

Clive Burgess, *'The Right Ordering of Souls': the parish of All Saints' Bristol on the eve of the Reformation*, Studies in the History of Medieval Religion XLVII (Woodbridge, Boydell Press 2018). xx + 463pp., 5 ill. Hardback, £60.00 [ISBN: 9781783273096]. **Reviewed 06.2018**

The fine late-medieval church architecture which is still to be seen throughout the central area of Bristol provides abundant evidence of the piety of parishioners and of their willingness to contribute to the extension and enrichment of their churches. Much evidence is likewise to be found in the unusually large number of Bristol churches which possess documentary sources in the form of churchwardens' accounts, wills, inventories, lists of benefactors and chantry records. Among the eighteen parish churches which were crowded in or around the town during the century before the Reformation, none can match All Saints' or All Hallows for the range, quality and detail of its records. In a cramped situation at the heart of the medieval town, All Saints' was by no means the largest or richest of the churches but its pre-Reformation archive is among the finest and most informative in the whole country. For many years, Clive Burgess has made a detailed study of these records and has published several books and major articles on aspects of the church life which they reveal, starting with three volumes published by Bristol Record Society. These comprise *The All Saints' Church Book*, Vol, 46 (1995), *The Churchwardens' Accounts*, Vol, 53 (2000) and *Wills, The Halleway Chantry Records and Deeds*, Vol, 56 (2004). In this latest book Dr Burgess provides a well-written overview of his work on the records of All Saints' and on the abundant evidence which they provide for the enthusiasm of the parishioners and their massive investment in the fabric, furnishings, services and decoration of their church.

The book begins with a long introductory chapter tracing the development of religious life in England and placing the medieval parish in the context of its institutional framework. While useful as background, this takes us a long way from Bristol and from the parish of All Saints'. Thereafter Dr Burgess begins the detailed study of the parish archive and provides an in-depth study of the way in which the parish operated in the century before the Reformation. Although some of the parishioners were wealthy, they were few in number. A list of communicants compiled in 1540 shows that there were only 180 adults, so that their expenditure on the church is even more extraordinary. The patrons of the living were successive abbots of the nearby Augustinian abbey (now the cathedral). Although generally supportive, the abbots and canons did little to contribute to the parish apart from fulfilling their duty to maintain the chancel. It was the parishioners who lavished money on the church and its services. They also maintained an almshouse, a school and a conduit bringing fresh water to the parish, while above the north aisle of the church was space for a fraternity of clergy and laity known as the Guild of Kalendarers. The Guild was headed by a Prior who was a well-educated priest who could give regular sermons and lectures, refute heresy and who was responsible for administering a library of theological books housed at All Saints'.

The influence of the widespread belief in purgatory is evident from the surviving wills of which some 40 survive for All Saints' parishioners during the period 1400-1550. The wording leaves no doubt that the bequests of testators were designed to secure the rapid progress of their souls through the torment of the first stage of the afterlife. Whatever the motivation, the result provided the wealth to enhance the splendour of the church and the elaboration of its liturgy.

In a particularly interesting section, Dr Burgess shows how four wealthy widows contributed to the church by bequests of tenements, vestments, masses, public works and largesse of all sorts, promoting 'spiritual leadership by material means'. Here and throughout the book, the study which Dr Burgess has made of these records over many years is evident from the wealth of information which he has extracted. The Church Book includes lists of benefactors, both clerical and lay, while property deeds and details show the careful manner in which church officials administered the growing property holding described as 'the livelode of the church'. Donors intended both to enhance the worship of God and to have their souls prayed for. Thus it was important to know that their names were inscribed in the benefactors' list. The depiction of the Last Judgment above the cross aisle of the church which was rebuilt and decorated during the 1430s left no doubt of the torments which awaited the damned and encouraged gifts to the church. The crucial importance of securing the prayers of the living is evident from the example of the wealthy widow Alice Chester. Her numerous gifts to the church included a black hearse cloth to be used at funerals. The large inscription in gold letters '*Orate pro animabus Henrici et Alicie uxoris eius*' would ensure that they were remembered in the prayers of mourners.

The parish could be ruthless if it was felt that they had been wronged or defrauded. Richard Haddon, a vintner, had been a generous benefactor as had his father before him. When his business failed and some of his gifts were reclaimed to pay his creditors his name was expunged from the list of benefactors. Dr Burgess comments that the parish community had consigned him to 'intercessory oblivion', and that although he managed to avoid incarceration in a debtors' prison 'his travails in Purgatory would be prolonged'.

The most ambitious bequest was the chantry founded by Thomas and Joan Halleway during the 1440s. Copious documentation survives concerning the foundation, endowment and management of the chantry until its suppression in 1548. After the death of the founders, the parish took control of the chantry, administering the property, paying the priest, supervising the services and the equipment provided. All this work fell upon successive churchwardens in addition to their main task of managing the affairs of the parish. Dr Burgess comments:

'The Halleway's chantry accounts bear witness to the prodigious investment of time and attention that perpetual chantry administration demanded,... the chantry's budget was either on a par with, or at times even succeeded, the monies ostensibly at the churchwardens' disposal in the parish accounts ... Had the chantry accounts perished – as elsewhere so many did – one would never have assumed that successive churchwardens devoted quite so much energy to sustaining just one foundation'.

The Halleways were the most prominent of a crowd of people, rich and poor, clergy and laity, whose gifts and bequests provided the means which enabled the church to support an impressive round of services. There were as many as five priests attached to the church, and inventories list the splendid vestments, altar-cloths, precious vessels, crosses, candlesticks, censers and service books which the church possessed. The services were accompanied by organs, choral singing, lights, processions and vestments all designed 'to move and excite people unto devotion', and to contribute to 'the more laud and worship of Almighty God'.

The All Saints' accounts provide many details about the liturgy, music and regular annual services of which we would otherwise be quite ignorant. Elaborate ceremonies marked occasions such as Christmas, Candlemas, Lady Day, Palm Sunday, Good Friday and Easter Day. The patronal festival was observed in suitable style on 1 November when the mayor and councillors attended, and a 'boy bishop' was chosen on the feast of St Nicholas (6 December). The accounts also contain valuable information about processions, perambulation of the parish bounds and the manner in which the feast of Corpus Christi was marked in conjunction with other churches in the town. A notable feature of these unusually detailed records is the intimation provided about the elaborate music which accompanied the liturgy and about the musicians employed by the church. This includes a rare inventory of the collection of music for parish use bequeathed by a clerk, William Bridgeman, in c1524. No doubt other churches had similar musical accompaniment for their services, but only at All Saints' is such detail revealed.

Sadly, the dramatic changes and regulation of the 1540s, and especially during the reign of Edward VI, marked the end of gifts, bequests and endowments. Belief in purgatory was forbidden, the chantries were suppressed and the church was stripped of valuables, images, screens and all that was regarded as superstitious. The interior was whitewashed to obliterate the illustrations of biblical scenes and pictures of the Virgin and saints. The careful research conducted by Dr Burgess over many years has enabled him to produce this impressive study of the life of All Saints' in the century before the destruction occurred. His work provides a major contribution to the ecclesiastical history of Bristol and to our knowledge of late-medieval parish life in general. His work will make the unusually complete and nationally- important records of All Saints' much more widely known. The book includes plans of late-medieval Bristol, the surroundings of All Saints' and a useful diagram of the church interior showing the position of the major altars, the Kalendars' house and other features. Some significant documents are given in appendices there is a full bibliography and glossary providing definitions of terms found in 15th church records. This is an excellent study of an important subject and can be thoroughly recommended to all who are interested in the history of Bristol.

JOSEPH BETTEY
Bristol