



VCH Oxfordshire Texts in Progress

Chastleton

Religious History



The parish church of St Mary the Virgin, Chastleton, from the south-east, showing its unusual south porch-tower (entirely rebuilt in 1689 following a fire reportedly started by lightning) and, in the foreground, the base of a medieval churchyard cross. The south aisle was enlarged c.1336 as a chantry chapel for the lord Robert Trillow.

Chastleton church (sited next to Chastleton House) was founded probably before 1100, and was given c.1129 to Osney abbey. A vicarage ordained c.1225 was abolished in 1459, and thereafter the benefice remained an unappropriated rectory. Though poorly endowed, it was held for much of the 16th to 18th centuries by well-off pluralists who employed curates; most later rectors resided, however, and in the 19th century a few also owned the advowson. A medieval chantry disappeared at or before the Reformation, and though Roman Catholicism persisted for several decades amongst some of the parish's gentry, neither that nor Protestant Nonconformity were much in evidence later.

Church Origins and Parochial Organization

The church was founded probably in the late 11th century, perhaps by the lord Nigel d'Oilly, who granted demesne tithes to Gloucester abbey.¹ In 1129 his son Robert gave it to Osney abbey,² and c.1180 it was apparently rebuilt and re-dedicated to St Mary the Virgin.³ A vicarage was ordained c.1225, but in 1459 the living's poverty led to it being reconstituted as a rectory, the abbey thereafter receiving only a small annual pension.⁴ It remained a rectory until 1962, when the parish became part of a united benefice served from neighbouring Little Compton (Warws.).⁵ That was expanded in 1980, becoming part of the even larger benefice of Chipping Norton in 2001,⁶ and in 2002 a new ecclesiastical parish, comprising the 'five villages' of Chastleton, Cornwell, Little Compton, Little Rollright, and Salford, was formed within the Chipping Norton benefice.⁷ Chastleton belonged to Chipping Norton rural deanery throughout.⁸

Advowson

Osney abbey retained the advowson until the Dissolution,⁹ and in 1545 Richard Gunter presented as patron for a turn, under an earlier abbey grant.¹⁰ In 1550 Richard Andrews sold the patronage to William Freeman with his half-share of Chastleton manor,¹¹ Freeman granting a turn (exercised in 1571) to Henry Mitchell and John Vade.¹² By 1588, however, the advowson belonged to the former rector Christopher Mitchell (d. 1590), who left it to his great nephew George Greenwood,¹³ and it descended with the Greenwoods' Chastleton estate until 1785,¹⁴ when Thomas Fothergill sold it to Patience Adams of Holborn (Middx).¹⁵

In 1789 Adams presented his son James (d. 1831), who inherited the advowson on his father's death in 1793, and whose widow Mary sold it in 1838 to the sculptor Sir Richard

¹ *Hist. & Cart. Mon. Glouc.* I, pp. 70, 223, 334; *Reg. Regum Anglo-Norm.* I, p. 59 (date 1086 and form suspicious); above, landownership (Chastleton).

² *Oseney Cart.* I, p. 1; IV, pp. 11, 324; *VCH Oxon.* II, 90.

³ *Oseney Cart.* IV, pp. 324–5, 328; below (church archit.).

⁴ Below (glebe, tithes, and vicarage).

⁵ OHC, MS Oxf. Dioc. c 1782/2, Order in Council 1961; *ibid.* PAR60/2/A/3 (retirement of last rector in 1962).

⁶ *Ibid.* c 1782/3, Pastoral Scheme 1980; *ibid.* DIOC/1/C/6/23/1, Pastoral Scheme 2001.

⁷ *Ibid.* DIOC/1/C/6/23/1, Pastoral Scheme 2002.

⁸ Lunt (ed.), *Val. Norw.* 310; Youngs, *Admin. Units*, I, 394.

⁹ *Rot. Welles*, II, 19; *Lincs. Arch.* REG/25, f. 44.

¹⁰ Pearce, 'Clergy', 27.

¹¹ *Cal. Pat.* 1549–51, 358; above, landownership (Chastleton).

¹² *Reg. Parker*, III, 999.

¹³ OHC, E24/1/2D/3; TNA, PROB 11/75/175; below (relig. life).

¹⁴ OHC, E24/1/3D/1–28; TNA, PROB 11/776/233; above, landownership (other estates).

¹⁵ OHC, MS Oxf. Dioc. c 1782/2, deed 16 Nov. 1785.

Westmacott of London.¹⁶ A similar pattern continued for several decades, with Sir Richard presenting his son Horatio (d. 1862), who in 1857 bought the advowson from Sir Richard's trustees, and whose widow Penelope presented the next rector George Nutting in 1863. Nutting (d. 1873) bought the patronage a few months later, and in 1878 his widow Mary sold it to Gustavus Sneyd, who presented himself as rector in 1879 before returning the advowson to Mary Nutting in 1884. In 1901 she sold it to William Carter of Branksome in Dorset (founder of the new settlement of Carterton in west Oxfordshire), who sold it in 1906 to Caroline Tetley of Bexley Heath (Kent). As Caroline Gillespie, she sold it in 1908 to Henry Anstey of Bradford-on-Avon (Wilts.), who gave it in 1934 to Georgina (d. 1960) and Elizabeth Burnley of Oxford; they were the widow and daughter respectively of Chastleton's former rector James Burnley (d. 1932), who had raised all but £10 of the purchase money in 1908. Elizabeth Burnley transferred it in 1963 to the diocesan board of patronage, sole patron of the expanded benefice in 2024.¹⁷

Glebe, Tithes, and Vicarage

The medieval rectory, appropriated by Osney abbey from c.1129 to 1459, was of very modest value, worth only £5 a year in 1254,¹⁸ and £6 in 1291, 1340, and 1428.¹⁹ The endowment was slightly increased at the church's rededication c.1180, when Bardulf son of Roger (as lord) gave it a house and croft apparently at Brookend, and a share in demesne and common meadow at Blakemor, while Roger Miles gave a further 2 acres. Bardulf's grandson Bardulf added another 3 a. c.1240.²⁰ Demesne tithes given to Gloucester abbey by Nigel d'Oilly (d. c.1115) were recovered by Osney abbey before 1221, in return for a ½ mark (6s. 8d.) annual payment still made in 1312.²¹

A meagre vicarage was ordained by the bishop (Hugh of Wells) c.1225, comprising a stipend of 2 marks a year (£1 6s. 8d.) along with food, fees, and oblations.²² By the 1330s the vicar typically received £1 13s. 8d. a year with allowances of grain, but in 1352 (following the Black Death) his stipend was only 20s.,²³ and in 1459 the continued poverty of the living

¹⁶ For this and rest of paragraph: OHC, MSS Oxf. Dioc. c 1762, presentation pps; c 1782/2, advowson deeds and presentation pps; *ibid.* Cal. Presentation Deeds; TNA, PROB 11/1232/142 (Patience Adams). For Sir Ric., who was buried in Chastleton churchyard, *ODNB*, s.v. Sir Ric. Westmacott; wall tablet in church; and for rectors, below (relig. life).

¹⁷ *Crockford's Clerical Dir.* (online database, accessed Feb. 2024).

¹⁸ Lunt (ed.), *Val. Norw.* 310.

¹⁹ *Tax. Eccl.* 32; *Nonarum Inquisitiones*, 140; *Feudal Aids*, VI, 381.

²⁰ *Oseney Cart.*, IV, pp. 324–5, 327–8.

²¹ Above (church origins) (for grant); *Hist. & Cart. Mon. Glouc.* I, pp. 159–60, 257; *Oseney Cart.* IV, p. 327; Bodl. MS dd Ch. Ch. c 26, OR 2.

²² *Liber Antiq. Welles*, 6; *Rot. Welles*, I, 179–80, 303; II, 19.

²³ Bodl. MSS dd Ch. Ch. c 26, OR 6–7, 12.

prompted the bishop (at the abbey's and vicar's request) to re-establish the benefice as an unappropriated rectory. Future rectors were to receive the rectory house, tithes from the two easternmost bays of the tithe barn, and glebe comprising the croft at Brookend and 3 a. of arable, paying 40s. a year to the abbey in recompense.²⁴ By 1535 the tithes all belonged to the rector, whose annual income was £11 10s. 8¾d. (£9 0s. 1d. clear) compared with £12 13s. 4d. in 1526.²⁵ The 40s. pension remained payable to the abbey until the Dissolution, and from 1542 was paid to Christ Church, Oxford, which still received it in 1805.²⁶

By 1635 the rector's glebe totalled 9 a., comprising 5 a. of arable, 2½ a. of furzes, and 1½ a. of pasture, the last in the close at Brookend.²⁷ Only the close and two gardens (totalling 2½ a.) remained in 1805,²⁸ and were exchanged in 1833 for a 4-a. plot containing the new rectory house (Chastleton Glebe), which was sold (with the plot) in 1914.²⁹ Great and small tithes (worth £162 in 1788, and revalued at £246 in 1789) were commuted in 1843 for a variable £518 rent charge,³⁰ and the rectory's net annual value rose from £336 in 1840 to £470 in 1883, before the national slump in corn prices reduced it to £222 in 1899.³¹ It later recovered to £400 in 1932 and £610 in 1957.³²

Rectory House

The medieval rectory house (mentioned in 1459) probably stood immediately east of the churchyard, on the site of a successor demolished in the 1830s. As no separate house was mentioned in the vicarage ordination, the vicars, too, may have been accommodated there, and when the vicarage was abolished the house was allotted to the new rector along with a share of the tithe barn.³³ One of two glebe gardens adjoined the churchyard in 1635, when the rectory's outbuildings (on the opposite side of the lane next to the Greenwoods' mansion house) included two barns, a stable, and a malthouse,³⁴ and in 1665 the rector was taxed on eight hearths.³⁵

²⁴ *Oseney Cart.* IV, pp. 330–2.

²⁵ *Valor Eccl.* II, 182; *Subsidy 1526*, 265, 268.

²⁶ *Oseney Cart.* VI, p. 242; *Valor Eccl.* II, 182; *L&P Hen.* VIII, XVII, p. 491; OHC, MS Oxf. Dioc. c 448, f. 31.

²⁷ OHC, MS Oxf. Archd. Oxon. b 40, f. 90. For the close's location, GA, D4084/Box28/4, map of 1780.

²⁸ OHC, MS Oxf. Dioc. c 448, f. 31.

²⁹ Northants. Archives, C 2307; OHC, MS Oxf. Dioc. c 2195, no. 4; below (rectory ho.).

³⁰ Northants. Archives, C 2311; C 2333–4; C 2418; OHC, tithe award. In 1835 Chastleton was reportedly among the county's better-off benefices, based presumably on its tithe income: *Oxon. Atlas*, p. 133.

³¹ *Lewis's Topog. Dict. of Eng.* (1840), I, 494; *Kelly's Dir. Oxon.* (1883); OHC, MS Oxf. Dioc. c 365, f. 91.

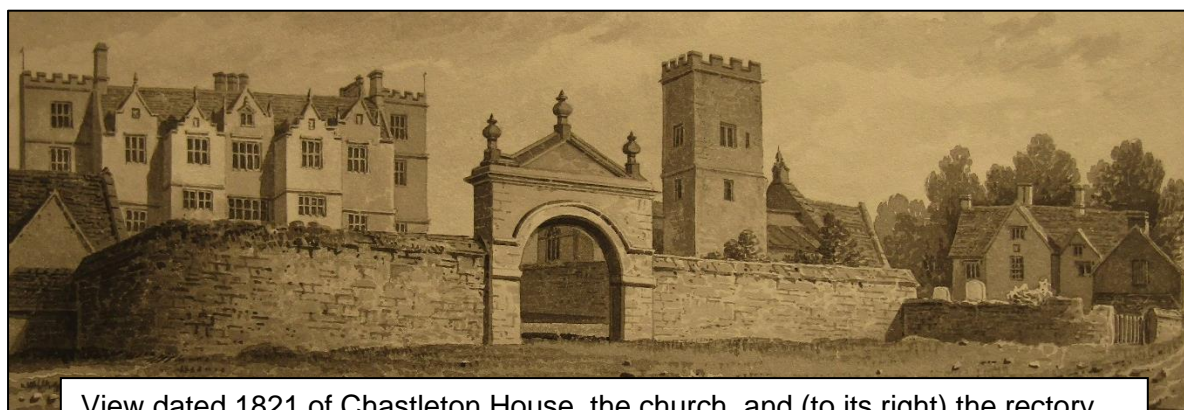
³² *Crockford's Clerical Dir.* (1932), 182; (1957–8), 1444.

³³ *Oseney Cart.* IV, pp. 330–2; OHC, MS Oxf. Dioc. c 2195, no. 4, map of 1832.

³⁴ OHC, MS Oxf. Archd. Oxon. b 40, f. 90.

³⁵ *Hearth Tax Oxon.* 186.

The house was still ‘very good’ in 1785, but by 1796 it was ‘neglected and out of repair’,³⁶ James Adams (rector 1789–1831) complaining of its small size and ‘decayed state’, with many of its rooms ‘so low pitched that a moderate-sized man may touch the ceilings of them with his hand’.³⁷ As a result he was allowed by the bishop to live in the present-day Chastleton Glebe, built as a private house by his father, the patron Patience Adams (d. 1793), and situated almost a mile north of the church in Brookend. James’s son George continued to live there after succeeding as rector in 1831,³⁸ and in 1833 it was formally adopted as the rectory house, George’s mother Maria (as patron) exchanging it for the earlier house next to the church. That was by then being let to the parish clerk and two labourers,³⁹ and when illustrated in 1821 had three chimneys, a stone-tiled roof, and a gabled west front containing Georgian sashes and older mullioned windows with hoodmoulds.⁴⁰ It was demolished in 1835,⁴¹ and in the 1870s the churchyard was extended eastwards over its site.⁴²



View dated 1821 of Chastleton House, the church, and (to its right) the rectory house before its demolition in 1835. Source: Bodl. MS Top. Oxon. a 66, no. 156.

The replacement rectory house (Chastleton Glebe) was Georgian in style, constructed on a square, double-pile plan with a linked north-eastern service wing offset at an acute angle. Its original twin-gabled roof was converted into a Welsh-slatted mansard roof with dormers by 1837, when sash windows were arranged symmetrically on the four-bay south front, and the principal doorway in the east front was sheltered by a neo-classical

³⁶ Northants. Archives, C 2362; OHC, MS Oxf. Dioc. c 327, p. 98.

³⁷ OHC, MSS Oxf. Dioc. b 8, f. 85; b 32, f. 75.

³⁸ Ibid. b 8, f. 85; *ibid.* MSS Oxf. Archd. Oxon. c 60, f. 58; b 23, ff. 170–4; below (since 1789).

³⁹ OHC, MSS Oxf. Dioc. b 38, f. 55; c 2195, no. 4; Northants. Archives, C 2307.

⁴⁰ Bodl. MS Top. Oxon. a 66, no. 156; cf. *ibid.* MS Top. Gen. a 11, f. 120, no. 471 (dated c.1820).

⁴¹ I. Hilton (ed.), *The Chastleton Diaries: Change and Continuity in the Nineteenth Century* (2011), 32. Its cellars reportedly remained: M. Dickins, *A History of Chastleton, Oxfordshire* (1938), 79.

⁴² Below (church archit.); cf. OHC, MS Oxf. Dioc. c 2195, no. 4; *ibid.* tithe map; OS Map 1:2500, Oxon. XIII.8 (1881 edn).

porch with a pediment, columns, and steps.⁴³ The house was enlarged in 1865 for the rector and patron George Nutting, to designs by the London architect Augustus Browne, whose Tudor-Gothic additions (including a large western drawing room with two bedrooms above) featured bay and mullioned windows, a gabled north porch, and a square north stair-turret with a pyramidal roof.⁴⁴ In 1914 (when in disrepair) it was sold as a private house to William Cooke Kettle, who remodelled and extended it in Cotswold Jacobethan style, removing the north porch and replacing the remaining Georgian windows with mullioned ones.⁴⁵ In 2023–4 it was further remodelled and extended to designs by Christian Fleming for its new owners the Fiskens, who thatched part of the north-east wing and added a new north porch and south orangery.⁴⁶



The south front of Chastleton Glebe: (left) as illustrated in 1837 (by kind permission of Mr and Mrs Fiskens) and (right) c.1930, following extensions and remodelling for both Nutting and Kettle. Source: OHC, POX0189985.

From 1914 there was no rectory house until 1935, when a more modest replacement (now Old Rectory) was built in the village for the rector Harold Harper on land given by Irene Whitmore Jones, to designs by Thomas Rayson. That became redundant in 1962 when the benefice was joined with Little Compton, and was sold the following year.⁴⁷

⁴³ Four watercolour views dated 1837, in private possession. Traces of the original roof structure were observed during building works in 2023: info. (2024) from Gregor and Carolina Fiskens.

⁴⁴ OHC, MS Oxf. Dioc. c 1762, plans and specification 1865; P. Inder and M. Aldis, *Gustavus Sneyd: A Scandal in the Parish* (1998), photos facing p. 22.

⁴⁵ OHC, MS Oxf. Dioc. c 1763, corresp. re sale of rectory ho. 1914–16; Brooks, *Pevsner N&W*, 251. Cf. OS Maps 1:2500, Oxon. XIII.4 (1905 and 1921 edns); OHC, POX0189985, POX0190066.

⁴⁶ WODC planning docs, 22/00134/FUL; info. (2024) from Gregor and Carolina Fiskens.

⁴⁷ OHC, MS Oxf. Dioc. c 1762, mortgage of 1935; Dickins, *Hist. of Chastleton*, 79; Brooks, *Pevsner N&W*, 251; *Tewkesbury Reg.* 12 Apr. 1963.

Religious Life

The Middle Ages

Although owned by Osney abbey from c.1129, the church was apparently rebuilt and re-dedicated c.1180 under the auspices of the resident lord Bardulf son of Roger, who along with some of his tenants endowed it with small parcels of glebe.⁴⁸ Nothing is known of how the church was served before the vicarage ordination of c.1225, but the abbey presented a chaplain named Henry immediately after,⁴⁹ and the names of a further 12 or 13 vicars are known before 1459, of whom few if any were graduates.⁵⁰ William of Turkdean (vicar 1310–37) and his successor Walter of Turkdean presumably both came from Turkdean (Glos.), where the abbey owned a manor and the church patronage,⁵¹ while John Wale (vicar 1351–69 or later) came from a prominent Chipping Norton family.⁵²

In 1336 Chastleton's new lord Robert Trillow founded a chantry dedicated to St Mary the Virgin, housed in a chapel forming an eastward extension of the church's south aisle. Its first chaplain (Thomas Fineble) was required to maintain both the chapel itself and the chantry's chalice, books, vestments, lights, and ornaments, besides supplying bread and wine and performing daily offices for the souls of Trillow and four named family members. In return he received a house, lands comprising 20 a. of arable and 3 a. of meadow, and 50s. annual rent,⁵³ making him considerably better off than the vicar. Surviving fragmentary window glass depicting the Virgin Annunciate was probably made for the chapel c.1450,⁵⁴ although no references to Fineble's successors have been found.

The chantry chapel's creation formed part of a larger-scale remodelling of the church, which included rebuilding of the chancel, a possible extension of the nave, and addition of a north chapel. That last may have been built for a guild of St Nicholas, to which a parishioner left 5s. in 1505, together with 4d. to the high altar and two torches.⁵⁵ Later (15th-century) changes to the church building included new windows and installation of at least one pew with carved bench-ends.⁵⁶ Palm Sunday processions are suggested by the remains of a

⁴⁸ Above (glebe, tithes, and vicarage); below (church archit.).

⁴⁹ *Rot. Welles*, II, 19; above (vicarage).

⁵⁰ *Rot. Gravesend*, 213, 221; *Reg. Burghersh*, II, p. 92; *Lincs. Arch. REG/2*, ff. 146v., 148v., 158v.; *REG/9*, f. 252v.; *REG/10*, f. 377v.; *REG/18*, f. 180. None appears in Emden, *OU Reg. to 1500*.

⁵¹ *Lincs. Arch. REG/2*, f. 158v.; *Reg. Burghersh*, II, p. 92; *VCH Glos.* IX, 230–1.

⁵² *Lincs. Arch. REG/9*, f. 252v.; *TNA*, CP 25/1/190/22, no. 34; *VCH Oxon.* XXI (forthcoming, Chipping Norton).

⁵³ *Cal. Pat.* 1334–8, 273; *Reg. Burghersh*, II, pp. 95–6; *TNA*, C 143/229/21; below (church archit.).

⁵⁴ For that and other 15th-cent. fragments, Newton, *Oxon. Glass*, 61–2; Brooks, *Pevsner N&W*, 247.

⁵⁵ *TNA*, PROB 11/14/614; *Oxon. Wills*, 86; below (church archit.).

⁵⁶ Below (church archit.). Some of the late medieval work presumably reflected the profits of sheep-farming, while the resident Trillows perhaps supported some 14th-century work besides the chantry.

14th- or 15th-century churchyard cross,⁵⁷ and a fire-damaged chapel at Brookend, mentioned in 1435 and 1437, perhaps served as a chapel-of-ease for Brookend inhabitants, although it most likely originated as a private oratory within the manorial complex there.⁵⁸ Multiple charges against the troublesome (and possibly unbalanced) Brookend tenant Thomas James in 1499 included disbelief in the Catholic faith, although it seems unlikely that he had any considered Lollard sympathies.⁵⁹



Left: the eastern part of the south aisle, representing Robert Trillow's chantry chapel of c.1336. Below: reset medieval encaustic floor tiles presumably from the chantry chapel.



Chastleton's last vicar (instituted in 1448) was John Stoppe, who after 1459 continued as rector until his death in 1465.⁶⁰ Later rectors included the abbot of Osney William Barton, who briefly held the living in 1515–16 and was perhaps the only graduate,⁶¹ although he seems unlikely to have had much direct contact with the parish. His presumably Welsh successor Philip ap Rice (1516–45) held Stonesfield in plurality, where he was reported c.1517 for neglecting church repair and for keeping a woman in his house.⁶² Records of assistant clergy are few, although in 1520 a priest named Master Skelington was

⁵⁷ NHLE, no. 1367762 (accessed May 2023); B.J. Marples, 'The Medieval Crosses of Oxfordshire', *Oxoniensia* 38 (1973), 305; N. Orme, *Going to Church in Medieval England* (2021), 133. For an 1821 drawing, Bodl. MS Top. Oxon. a 66, no. 154.

⁵⁸ BL, Harl. Roll B1, cts May 1435, Feb. 1437; *Eynsham Cart.* II, p. xxix. For the later Brookend field name Chapel Close, OHC, E24/1/MS/2; E24/1/2D/16.

⁵⁹ Above, social hist. (Middle Ages); C. Dyer, 'Villages in crisis: social dislocation and desertion, 1370–1520', in C. Dyer and R. Jones (eds), *Deserted Villages Revisited* (2010), 40.

⁶⁰ Lincs. Arch. REG/18, f. 180; REG/20, f. 241; *Oseney Cart.* IV, pp. 330–2.

⁶¹ Lincs. Arch. REG/20, f. 241; REG/21, f. 86; REG/23, f. 290; REG/25, f. 44; Emden, *OU Reg. to 1500*, I, 124.

⁶² Lincs. Arch. REG/25, f. 44; Pearce, 'Clergy', 27; *VCH Oxon.* XI, 191.

said to have taken a pair of vestments from the church, while Thomas Davies (apparently also a priest) left 4*d.* for church lights which his executors still owed.⁶³ Rice's curate in 1526 was the university graduate Maurice Lewis (paid £5 6*s.* 8*d.* a year),⁶⁴ who was still in post in the 1540s when he pursued a parishioner through the church courts for unpaid tithes.⁶⁵ In 1530 the churchwardens were ordered to cover the altar.⁶⁶

The Reformation to 1789

Christopher Mitchell (rector 1545–71) was a well-to-do Oxford graduate with apparently flexible religious views, since his tenure spanned the Edwardian Reformation, the brief return to Catholicism under Mary I, and the subsequent Elizabethan settlement.⁶⁷ He witnessed parishioners' wills in 1557 and 1565,⁶⁸ and remained in Chastleton until his death in 1590, having purchased an estate there around the time that he resigned the benefice, and later also acquiring the advowson.⁶⁹ His wealthy successors Robert Windle (rector 1571–92) and Christopher Scott (1592–1640) both came from Yorkshire, where each owned estates and founded a school, while Windle also held the Oxfordshire rectory of Tackley in plurality. Both nevertheless lived in Chastleton and died in post, Scott leaving 40*s.* to his curate.⁷⁰ Daniel Greenwood (rector 1640–57) was presumably related to the patron (and Chastleton landowner) George Greenwood, and as an Oxford-based academic also employed a curate.⁷¹ Noted for his Puritan preaching, in 1648 he was installed as principal of Brasenose College, Oxford, but was ejected from the post in 1660.⁷²

The Reformation presumably saw lights and images stripped from the church, but few details are known. The medieval chantry had apparently ceased before 1547, although its former chapel was still called 'Our Lady guild' in 1561,⁷³ and in 1566 a widow left 6*s.* 8*d.* for cloths to cover the church's communion table.⁷⁴ Roman Catholicism persisted amongst

⁶³ *Visit. Dioc. Linc.* I, 135 (calling Davies 'dominus').

⁶⁴ *Subsidy* 1526, 265, 268; Emden, *OU Reg.* 1501–40, 355.

⁶⁵ *Oxf. Ch. Ct Deposns* 1542–50, p. 1.

⁶⁶ *Visit. Dioc. Linc.* II, 45.

⁶⁷ Pearce, 'Clergy', 27; *Alumni Oxon.* 1500–1714.

⁶⁸ OHC, MSS Wills Oxon. 182.162; 184.201.

⁶⁹ TNA, PROB 11/75/175; above (advowson); landownership (other estates).

⁷⁰ Pearce, 'Clergy', 28; TNA, PROB 11/81/103 (Windle); PROB 11/183/336 (Scott); Oldfield, 'Clerus'; www.robertwindlefoundation.org (accessed May 2023). Windle's will indicates family ties with both Mitchell and Scott.

⁷¹ *Alumni Oxon.* 1500–1714; OHC, Cal. Presentation Deeds, no. 95; *Prot. Retns*, 82. Not to be confused with his nephew and namesake the rector of Steeple Aston, with whom he lived from 1660: *VCH Oxon.* XI, 40, 43.

⁷² J.H. Parker (ed.), *The Works of the Most Reverend Father in God, William Laud, D.D., sometime Lord Archbishop of Canterbury*, V, 182; *Calamy Revised*, ed. Matthews, 234.

⁷³ *Chant. Cert.* (containing no record of it); TNA, PROB 11/44/62.

⁷⁴ OHC, MS Wills Oxon. 185.21.

local gentry (though apparently not amongst most ordinary parishioners) for several decades: the Ansleys of Brookend were fined regularly for recusancy from the 1580s, and the Osbastons alongside them c.1610,⁷⁵ while in 1591 Katherine Ansley's recusancy led to two thirds of her dower estate being sequestrated.⁷⁶ The former resident lord of Chastleton, Robert Catesby, achieved notoriety in 1605 as leader of the Catholic Gunpowder Plot,⁷⁷ and the landowner and church patron George Greenwood (d. 1650), although outwardly a Conformist, had Roman Catholic parents.⁷⁸ Walter Jones (d. 1632), Catesby's successor as lord, was resolutely Protestant, however, as the long preamble to his will demonstrates,⁷⁹ and a silver chalice and paten cover presented to the church in 1633 were possibly given in his memory.⁸⁰ No papists or any other Dissenters were reported in 1676 or 1682, and both Roman Catholicism and Protestant Nonconformity remained negligible thereafter.⁸¹ New church furnishings during the period included a Jacobean polygonal wooden pulpit with the scratched date 1623, and three 16th- or 17th-century pews survive in the south aisle.⁸²



Left: fragmentary post-Reformation texts painted on the nave walls.
Right: Jacobean polygonal pulpit with the scratched date 1623.

⁷⁵ *Recusant Rolls 1581–92* (Cath. Rec. Soc. 71, 1986), 10, 129; 1592–3 (Cath. Rec. Soc. 18, 1916), 254, 260; 1593–4 (Cath. Rec. Soc. 57, 1965), 122–3, 125, 126; Salter, 'Recusants', 17, 24, 26; A.G. Petti (ed.), *Recusant Documents from the Ellesmere Manuscripts* (Cath. Rec. Soc. 60, 1968), 211, 222, 231. For the Ansleys, see also Davidson, 'Cath. Oxon.', 194–5, 197–9; below, Cornwell, relig. hist.

⁷⁶ Above, landownership (Brookend).

⁷⁷ ODNB, s.v. Rob. Catesby; above, landownership (Chastleton manor).

⁷⁸ His recusant father Thomas (d. 1577) married Joan, sister of the Catholic priest and martyr Geo. Napper (d. 1610): Stapleton, *Cath. Missions*, 168; Davidson, 'Cath. Oxon.', 199–202. Cf. *VCH Oxon.* XI, 43; XV, 243.

⁷⁹ TNA, PROB 11/162/656.

⁸⁰ Evans, *Ch. Plate*, 37.

⁸¹ *Compton Census*, ed. Whiteman, 422; OHC, MS Oxf. Dioc. c 430, f. 12. Cf. *Secker's Visit.* 40; OHC, MSS Oxf. Dioc. d 555, f. 121; d 561, f. 125.

⁸² Brooks, *Pevsner N&W*, 247.

Later rectors were mostly wealthy graduates, of whom several were pluralists and employed curates. Richard Corpson (rector 1683–1715) lived at first on his Northamptonshire benefice of Ravensthorpe, before moving to Chastleton where he died in 1715.⁸³ His successor Thomas Griffith Biggs, brother-in-law of the patron Thomas Greenwood, held Westwell rectory and a canonry and prebend in Wells cathedral, but was also resident shortly before his death in 1735.⁸⁴ John Ingram (1735–52), lord of Little Wolford (Warws.), lived mainly on his Warwickshire benefice of Whichford, and in 1738 paid his curate a £35 stipend. There were then two Sunday services at Chastleton (one with a sermon), as well as six annual communions and Lenten catechism.⁸⁵ A decade later Ingram's curate was his future successor Edward Williams (rector 1752–89), who was chaplain to the earl of Abingdon but who mostly resided and served unassisted. During his long incumbency annual communions were nevertheless reduced from six to four, while the number of communicants fell from c.50 in 1759 to just 24 in 1787.⁸⁶

Around 1720 the church itself was 'very neat', the tower having recently been rebuilt.⁸⁷ Among its more striking monuments, forming a backdrop to weekly worship, were floor brasses to Katherine Throckmorton (d. 1593) and her five sons and four daughters,⁸⁸ to Edmund Ansley (d. 1613) and his seven sons and three daughters, and to the Lancashire MP William Banks (d. 1676), a grandson of Walter Jones (d. 1632). Baroque wall tablets commemorated Sarah Jones (d. 1687), Dr Henry Jones (d. 1695), chancellor of Bristol, and Anne Jones (d. 1708),⁸⁹ and further wall tablets (chiefly to members of the Jones and Greenwood families) were added in the 18th century. The lord Henry Jones obtained a faculty in 1687–8 for a burial vault beneath his family pew in the south chapel, the vault being later extended under the south aisle floor.⁹⁰ In 1755 the churchwardens were ordered to repair the flooring, to obtain a new bible, chest, and font cover, and to inscribe (or renew) the Commandments and Sentences on the walls,⁹¹ and in 1770 the church remained 'well floored' and 'regularly and very decently pewed', its walls 'whitewashed and very clean'.⁹² Two silver almsplates and a silver tankard flagon were given by an unknown donor in

⁸³ *Alumni Oxon. 1500–1714*; Northants. Archives, C 2333; OHC, par. reg. transcript, burial 1715; *Par. Colln*, I, 85.

⁸⁴ *Alumni Oxon. 1500–1714*; *Fasti 1541–1857*, V, 61; TNA, PROB 11/674/147.

⁸⁵ *Alumni Oxon. 1500–1714*; TNA, PROB 11/799/272; *VCH Warws.* V, 217; *Secker's Visit.* 40–1.

⁸⁶ OHC, MSS Oxf. Dioc. e 23, p. 44; d 555, f. 121; b 37, f. 19; c 327, p. 98; Oxf. Jnl Syn. 24 Jan. 1789.

⁸⁷ *Par. Colln*, I, 84; below (church archit.).

⁸⁸ The Gregorian calendar appears to be followed in the parish register entry (OHC, PAR60/1/R1/1) giving her burial date as 7 Jan. 1593, thus agreeing with the death date 6 Jan. 1592/3 on her brass.

⁸⁹ Brooks, *Pevsner N&W*, 247; *Par. Colln*, I, 84–5. For Banks, above, social hist. (1500–1800).

⁹⁰ OHC, E24/1/L/3; *ibid.* MS Oxf. Archd. Oxon. c 1, f. 70v.; *ibid.* PAR60/10/A/1, ff. 19–20; *ibid.* par. reg. transcript, note at back of burial register 1779–1811.

⁹¹ OHC, MS Oxf. Archd. Oxon. d 13, f. 14. For surviving fragmentary texts on the nave walls, below (church archit.).

⁹² OHC, E24/1/MS/2.

1717,⁹³ and bells were added or replaced on at least five occasions between 1696 and 1825.⁹⁴

Since 1789

James Adams (rector 1789–1831) was a son of the patron Patience Adams, who built a house at Brookend for James to occupy instead of the rectory house, which he claimed as unfit.⁹⁵ For the first few years of his incumbency James remained in Oxford, where he was a fellow of New College, and paid a curate £40 a year.⁹⁶ By 1802, however, he resided full-time and served in person, though seemingly with little beneficial effect on church attendance, as in 1817 there were only 12 communicants, and ‘seldom above ten people’ attended winter Sunday afternoon services. James was also curate of neighbouring Little Compton, which perhaps contributed to Chastleton’s low church attendance; no Dissent was recorded in Chastleton, however, and in 1810 James started a successful Sunday school run by his wife and daughters.⁹⁷ That was continued by his son George Adams (rector 1832–8), who also rebuilt and enlarged the chancel.⁹⁸

Horatio Westmacott (rector 1838–62), son of the sculptor and patron Sir Richard Westmacott (d. 1856), served the church unassisted, increasing the number of communions to eight, and the number of communicants to 50.⁹⁹ Regarded by Bishop Wilberforce as ‘a very excellent amiable man’, a ‘pleasing preacher’, and High-Church in his views, Westmacott repaired the chancel and added a vestry, proudly describing the church’s six bells as ‘of harmony equal to any in the neighbourhood’.¹⁰⁰ In 1847 he introduced an organ (placed in the west gallery), and in 1848 accepted a communion table presented by the lord J.H. Whitmore Jones,¹⁰¹ although his relations with the family were not always good, thanks to a long-running dispute over parish charities.¹⁰² Morning and afternoon congregations on Census Sunday in 1851 numbered 103 and 75 respectively, excluding 27 Sunday-school pupils.¹⁰³ George Nutting (rector 1863–73), who enlarged the rectory house, introduced

⁹³ Evans, *Ch. Plate*, 37.

⁹⁴ Below (church archit.).

⁹⁵ OHC, MS Oxf. Dioc. c 1782/2, presentation; *Oxf. Jnl*, 17 Dec. 1831; above (advowson; rectory ho.).

⁹⁶ *Alumni Oxon. 1715–1886*; OHC, MS Oxf. Dioc. c 327, p. 98. For curates licensed in 1790 and 1797, OHC, MSS Oxf. Dioc. c 2211, no. 76; c 2212, no. 16.

⁹⁷ OHC, MSS Oxf. Dioc. d 566, f. 69; d 576, f. 69; b 29, f. 86; b 38, f. 55; above, social hist. (educ.).

⁹⁸ *Alumni Oxon. 1715–1886*; OHC, MSS Oxf. Dioc. c 1782/2, presentation; b 39, f. 81; b 41, f. 63; below (church archit.).

⁹⁹ *Alumni Cantab. 1752–1900*; above (advowson); *Wilb. Visit.* 33.

¹⁰⁰ *Wilb. Dioc. Bks*, 9; OHC, PAR60/10/A/1, ff. 5–6; below (church archit.).

¹⁰¹ Hilton (ed.), *Chastleton Diaries*, 53–4; Dickins, *Hist. of Chastleton*, 75.

¹⁰² Above, social hist. (since 1800; welfare).

¹⁰³ *Ch. and Chapel, 1851*, p. 22.

monthly communions and a winter evening class,¹⁰⁴ while Jocelyn Barnes (1875–9) oversaw the formation of a church choir, and in 1878 initiated the church's restoration, partly to tackle the fact that the nave was 'blocked with pews' and that the poor were 'thrust back into and below a west gallery', where they could 'hardly kneel'.¹⁰⁵ In the same year he established a small mission room in the rectory house garden, presumably in an attempt to dissuade Brookend inhabitants from attending Little Compton's newly-opened Congregational chapel.¹⁰⁶

The long incumbency of Gustavus Sneyd (rector 1879–1913) was tainted by scandal early on, when in 1882 he was tried in the diocesan consistory court on a charge of fathering a child with a local housemaid named Rose Marnes. The incident caused 'great scandal and offence to his parishioners' and left significant ill feeling, and though Sneyd was acquitted (despite admitting to secret assignations with Marnes), the bishop condemned his conduct as 'foolish', 'unjustifiable', and 'highly reprehensible'. The following year the rectory was sequestrated until Sneyd's debts of more than £2,000 could be paid, although the sequestration was lifted in December when he was declared bankrupt.¹⁰⁷ His later years in the parish proved less eventful, although Little Compton Congregational chapel attracted some parishioners,¹⁰⁸ and in 1890 Sneyd complained of the 'far from good influence and example of the gentry (except one case) and also the farmers with respect to church attendance'.¹⁰⁹ The exception was presumably Mary Whitmore Jones (his aunt by marriage), who had left Chastleton House to live with him at the rectory house. Sneyd nevertheless allowed it fall into disrepair, prompting its sale in 1914.¹¹⁰

The consequent lack of a rectory house caused Chastleton's penultimate rector, the former workhouse chaplain James Burnley (1914–32), to live in Chipping Norton. Burnley introduced weekly communions in 1914, when he reported no Roman Catholics and 'very few' Nonconformists,¹¹¹ although in 1933 (when parishioners successfully fought off a proposed union with Little Compton) congregations averaged only 20.¹¹² The last rector, Harold Harper (1933–62), occupied a newly built rectory house in the village, and held two or three Sunday services including weekly evensong and communion. Following his retirement

¹⁰⁴ OHC, MS Oxf. Dioc. c 332, f. 119; *ibid.* par. reg. transcript, burial 1873; above (rectory ho.).

¹⁰⁵ OHC, MSS Oxf. Dioc. c 1762, presentation; c 341, f. 112; *Oxon. Weekly News*, 27 Sept. 1876, 6 Nov. 1878; below (church archit.).

¹⁰⁶ *Oxon. Weekly News*, 17 July, 9 Oct. 1878.

¹⁰⁷ Inder and Aldis, *Gustavus Sneyd*; OHC, MS Oxf. Dioc. c 1764; *Oxon. Weekly News*, 2 Aug. 1882, 9 May 1883; above, social hist. (since 1800).

¹⁰⁸ *Oxon. Weekly News*, 2 May 1883. For its Band of Hope, above, social hist. (since 1800).

¹⁰⁹ OHC, MS Oxf. Dioc. c 356, f. 93.

¹¹⁰ Inder and Aldis, *Gustavus Sneyd*, 23–4, 31; above (rectory ho.).

¹¹¹ *Alumni Cantab. 1752–1900*, I, 460; *Cheltenham Chron.* 7 Feb. 1914; *Oxon. Weekly News*, 7 Jan. 1920; *Kelly's Dir. Oxon.* (1931); *Gore's Visit.* pp. 121, 384–5.

¹¹² *Tewkesbury Reg.* 25 Mar. 1933.

in 1962 the parish was joined to a united benefice served at first from Little Compton and, after 2001, from Chipping Norton,¹¹³ and in 2024 church services were held only around major festivals.¹¹⁴

Church Architecture

The church (standing next to Chastleton House) is a small to middling-sized building of 12th-century origin, constructed of regularly coursed and dressed marlstone with limestone ashlar dressings, and roofed with stone slate, lead, and zinc (which replaced stolen lead in 1980).¹¹⁵ The present structure comprises a two-bay 19th-century chancel with Victorian north vestry; a clerestoreyed nave with a four-bay south aisle, the latter begun in the 12th century and extended eastwards in the 14th, when north and south chapels were added; and an unusual two-stage south porch-tower entirely rebuilt in 1689.¹¹⁶



Left: late Norman (c.1180) arcade at the western end of the south aisle, also showing the plain tub font of similar date.
Right: the 14th-century north chapel with its asymmetric arch.

The late Norman church of c.1180 probably comprised a short chancel (perhaps with an apse), a short nave, and a south aisle whose two westernmost bays survive, the arcade comprising plain pointed arches set on a round pier with a scalloped capital. The nave's north doorway and the plain tub font are of similar date, the doorway retaining its semi-circular lintel and blank tympanum. Around 1336 the south aisle was extended eastwards to

¹¹³ Tablet in church; OHC, PAR60/2/A/3, f. 13; above (church origins; rectory ho.).

¹¹⁴ www.achurchnearyou.com; <https://stmaryscnorton.com> (accessed Feb. 2024).

¹¹⁵ OHC, MS Oxf. Dioc. c 1782/3, faculty 1980.

¹¹⁶ Unless indicated, following based on: NHLE, no. 1183347 (accessed Dec. 2023); Brooks, *Pevsner N&W*, 246–7; Sherwood, *Oxon. Churches*, 49; G. Yeomans, *Chastleton Church, Oxfordshire* (1998): copy in OHC; and see also Parker, *Eccl. Topog.* no. 68. For SE and SW views in 1821, Bodl. MS Top. Oxon. a 66, nos. 156–7.

create a chantry chapel for the lord Robert Trillow;¹¹⁷ the chapel is wider than the rest of the aisle, and retains a fragmentary encaustic tiled floor, a cinquefoiled piscina, a semi-circular seat recess, and a two-light east window of intersecting tracery, with an external ogee hood, finial, and headstops. Where the chapel opens into the nave, the south aisle's arcade was extended eastwards by two unequal bays, its double-chamfered arches set on octagonal piers. Since those arches match the surviving chancel arch the chancel, too, must have been rebuilt around that time, presumably further east than its predecessor, so also extending the nave. The added 14th-century north chapel (opposite the chantry chapel) opens into the nave through a single wide double-chamfered arch, and retains a plain pointed piscina,¹¹⁸ while other 14th- or 15th-century work includes the nave's three-light west window (with reticulated tracery), a stone bellcote above the nave's east gable, and (probably) the stair and doorway to a former rood loft immediately west of the chancel arch. Square-headed Perpendicular windows were inserted into the nave and north and south chapels in the 15th century, some probably containing painted window glass, of which fragments survive.¹¹⁹ Late-medieval pewing is suggested by a single late 15th-century bench end with linenfold panelling.

A clerestorey of plain, three-light mullioned windows was added probably in the late 16th or 17th century and possibly as late as 1689,¹²⁰ the nave and chapels being given shallower-pitched roofs. Surviving fragmentary texts painted on the nave walls are of similar date, and the surviving pulpit was installed c.1623.¹²¹ The south porch-tower was entirely rebuilt in 1689, following a fire reportedly started by lightning; the date of its predecessor is unknown, but bellringers were mentioned in 1581 and 1617,¹²² and possibly it was contemporary with the south aisle's 14th-century extension. Its replacement (paid for by a church rate)¹²³ is of two stages with a chamfered plinth, moulded stringcourses, plain mullioned bell-openings, and an embattled parapet, its appearance echoing the staircase towers of the neighbouring Chastleton House. The five bells mentioned c.1720 were later increased to six, the surviving bells bearing the dates 1696, 1731 (two), 1762, 1811 (a gift by John and Arthur Jones), and 1825.¹²⁴

¹¹⁷ Above (Middle Ages).

¹¹⁸ For the chapel's possible association with a guild of St Nicholas, *ibid.*

¹¹⁹ For glass, Newton, *Oxon. Glass*, 61–2; above (Middle Ages).

¹²⁰ As suggested by Brooks, *Pevsner N&W*, 246.

¹²¹ For pulpit, pews, memorials, and a Jones family vault created in 1687–8, above (Reformn to 1789).

¹²² OHC, MS Oxf. Dioc. c 104, f. 45c.; inscription and date above doorway. For ringers, OHC, MS Wills Oxon. 69/1/20; TNA, PROB 11/131/152; for tradition that lightning caused the fire, OHC, PAR60/10/A/1, f. 6. The late medieval bellcote is for a single bell only.

¹²³ OHC, MS Oxf. Dioc. c 104, f. 45c.

¹²⁴ *Par. Colln*, I, 84; *Ch. Bells Oxon.* I, 85.



Left: the nave looking west, showing the south arcade and the 16th- or 17th-century clerestory. Right: the chancel and south aisle with their matching 14th-century arches.

Roof repairs were carried out in 1811–12,¹²⁵ and in the 1830s the rector George Adams rebuilt the chancel and extended it from one bay to two, retaining a plain south priest's door of uncertain date.¹²⁶ Further unspecified alterations to the chancel were made by Adams' successor Horatio Westmacott, who in 1853 erected a vestry against its north side, the workmen digging its foundations encountering a medieval grave slab which was later kept in the churchyard.¹²⁷ A family vault dug under the north chapel some years earlier was blamed around the same time for weakening the chapel walls and deforming its arch,¹²⁸ but the church saw little further work until 1878–80, when a restoration costing c.£900 (raised by public subscription) was carried out to designs by Charles Edward Powell, assisted by John Medland. Box pews and a large west gallery (painted with details of the parish charities) were replaced with low oak bench-pews (modelled in part on the 15th-century bench end), and the floors were tiled, while the chapels were re-roofed and the north chapel's north wall was rebuilt on a new footing, slightly further north. New north and west doorways were opened into the vestry, and stained glass by J.T. Carter (depicting the four evangelists and scenes from the life of Christ) was installed in the south chapel's east and south-east windows, given in memory of her parents and brothers by Mary Whitmore Jones, who also commissioned the chapel's new oak panelling and panelled oak roof. Work in the chancel included a new roof and new east and south-west windows (the latter replacing the priest's door), and was partly funded by the rector Jocelyn Barnes, although the rural dean

¹²⁵ OHC, MS Oxf. Archd. Oxon. c 60, ff. 82–4.

¹²⁶ Ibid. PAR60/10/A/1, f. 6; Bodl. MS Top. Oxon. a 66, no. 156.

¹²⁷ OHC, PAR60/10/A/1, ff. 5–6; NHLE, no. 1284054.

¹²⁸ That of the Harbidge family: OHC, PAR60/10/A/1, f. 19.

gave the piscina.¹²⁹ A new reredos incorporated a fragment of a medieval rood screen, and the chancel's raised sanctuary and encaustic floor-tiles date probably from the same period.¹³⁰ An organ was erected on the north side of the chancel in 1897,¹³¹ and memorial glass in the north chapel's north window (by Cox, Sons, Buckley, & Co.) was given in memory of F. Hubert Freer of Kitebrook House and his wife Mary Caroline (both d. 1897).¹³²



Victorian stained glass: (left) by J.T. Carter given in 1879 by Mary Whitmore Jones in memory of her three brothers, and (right) by Cox, Sons, Buckley, & Co. given in memory of F. Hubert Freer and his wife Mary Caroline (both d. 1897).

Stained glass by Herbert W. Bryans was fitted in the chancel's east window in 1913 and in the nave west window in 1921, commemorating (respectively) Marion Male (d. 1912) and Charles Taswell Richardson (d. 1920), both of Chastleton House. A white marble tablet commemorating parishioners killed in the First World War was affixed to the nave's north wall in 1920.¹³³ Later alterations were mostly remedial or cosmetic, although in 1937 the organ in the chancel was replaced with a larger instrument (by J.W. Walker & Sons of London) in the north chapel,¹³⁴ and in 1993 the bells were rehung and a new altar table was placed in the south chapel.¹³⁵ The churchyard, which contains chest tombs of c.1624, c.1737, and c.1800,¹³⁶ was extended in 1870, 1878, and 1997–8.¹³⁷

¹²⁹ See also OHC, MS Oxf. Dioc. c 2206, no. 26; *ibid.* PAR60/10/A/1, f. 9v.; Dickins, *Hist. of Chastleton*, 76; *Oxon. Weekly News*, 6 Nov. 1878; LPL, ICBS 8378. Brooks, *Pevsner N&W*, 247, incorrectly states that Carter's SE window glass was originally installed in the chancel's east window, but cf. Kelly's *Dir. Oxon.* (1883).

¹³⁰ Brooks, *Pevsner N&W*, 247; NHLE, no. 1183347.

¹³¹ OHC, MS Oxf. Dioc. c 1762, faculty 1897.

¹³² Brooks, *Pevsner N&W*, 247; plaque beneath window.

¹³³ OHC, MS Oxf. Dioc. c 1762, faculties 1913, 1920, 1921; *Leamington Spa Courier*, 9 Jan. 1914.

¹³⁴ OHC, MS Oxf. Dioc. c 1762, faculty 1937.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.* c 1782/3, faculties 1992, 1993.

¹³⁶ NHLE, nos. 1053366–7, 1197972.

¹³⁷ OHC, MSS Oxf. Dioc. c 1762, deed of 1878; c 1763, deed of 1870; c 1782/3, deed and consecration pps 1997–8.