

# Destruction, Repair and Removal: An Oxford College Chapel during the Reformation

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## SUMMARY

*Merton College in the early sixteenth century remained an important source of theologians who played a major role in England during the Reformation controversies. The college was, therefore, carefully observed by the administration and especially by its Visitor, the Archbishop of Canterbury. The college chapel, also a parish church, was richly endowed with glass, fittings, vestments and an organ; many of these had only recently been obtained. The subwardens' accounts show that little alteration to the chapel had occurred before the accession of Edward VI, although a 'great bible' had been purchased. During Edward's reign, fittings and altars were removed and the church whitewashed and colourwashed. Mary's reign saw the gradual replacement of fittings and altars with the help of a private benefaction. Elizabeth removed the Catholic Warden and installed Protestant sympathisers. The restorations of Mary's reign were removed and the organ and vestments sold. Expenditure on the chapel fell and the subwardens' account ended. The college had responded rapidly to government injunctions and seems to have been used as an example to intimidate others. The chapel by 1600 no longer appears so dominant in college life and finances as in 1500.*

The central position of Merton College and the eminence of its chapel within the city of Oxford will be apparent to any visitors to the university. The happy survival in the college archives of a substantial amount of unpublished material for the 16th century enables us to look in considerable detail at the impact of the Reformation on the development of the college.<sup>1</sup> In particular, we are able to trace the reaction of the college authorities to the changes required by the central government in the ecclesiastical services and furnishings of the chapel. We have no space to attempt a full evaluation of this material or to make a detailed comparison of events at Merton College with those elsewhere, but it is hoped that the evidence here produced for the first time will be of interest and value to all working on the history of the Reformation, and especially to those concerned with the connections between religious change and the development of the University of Oxford in the sixteenth century.

Merton College was established in 1264. In its size, its careful constitutional arrangements, and in its possession of substantial endowments and buildings, the new college stood apart from other contemporary institutions in English universities. It formed the model for many later colleges at Oxford and Cambridge; it played an important role in

<sup>1</sup> We are pleased to record our thanks to the Social Science Research Council, the British Academy and Merton College for generous financial support for our project to transcribe all the internal Tudor accounts of the college. We are especially grateful to the Warden and fellows of the college for their permission to examine documents in their care and for help and co-operation from the college Librarian and Archivist and his Assistant Librarian. Françoise Bannister of the Department of Modern Languages, the University of Aston in Birmingham, typed the article, and the Department gave further support to our work. We acknowledge this valuable help.

the education of scholars throughout the late medieval period and provided the Church with many prominent administrators.<sup>2</sup> The college retained close contact with the wider world of ecclesiastical and secular politics through its Visitor, the Archbishop of Canterbury, and through the regular appointment of its former fellows to positions near the crown: Merton physicians in particular found favour at Court; the Warden of Merton, John Chamber, was physician to Henry VIII from 1509 to 1546.<sup>3</sup> These factors were to be significant in the 16th century when the Archbishop of Canterbury was able to influence and sometimes dictate college policy.

The fame of the college was not totally overshadowed by the foundation of later, more substantial, institutions such as New College, All Souls College, Magdalen College and Christ Church. These later colleges made considerable provision for the study of law, whereas Merton College continued to produce mainly artists and theologians, with a small but important support for the study of medicine. The college, therefore, remained a major source of trained churchmen in the early 16th century. Merton fellows held prominent positions in the early Tudor Church; they can be found among the chaplains to the University of Oxford, the chancellors of Lincoln, the archdeacons of Wells and the chaplains to members of the royal family. During the Reformation itself, former members of the college took part in the religious controversies of the period: Robert Serles was one of the leaders of the attack on Cranmer; William Tresham was a member of the commission to examine Cranmer, Ridley and Latimer and later disputed against the archbishop; Richard Smyth, after holding the post of Regius Professor of Divinity, gave evidence against Cranmer and later escaped to Douai where he became Chancellor of the new Catholic University; Edmund Danyell and Robert Warde both fled to Rome to die; Walter Buckler, knighted by Edward VI, was prominent in assisting the spread of Protestant views in the West Country. It would seem that, in general, the leanings of the college fellows were towards the old religion. With its members so involved in ecclesiastical affairs, the college could not expect to escape the attentions of the government. Events were to suggest that control of Merton College was of some concern to those attempting to impose their policies on the country and the university.

The chapel was the most impressive of the buildings of the college as they existed in the 16th century; it served also as the local parish church. The history of its building occupies much of the story of the college during the later medieval period: the tower had been completed by 1450, the transepts probably somewhat earlier. Any hopes of further building were dashed by the erection in the early 16th century of Corpus Christi College on the proposed site of the nave after the disposal of this land in a controversial transaction, probably by Warden Rawlyns. Even in its incomplete state, the chapel at the beginning of the 16th century was a substantial and imposing building with a roomy choir, 102 ft. by 28 ft., and very high transepts. The many windows of this building were richly filled with stained glass; part of the great east window had been glazed in 1425, at a cost of £10. Most of these features are visible today and their development can be ascertained from printed sources.

We are on less certain ground when we consider the fittings of the chapel which have now disappeared. Here, we may reconstruct something of the internal state of the chapel

<sup>2</sup> The history of Merton College and other Oxford colleges can best be examined quickly in the *Victoria History of the County of Oxford*, iii. (The University of Oxford, 1954), henceforth noted as *V.C.H. Oxon*.

<sup>3</sup> Brief biographies of the fellows of Merton College for this period may be found in the relevant volumes of A.B. Emden, *A Biographical Register of the University of Oxford*, four vols., 1957-1974 (henceforth noted as *BRUO*), and in G.C. Brodrick, *Memorials of Merton College* (O.H.S. iv), 1885.

from the college register,<sup>4</sup> and especially from the unpublished accounts of the subwardens. These accounts, each in normal circumstances covering an academic year beginning on 1 August, cover income and expenditure relating to the chapel, library, and other special items, and so provide detailed information concerning the chapel and the use made of it for ecclesiastical ceremonies.<sup>5</sup> From these sources, we learn that the chapel in the early 16th century contained altars dedicated to saints Margaret, Catherine, Leonard, Jerome, Andrew, John the Baptist and the Virgin Mary.<sup>6</sup> The chapel itself was dedicated to the Virgin and St. John the Baptist. Many images adorned these altars and probably other parts of the interior: other saints honoured in this way included St. Stephen and perhaps St. Nicholas.<sup>7</sup> These furnishings were often of recent origin; the altars dedicated to St. Jerome and St. Andrew had been consecrated only on 11 March 1488.<sup>8</sup> The chapel rood-loft was also new; money was being raised for its building in the 1480s and its painting was finished at a cost of £15 13s. 4d. in April 1491.<sup>9</sup> On this new rood-loft, William Wotton of Oxford agreed in March 1488 to erect an organ in return for a payment of £28.<sup>10</sup> Money was also raised for the building of new stalls in the chapel, and this work had probably been completed by June 1491 when a donation was received for painting *circa nova stalla*.<sup>11</sup> The walls of the chapel had been recently decorated, for a bursar's account speaks of a payment in 1492-3 for scaffolding for the painters, *pro factura unius le scaffold pro pictoribus in ecclesia*.<sup>12</sup> Ornaments and relics for the altars and items necessary for the church services are frequently mentioned in the records and the registers; candelabra, holy water buckets, crosses, staves for the rulers of the choir, phials, a lectern, a Lenten veil, cloths for the altars, chalices and hangings are recorded amongst the possessions of the chapel. Service books were provided for both the college fellows and the parishioners.<sup>13</sup> The chapel was richly endowed with fine vestments. Substantial gifts were made towards their acquisition: a legacy of £100 in 1503, 18 purple gowns to be used on the feast day of St. John the Baptist in 1509, for example.<sup>14</sup> Following the 1503 legacy, Warden FitzJames spent £218 9s. 4d. on the purchase of 24 copes in 1505.<sup>15</sup> The high price paid for cloth of quality for the chapel is also shown by the same Warden's expenditure of £18 8s. 7d. on cloth for the Easter sepulchre in the following year.<sup>16</sup> At the same date, the college paid skilled workmen at the rate of 6d. per day.

<sup>4</sup> The college register for the Tudor period has been published by H.E. Salter, *Registrum Annalium Collegii Mertonensis 1483-1521* (O.H.S. lxxvi), 1923 (henceforth noted as *Reg. Ann. 1483-1521*), J.M. Fletcher, *Registrum Annalium Collegii Mertonensis 1521-67* (O.H.S. n.s. xxiii), 1974 (henceforth noted as *Reg. Annal. 1521-67*), and J.M. Fletcher, *Registrum Annalium Collegii Mertonensis 1567-1603* (O.H.S. n.s. xxiv), 1976 (henceforth noted as *Reg. Annal. 1567-1603*).

<sup>5</sup> The subwardens' accounts are preserved in the archives of Merton College. Different documents are sometimes given the same archive numbers since many are stored in bundles.

<sup>6</sup> The altars are mentioned in Merton College Records (henceforth noted as M.C.R.) 4009, 4011, 4012, 4034 and elsewhere in other records and the register.

<sup>7</sup> M.C.R. 4019, 4027.

<sup>8</sup> *Reg. Ann. 1483-1521*, 110.

<sup>9</sup> See, for example, *ibid.* 79, 98, 146. The contract for the building of the rood-loft is M.C.R. 2967.

<sup>10</sup> *Reg. Annal. 1483-1521*, 109.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.* 101, 103, 112, 131, 148.

<sup>12</sup> The account is preserved as a pastedown in the original copy of the foundation statutes of Trinity College, Oxford, now in the college office. We are grateful for permission to examine this document.

<sup>13</sup> See, for example, M.C.R. 4011 (one antiphonal, three processional, and a *Legenda Sanctorum*) and *Reg. Ann. 1483-1521*, 322 (a breviary '*pro communi utilitate parochianorum*').

<sup>14</sup> *Reg. Annal. 1483-1521*, 283, 388.

<sup>15</sup> M.C.R. 3586.

<sup>16</sup> M.C.R. 3587.

The maintenance of the large chapel, the need to keep in good order ornaments and fittings which were always in use, and the continuance of the many ceremonial activities associated with the chapel placed a heavy financial burden on the college. Without the striking generosity of former fellows, who regularly remembered the college in later life and in their wills, it would have been impossible for Merton to have undertaken such expensive work on the chapel. Even so, such operations could interfere seriously with other college affairs. It was noted in March 1488 that one of the reasons for the need to postpone the election of new fellows was the necessity of meeting heavy expenditure on improvements to the chapel.<sup>17</sup> So important was the chapel in college financial life that the separate account of the subwarden was largely devoted to its affairs. The subwarden also had charge of library and certain special expenditure, but it is apparent from even a cursory glance at this account that under normal conditions it was the chapel expenses that concerned him most.

The obligations met regularly by a subwarden can best be shown by a brief examination of his expenditure for one year. Simon Molland from 1 August 1491 to 1 August 1492 spent £12 5s. 9d.<sup>18</sup> He purchased bell-ropes, oil, wine, solder, a scuttle, bolts and keys, pipes, lead, brooms, candles, bread, cords for the lamp, grease for the bells, needles and thread, incense, rushes, a silver phial, pyxes and torches. He employed and paid laundresses, cleaners, plumbers, tilers, embroiderers, locksmiths, paviors, carpenters, women to repair the vestments, candle makers, a cantor and an organist. In addition he spent a further £8 on stipends for the four chaplains regularly employed by the college. To meet these payments, the subwarden received only £3 4s. ½d. from offerings, tithes, the sale of candles and burial fees; the remainder of his expenditure was covered by three grants at different times of the year from the three college bursars. Two other chaplains, the so called 'chaplain of the chapel' and Hamsterley's chaplain, who after 1518 celebrated at St. Catherine's altar,<sup>19</sup> were each paid £1 a year directly from the bursars' accounts. In the early 16th century, therefore, about £20 was spent each year on chapel expenses alone. At about the same time, the bursar for the period of 17 weeks from 24 November 1503 to 22 March 1504 spent only £72 on *all* college activities for that period.<sup>20</sup> Even without taking into account the occasional large sums spent on special building projects or the purchase of expensive items, the regular day to day expenses of the chapel absorbed a considerable part of the college's income. Changes within the chapel that had financial implications could have some serious repercussions on the general state of the college.

The religious controversies of Henry VIII's reign had little impact on the day to day activities of the college chapel. The subwarden in charge of chapel expenditure for the period 1 August 1546 to 1 August 1547,<sup>21</sup> which covers the last months of the king's life and the first of his son's reign, continues the traditional payments of his predecessors. He purchases a chest in which to keep bread for the sacrament, repairs vestments, candelabra and other fittings, pays for holy water sprinklers, for a rope for the canopy to cover the high altar, for a lock and key to the rood-loft, for incense, candles, bellropes, wax, a torch, wine and bread, and for work on the chapel fabric. However, the college chapel had possessed since the academic year 1539-40 a copy of the great Bible — *magna biblia* — which the government by the Cromwellian order of 5 September 1538 required to be set up in each church. The account of the subwarden for that academic year notes the purchase of these particular Bibles for the college chapel at a cost of 12s. 6d., for St. Peter's in the East at 10s.,

<sup>17</sup> *Reg. Annal. 1483-1521*, 108-9.

<sup>18</sup> M.C.R. 4010.

<sup>19</sup> *Reg. Annal. 1483-1521*, 480.

<sup>20</sup> M.C.R. 3815.

<sup>21</sup> M.C.R. 4043.

for Wolford church at 4s. 6d. and for Stratton St. Margaret's church at 4s. 6d.; in the case of the three churches associated with the college or its estates, Merton was paying only part of the cost. These Bibles had been purchased in London and 2d. was charged for their conveyance to Oxford.<sup>22</sup> The college copy was strengthened with bosses during the following year.<sup>23</sup> Merton seems to have reacted quickly to the government's injunction,<sup>24</sup> but no such further action was taken to affect the state of the chapel while Henry was alive.

This tranquility soon ended with the accession of Edward VI. The subwarden's account for 1 August 1547 to 1 August 1548 shows the chapel at once being affected by royal legislation. A copy of the royal Injunctions and Homilies was purchased and a chair was erected from which the Homilies could be read.<sup>25</sup> Changes in ceremony were foreshadowed by the purchase for 3d. of a small book — *libellus* — of a new order for the ancient mass, *de ordine communionis*; this had been issued on 8 March 1548 and its use required by royal proclamation.<sup>26</sup> The first serious alterations to the internal appearance of the chapel were made by a painter who was paid 18d. for blotting out certain things — *quedam*, presumably pictures, wording, or decorations, and by a carpenter, paid for a day's work in taking down images.<sup>27</sup> During the following year these two movements, towards the replacement of service books and towards the removal of internal features in the chapel, continued. New hymn books and psalters in English were purchased for the college, and two books of the Paraphrases of Erasmus were obtained for the churches of St. Peter in the East and Wolford. In January 1549 Parliament accepted the new Prayer Book and required its use after 9 June;<sup>28</sup> before the end of his term of office on 1 August the subwarden had purchased for 10s. two books of the new public prayers — *novi ordinis publicarum precum* — for the college's use. Within the chapel drastic changes occurred in this year, when a small gang of skilled workmen and labourers were employed to destroy the altars.<sup>29</sup> It is apparent from later evidence that reference here is made to the minor altars; the two dedicated to St. John and the Virgin Mary, together with the high altar, for the moment survived.

The next year, 1549–50, brought a temporary breathing space. Indeed, the subwarden found it necessary to employ a painter to decorate two of the remaining altars. The process of modifying the interior of the chapel, however, was not entirely halted; the columns and part of the choir were painted, perhaps with a colour wash since payment was made *pro rebus necessariis inducentibus colores*. Others were employed to whitewash the walls of the church, and, in an intriguing reference, also the windows: *Waltero Cudston dealbanti parites chori et fenestras 8 dies*. Presumably the intention was to cover the stained glass or the tracery in the windows.<sup>30</sup> A contemporary bursar's account shows that the college also contributed to the expense of whitewashing the church at Gamlingay, a Merton property in Cambridgeshire.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>22</sup> M.C.R. 4041.

<sup>23</sup> M.C.R. 4042.

<sup>24</sup> Interesting information concerning the production, distribution and pricing of the great Bible may be found in J.F. Mozley, *Coverdale and his Bibles*, 1953, especially in ch. 13. The college also contributed 9s. for a Bible for its church in Wolvercote during the academic year 1549–50 (M.C.R. 4043).

<sup>25</sup> Events at Merton College are related here to national policies by reference to P. Hughes, *The Reformation in England*, three vols., London, 1950–55, henceforth noted as *Reformation in England*. The Injunctions and Homilies are discussed there, ii. 94–100.

<sup>26</sup> *Reformation in England*, ii, 101–2.

<sup>27</sup> M.C.R. 4043.

<sup>28</sup> *Reformation in England*, ii. 106.

<sup>29</sup> M.C.R. 4043.

<sup>30</sup> M.C.R. 4043.

<sup>31</sup> M.C.R. 3900.



The short subwardenship of Humphrey Burneforde, which lasted from 1 August 1550 to 24 March 1551, coincided with a drastic assault on the appearance of the chapel. The first few lines detailing his expenditure briefly describe the end of its most significant fittings. The college paid a certain Perne to take down the high altar and the two others remaining — *destruendi summum altare et cetera 20*; the work of removal lasted six days. At the same time the college was purchasing timber and entrusting it to Henry Bolton, who, for a charge of 9s., constructed the communion table which replaced the high altar. Some general tidying up seems to have been done, for several workers were employed in various parts of the chapel. Opportunity was also taken to remove the holy water container — *situla aquae lustralis*.<sup>32</sup> These changes presumably followed on the decision of the Council taken on 24 November 1550 that all altars should be removed.<sup>33</sup> Between 25 March and 1 August 1551, the college purchased 28 psalters at a cost of 42s., perhaps in response to a government campaign to ensure the destruction of the older service books.<sup>34</sup>

The short reign of Edward VI had, therefore, seen the removal of many of the prominent features of the college chapel and the obliteration of others. However, the rood screen and the organ it contained seem to have survived; the subwarden's account from the first year of Edward's reign to 31 July 1549 includes payments to an organist, and they reappear in Mary's reign. Also absent from the accounts in these later years are the frequent references to work on the chapel bells. These had been a marked feature of earlier accounts, with payments for ropes as well as repairs of various kinds. In 1546–7 the sum of 28s. 8d. was required for the maintenance of the bells, whereas, in the accounts of 1551–2,<sup>35</sup> only 1s. was spent on the bells, for the purchase of a new baldric. The accounts of 1551–2, with no exceptional expenses incurred by the need to remove or modify chapel fittings, indicate that the amount needed by the subwarden has declined drastically. He is now spending £4 3s. 7d., excluding the regular stipends of the chaplains. This figure, however, includes much unusual or non-ecclesiastical expenditure: 10s. towards the costs of an episcopal Visitation, 4s. 8d. for the cleaning of the library, £1 0s. 2d. for losses on money paid out, perhaps from debasement. The actual expenditure on the traditional concerns of the chapel was very low; the need to maintain, repair and replace the many items once used in the elaborate services of the chapel no longer existed.

We have no information about developments within the chapel for the early years of the reign of Mary and of Mary and Philip from either the subwardens' accounts or the college register; the former seem to have been lost and entries in the register for these years are few and insubstantial. The disappearance of the accounts may be accidental, but we may suspect that the lack of material in the register reflects the general uncertainty of these years. Later evidence, however, suggests that changes within the chapel at this time were not significant. Mary seems to have moved warily at first in her efforts to restore the old religion; in November 1553 her first parliament passed an act of repeal which re-established the liturgy and ritual of the final year of Henry VIII, but decreed no penalties for those ignoring this legislation.<sup>36</sup> The reintroduction of the old ceremonies depended on the enthusiasm and determination of local individuals and groups and the zeal of ecclesiastical officials. In many places, and certainly at Merton, attempts to practise the earlier ritual must have been hampered by a lack of fittings, service books, equipment and especially altars. It was not until the academic year 1556–7 that the college made a determined effort

<sup>32</sup> M.C.R. 4043.

<sup>33</sup> *Reformation in England*, ii. 120–1.

<sup>34</sup> M.C.R. 4043.

<sup>35</sup> M.C.R. 4043.

<sup>36</sup> Discussed in *Reformation in England*, ii. 201–2.

to provide those things necessary for the proper celebration of the restored ceremonies.

The account of the subwarden, William Smith,<sup>37</sup> shows that in that year a stone stoup for holy water was built at the north door of the chapel and lined with lead. Reference is made to the purchase of a covering for a pyx and a holy water bucket brought from Cambridge. Canopies, candelabra, frames for the altars, mats to lay before the altars, and a frame to cover the sepulchre at Easter time are also mentioned. Money is again spent on the repair of copes and vestments; incense, bread, wine, and candles are now obtained in some quantities; an image of Christ is painted and set up. The amount of money spent on the repair of the various bells seems to suggest that they are now being used more often. Of great interest is the attempt made to purchase service books suitable for the restored liturgy. There seems to have been some difficulty experienced here, for they are obtained a few at a time and some are old copies. For instance one old processional was purchased from a certain Leake, three were purchased in London, and two were obtained from someone named Evans. Some had to be bound and repaired.

The references to altars in this year are important. Apparently some kind of high altar was in use, and other altars had been restored; an *altare beatae Mariae* is named. However, these altars must have lacked the splendour of those removed in the previous reign, for money continued to be allocated especially for the adornment of the high altar. In December 1557 the college register notes the receipt of a donation of £5 from Robert Morwyn<sup>38</sup> for this purpose, *circa summum altare adornandum impendendas*. The money must have been received a little earlier, for the Warden's account for the academic year 1556-7 records the receipt of this money *ad aliqua ornamenta circa altare paranda*.<sup>39</sup> Morwyn, the President of Corpus Christi College since 1537, was a strong supporter of the old religion although he had succeeded in surviving the years of Edward's reign, with a brief period of imprisonment in the Fleet, without losing his position. He had been in 1556 one of the royal Visitors appointed to investigate the state of the university.<sup>40</sup> During the final year of the reign of Mary and Philip the college continues to spend money on the altars;<sup>41</sup> most impressive was the allocation of £10 7s. 8d. for the setting up of nine images of Apostles at the front of the high altar, but £4 16s. 8d. was also spent for an image of St. John and its associated fittings — *pro magna imagine sancti Iohannis Baptistae cum suo tabernaculo et aliis*. In these final years of the reign it seems that a definite effort was made to restore something of the splendours that had been lost. The inventory made in 1556 of the items held by the chapel records the presence of cruets, censers, candlesticks, a 'shippe of silver', crosses, basins, chalices and the choir rulers' staves.<sup>42</sup>

The subwarden in this year also purchased a vessel to carry holy water, sconces, altar cloths, an image of the Virgin carrying the sacrament — *quae sursum ac deorsum fert sacrosanctam eucharistiam*, had an image of the Trinity gilded, paid for curtains for the altar, and for bread, incense, wine and candles. The usual repairs to the bells, cleansing of the fittings of the chapel, and sewing of the vestments were also undertaken. Again, an effort was made to purchase service books; they were obtained in ones and twos, and fifteen leaves of a large antiphonal were copied out by hand.

The work of removal and replacement that had continued in the college chapel throughout this time engaged a considerable number of local workmen, many of whom are

<sup>37</sup> M.C.R. 4043.

<sup>38</sup> *Reg. Annal.* 1521-67, 170.

<sup>39</sup> M.C.R. 3595.

<sup>40</sup> His brief biography may be found in *BRUO*. See also *Reg. Annal.* 1521-67, 156.

<sup>41</sup> M.C.R. 4043.

<sup>42</sup> M.C.R. 4277.

named in the accounts. They destroy, renovate and embellish at the wishes of the college; Henry Bolton, for example, was responsible for the making of the communion table during Edward's reign, but also made the nine images, and that of St. John, placed in the chapel in the last year of the reign of Mary and Philip. He was, incidentally, also responsible for the removal of the organ from New College chapel and for the replacement of the images in Magdalen College chapel in 1555.<sup>43</sup> No doubt a closer examination of other records would show how these years brought a steady stream of commissions from colleges requiring work on their chapels to a group of carpenters, stonemasons and other tradesmen.

The heavy expenditure in the year 1557-8 for new images, already noted, helped to raise the amount spent by the subwarden for that year to £26 4s. 11½d., excluding the stipends paid to the chaplains, organist, clerks and those cleaning the library. It seems clear that the resumption of the traditional ceremonies and the need to maintain the replaced fittings of the chapel had returned the subwarden's expenditure to something like its earlier pattern.

The accession of Elizabeth to the throne brought sudden and drastic changes to the college. Thomas Raynold, who had been Warden of the college since December 1545, was deprived of his office by the Queen on 4 September 1559, that is before she had been on the throne for one year, and on 13 December 1560 three fellows were expelled on the instructions of the Bishop of London before whom they had refused to take the Oath of Supremacy.<sup>44</sup> The new Warden, James Gervase, occupied the position only until 1561. His successor, John Man, was appointed by the Archbishop of Canterbury on the grounds that the fellows had not properly followed the procedure required by the college statutes for the election of a new Warden. Man, as his later statements while ambassador in Spain clearly revealed, was a staunch Protestant; such comments as his description of the Pope as 'a canting little monk' caused the king to request his withdrawal from the court. It is probable that resentment at the archbishop's action combined with hostility to the new ecclesiastical policies of the government produced the celebrated conflict before the college gate, when a majority of the fellows refused to admit the archbishop's nominee. The enraged archbishop immediately ordered a Visitation, established Man as Warden, took into his own hands much of the important business of the college, and expelled and silenced those opposing his policies.<sup>45</sup> Clearly, Archbishop Parker was determined to use the authority given to him as Visitor to make an example of the college and so ensure that opponents of royal policies in the university were made aware of the penalties that this would immediately bring. In this he was generally successful. After the initial purge of Roman Catholic supporters, resistance to the new order was confined to groups and individuals within the Oxford colleges. Regular Visitations and warnings were able to secure the expulsion or resignation of such fellows without widespread dislocation of the university's activities. Oxford academics who wished to demonstrate as a body their loyalty to the old religion were compelled to do so in exile at Douai rather than in their own university.

In such circumstances, it is to be expected that the college records give evidence of a ready acceptance of the changes in ecclesiastical ceremonies required by the government. At the end of the academic year 1559-60, the subwarden had already paid for the

<sup>43</sup> *V.C.H. Oxon.* iii. 146. W.D. Macray, *A Register of the Members of St. Mary Magdalen College, Oxford*, ii. 1897, 30.

<sup>44</sup> *Reg. Annal.* 1521-67, 189, 197. The reaction of Oxford heads of houses to the changes of these years has been briefly surveyed in G.D. Duncan, 'The Heads of Houses and Religious Change in Tudor Oxford 1547-1558', *Oxoniensia*, xlv (1980), 226-34.

<sup>45</sup> These events are described at length in the college register and in the archbishop's register. Parker's register (ed. by W.H. Frere for the Canterbury and York Soc., 1928, 1933) gives interesting suggestions that chapel ornaments and service books had been concealed by certain fellows in the hope of a restoration of the old ritual.



destruction of altars and for the purchase of six service books — *pro sex libris sacris* — at a cost of 3s. 4d. each.<sup>46</sup> Shortly afterwards, on 20 December 1560, the fellows decided that the traditional Latin hymns sung in hall should be replaced by metrical psalms in English.<sup>47</sup> Expenditure on the chapel during these early years seems to slump drastically. From the high figures of the last years of Mary's reign, the amount spent excluding stipends falls to just over £6 in 1559–60, to just over £7 in 1560–1, and to about £4 in 1563–4. It must also be emphasized that not all of these low amounts was spent on the chapel alone; library expenditure and other special expenses are, as usual, included. The only unusual item in these lists is the installation between April and August 1561 of a table of the Ten Commandments in the chapel.<sup>48</sup>

The accounts of 1564–5<sup>49</sup> indicate that the most radical alterations to the internal appearance of the chapel had already been made. The high altar had by this date apparently been removed, for a payment was made for work on a 'holy table' — *cuidam leviganti mensam sacram*. This perhaps indicates that the communion table of Edward's reign had been stored, used for other purposes, and now needed attention to its surface, or that the table previously used had some unacceptable inscription on its surface that needed removal. A painter was paid also to 'deform' the pictures in the chapel. The wording of the entry — *pictori deformanti picturas papisticas in ecclesia* — seems to indicate an attempt to associate more closely the papacy with aspects of the ancient pageantry of the church, so that both might be condemned together as dangerous to the country's independence. Pictures showing sanctified papal figures such as Pope Gregory or papal supporters such as Thomas Becket especially aroused the anger of reformers. At the same date the college purchased 4 copies of the English Psalter at 1s. 6d. per copy, the Royal Injunctions for 4d., and 4 books of prayers — *libelli precatorii* — for use in time of plague, at a cost of 1s. A reference to the placing in the chapel of a Bible for public use perhaps reveals something of the events of the preceding years, for the book is described as being 'put together' — *pro compactura* — and its torn and cut leaves are repaired. Could this be the great Bible of Henry's reign that had been mistreated by hostile readers and was now in need of repair before it might be replaced in the chapel? The first seven years of Elizabeth's reign had apparently seen at Merton a removal of most of the chapel fixtures associated with the old religion.

Evidence from other sources confirms the speed and thoroughness of this process. In 1563, special allowances associated with the feast *Nominis Iesu*, 7 August, were transferred to the feast of St. Peter Ad Vincula, 1 August, the date which marked at Merton the beginning of the college's administrative and financial year; the college allocated 10s. for the payment of a preacher to deliver a sermon on that day.<sup>50</sup> In October of the following year, a copy of Foxe's *Acts and Monuments* was chained in the library.<sup>51</sup> During the years 1569–71 the Warden purchased for the chapel a new translation of the Bible for £1 7s. and an Anglican service book — *liber ecclesiasticus . . . iuxta ritum Anglicanum* — for 6s. 8d.<sup>52</sup> Certain church fittings must have been sold in these years, for, in December 1566, Henry Atwood was called before the fellows to account for various sums of money that he owed to the college.<sup>53</sup> Amongst these was the amount of 41s. for certain furnishings previously used

<sup>46</sup> M.C.R. 4043.

<sup>47</sup> *Reg. Annal.* 1521–67, 198.

<sup>48</sup> M.C.R. 4043.

<sup>49</sup> M.C.R. 4043.

<sup>50</sup> *Reg. Annal.* 1521–67, 229.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.* 242–3.

<sup>52</sup> M.C.R. 3597.

<sup>53</sup> *Reg. Annal.* 1521–67, 271.

in the chapel. Again, the wording associates the papacy with the abandoned fittings — *pro quadam suppellectili papistica*.

Throughout the disturbed reigns of Edward and Mary the college seems to have kept two important links with the past, its magnificent vestments and its new organ. Other colleges had lost their vestments and organs earlier; All Souls College had sold its copes and vestments in 1550 and New College had disposed of its organ in the early years of Edward's reign.<sup>54</sup> The Merton chapel inventory of 1556, however, gives a long list of 'copes, vestments and other ornaments'.<sup>55</sup> These were not to survive the attacks of the Elizabethan reformers. In the Autumn of 1562, the college decided that all vestments except the silken copes should be placed in the hands of the Warden and the senior fellows for disposal. In December, a fellow was sent to London to consult with merchants about the sale of the silken copes so that the college should suffer no loss. These elaborate vestments, as many others at this date, probably found appreciative purchasers in Catholic Europe. A few examples only, a pall, two satin copes, and some pieces of cloth were retained in the Warden's care.<sup>56</sup> The organ remained until the summer of 1567. Then a brief sentence in the register announced the decision that the subwarden should sell the organ for the benefit of the college — *ad usum et commodum collegii*.<sup>57</sup> It is probable that the rood screen on which the organ was built was also removed at this time.

The impression given by the records for these years is that Merton College reacted quickly to government instructions and that major changes in the character of ecclesiastical services were speedily introduced without much apparent opposition. The importance of the college as a centre for the production of eminent theologians no doubt meant that its affairs were closely observed. The regular reception at Oxford of royal commissioners and other Visitors served to ensure that failure to conform would be soon detected. Merton College also seems to have been carefully supervised by its own Visitor, the Archbishop of Canterbury, who appears to have been determined that the college should be an example to others of the need to accept the new ecclesiastical regime. Perhaps the fact that the college chapel was also a parish church encouraged stricter attention to its ritualistic conformity. The impact of its services was not restricted to a few fellows; also critical parishioners might take note of any failure to observe the law. Of course, the accounts show only the financial impact of the Reformation on the chapel. The apparent orderly acceptance of change and the destruction or restoration that this implied clearly concealed a situation that left many fellows disturbed and distressed; events of the early years of Elizabeth's reign showed how this anxiety could erupt into open hostility.

It is not yet possible to say how far Merton's experiences are matched by those of other colleges. Material for such an investigation exists especially in the Computus Rolls of New College, the Computus and Expense Rolls of All Souls College, and the Liber Computi of Magdalen College, and some details of the process of destruction, restoration and eventual removal have been extracted from these records.<sup>58</sup> Nor was Merton alone in suffering the loss of its head at the accession of Elizabeth; most of the Oxford college heads were dismissed or forced to resign as the Elizabethan government consolidated its authority over the university. Pressure on Merton, however, seems to have been particularly successful, for several other colleges did continue their opposition to the changes. At All Souls and Trinity, for example, later Visitors had to insist on the removal of the 'popish' remnants

<sup>54</sup> *V.C.H. Oxon.* iii. 177, 146.

<sup>55</sup> *M.C.R.* 4277.

<sup>56</sup> *Reg. Annal.* 1521-67, 225-6; *Reg. Annal.* 1567-1603, 205.

<sup>57</sup> *Reg. Annal.* 1521-67, 277.

<sup>58</sup> See, for example, *V.C.H. Oxon.* iii. 145-6, 177-8, 184, 206.

from the chapel. This was required at All Souls even though the college also had as its Visitor the Archbishop of Canterbury. Such actions were not necessary at Merton.

The fellows of the Elizabethan college celebrated the Anglican rite in a chapel stripped of its colourful richness, without altars or organ and with little of the pageantry of the former elaborate ceremonies. The expenditure on the chapel reflected this significant change in its function. If we analyse the account of the subwarden for the academic year 1580-1,<sup>59</sup> we find that his general expenditure, apart from the stipends for which he was responsible, can be grouped easily under a few headings. In this year the subwarden spend £9 0s. 1d.: general expenditure on unspecified repairs to the chapel fabric reached £3 18s. 7d. and also 1d. was spent on glazing. Eight pence was spent on repairs, twice, to the chapel desk, and the cloth on the communion table was washed regularly at a total cost of 1s. 4d. The lock on the door to the churchyard was repaired at a cost of 4d. Frequent work on the bells, their ropes and other attachments cost £3 4s. The subwarden spent 10s. on behalf of St. Peter's in the East Church and 8s. 4d. on behalf of the church at Wolvercote. Parchment for the farmers' accounts — that is, the financial statements made by the holders of college estates — cost 9d. and the subwarden paid himself 10s. for giving the college sermon on 1 August. Six shillings were spent on communion wine.

There is a clear contrast between this type of account and those of the subwardens earlier in the century. The varied expenditure on the chapel fittings and its ceremonies has almost totally disappeared. Had the subwarden not had the responsibility for maintaining the bells and the chapel building itself, he would in 1580-1 have spent only a few pounds. Indeed some subwardens at this date, being fortunate in their experiences with the fabric and the bells, were required to spend very little. John Whitcombe as subwarden in 1578-9 spent £2 14s. 5d. and in the following academic year £3 16s.,<sup>60</sup> excluding stipends. These accounts, therefore, had lost their distinctive character; the subwardens were no longer handling large sums of money and their expenditure on purely ecclesiastical matters was not significant. On 10 October 1586 the college decided that the subwarden's account was no longer necessary. His responsibilities for collecting and spending money were to be transferred to the bursars, although the subwarden still retained charge of the affairs of the chapel. On the next day, Doctor Jervis, subwarden for the previous academic year, presented the last subwarden's account to the bursar and was paid his surplus.<sup>61</sup> So ended an accounting tradition that appears to date from the earliest years of the college's history.<sup>62</sup>

The abandonment of what had become in the 16th century very largely a separate account for the income and expenditure of the chapel perhaps indicates that the chapel itself no longer occupied the position in college life that it had done at an earlier date. It is regularly mentioned in the register before the Reformation, but in the part of the register that covers the later Elizabethan period, the chapel and its affairs are very rarely discussed. One reason for this must be the absence of any need to record donations to the chapel. Earlier, the register noted frequently the gifts of vessels, vestments, cloths, and other such items, as well as of money often allocated to a specific purpose in the chapel. Past fellows, estate officials and general benefactors enriched the chapel in a very impressive manner at the end of the 15th and the beginning of the 16th century. There was, of course, after the Reformation little place for such generosity. Not only were such elaborate fittings no longer in use, but the reformed church forbade prayers for the souls of the dead that earlier

<sup>59</sup> M.C.R. 4044.

<sup>60</sup> M.C.R. 4043.

<sup>61</sup> *Reg. Annal. 1567-1603*, 218.

<sup>62</sup> Dr. J.R.L. Highfield has printed subwardens' accounts from 1298-9, 1299, and 1300-01 in his *The Early Rolls of Merton College Oxford*, 1964.

benefactors had expected to earn in return for their offerings. The maintenance of the chapel and its services became simply another item in the general college accounts kept by the bursars.

We have noted how, once the costs of removing the Marian restorations had been met, the regular expenditure of the Elizabethan subwarden on the chapel was much less than in the pre-Reformation period. This is despite the impact of the 16th-century price rise on any figures for expenditure. Chapel income had never been very considerable; in 1491-2, for example, it reached £3 4s. ½d. and in the following academic year £3 12s. 4½d.<sup>63</sup> In the 1580s the subwarden could expect to obtain just over £1 per year from these sources: the opportunity for the celebration of commemorative masses for which offerings were made had, of course, disappeared. However, the decline in expenditure seems to outweigh the decline in income. On balance it would appear that the cost of maintaining the chapel and its services after the Reformation was not such a burden to the college as at an earlier date. The money so saved would be available for other purposes.

Merton College was an important institution in a major university near to the centre of government. The history of its chapel during the Reformation cannot be said to give reliable information about churches in England as a whole at this period, although the churches of the city of Oxford seem to have shared the experiences of Merton chapel.<sup>64</sup> However, it is impressive to see the speed and determination with which government mandates were carried out. It was much easier to remove clearly visible church fittings than to induce a change of heart in the fellows themselves, as later events were to show, but it was also easier to destroy fittings than to replace them. It is perhaps significant that restoration under Mary was much slower and accomplished partly by a large donation from a strong supporter of the old religion. Whether this indicated a sensible caution, an unwillingness to spend money without good reason, or simply lack of means cannot be discovered from the records. Whatever the motives then of the college fellows, they soon had to accept a further period of destruction under Elizabeth. As we have already noted, during Edward's reign some colleges went much further in their efforts to remove fittings and dispose of vestments and ornaments than did Merton. Accordingly, the impact of the Elizabethan reformation was felt especially strongly at Merton, where the chapel quickly now lost most of its remaining medieval fittings. This rapid acceptance of the government's policy possibly is the result of the influence of the strongly Protestant Elizabethan Wardens.

Of the older chapel features, the 17th century was to inherit the lectern, which still survives, the pulpit and some cloths, probably replaced in the Laudian period, and the stalls which were finally removed in the 19th century.<sup>65</sup> The changes of the period did not seem to affect the external appearance of the chapel. The Elizabethan settlement, however, brought to the chapel only a temporary respite from change; the next century was to see the battle between Laudian and Puritan influences that was again to affect the internal appearance of the chapel. Later classical and 'gothic revival' movements were also to add their contribution, and the collapse of part of the chapel roof in the 17th century forced further rebuilding operations. Amidst such a record of destruction, repair and removal, it is perhaps remarkable that anything at all of the early chapel fabric at Merton survives.

*The Society is grateful to Merton College for a grant towards the publication of this article*

<sup>63</sup> M.C.R. 4010, 4011.

<sup>64</sup> See the evidence in *V.C.H. Oxon.* iv. 369-406.

<sup>65</sup> Dr. J.R.L. Highfield has produced an excellent short survey of the history of the college chapel as *Merton College Chapel. A Lecture*, Oxford, n.d. This is an especially valuable summary of the pre- and post-Reformation development of the chapel.