Prophecy in the Future of Religion', in Grace Davie, Linda Woodhead, and Paul Heelas (eds.), *Predicting Religion* (Aldershot, Hants.: Ashgate, 2002), 64-73.

⁵⁰⁷ Davie, Woodhead, and Heelas (eds.), *Predicting Religion*, 4.

⁵⁰⁸ Jenkins, *Religion*.

⁵⁰⁹ Quote from funeral interview in Malton on 27/9/2007 as to practice of 94 year old deceased and her 67-year-old daughter, both now non-attenders.

⁵¹⁰ Rob Hirst, 'Social Networks and Personal Beliefs', in Grace Davie, Linda Woodhead, and Paul Heelas (eds.), *Predicting Religion* (Aldershot, Hants.: Ashgate, 2002), 86-94.

⁵¹¹ Steve Bruce, 'The Demise of Christianity in Britain', in Grace Davie, Linda Woodhead, and Paul Heelas (eds.), *Predicting Religion* (Aldershot, Hants.: Ashgate, 2002), 53-63.

⁵¹² Davie, Woodhead, and Heelas (eds.), *Predicting Religion*, 4.

⁵¹³ Percy and Markham (eds.), *Liberal*.

⁵¹⁴ e.g. in Percy and Markham (eds.), *Liberal* chs 7 and 14; and in Martyn Percy, 'Many Rooms in My Father's House: The Changing Identity of the English Parish Church', in Steven J. L. Croft (ed.), *The Future of the Parish System* (London: Church House Publishing, 2006), 3-15. but per contra in chapter 8 of Davie, Woodhead, and Heelas (eds.), *Predicting Religion*, where he is gloomy about the prospects of the charismatic churches.

These works that straddle the boundaries between theology and the sociology of religion provide useful material with which to approach a study of the rural church, as well as ample evidence of very divergent views amongst practitioners, of significant issues needing to be explored, and of a need for caution on being too dogmatic with predictive conclusions.

Sociology of Religion

This review has taken us from theology to the sociology of religion, a vast field which cannot be ignored in any research, not least because there is such a major divergence of opinion on a number of issues, in particular the theory of secularisation, between a number of practitioners in this field.

I review later David Martin's important but now very outdated *A Sociology of English Religion*. Another important introductory work in this field is Grace Davie's recent *The Sociology of Religion*, not least because in it she takes the opportunity to comment on and update her own earlier writings.⁵¹⁵ Davie, with her key ideas of believing without belonging and of vicarious religion takes a very different approach in the secularisation debate from Bruce⁵¹⁶ and Brown⁵¹⁷ with their stark predictions of the total decline of institutional religion. Jenkins sets up an interesting dialogue between Davie and Bruce⁵¹⁸ as a way of justifying the particular approach he has followed. Gill,⁵¹⁹ with his carefully researched assertions that, for the most part, churches have never been full and that the present decline in attendance needs to be seen in a wider context, takes a similar, but by no means identical, line to Davie. I find myself more drawn to the relative optimism of Davie, Gill and Jenkins than the pessimism of Bruce and Brown.

Jenkins is of most interest to a study of rural church in the relatively short chapter in which he explores village life in Comberton.⁵²⁰ There is a great deal of interest both in terms of methodology and also in terms of the underlying analysis he makes of village life. His thesis identifies three distinct groups of population within the village: the villagers, the incomers of several generations ago, still regarded by the villagers as incomers, but by the more recent arrivals as conservatives, and then the more recent

⁵¹⁵ Davie, *Religion in Britain*; Grace Davie, *Religion in Modern Europe: A Memory Mutates* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); Grace Davie, *Europe: The Exceptional Case: Parameters of Faith in the Modern World* (London: Darton Longman & Todd, 2002).

⁵¹⁶ Steve Bruce, *Religion in the Modern World: From Cathedrals to Cults* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996).

⁵¹⁷ Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain*.

⁵¹⁸ Jenkins, *Religion*, 25-39.

⁵¹⁹ Gill, *The Empty Church Revisited*.

⁵²⁰ Jenkins, *Religion*, 41-73.

incomers. That analysis, and the accompanying attitudes, would usefully inform any study of rural church life.

Theology – again

Moving back to areas of theology that might assist in reflection on the many issues arising from a study of rural church, there are two or three worthy of mention for the big issues that they raise and the important questions they allow to be asked. For rural ministry, questions of place assume a great importance and in this connection Inge's *Theology of Place*⁵²¹ certainly warrants attention, going further than *The Parish*.⁵²² *The Qualities of Time*,⁵²³ raises issues of time that may need to be considered when looking at the supposedly timeless (but in reality rapidly changing) rural church situation. The issues of churchmanship which seem to me to be an important element of the study of rural religion have not spawned a large literature, certainly in relation to the overwhelmingly prevalent central churchmanship, where the literature is most noticeable by its absence. Nevertheless the writings of (or about⁵²⁴) F D Maurice provide a useful background to what might be perceived as influential to at least some of today's central churchmanship.

What this brief overview demonstrates is that there is a substantial amount of literature that has relevance to certain aspects of the area in which I am researching, but none that entirely covers my field, certain aspects of which (such as central churchmanship) appear to be a literary desert. I have also demonstrated that it is not possible to confine my studies to theology or ecclesiology alone; to cover the subjects that are before me requires recourse to the sociology of religion, within which there are as many diverse viewpoints as there are within theology.

There follow some more substantial reviews of literature that struck me as key in formulating issues for this thesis.

I begin with a review of Wesley Carr's *The Priestlike Task*⁵²⁵ with a sidelong glance at Hensley Henson's chapter on the *Via Media* in *The Church of England*.⁵²⁶ Neither of these books is in print, but they are of interest for describing, at different points in time (1939 and 1983) their respective authors' ideal types of what the centre of the Church

⁵²¹ Inge, *A Christian Theology of Place*.

⁵²² Torry (ed.), *The Parish*.

⁵²³ Wendy James and David Mills (eds.), *The Qualities of Time : Anthropological Approaches* (Oxford: Berg, 2005).

⁵²⁴ Jeremy Morris, *F.D. Maurice and the Crisis of Christian Authority*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

⁵²⁵ Carr, *Priestlike*

⁵²⁶ Henson, *Church*, 57-89.

of England should look like. Thus they form part of the literature undergirding my study of contemporary central churchmanship. Surprisingly, neither book seems to have been reviewed in any substantial way.⁵²⁷

Henson, recently retired Bishop of Durham, was commissioned to write the *Church of England* in the English Institutions series. One chapter, *Via Media*, addressed the essential characteristic of the Church of England. I have chosen to use that chapter, after discussion with my supervisors, to provide a dialogue with Carr's *Priestlike Task*. Neither work is aimed solely at an academic readership. Nor is either intended as popular theology. Each aims to make a thoughtful and considered contribution, in the case of Henson to the place of the Church of England within English society, and in the case of Carr to the sort of ministry the church requires to serve English society. Henson's readership, at a time when the Church of England was relatively more important in the life of the nation, would likely be wider than Carr's, whose writing has served a generation of ordinands at a time when the nature of ministry has been under review. Carr reflects on the sort of ministry the church of the 1980s and 1990s needs, a church very different from that described by Henson.

Carr states his approach: this is 'an essay in applied theology', starting from 'what is' before moving on to what might be.⁵²⁸ He is clear that he is constructing a model of ministry (describing an ideal type) rather than endorsing any existing position. Does this construction of a model of ministry imply that he is also constructing a model or ideal type of church (i.e. the Church of England), albeit one focussed 'in a particular environment'⁵²⁹? If so then this might be a church that lies at the point of balance between the extremes (rather than simply being the lowest common denominator) and thus serve as a model for central churchmanship – rather as Henson's *Via Media* constructs an ideal church inhabiting centre ground.

Carr stresses the importance of development and change, but with the caution that applied theology must take things as they are and develop as much by recognising resources within existing structures as finding new ones.⁵³⁰ In that he is close to Henson whose *Via Media* is one of 'cautiously conditioned revision'.⁵³¹

⁵²⁷ Alan Webster, 'The Work of the Ministry,' *The Expository Times* 96 (1985). 349.

⁵²⁸ Carr, *Priestlike*, 1.

⁵²⁹ Carr, *Priestlike*, 1.

⁵³⁰ Carr, *Priestlike*, 2.

⁵³¹ Henson, *Church*, 62.

Carr's model of interaction⁵³² seems particularly significant: it is not what the church takes to the world or the expectations the world brings to the church but the interaction and effect of the one upon the other. That provides a useful paradigm of centrality or balance, reinforced by his illustrations of parish churches committed to serving their community. This approach resonates with F.D. Maurice's a century earlier. There are hints, but no more, of a ministry of presence, and maybe of place too. He uses 'dependence' (he claims in a value free way; but it resonates in some parts of the church as a value laden description of the reality that still exists) to describe this relationship between church and community.

The distinctive task of the Church of England is in allowing all a claim on its ministry, 'to handle competently the dependent expectations of people'.⁵³³ This theme re-emerges in the chapter on Ministry which envisages ministry to the parish/community and not just to the gathered congregation. Carr explores the term 'consultant' to describe the role of the minister. Henson sees no such need. Given the current ambiguity of the term 'consultant', it is a relief when Carr decides that, despite the problems associated with the word, 'priest' best describes the role of the minister in this wider context.⁵³⁴

This theme continues in the chapter on the church as institution, again presupposing a wider community role and interaction. An interesting overview of the societal changes of the last 150 years affecting the role and self understanding of the church might usefully be brought up to date to reflect the very significant changes of the last 25 years which mean that Carr's analysis stops far short, for today's reader, of 'what-is-now', whilst underlining how far things have moved on since Henson. Carr speaks of 'the representative role of the church in society, often focussed in the representative role of the minister'.⁵³⁵ Could Carr, never mind Henson, have foreseen the rapid pace of secularisation, the growth of alternatives to religion and ministry and the erosion of the trusted status of the priest?

In a chapter 'Folk Religion: the Acid Test' Carr develops his idea of ministry as interaction with wider society, seeing a positive interaction with folk (common, popular or implicit) religion as a key characteristic of parish ministry. His model of church is not tightly boundaried. The crucial questions this implies for the church's understanding of mission and evangelism are left unarticulated and unanswered.

⁵³² Carr, *Priestlike*, 5.

⁵³³ Carr, *Priestlike*, 11.

⁵³⁴ Carr, *Priestlike*, 17.

⁵³⁵ Carr, *Priestlike*, 28.

Carr discusses the meaning of boundary, not least in the context of the minister 'manning the boundary of the church's task'.⁵³⁶ He explores the dichotomy: the minister as chaplain to his congregation at the expense of engagement with the community, and the minister immersed in the structures of society. Both depart from the parish ideal. At their respective extremes lie fundamentalism and the social gospel. But Carr describes here a very clericalised understanding of ministry, like Henson's, far removed from the clergy role of enabling the baptised to engage in their ministry. If Carr were writing 20 years later this chapter might appear somewhat differently.

Carr nowhere seeks to classify his model ministry and church. It is for the reader to infer that it might best fit the largest part of the church, that is, be at the centre of the Anglican spectrum. Henson is less reticent. In seeking to address the essential characteristic of the Church of England he adopts the phrase *Via Media*, described by Hartford in 1912 'not as a safe and easy path....but as the carefully surveyed central road'.⁵³⁷ Perhaps Carr is describing another attempt at that carefully surveyed central road.

I move on to what was one of the first English works in the field of sociology of religion, *A Sociology of English Religion*, David Martin, 1967.⁵³⁸

Although the study of the sociology of religion, as a separate sub-discipline of sociology, dates from the later part of the 19th century and the work of Marx, Durkheim and, particularly, Weber, it was only in the 1960s that the discipline began to flourish in Britain, possibly due to the timing of the English translations of other seminal works. Consequently, this book by David Martin was one of the early books in the field published in Britain, and relating specifically to the English (and Welsh) situation. As a reviewer of the book said 'there has long been a need for an overview of the 'religious situation' in England'.⁵³⁹

This short book (130 pages of text) is principally concerned with English religious culture. Starting with a historical overview Martin then discusses religious practices, and is clearly interested in the relative roles of the established church and of dissent. A discussion on attitudes, beliefs and opinions follows which allows Martin to consider the different approaches to belief, noted below. This leads into a discussion of structures and patterns and analysis along the familiar and somewhat simplified

⁵³⁶ Carr, *Priestlike*, 41.

⁵³⁷ Henson, *Church*, 62.

⁵³⁸ Martin, *Sociology*.

⁵³⁹ Julius Gould, 'A Sociology of English Religion,' *The British Journal of Sociology* 19, no. 1 (1968), 96.

church/denomination/sect categories, allowing him to explore issues of institution and dissent and independence. It is not always easy to see what Martin himself thinks, other than that he seems not to be averse to some elements of the status quo, including those of class. At the end he seems to be persuaded that the book has mainly shown 'what we do not know about religion in Britain'⁵⁴⁰ and thus he highlights issues for further research. It may be significant that the book was never revised and reissued, and that Martin and others explored a number of these further issues over the ensuing decades. As such the book may be seen as a catalyst for the study that followed rather than of lasting significance in its own right.

Whilst now seeming very dated – it was, after all, written over 40 years ago – this book has proved to be, personally, a fascinating read, describing the church in the era when I grew up, found faith, flirted with - and then abandoned - extreme reformed independent evangelicalism. But reading it underlines just how much both society and church have changed in the last 40 years. Martin himself acknowledged 20 years later how quickly his book had aged because its writing 'immediately preceded the watershed of the late 1960's' and expressed the view that any sociology of religion only has a shelf life of a decade before it becomes of merely historical interest.⁵⁴¹ Whilst Martin's other writings show his disagreement with Callum Brown's thesis that the decline of religion in Britain can be traced to 1963,⁵⁴² the benefit of hindsight shows the late 1960's to be more significant than Martin at the time allowed. He did not anticipate the 'shaking of the statistics', nor the extent to which the churches would 'collude with the spirit of the age'.⁵⁴³

One of the latest works in the field is by Davie.⁵⁴⁴ She acknowledges that she builds on Martin's work, so illustrating both how the study of the sociology of religion develops, and the importance of Martin's 1967 work as a foundation for what has followed. Martin's work is seen by others as the foundation for 'the British fascination with broad theoretical issues relying mainly on participant observation, coupled with empirical studies'.⁵⁴⁵ That phrase seems to sum up Martin's conceptual approach to his task, drawing both on his own observations and on the empirical researches of others to construct a broad overview of the situation as it was then. It is noticeable that Davie's book, intended to serve a similar introductory purpose, is somewhat longer and its

⁵⁴⁰ Martin, *Sociology*, 117.

⁵⁴¹ Davie, *Religion in Britain*, viii.

⁵⁴² Brown, *Death of Christian Britain*.

⁵⁴³ Davie, *Religion in Britain* viii.

⁵⁴⁴ Davie, *Sociology*.

⁵⁴⁵ James A Beckford, 'The Sociology of Religion 1945-1989,' *Social Compass* 37, no. 1 (1990), 50.

overview addresses issues barely beginning to surface when Martin wrote 40 years earlier, such as the impact of globalisation. His work is a child of its time.

What is extremely interesting, given the developments in the field over the last 40 years, is the very limited discussion in Martin's book on secularisation. In his Introduction he hopes 'it will be clear that I have reservations about this thesis' and that he is 'suspicious of it as a sociological or historical generalisation'.⁵⁴⁶ Secularisation theory has engaged many writers in the last 40 years. It is clear that at the time Martin saw secularisation as a concept to be treated with care and caution, and not to be the inevitable outcome of an increase in the range of religious choices. Martin, with hindsight, may well have felt his 1967 treatment of the subject inadequate and he contributed to the ongoing discussion.⁵⁴⁷ Secularisation warrants a whole chapter in Davie's recent book⁵⁴⁸ demonstrating what a key, although hotly controverted, area of the sociology of religion it has become. Whereas twenty years ago the major debates in the field were between Martin and Wilson,⁵⁴⁹ the opposing views are now more between Davie and Bruce.⁵⁵⁰

There are a number of issues raised in Martin's book that are of particular interest to my study of rural religion and in particular that central churchmanship which is prevalent in rural Anglicanism. Martin makes a passing reference to 'what may perhaps be called 'Central'',⁵⁵¹ contrasting this category with the more familiar High and Low, and perhaps seeing it as the median point between those extremes. More interestingly, later on he describes five subsystems of the British religious experience which, on his own admission, mix categories – two are status groups and three are ideological types.⁵⁵² Of the latter he has catholic, evangelical and progressive. Initially hoping these might equate to the more familiar categories I was working with, it soon became clear that, if anything, his progressive equates to 'liberal' (or possibly the Victorian Broad Church) rather than 'Central'. In other words Martin is broadly following the familiar, if not always accurate, threefold classification of evangelical, catholic and liberal that does not adequately reflect the central churchmanship so commonly found in rural churches. Nevertheless his descriptions of some of the characteristics of the progressives resonated with certain characteristics of a (particularly civic⁵⁵³ or 'society') manifestation of central churchmanship. His sociological reflections, although now

⁵⁴⁶ Martin, *Sociology*, 11.

⁵⁴⁷ David Martin, *A General Theory of Secularisation*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1978).

⁵⁴⁸ Davie, *Sociology*, 46-67.

⁵⁴⁹ Bryan Wilson, *Religion in a Secular Society*, (London: Penguin, 1969).

⁵⁵⁰ Timothy Jenkins, 'Two Sociological Approaches to Religion in Modern Britain,' *Religion* 26 (1996). 331-42.

⁵⁵¹ Martin, *Sociology*, 30.

⁵⁵² Martin, *Sociology*, 58.

⁵⁵³ Bayes and Sledge, *Parish*, 100; Martin, *Sociology*.

dated, bear further thought, especially on the distinction between status and personal commitment.⁵⁵⁴ His discussion of what he calls superstitions and subterranean theologies⁵⁵⁵ and of individualism and fear of institutions might also prove a useful aid to reflection on some of the characteristics of central churchmanship.

It is interesting to see just how wrong an eminent sociologist was in his reading of the signs about the future of the church, dismissing the apparently increasing 'decline' of the churches as exaggerated: 'If we except some mild erosion of the more conventional rites of passage and the special difficulties of the non-conformists, the position seems to have been almost stationary since the war.'⁵⁵⁶ If he was able to be so wrong (as he himself later admitted) perhaps other workers in the field can afford to be somewhat tentative in their conclusions as they sift the evidence from their research.

⁵⁵⁴ Martin, *Sociology*. 71.

⁵⁵⁵ Martin, *Sociology*, 74.

⁵⁵⁶ Martin, *Sociology*. 51

Appendix 6 Methodology

(as previously submitted for ARMPT: to be read in conjunction with chapter 2)

Methodology

Methodology is

best regarded as the study of different approaches to research within the academic discipline. It offers more abstract and theoretical exploration of how to carry forward the research. It allows you to weigh up the advantages and disadvantages of one method over and against another as well as giving an account of the rationale behind the particular methods.⁵⁵⁷

For those engaged in research in practical theology, it is necessary to have recourse to a wider range of disciplines than just theology (and its sub-disciplines such as ecclesiology): anthropology (and ethnography) and sociology (and its sub-discipline the sociology of religion) will frequently feature. But this multi-disciplinary approach also emphasises the crucial importance for the methodology of allowing the different aspects to have their proper weight. The different disciplines predicate different approaches to research. For anthropology a predominant method is participant observation describing, comparing and interpreting its research subject. Sociology will concern itself with empirical investigation, either of positive quantitative 'hard' data, or that more intuitive qualitative 'soft' data, which focuses more on the meanings attached to human behaviour. Theology, if it seeks a practical outcome, will very likely find itself engaging with the pastoral cycle,⁵⁵⁸ whether in a simple or more complex form.

It needs to be borne in mind that congregational studies has emerged as a distinct field, recognising that much practical theology research is of, and about, congregations. The developing field since Hopewell's seminal book⁵⁵⁹ is summarised in the opening chapter of *Congregational Studies in the UK*.⁵⁶⁰ Other contributions to that volume, especially in the third part, provide insights into a number of relevant methodologies. And, of course, *Studying Local Churches* aims to be a practical

⁵⁵⁷ Cameron et al. (eds.), *Studying Local Churches*, 19.

⁵⁵⁸ Paul H. Ballard and John Pritchard, *Practical Theology in Action: Christian Thinking in the Service of Church and Society* (London SPCK, 1996); Laurie Green, *Let's Do Theology*, (London: Mowbray, 1990).

⁵⁵⁹ Hopewell, *Congregation*.

⁵⁶⁰ Mathew Guest, Karin Tusting, and Linda Woodhead (eds.), *Congregational Studies in the UK : Christianity in a Post-Christian Context* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), and see also Heelas and Woodhead, *Spiritual Revolution*, 152-54.

handbook for precisely this purpose. All that literature has had its place in informing my own research.

Given the multi-disciplinary approach of practical theology, any methodology must consider how to give each area its proper significance and must grapple in particular with issues of whether any particular discipline has priority or, indeed, ultimate primacy. For those engaging in research from a faith standpoint the temptation to allow theological insights to take priority is very strong and must be carefully addressed. Is the conversation between theology and sociology and/or anthropology a conversation of equals?⁵⁶¹ Swinton and Mowat cite Hunsinger's argument that it is not simply a faith stance that makes a researcher give logical priority to theology but it is actually a logical precedent for interdisciplinary enquiry. Hunsinger wrote from a Barthian Reformed theological tradition, leading her to apply what she described as a Christological perspective to this method. This is interesting, given the relative lack of writers from this tradition in the field of pastoral theology; their insistence on the primacy of biblical revelation often excludes dialogue with other disciplines. So her insistence that dialogue is possible from that starting point may serve as a corrective to those from other traditions who may be tempted to give less than due weight to the importance of theological primacy in this process.

Swinton and Mowat⁵⁶² refine and develop their ideas of mutual critical correlation, a variation of the pastoral cycle, drawing heavily on the work of Pattison and Hunsinger. As its title suggests this method postulates a critical conversation between equals: the 'as is' situation, the social sciences and theology. But in fact these conversation partners are not equal. More often than not these other disciplines are approached in terms of theology rather than on their own terms, There are the inevitable interpretative effects of applying knowledge, whether from the social sciences or from theology. Is it appropriate, if approaching from a standpoint of faith, to allow for the possibility that theology might be subordinated to, even over-ruled by, the other conversation partners? In exploring this they conclude, put simply, that the conversation between the disciplines is a mutual one, but it is an asymmetric one and certainly not an unfettered one. A conviction of the reality of God who speaks through scripture (and, an Anglican would wish to add, tradition and reason too) must mean that a different form of epistemological knowledge must be ascribed to these different forms of knowledge, ascribing a degree of logical priority to theology in that conversation. However, I would argue that that statement needs to be qualified by asserting that

⁵⁶¹ Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology*, 86.

⁵⁶² Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology*, 80-82.

theology does not arrive like the tablets of the Decalogue on Mount Sinai, and it is therefore entirely right and proper that in the conversation the assertions of theology are critically examined in the light of the data and of the input of the other disciplines. In Lartey's phrase, the theology itself is subjected to situational analysis.⁵⁶³ There is more than a degree of interpretation involved in applying the insights of theology.

Such a stance can be criticised; there will be those who argue that in any investigation both the data emerging from the research and the conversation partners of whatever discipline need to be given equal weight. I recognise that as an argument, albeit one that is not unchallengeable. However, as one engaging with this research from a standpoint of faith and with a view to seeking outcomes that will add to ministerial praxis I must approach this from a standpoint that, whilst recognising the degree of interpretation involved, accepts the logical priority of theology and the asymmetry this brings to the conversation. The phrase 'critical faithfulness'⁵⁶⁴ seems to me to sum up the approach my standpoint requires me to bring, and with it those further qualities Swinton and Mowat describe of hospitality (creating a context where the voice of qualitative research can be heard, respected and taken seriously) and conversion (challenging the autonomy of the other disciplines and their traditional insulation from God) are necessarily implicit.⁵⁶⁵

Swinton and Mowat's approach has been critiqued by Francis, by Nieman and by Davies.⁵⁶⁶ The reviews are generally positive, but Francis⁵⁶⁷ questions whether the case for the priority of theology is sufficiently argued, a critique Davies also pursues. Nieman's critique is more significant when he regrets that the book 'unfortunately places theology as but one moment in a larger cycle of research rather than, as one would hope in practical theology, a consistent perspective adopted throughout.'⁵⁶⁸

⁵⁶³ E Lartey, 'Practical Theology as a Theological Form', in J Woodard and Stephen Pattison (eds.), *The Blackwell Reader in Pastoral and Practical Theology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000).

⁵⁶⁴ Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology*, 93.

⁵⁶⁵ I discuss further at p [7-8] below other factors that might affect my approach.

⁵⁶⁶ Douglas Davies, 'John Swinton and Harriet Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*,' *Ecclesiology* 5, no. 3 (2009), 376-78.

⁵⁶⁷ Leslie J Francis, 'Reflecting Critically on the Church's Practice,' *Church Times*, 16 Feb 2007.

⁵⁶⁸ Nieman, '*Practical Theology and Qualitative Research - by John Swinton and Harriet Mowat*,' 233-4.

Appendix 7 NVivo Coding Nodes

Tree Node	Buildings	
	Free Node	Building important
	Free Node	Change of use
	Free Node	Church as focal point
	Free Node	Community see as their church
	Free Node	Feudal family influence
	Free Node	Financial burden
	Free Node	Historic building - museum
	Free Node	Influence of non attenders
	Free Node	Loss of church building
	Free Node	Multipurpose building
	Free Node	Need to travel to church
	Free Node	No purpose if not used
	Free Node	Non church building
	Free Node	Objections to church closure
	Free Node	Open church
	Free Node	Too many buildings
	Free Node	Wow factor
Tree Node	Community	
	Free Node	Church as focal point
	Free Node	Church obligation to community
	Free Node	Church part of community identity
	Free Node	Church role in local issues
	Free Node	Clergy visibility
	Free Node	Community celebrations
	Free Node	Community see as their church
	Free Node	Relationship with community
	Free Node	Size critical mass
	Free Node	There when needed

Tree Node	Flexibility	
	Free Node	As now
	Free Node	Changed to keep up
	Free Node	Fit in
	Free Node	Flexibility vs. fit-in
	Free Node	Flexible days times
	Free Node	Forward looking
	Free Node	Freer
	Free Node	Need for change
	Free Node	Willing unwilling to travel
 Tree Node	 Futures	
	Free Node	Age profile
	Free Node	Ecumenical
	Free Node	Futures
	Free Node	Realistic
	Free Node	Size critical mass
	Free Node	Sundays are different now
	Free Node	Sustainability
 Tree Node	 Ministry	
	Free Node	Acceptability of lay ministry
	Free Node	Clergy role
	Free Node	Clergy visibility
	Free Node	Lay initiative
	Free Node	Lay ministry
	Free Node	NSM
 Tree Node	 Mission	
	Free Node	Child friendly
	Free Node	Church resourcing members in mission
	Free Node	Lack of awareness of church offering
	Free Node	Mission
	Free Node	Open church
	Free Node	Outsider
	Free Node	Outward looking
	Free Node	There when needed
	Free Node	Welcome

Appendix 7 NVivo Coding Nodes

Tree Node	People	
	Free Node	Category 1
	Free Node	Category 2
	Free Node	Category 3
Tree Node	Place	
	Free Node	Place - sacred space
	Free Node	Wow factor
Tree Node	Religious concepts	
	Free Node	Faith or belief
	Free Node	God
	Free Node	Hope
	Free Node	Joy
	Free Node	Prayer
	Free Node	Think or feel
	Free Node	Vision
	Free Node	Worship
Tree Node	Services	
	Free Node	Age profile
	Free Node	Cell
	Free Node	Child friendly
	Free Node	Eucharist
	Free Node	Family Service
	Free Node	Flexible days times
	Free Node	Impossibility of present service pattern
	Free Node	Influence of non attenders
	Free Node	Nurture children in faith
	Free Node	Nurturing faith
	Free Node	Occasional offices
	Free Node	Reasons for non attendance
	Free Node	Service types
	Free Node	Shared services
	Free Node	Size critical mass
	Free Node	Traditional
	Free Node	Value of Christian teaching
	Free Node	Willing unwilling to travel

Appendix 7 NVivo Coding Nodes

Tree Node	Structure	
	Free Node	Benefice
	Free Node	Size critical mass
Tree Node	What church is like	
	Free Node	Answering hard questions
	Free Node	Benefits all or just regulars
	Free Node	Cater for all
	Free Node	Central - middle of road
	Free Node	Child friendly
	Free Node	Church as people
	Free Node	Common interest group
	Free Node	Dealing with modern issues
	Free Node	Different lay and clergy views
	Free Node	Friendship
	Free Node	Inclusive
	Free Node	Providing a service
	Free Node	Support and sharing
	Free Node	Taken for granted
	Free Node	There when needed
	Free Node	Traditional
	Free Node	Welcome

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