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Ritual and Narrative
in the Contemporary Anglican Wedding

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2009

Sarah Lucy Farrimond

'Ritual and Narrative in the Contemporary Anglican Wedding'

ABSTRACT

Contemporary wedding ritual is a little-explored area of both the Christian theology and the English social reality of marriage. As persistently important rituals in contemporary England, weddings are of great interest in any attempt to describe and account for the place of ritual in contemporary life. As events which are simultaneously acts of Christian worship, efficacious legal ceremonies and popular cultural rites, Anglican weddings bring into focus numerous issues about the inter-relation of social and religious institutions and experiences, theological responses to contemporary culture, material culture and the defining and mapping of personal relationships.

The central part of the research consists of a close, empirical study of weddings in the Church of England. This includes semi-structured interviews with marrying couples and officiating clergy, and observation of weddings and wedding rehearsals. This research was conducted within one deanery in West Yorkshire in 2006 and 2007.

Theories of ritual, including rites of passage, and of performance are critically employed to examine the structure and function of wedding ritual, and the way in which specifically Christian ritual is incorporated into and informs a more complex ritual whole. Narrative, an increasingly important interpretative concept in both theology and the social sciences, is also employed as an analytical tool to examine both the way individuals make sense of their own experiences and actions. In addition to a detailed account of contemporary practice, weddings are shown to offer important insights into pastoral and liturgical practice and the ministerial identity of clergy. Moreover, weddings are revealed as vital events in contemporary social life, consolidating and displaying the socially embedded identity of marrying couples.

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Sarah Farrimond, September 2009

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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

> We made our vows to love each other, forsaking all others, and there was such poignance in the words. 'To have and to hold from this day forward, for better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, till death us do part.' How many misbegotten journeys have started with these words, how many lonely people grasping at straws, hoping the words themselves have incantatory power to make a true love story out of a passing fancy… and then I remembered what Jesus said: 'If you have faith as a mustard seed, you would be able to move mountains,' and there I stood, a faithless mountain, and then having put the ring on Alida's finger, I kissed her, and kissed Mother, and the three of us walked down the aisle.[1]

This thesis concerns weddings in the contemporary Church of England. While I am married myself, in an Anglican church as it happens, and have attended numerous weddings as a guest, I remain somewhat ambivalent about them. Besides being sympathetic to the idea that weddings can too easily embody inequitable gender relations, though not convinced they have to, they also seem to me to be almost too intimate, too revealing. It is not just that weddings concern 'personal' things: sex, children, religious commitment or the longing that Garrison Keillor describes above. Weddings are windows on the usually hidden social worlds of couples: their families and friends (absence as telling as presence), their beliefs, values and taste, their idea of a special place.

After graduating in geography I spent my twenties alternately engaged in Christian education in Uganda and Yorkshire and in studying theology. My theological interests were rooted in Christian practice and I developed particular interests in both the interrelation of theology and culture and in worship, as the place in which most Christians actually encounter theological ideas.[2] When the opportunity arose to do research these were my interests, and I set out to look at the historical conversation between Christian theology and culture, thinking that marriage and specifically weddings, being concerns of the church and of society

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[1] Garrison Keillor, *Wobegon Boy* (London: Faber, 1998), p.302.
[2] See Aidan Kavanagh, *On Liturgical Theology* (Collegeville MN: Liturgical Press, 1984).

more generally, would provide pertinent examples of wider processes. I began reading, and was struck by the argument that the theology of marriage needed to take due account of the actual experience of marriage, which seemed to confirm this area as a useful one in which to pursue my interests.[3]

While there has been considerable effort by contemporary theologians interested in marriage to take seriously such social facts as divorce or domestic violence, this tends to restrict the notion of 'experience' to a necessary check on over-optimistic theological idealism. To paraphrase Tolstoy, only unhappy families are sufficiently interesting to merit attention[4]. I was not convinced by this and saw in English church weddings not only a historical conversation between theology and culture, but one on which the experience and perceptions of individuals offered a vital, but largely unexamined perspective. Asserting the significance of experience is one thing, accessing it quite another. At this point I read Timothy Jenkins' *Religion in English Everyday Life*[5]and Martin Stringer's *On the Perception of Worship.*[6] These scholars demonstrated the importance of the experience of 'ordinary' participants in religious activities to an understanding of such activities and described methods by which such experience could be investigated: participant observation, including detailed, extended conversations with participants. So, in addition to the historical, sociological and theological material and methods necessary to an understanding of the practices of the Church of England in respect of weddings I added empirical methods: the observation of weddings and extended semi-structured interviews with participants in weddings.

What is an Anglican Wedding?

The central question of this thesis is this: what is a Anglican wedding[7] and how

[3] Edward Schillebeeckx, *Marriage: Secular Reality and Saving Mystery. Vols. 1 and 2* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1965), p.vii.
[4] Leo Tolstoy *Anna Karenina* [1876], trans. Constance Garnett (London: Pan, 1977), p.1.
[5] Timothy Jenkins, *Religion in English Everyday Life: an Ethnographic Approach* (New York: Berghahn, 1999).
[6] Martin Stringer, *On the Perception of Worship. The Ethnography of Worship in Four Christian Congregations* (Manchester: MUP, 1999).
[7] The term 'Anglican wedding' will be used throughout instead of the more familiar 'Church of England wedding' for reasons of brevity.

might it be properly understood? This is a significant question for three related reasons. First, while there have been several detailed, empirical studies of weddings in the British Isles in recent years, which will be described later in this chapter and referred to throughout this thesis, none of these focuses on Anglican, or even church weddings as such. There is therefore room for the detailed account of such weddings that this study attempts. Second, Anglican weddings are an aspect of both popular cultural and formal liturgical practice. Weddings, as much of the literature suggests (see later in this chapter) are a window on society more generally and, in this case, on the way in which church and society relate. The third reason is more complex. Theological accounts of Anglican weddings are as scarce as sociological or anthropological ones, even though the Anglican wedding is a place where deliberate liturgical action coincides with popular social practice. As such, it is not only somewhere people with little church involvement encounter Christian ideas and practices, but also somewhere individual clergy, and the church as a whole encounter contemporary social mores. Such encounters raise questions about the interrelation of Christianity and culture, which have been a major preoccupation of all churches, including the Church of England. This large subject has implications for academic theology and religious studies, and also for Christian practice, not least liturgy. The introduction into the academy of 'scientific' accounts of religion and culture were not received simply as a threat to orthodoxy by the churches. Instead, notwithstanding articulate criticism of secular social theory from some theologians,[8] ideas from such sources have proved attractive to many. The few Anglican theological accounts of wedding liturgy that exist draw upon ideas that derive from the social sciences, both to interpret existing rites and to propose future liturgical revision. Theoretical accounts of 'culture' in general and of 'ritual' and 'rites of passage' in particular are very influential. This study will, in the course of its detailed description of Anglican weddings, also look critically at the construction and application of such ideas, not only in written, scholarly accounts, but also in the pastoral practice of parish clergy.

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[8] Most notably John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory. Beyond Secular Reason* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990).

A wedding is such a familiar thing that any proposal to define or describe it seems unnecessary. Actually attempting to do so, however, swiftly reveals that this very familiar thing is in fact a very complex reality. A wedding is a consciously undertaken event through which one man and one woman abandon their single status and become a married couple. It is an event that involves certain particular actions; attending in person, saying particular words, signing particular documents. An Anglican wedding is such an event that takes place in an Anglican church, using actions, including words, prescribed by Anglican authorities. So the notion of a wedding rests on the understanding that there exist a number of meaningful and distinct states of life. At the most rudimentary level these are 'being single' and 'being married.' Being married is an easier category; it has its own noun, marriage, referring both to a particular relationship and to the institution in general. Marriage, in English law, is a permanent and exclusive relationship between a man and a woman, which can only be ended by death or divorce and which prohibits parties to it from marrying anyone else. Civil partnership, possible from December 2005[9] complicates this scheme somewhat, being in law in some respects distinct from marriage, concerning only same-sex couples. Civil partnership, in official documents, is accessed not by a 'wedding' but by a 'registration', in which a 'ceremony,' which must be wholly secular, is an optional extra.[10] However the law, like religious authorities, only exercises limited control over language. Ceremonies associated with civil partnership registration, whatever their technical status, are widely referred to as weddings.[11] 'Singleness' is the counterpart of 'marriage,' though the awkwardness of its etymology is matched by the variety of forms that singleness takes, including as it does the divorced, the widowed and, to employ the precise if ungainly terminology of some official statistics, the 'never-married.' All this, of course, relates to marriage at present, in England. In other parts of the world and at other times things have been very different. For some, marriage between divorced persons is an impossibility, others see no reason to prevent a man having several wives at the same time. Much less frequently, women may have more than one

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[9] 'Civil Partnership Act' http://www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts2004 (30/11/08).
[10] 'Civil Partnership Registration' http://www.gro.gov.uk (02/11/08).
[11] Nicola Hill, *A Very Pink Wedding. A Gay Guide to Planning Your Perfect Day* (London: Collins, 2007).

husband, while in some countries legally binding same-sex partnerships are not distinguished from heterosexual marriage. More often, as was the case everywhere until recently, they are not possible at all.

Any attempt to define a wedding very easily reduces the wedding itself to a gap, albeit a transformational one, between defined states of life: marriage or singleness in particular. It also tends to privilege some abstract notion or ideal type of a wedding over actual weddings. It is a strong argument of this thesis that a wedding, in itself, is a most significant event and that the details of weddings, the rituals, the significant objects and the particular people, are where the meaning of the wedding can be found. Change of the couple's legal status is only one aspect of this, although an important one. This is not just a matter of a formal change of identity in the eyes of the statutory authorities but of numerous other changes of identity from the point of view of the individuals concerned. Weddings produce married couples. The interest lies in how they do so. What follows is an account of a particular wedding, observed in June 2008. A detailed description will be followed by an elucidation of themes that emerge from it, which will be investigated in this thesis.

A Yorkshire Wedding

The church is located on a moderately busy road between a voluntary aided primary school and the vicarage, a 1980s detached house. The 'old vicarage' is somewhat further away, an imposing stone villa, now privately owned. A small number of similarly large detached houses are present on the road, but it is an area of mixed housing: 1970s brick semi-detached housing and Victorian stone terraced cottages predominate. This is a mixed, urban residential area, close to but not immediately adjacent to heavy manufacturing. Built in stone in the mid nineteenth century, on an east - west axis, this parish church in West Yorkshire is a tall rectangular building with a steeply pitched slate roof and pointed lancet windows. It has a small spire at the west end. The main door is on the south side of the church, under the spire. Inside, at the east end, there is an altar under a pointed stained glass window covered with heavy brocade and then a white linen cloth. On top of these are six tall polished brass candlesticks with lit candles. The south-east and south-west corners of the building, on either side of the altar, are

blocked off to form enclosed spaces, making the sanctuary much narrower than the main body of the church. The south-east corner contains a Lady Chapel. The south-west has an organ and behind that a vestry. From the corners of both sides of the sanctuary rows of columns supporting the roof extend to the back of the church. Two central rows of pews lie within these rows, on either side of a central aisle and two further aisles and rows of pews take up the rest of the space in the main body of the church. Near to the organ in front of the front pew on the north aisle is a stone font with a wooden cover. Next to this is a tall candle on a stand, also lit. At the back of the church, behind the pews, there is a space made by removing several rows of pew contains small chairs and boxes of children's books and toys. Nearby are shelves containing hymnbooks and boxes with orders of service for the various services held in the church, notice boards and a table with a large, shallow brass dish on it. At the front of the church there are two large flower arrangements of white and light pink carnations and lilies and greenery on wrought iron pedestals. Big purple bows in florists' ribbon are attached to the ends of alternate pews up the central aisle.

It is 12.50 p.m. Outside the church a photographer is taking photographs of three young women in long purple satin dresses, all holding posies of white carnations and lilac. With the young women are two girls, aged about five and seven in cream dresses with purple sashes, holding baskets of flowers in the same colours as the older women's posies. A boy of five is also there, dressed in a grey 'Edwardian' morning suit (with an elongated jacket, rather than a tailcoat) and a cream waistcoat. He wears a cravat in the same colour as the girls' sashes and women's dresses. A car pulls up: an old, highly polished white Bentley driven by a chauffeur. In the back of the car is a middle-aged man, dressed like the boy, and a young woman in a white dress and a veil. The chauffeur confers with the photographer and his passengers and sets off again, saying to the photographer and the guests waiting that he is 'just going round the block.' I go into the church. About fifty people are sitting in the middle rows of pews, towards the front. Most of the men wear lounge suits and ties. The women are in smart dresses or suits. Several of the women are wearing elaborate hats or fascinators. There are a small number of children, also dressed up.

I sit at the back to one side, attempting to be as unobtrusive as possible. A man comes into the church in a rather dirty anorak and a bowler hat. He mutters indignantly through the service and addresses occasional audible remarks to me and to the people in the pew in front, who reply with courtesy and some warmth, though they do not appear to know him. Organ music is playing in the background.

The priest is standing by the church door and the photographer, with camera poised, in the northeast corner of the building, where she has a good view of the door. The organist changes tune to something much louder and most of the congregation stand up. Realising that this music is not the wedding march and does not indicate the imminent arrival of the bride, some sit down again. Then the priest signals to the organist, who is evidently watching for the signal in a small mirror by the organ. There is a brief pause and the music changes to Wagner's 'bridal march' from the opera *Löhengrin*. The congregation seem uncertain what to do; some stay sitting and others stand up hesitantly until the priest says, loudly, 'please stand.' Everyone now does so and they turn round to watch as the bride enters the church and the bridal procession moves down[12] the aisle to the front. The priest after a gap of about fifteen feet is followed by the bride, wearing a long, nearly white 'ivory' coloured dress. This dress is decorated with embroidery and tiny pearlised beads and has a closely fitted strapless bodice, a full skirt and a train extending the dress several feet behind her. The bride wears, in addition to this dress, a veil and a tiara, ivory satin shoes with a high heel. She carries a bouquet of lilac roses and is accompanied by a middle-aged man, her father, with whom she links her left arm as they walk slowly down the aisle. Leaving a gap of about eight feet, the page boy follows, then the child bridesmaids together, then one adult bridesmaid and lastly the remaining two adult bridesmaids; each individual or pair about four feet behind the one in front. As the bridal party walks slowly down the aisle, the groom and the best man, who have been sitting and then standing on the front right hand pew move forward. Several guests take photographs of the bridal party, and especially the bride and her father.

[12] Couples and clergy use 'down' or 'up the aisle' interchangeably.

As each arrives at the chancel steps they stop. The priest stands on the step at the front and turns to face the congregation. The child bridesmaids sit down on the front left hand pew and the adult bridesmaids stand in front of them. The groom and best man take a further step forward so there are four people with their backs to the congregation, in order from the left: the bride's father, the bride, the groom and the best man. At right angles on the far side of the bride's father stand the adult bridesmaids. The bride passes her bouquet to one of the adult bridesmaids. The priest asks the congregation to sit down and everyone apart from these people does so. The priest, who seems slightly flustered welcomes the congregation and the couple and makes several announcements in a friendly, if somewhat ironic tone. The congregation are asked not to take photographs until the register is signed and to restrict themselves to throwing confetti outside the church grounds, so that 'the council, and not us, can clear it up'. They are told that directions to the reception can be found in the order of service, the quality of which, the priest observes, suggests that this is 'a very deluxe wedding.' Lastly they are reminded that churches are expensive places to run and there is a plate at the back for donations. 'I used to say' says the priest ' "think of it as buying Jesus a pint at the reception." But things are more expensive these days, so perhaps a gin and tonic or a couple of gin and tonics might be better.' He then pauses, says a prayer and announces the first hymn: *Morning has Broken*. Everyone stands, but the majority either do not sing at all, or do so very quietly. Apart from the members of the bridal party, who remain standing at the front, the congregation then sits down and the priest reads, carefully and solemnly, the 'preface' from the *Common Worship* marriage service.[13] The congregation is quiet and attentive.

They remain so for the next section: 'the declarations.' Here the priest addresses different sections of speech to different groups of the people assembled. First, everyone is told they should 'declare it' if they know a reason why the couple cannot 'lawfully marry.' Second, the couple are reminded of the seriousness of the vows they are about to take: these are 'in the presence of God, who is judge of all and knows all the secrets of our hearts.' They too, specifically must declare

[13] Church of England, *Common Worship. Marriage* (London: CHP, 2000), p.3.

it if they are aware of a reason that prevents their marrying each another. Third, the groom and then the bride are asked to declare their willingness to marry their partner, to love, comfort, honour and protect them and to be faithful to them for the rest of their life. Each responds to the priest's questions with 'I will.' Neither sounds very loud or confident. Fourth, the priest asks the congregation if they will 'support and uphold' the couple in their marriage 'both now and in the years to come.' The priest says that he wants to hear the congregation's response very clearly, and their response 'we will' is indeed loud and cheerful. The priest says 'we will now say a prayer' and does so, and then says that Karen[14] is going to read a passage from the Bible. A young woman walks up to the lectern and reads 1 Corinthians 13. She goes and sits down in her pew, about three rows back on the right hand side of the church and the priest delivers a short address, lasting less than five minutes, in which he talks about getting married as an act not just of love, but also of faith and of hope. During this the congregation is quiet, though some fidget slightly.

The priest then says 'who brings this woman to be married to this man?' The bride's father does not say anything, but takes his daughter's hand and places it in the hand of the priest, who then places it in the hand of the groom. The bride's father then goes and sits down in the second pew on the left side. The priest exactly follows the order indicated in the marriage service, giving brief directions to bride and groom. They face each other, at a slight angle so they can see the priest who stands on the choir steps. First the groom and then the bride hold the right hand of the other in theirs and make their vows:

> I, David [Charlotte] take you Charlotte [David]
> to be my wife [husband],
> to have and to hold
> from this day forward;
> for better, for worse
> for richer, for poorer,
> in sickness and in health,

[14] All names of people and places, and other identifying information, have been changed.

to love and to cherish,
till death us do part;
according to God's holy law.
In the presence of God I make this vow.

Then the priest asks the best man for the wedding rings. He hands them to the priest, who places them on his open prayer book and says a prayer of blessing over them. The groom places a ring on the fourth finger of the bride's left hand and says:

Charlotte, I give you this ring
as a sign of our marriage.
With my body I honour you,
all that I am I share with you,
within the love of God,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

The bride repeats this action and these words, substituting her husband's name for her own. The priest then says:

In the presence of God, and before this congregation,
David and Charlotte have given their consent
And made their marriage vows to each other.
They have declared their marriage by the joining of hands
And by the giving and receiving of rings.
I therefore proclaim that they are husband and wife.

The priest joins the couple's right hands and says:

Those whom God has joined together let no one put asunder.

After this the priest gets the couple to kneel next to each other, wraps one end of his stole around their joined hands and reads a long prayer of blessing. Then he announces that the prayers will come next and asks the congregation to pray. He reads several prayers, derived from the *Common Worship* service and concludes

with the Lord's Prayer, in its 'traditional' form. The congregation join in with this much more enthusiastically than they do with the singing that follows.

The priest announces another hymn: *All Things Bright and Beautiful*. The organ music starts, the congregation stand up, and the hymn is sung, or in many cases not sung. During this hymn the priest leads the couple on a short procession round the church, up the north aisle along the back and down the south aisle, finishing back where they began, at the front of the church. The hymn ends, and the priest says that the register is going to be signed. He invites the bride and groom, their parents and witnesses to go over to the table on the south side of the church, at the front, on which are the marriage registers and a pen. He tells the rest of the congregation to relax and listen to the music that will be played as the registers are signed. The designated people go over to the registers. There is not quite enough room for all of them in the space around the small table and there is a certain amount of awkward manoeuvring as the people who need to sign the registers get to and from the table to do so. The rest of the congregation do indeed relax and chat with one another as recorded instrumental music is played through the church's PA system. After a few minutes, when the registers have been signed, the photographer arranges the couple and various other people: their parents, and the witnesses (the best man and one of the adult bridesmaids) for posed photographs. A considerable number of members of the congregation get up and take their own photographs at this point. When it appears that those who wish to take photographs have done so, the priest speaks quietly to those gathered round the table with the registers and they move back to their places. There is a certain amount of shuffling and whispering, which quiets down. The priest blesses the congregation as a whole. The organ starts playing again: Mendelssohn's *Wedding March*, and the bride and groom begin to walk down the central aisle out of the church. They are followed by, in order, the pageboy, the young bridesmaids, two of the older bridesmaids, the remaining older bridesmaid (the one who held the bride's bouquet during the wedding and who acted as a witness) with the best man, the bride's mother with the groom's father then the groom's mother with the bride's father. As the wedding party process out, many in the congregation take photographs, mainly of the bride and groom. The party do not go outside straight away, but are delayed by the photographer

who takes several shots of the couple in the church door. A few guests wander round the church, one or two lighting candles on one of the stands before an icon. I speak to the priest and when I leave the church the bride and groom are sitting in the white Bentley and other guests are standing about and chatting.

Several things are observable in this account, themes that will be introduced here and explored in later chapters. First of all, it is a very familiar scene, at least for a British observer, and for many others too. A familiar cast of characters are assembled for a familiar occasion. However, while a wedding thus described is instantly recognizable, it is not, in fact often actually described. With rare exceptions,[15] fiction seldom ventures into the detailed speech and action of a wedding ceremony. Written fictional accounts of weddings, where they appear at all will describe areas where things might vary: clothes and location most of all and will otherwise focus on disasters. Adultery is reportedly more frequent in literature than life, and the same is certainly true of brides and grooms jilted at the altar. But otherwise, what is true of fictional accounts of weddings is also true of factual accounts: people narrate what is particular with alacrity, but rarely describe the constants, what 'everyone knows' to be the case. This is a large claim, which will be substantiated in the course of this thesis, and it has important implications. It is hard to narrate a wedding because its familiarity makes it unnecessary to do so. This suggests that a wedding is widely perceived as what might technically be described as a 'paradigmatic scene,'[16] which can be referred to and discussed without being precisely described. This is helpfully suggestive of another important feature of a wedding, as described. A paradigmatic scene is a concentrated depiction of cultural values. The idea that a wedding is this sort of event: a window on society more generally, is one that recurs in much of the literature concerned with weddings, and also in the comments of the informants of this study. Herein lies an example of the 'insider/outsider problem', that dilemma as to whether religious or social phenomena can best be understood from the inside or the outside. On the one hand the very familiarity of weddings stands as a warning against premature

[15] For example David Nobbs, *A Bit of a Do* (London: Methuen, 1986).
[16] Rodney Needham, *Circumstantial Deliveries* (Berkeley CA, UCAP, 1981) p.89.

conclusions about what it might all mean. On the other, this familiarity is such that weddings are not just the occasion for the unconscious enactment of cultural values. Participants, additionally, utilise the weddings in which they are involved, to make a quite deliberate display of what is important to them. Thus careful observation, mindful of potential blind spots of the 'insider,' and a complementary awareness that understanding what a wedding might mean is not only a concern of disinterested 'outsiders,' are both very important and a persistent thread throughout this study.

Secondly, the wedding ceremony takes place in a church and takes the form of a church service. The overall structure of the *Common Worship* service replicates the shape regarded by the liturgical revisers as proper to acts of worship in general: gathering, a declaration of the intent of the service, 'the Word,' in both Bible reading and preaching and then some form of symbolic action as a deliberate, 'spiritual,' though not disembodied response to the Word.[17] Blessing and dismissal conclude things. Contained within this new structure (new for a marriage service, at any rate) are liturgical pericopes of ancient provenance: the declarations, blessings and vows, which developed independently in response to various theological concerns until brought together in the wedding rites of the high Middle Ages. The priest presides throughout all this. While it is the wedding of a couple, it is the priest who does most of the talking that is involved, the congregation restricted to the hymns and the Lord's prayer and the couple to their declarations and vows. Chapter 2 will take up this issue: what a church wedding means, from a theological perspective. Chapter 6 will add to this general account the perceptions of parish clergy. It is far from clear that all the participants understand the wedding as an act of worship, and the significance of this will be considered as well, in Chapter 7. The idea of 'dual-purpose ritual,'[18] which serves different ends for different participants, is pertinent here. It will be considered in some detail in Chapter 4, though employed in the other chapters just noted. Like the earlier observations about the familiarity of these weddings,

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[17] Stephen Lake, *Using Common Worship: Marriage. A Practical Guide to the New Services* (London: CHP, 2000), p.4.
[18] See Douglas Davies, *Anthropology and Theology* (London: Berg, 2002), p.120.

dual-purpose ritual rests on an understanding that the perceptions and intentions of participants in an event are vital to any proper understanding.

Thirdly, the wedding is a wedding in the Church of England. The celebrant is not simply a priest, but the priest of this parish, a defined geographical area within the Church of England. This means that while a couple may be regular churchgoers, or have some other connection with the church, they need only be resident in the parish to be married in the church. While rules of residence and parish boundaries[19] are things most people are rarely cognizant of, the perception that a church wedding is possible remains. The wedding described, while indubitably Anglican, differs in some respects from other weddings in Anglican churches. The six candles on the altar, the Stations of the Cross and, to a lesser extent, the Lady Chapel and candle stands mark the church as one in the Catholic tradition. So too does the blessing of the rings, and the priest's wrapping of the hands of the couple in his stole, a liturgical garment, for the blessing. Other Anglican weddings might well omit all of these things. While *All Things Bright & Beautiful* and *Morning Has Broken* are very popular hymns, and 1 Corinthians 13 the overwhelmingly popular reading, they are by no means obligatory in the popular imagination and are one option among many from the point of view of the church. A less common, but important, variant of the Anglican wedding would include a Eucharist. Such an inclusion would mark the occasion as a wedding between people with a considerable familiarity with, and probably also involvement in, church on a regular basis. Weddings as an aspect of Christian and specifically Anglican interest and involvement in marriage are considered in Chapter 2. This chapter locates the contemporary wedding in a particular tradition of theology and Christian practice, which includes a particular history of involvement with the state and with English culture more generally, a theme that continues in Chapter 3.

[19] The Marriage Measure, in force from October 2008, allows couples to marry in churches with which they have a 'special connection'.
'Weddings'http://www.cofe.anglican.org/lifeevents/weddings (30/11/08). This research refers to the period immediately before this change.

Fourthly, this is a contemporary, early twenty-first century, wedding. Clothing in general, but the bride's dress in particular, indicates a contemporary setting. Much of this can be put down to changing fashions (themselves significant), though the impropriety over and above aesthetics, of strapless or even sleeveless dresses was asserted by etiquette books until very recently.[20] The fact that the couple gave the same address in the marriage register would also locate the wedding in the very recent past. That the couple took no trouble to conceal their living arrangements from the priest is suggestive not only of the conventional character of cohabitation, but also of an attitude that either does not expect or is not concerned about the disapproval of the priest. This continues the theme of the relationship of church and both state and culture, already introduced. It also indicates contemporary society and its antecedents as an important context of the contemporary wedding: the subject of Chapter 3. The material culture that is an aspect of this will be introduced here, and pursued in Chapters 6 and 7 and in the conclusion.

Fifthly, and closely connected to the previous point, the wedding is a concrete, embodied reality. The physical presence of people is vital: not only the couple and the priest, but also their relatives and friends. Like the material culture peculiar to a wedding, the church building, the internal architecture of the church, smaller artefacts like the marriage registers are likewise far from incidental. The importance of the physical and material is a recurring theme in this study: it emerges in the theological consideration of the sacramental status of marriage in Chapter 2, in the consideration of theories of ritual in Chapter 4 and in the perceptions of clergy and couples in Chapters 6 and 7. In these diverse contexts the issue of the meaningfulness of material things appears and will be addressed.

Sixthly, the wedding is a ritual, specifically a rite of passage. The participants act and speak in prescribed and deliberate ways that by popular agreement, as well as statute, effect a change of legal status. The wedding ceremony is the key event in a wider ritual sequence, including getting engaged, a liminal or transitional

[20] Pat & Bill Derraugh, *Wedding Etiquette* (London: Foulsham, 1994), p.59.

period of 'being engaged,' which typically includes hen and stag parties and the wedding reception, itself a highly ritualised occasion that follows the wedding ceremony. Ritual is far from a straightforward designation, as will be discussed in Chapter 4. Notwithstanding this, it will be argued that ritual is a necessary analytical category. Weddings are widely regarded as rituals by celebrants and by marrying couples. Additionally, to describe a wedding as a ritual, or specifically a rite of passage, is useful because it suggests multiple connections with other rituals, or with rites of passage associated with major life crises. A related concept to the rite of passage is the rite of intensification where 'a group gather to re-engage with their basic values.'[21]

Seventhly, the wedding is a performance. It is entirely possible to describe the whole thing without reference to anyone's name: roles are sufficient to paint a verbal picture of words spoken, the actions performed and the overall movement within the space. These roles extend well beyond the bridal party to include all the guests, the photographer and the various people associated with the church: priest, organist, verger and choir. The scholarly ideas about performance to be introduced in Chapter 4 derive from the application of ideas from the study of theatrical performance to the study of ritual, here understood as a special form of cultural performance. Still, the notion of a wedding as a performance, in some sense at least, is not an etic abstract idea with which to interpret the wedding. It is also how the participants in weddings see things, as will be seen in Chapters 6 and 7.

Eighthly and lastly, the above account is oddly detached: oddly because weddings are not, on the whole, experienced in a detached manner. While a wedding is, in England, a public event, which anyone may attend, it is rare for anyone to be there without either a professional stake in the proceedings or a personal relationship to the couple, quite often both. Even people present who are not invited guests are neighbours, acquaintances or colleagues. Wedding ritual is something that participants find hard to narrate, an issue that will be considered

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[21] Douglas Davies, 'Cultural Intensification: A Theory for Religion', p.9. in Abbey Day (ed. *Religion and the Individual: Belief, Practice, Identity* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), pp. 7-18, referring to Chapple and Coon, *Principles of Anthropology* (London: Jonathon Cape, 1947).

in Chapters 6 and 7. For this reason, much of the detail about ritual performance in a wedding must be derived from observation. Conversely, an account of a wedding such as this inevitably misses much that is important in a wedding, namely the stories of this particular bride and groom, the story of their relationship with one another and with their families and friends, but also wider narratives in which they participate that prompt them to choose to marry, or to marry in church, or in an Anglican church or in this particular Anglican church. Theoretical ideas about ritual and observation of weddings, can only furnish an incomplete account of the contemporary wedding. Weddings are not only events that are enacted, they are also events that are talked about, indeed about which stories are told. It is this that makes narrative an additionally important theme of this study. Chapter 5 will outline why this is the case, and Chapters 6 and 7 develop this, resting as they do on the observations and narrative of clergy and couples.

Existing Perspectives

Existing scholarly literature on weddings in contemporary England is limited. Liturgical texts themselves and their rubrics, as well as guides to new liturgy[22] and guides to conducting liturgy,[23] often articulate the writers' views about the meaning or utility of the services they discuss. While such works are an important source for an understanding of weddings in the contemporary Church of England, they are intentionally limited in scope. The considerable body of Christian theological literature concerned with sexual ethics, marriage and family life, whether ecclesiastical law, popular devotional material or works of scholarship, rarely addresses weddings as such. Instead, weddings are significant simply as a means of entry into marriage, a state of life which Christian thinkers have regarded in diverse (though mainly positive) ways, as will be seen in Chapter 2. Official publications of the Church of England have tended to be preoccupied with divorce[24] rather than marriage or with the rival claims of

[22] Paul Bradshaw (ed.), *A Companion to Common Worship. Volume 2* (London: SPCK, 2006).
[23] Lake, *Using Common Worship.*
[24] *Putting Asunder* (London: SPCK, 1966), *Marriage, Divorce and the Church* (London: SPCK, 1971), *Marriage and the Church's Task* (London: CIO, 1978), *Marriage and the Church's Task: A Discussion Document* (London: CIO, 1979), *An Honourable Estate* (London: CHP, 1988), *Marriage* (London: CHP, 1999) and *Marriage in Church After Divorce: a Discussion Document*

ethical conformity over tolerance of 'diverse' lifestyles.[25] The current 'Weddings Project',[26] in contrast, specifically aims to promote church weddings. Major theological accounts of marriage in recent decades[27] emphasise the need for a theology of marriage to take proper account of the actual experience of marriage, rather than simply articulating ideals. 'Experience' here does not however include weddings, referring rather to the experience of married life, and often focusing on difficulties: sex, money, and inequality among them.

Some theologians do address the question of weddings, however. The concern noted above for the welfare of individuals and the pastoral task of the church contributes to Wesley Carr's[28] and Roger Grainger's[29] claims for the pastoral utility of life-cycle ritual. As the titles of their books indicate, Carr's concern is principally pastoral, though he is interested in the way liturgical texts are performed and makes several pertinent observations about the way in which the liturgy of the church operates as popular ritual. Grainger is more interested in ritual as an analytical category and as something of psychological as well as social utility.

While there is little evident theological interest in actual weddings, there is some in the liturgical texts that are performed at weddings. Such texts are often regarded as statements of theologies of marriage, both by those composing them and by others interested in the theology of marriage in a more disinterested way. As Kenneth Stevenson demonstrates, in the texts shortly to be introduced wedding liturgy is not only the deliberate assertion of specific views. It also

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from a Working Party (London: CHP, 2000). While these include reflections on marriage they were all occasioned by anticipated or actual changes to divorce law, or else by moves to change the Church's policies with regard to marriage in church after divorce.

[25] Church of England, General Synod Board for Social Responsibility, *Something to Celebrate: Valuing Families in Church and Society* (London: CHP, 1995).

[26] http://www.coe.anglican.org/lifeevents/weddings (31/11/08).

[27] In particular: Edward Schillebeeckx, *Marriage: Secular Reality and Saving Mystery. Vols. 1 & II* (London: Sheed &Ward, 1965), John Witte Jr., *From Sacrament to Contract: Marriage, Religion and Law in the Western Tradition* (Louisville, Kentucky: WJKP, 1997), and Adrian Thatcher, *Marriage After Modernity* (Sheffield: SAP, 1999) and *Celebrating Christian Marriage* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2001).

[28] Wesley Carr, *Brief Encounters. Pastoral Ministry Through Baptisms, Weddings and Funerals* (London: SPCK, 1994).

[29] Roger Grainger, *The Message of the Rite: the Significance of Christian Rites of Passage* (Cambridge: Lutterworth, 1988).

contains much material that originated in pastoral or legal practice. Stevenson has produced two detailed accounts of the historical development of marriage liturgy: *Nuptial Blessing*,[30] a general account and *To Join Together,*[31] which covers similar territory, but is focussed on the Roman marriage rite specifically, and commissioned by the Roman Catholic Church in anticipation of the revision of that rite. In addition *Documents of the Marriage Liturgy*[32] is an edited collection of marriage rites. Though the focus in these books is on the liturgical texts, these are put into context: both that of their composition and that of their continued performance. Stevenson, especially in *To Join Together*, shares something of Grainger's conviction that weddings should be understood as ritual, and furthermore that ritual is both socially and psychologically valuable. Stevenson uses Arnold van Gennep's[33] scheme of the ritual structure of what van Gennep himself identified as 'rites of passage' to critique the existing Roman marriage rite and make suggestions for future revision. He argues that the extended sequences of rites at major life crises observed by van Gennep are of greater benefit to the participants than the attenuated rites of the contemporary church. With this in mind he proposes the Church (in this case the Roman Catholic Church) develop a more extended ritual entry into marriage. While he is anxious to extend the benefits of this ritualisation beyond churchgoers, his concern is only for the ritual of marriage sanctioned by the church and performed by its ministers. Extra-ecclesiastical ritual is of little interest, whether considered on its own or in its relationship to Christian ritual. The way in which the performance of Christian liturgy takes place alongside other rites and events, and the significance of this, is an area that this study will investigate. Similarly, while Stevenson is very mindful of the experience of liturgy by those participating in it, this experience is, here, referred to rather than explored. Martin Stringer, in his book *On the Perception of Worship*,[34] an ethnographic account of worship in four Manchester churches, offers an alternative to the focus on liturgical texts

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[30] Kenneth Stevenson, *Nuptial Blessing: a Study of Christian Marriage Rites* (London: SPCK, 1982).
[31] Kenneth Stevenson, *To Join Together. The Rite of Marriage* (New York: Pueblo, 1987).
[32] Mark Searle and Kenneth Stevenson, *Documents of the Marriage Liturgy* (Collegeville MN: Liturgical, 1992).
[33] Arnold Van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage* [1909], (Chicago: UCP, 1960).
[34] Stringer, *On the Perception of Worship.*

and their proper performance found in most studies of liturgy. Stringer's book, like other 'Congregational Studies',[35] suggests helpful ways of investigating the experience and perceptions of those participating in worship or liturgy. A major area of this study, this will be addressed in Chapters 6 and 7.

An Anglican wedding is not only of theological interest. Historical accounts of marriage, family and sexuality by such writers as Lawrence Stone[36] and Edward Shorter[37] take some account of wedding ritual, though the quality of family life and the 'emic'[38] understanding of various kinds of human familial relationship are their main concerns: weddings are peripheral to this in their understanding. John Gillis's historical interests, in contrast, lie in ritual, both the rituals that support and sustain family life in general[39] and rituals specifically associated with weddings.[40] He is concerned, respectively, to encourage men to participate in the ritual and narrative construction that in his view creates and consolidates familial identity and to demonstrate that the persistent ritualisation of marriage serves to embed 'conjugal couples,' which he regards as a contemporary ideal, in wider networks of family and friendship. Gillis draws on historical and empirical research to build up his arguments.

Similar themes of the persistence of the collective in human relationships are evident in the small number of ethnographic accounts of marriage in Britain, of which considerable use is made in Chapters 6 and 7. Diana Leonard conducted an extended piece of sociological research into weddings in Swansea in the

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[35] See Mathew Guest, Karin Tustig, and Linda Woodhead (eds.), *Congregational Studies in the UK: Christianity in a Post-Christian Context* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004) and Helen Cameron *et al* (eds.), *Studying Local Churches. A Handbook* (London: SCM, 2005).
[36] Lawrence Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage In England 1500-1800* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1977).
[37] Edward Shorter, *The Making of the Modern Family* (London: Collins, 1976).
[38] 'Emic' indicates interpretations of behaviour or phenomena from *within* a given context, as opposed to 'etic', which describes some theory or method of interpretation, applied to social phenomena from *outside*. Kenneth L. Pike, *Language in Relation to a Unified Theory of the Structure of Human Behavior* (Glendale CA: SIL, 1954). Marvin Harris, *The Nature of Cultural Things* (New York: Random House, 1964) and 'History of the Emic/Etic Distinction', *Annual Review of Anthropology* 5, 329-350.
[39] John R. Gillis, *A World of Their Own Making. A History of Myth and Ritual in Family Life* (Oxford: OUP, 1997).
[40] John R. Gillis, *For Better, For Worse. British Marriages 1600 to the Present* (Oxford: OUP, 1985).

1970s,[41] from which Gillis draws extensively. The first extensive sociological study of weddings in Britain, this work, deriving from 'an anthropological concern with describing the scale and assessing the significance of … a major ceremonial cycle' of her own society[42], involved participant observation of weddings and extensive qualitative interviews, focusing on differential experiences of men and women in marriage and society and the ways in which the ritual associated with weddings consolidates this. Leonard amply justifies her initial tentative conviction that weddings are not only effective in this regard, but are also, as things about which people talk freely and publicly, points of access into otherwise private areas of experience and perception of marital and other relationships.[43] Leonard contrasts the anthropological view, which her study corroborates, that rituals reveal much about the society in which they take place with a popular perception at the time of her study that 'traditional' weddings fail to reflect contemporary attitudes and behaviour concerning marriage. She concludes that wedding ritual does reflect popular values about relations between the sexes and sees the idea that equality between men and women is generally accepted as 'wishful thinking' on the part of those 'liberal intellectuals'[44] who assert it.

Simon Charsley's study of the wedding industry in Glasgow in the 1980s,[45] shares with Leonard an anthropological concern to 'record and to make the record available'[46] of a little documented area of life, including the purposes served by weddings in the lives of couples and their families. Like Leonard, Charsley engages in an extended piece of participant observation, interviewing couples, their relatives and wedding industry professionals. His theoretical interests focus on the interpretation of ritual behaviour, which he regards as problematic, arguing that a particular artifact or ritual action 'has the meanings

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[41] Diana Leonard, *Sex and Generation. A Study of Courtship and Weddings* (London: Tavistock, 1980).
[42] Ibid, p.2.
[43] Ibid, p.3.
[44] Ibid, p.265.
[45] Simon R. Charsley, *Rites of Marrying The Wedding Industry in Scotland* (Manchester: MUP, 1991). See also his separate study: *Wedding Cakes and Cultural History* (London: Routledge, 1992).
[46] Ibid, p.6.

that people give to it, no more and no less. There is no intrinsic meaning to be discovered.'[47] Rather, the process of reflecting on the meaning of such things is important as a means of motivating ritual change.

While animated by rather different issues, Leonard's and Charsley's detailed descriptive accounts both demonstrate the necessity of empirical methods for a thorough understanding of weddings. Allowing the researcher, by means of observation and interview, access to the diverse perspectives of the various participants, such methods reveal ways in which people understand and make use of wedding ritual. While not, in the absence of previous studies, engaging in existing debates about the interpretation of weddings as such, they nevertheless reveal the empirical study of weddings as an area which can contribute to theoretical debates within anthropology and sociology, especially in the areas of the meaningfulness, or otherwise, of ritual acts. Where Leonard sees wedding ritual in a broad sense as embodying widely held understandings of gender and marriage, and specific details like the white wedding dress as embodying a continuing ideal that brides be, at least relatively, sexual inexperienced,[48] Charsley is more skeptical. For Charsley, the persistence of white wedding dresses is about 'following custom rather than making any statement about one's own condition.'[49] This distinction should not be overplayed; Leonard's category of 'not necessarily absolute'[50] virginity shares an interpretive flexibility with Charsley's idea that meanings are be attributed to objects, not found in them.

The significance of objects is a key theme in Sharon Boden's study of wedding-related consumption in England in the late 1990s.[51] Boden has a theoretical interest in consumption, being most concerned with Colin Campbell's theory of 'romantic consumption,'[52] which challenges ideas that see consumption as the consequence of manipulation by parties who might benefit from it, emphasising

[47] Charsley, p.198.
[48] Leonard, p.133.
[49] Ibid, p.68.
[50] Ibid, p.133.
[51] Sharon Boden, *Consumerism, Romance and the Wedding Experience* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2003).
[52] Colin Campbell, *The Romantic Ethic and the Spirit of Modern Consumerism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1987).

instead the emotions and motivations of consumers themselves. Boden identifies weddings, which have always involved consumption, as occasions particularly well suited to testing such theories, especially after the 1994 Marriage Act, which permitted weddings in locations other than register offices and places of worship, thus increasing consumer choice. Using interviews with marrying couples and a textual analysis of wedding media, she broadly corroborates Campbell's theory. Consumption is not simply something which couples are coerced into, but something people do deliberately to assert themselves and consolidate identity. However, Boden also observes the wedding industry strategically challenging the traditional involvement of family members, especially brides' mothers, in wedding planning, which might act as a constraining force on spending. This is also observed by Louise Purbrick, in her cultural-historical monograph on wedding presents, which uses responses to mass-observation directives on gift giving from 1945 to the present,[53] employing anthropological ideas about consumption, the symbolic value of material objects and gift giving in her interpretation. Purbrick and Boden highlight the importance of the material culture of and around weddings.

The empirical methods of Leonard, Charsley and Boden are aimed, in part, at gaining access to the perceptions of participants on the understanding that such perspectives are important to the proper understanding of, in these cases, the wedding. This includes interviews. Purbrick sounds a note of caution here, noting an assumption 'that the lengthy or relaxed interview that probes for emotional responses inevitably reveals real feelings, the truth behind outward behaviour. These kinds of verbal exchanges can allow the interviewee space and time to present an interior self to an outsider, to compose their feelings into carefully constructed narratives. Indeed, unguarded remarks and awkward silences may be just as telling as any confession, which is always staged to some extent.'[54] I will argue that such 'carefully constructed narratives', whether or not they reveal 'real feelings' are cultural artifacts themselves and a means by which participants negotiate the changes to their identity and social embeddedness.

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[53] Louise Purbrick, *The Wedding Present: Domestic Life Beyond Consumption* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007).
[54] Ibid, p.156.

These scholars are all engaging not only with ongoing scholarly debates relevant to weddings, but with the very small number of studies of weddings, itself noteworthy. Charsley says this: 'in the extensive contemporary literature on marriage and its problems, the wedding day is at best seriously underplayed…. The effect has been to misrepresent marriage…as something of far more exclusively individual relevance than a study of current practice reveals.'[55] All these studies assert weddings as a worthwhile area of investigation, not least as a window on social worlds and social processes.

Studies outside the United Kingdom suggest similar themes. Walter Edward's study of wedding houses in Japan[56] and Argyrou Vassos' account of weddings in Cyprus[57] both use weddings to investigate Japanese and Cypriot society respectively, seeing weddings as key sites where the rival imperatives of the perpetuation of tradition and cultural innovation are negotiated. The wedding as a site of cultural negotiation is also evident in Wendy Leeds-Hurwitz's work on weddings in the United States,[58] cultural and racial difference being highlighted by the drama of a wedding, though in some respects also resolved.

The studies referred to above all share a methodological concern to understand weddings from the perspective of participants. While questions of value (especially of gender and family) are by no mean ignored, the overriding aim to interpret weddings in their own terms predominates. In this respect they differ markedly from the theological studies described earlier. More explicitly ideologically motivated are
Jaclyn Geller's[59] and Chrys Ingraham's[60] radical critiques of weddings in contemporary North America, which draw connections between the ritual and consumption of weddings and the privileged status of marriage in that society.

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[55] Charsley, p.5.
[56] Walter Edwards, *Modern Japan Through Its Weddings. Gender, Person and Society in Ritual Portrayal* (Stanford, CA: SUP, 1989).
[57] Argrou Vassos, *Tradition and Modernity in the Mediterranean: The Wedding as Symbolic Struggle* (Cambridge: CUP, 1996).
[58] Wendy Leeds-Hurwitz, *Wedding as Text. Communicating Cultural Identities Through Ritual* (Mahwah NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 2002).
[59] Jacqueline Geller, *Here Comes the Bride: Women, Weddings and the Marriage Mystique* (New York: 4W8W, 2001).

Geller is concerned at the way that marriage has been regarded as the only real purpose of women's lives, at the expense of those who do not marry. She argues that the wedding, pervasively evident in everyday life and popular culture, operates as a formative narrative in this respect, obscuring both the hard realities of married life for women and other possible paths through life. She thinks the contemporary American wedding has grown out of the modern western tradition that unites the romantic ideal with marriage[61] and aims to demystify the wedding and to suggest alternative narratives through which women might imagine their lives.

Ingraham's analysis also focuses on the contribution weddings make to the popular imagination. Noting the ubiquity of weddings in popular culture, she wonders, like Charsley[62] whether weddings are simply taken for granted or regarded as so unimportant that little can be gained by studying them.[63] Again like Charsley, she thinks such oversight reveals more about the cultural blindspots of potential researchers than it does about the importance of weddings, which are, in fact, most significant. Unlike Charsley, who makes no value judgment on the subject, Ingraham is far from sanguine about the considerable cultural power of weddings that her study, an analysis of weddings in popular culture, reveals. She sees the interests of the wedding industry, the mass media and reactionary political groups as meeting in weddings, which serve economic interests and normalise and perpetuate the 'social institution of heterosexuality.'[64] Ritual, for Ingraham both promotes these values and obscures the structural inequities that support them. While the social and financial privileges associated with marriage in the USA are not identical to those in Britain and while it need not necessarily follow that, because those with much to gain financially use ritual for their own ends, ritual is inevitably so deployed, Ingraham crucially highlights the issue of the economic and political ramifications of cultural practices.

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[60] Ingraham, C. *White Weddings: Romancing Heterosexuality in Popular Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1999).
[61] See Gillis, *For Better for Worse*.
[62] Charsley, p.5.
[63] Ingraham, p.3.
[64] Ingraham, p.4.

For all these writers, a wedding is not simply an interesting aspect of a society; it *is* that society, in miniature. While the scope of this study is much too limited to make such a broad claim, there remains something important here for this study: weddings involve a display, sometimes inadvertent, sometimes quite deliberate, of social values. The allocation and the performance of defined roles in the rituals of a wedding, the material objects used to do this and the stories told about these things are all aspects of this social display. Again, this will be explored in Chapters 6 and 7.

Answers to this question ‘what is an Anglican wedding?’ have been sought primarily in a close, empirical study of weddings in an area of West Yorkshire, an Anglican deanery (a geographical group of several parishes, in this case eighteen). This has included the observation of wedding ceremonies, the examination of the marriage registers and most importantly extended, semi-structured interviews with marrying couples and with parish clergy, and shorter interviews with ‘wedding industry’ professionals. The aim has been to achieve as thorough as possible an appreciation of what weddings are like and what they mean to those involved in them. While there is much that can be discovered about weddings by a more abstract, text-based approach, certain issues can only be addressed, and the detailed description that this thesis aims to offer can only be produced, by attending to the experiences and perceptions of individuals, as will be demonstrated. However, individuals neither experience nor perceive things in a vacuum. They live their lives and celebrate their weddings in a context, which has a considerable bearing upon them. This context does not just circumscribe certain choices couples might make; it also has a formative effect on their capacity to make those choices. Couples get married in England as enculturated and socialised members of contemporary English society. For those involved in weddings in the Church of England ‘context’ includes Anglican theological and liturgical traditions as well as the legal system and social mores of contemporary England. These two contexts will be addressed in Chapters 1 and 2 respectively. This is an empirically grounded piece of research, motivated by a concern to understand a rarely examined aspect of everyday life. It does not set out to collect and use empirical data to test a particular theoretical position. Nevertheless, certain theoretical tools will be employed: ‘ritual’ and ‘narrative’.

No study of social or theological phenomena can dispense with theory; an empirical approach rests on a ‘theoretical’ position that the senses can be trusted to deliver accurate information about the world. Moreover, particular theories offer particular perspectives from which particular insights can be gleaned and particular patterns discerned. In addition, theories about ritual and narrative, do not operate on some entirely separate plane of existence from that of the various participants in weddings. Not only are there working theories, or folk-models, in both society and the Church of ritual or narrative (or weddings), but also, such emic theorising is frequently informed by the percolation into the popular consciousness of more abstract, etic theories, as will be seen. So Chapters 4 and 5 address, respectively, ritual and narrative. Chapter 6: ‘The Anglican Wedding: Clergy Perspectives’ and Chapter 7: The Anglican Wedding: Couple’s Perspectives’ are the heart of the study, drawing on the empirical research outlined above, and using that data to answer the question: ‘What is an Anglican wedding?’ from the perspectives of these key participants. Chapter 8, the conclusion, consolidates these answers and considers what this detailed account of contemporary Anglican weddings might add to the understanding of weddings and marriage as both socially and theologically significant.

SECTION I: MARRIAGE IN CHURCH AND STATE

Behind the wedding described in the introduction, and the other weddings that form the subject of this study, lies a complex history. In addition to the personal histories that brought these individuals into this church at this time for this purpose, what happens when they are there is the result of numerous processes of thought and action in church, state and society at large. This is the subject of the two chapters that comprise this section, Chapter 2 addressing the Church of England's thought and practice in respect of marriage and weddings and Chapter 3, marriage and weddings in English society more generally.

The division of this background information into two chapters mirrors much thinking that distinguishes not just 'church' and 'state', but also the 'secular' and the 'religious.' However useful such a distinction is, it is far from easy, in an English context, to distinguish accurately between secular and religious, however broadly or narrowly such categories might be defined. For many years first the Catholic Church and then the Church of England had effective control over marriage law. While legislation from the late eighteenth century gradually removed such control, significant influence persists even now. That a 'traditional English wedding' remains one conducted in an Anglican parish church by an Anglican priest is an example of the way in which church and state, or religious and secular can be hard to keep apart.

This has considerable implications for this section and for the thesis as a whole. Chapter 2, which examines the contribution of Christian and specifically Anglican thinking to the contemporary wedding, will make mention of the state, social realities, and also sociological interpretations of those realities. Chapter 3, which is concerned with the wedding as an aspect of English society, will make frequent mention of the Church, its thinking and practice.

Both of these chapters aim to begin to answer the questions raised in the introduction: what does it mean to talk about a 'church wedding' an 'Anglican wedding' or an 'English wedding'? Such terms are laden with accumulated and interwoven significances that these chapters aim to begin to disentangle. The tentative answers to these questions will form a foundation for the wider

concerns of this thesis: the meaning of the contemporary wedding, both for the Church's engagement with contemporary culture and for the significance of religious practice in everyday lives.

CHAPTER 2
MARRIAGE AND WEDDINGS IN ANGLICAN THEOLOGY AND PRACTICE

The subject of this thesis is the Anglican wedding. This chapter locates such weddings in the context of the Church of England's wider involvement and interest in marriage. The Church of England is the inheritor, with other Churches, of a long and complex history of thinking about marriage and also of pastoral and liturgical practice with respect to marriage. These three areas cannot be easily separated. Liturgical texts articulate theological convictions. The pastoral practice of parochial clergy with respect to marriage is similarly informed by such convictions. Not only is practice informed by theological principle, but also thinking is informed by practice: not only the pastoral and liturgical practice of clergy, but the broader practice of people in society at large with respect to marriage.

In 2006 there were 57,070[1] weddings in Anglican churches in England and Wales. While this represents a considerable proportionate (as well as absolute) decline since the number of wedding peaked in 1972, about a quarter of all marriages in England and Wales were conducted in Anglican churches. Of the twenty churches in this study, five had no weddings in 2006, where the busiest church had twenty-one[2]. This reflects national patterns and is partly because of local variations in denominational affiliation, partly because some church buildings are more attractive than others and also because of the ways in which particular priests think about and conduct weddings.

All of these weddings involve effort on the part of the officiating priest: planning and conducting the ceremony, completing the necessary paperwork and often also offering marriage preparation of some kind. As will be seen in Chapter 6 this can take a considerable amount of time. But it is simply part of the job of a parish priest in the Church of England, as is the thorny task of deciding whether or not to conduct the weddings of couples where one or both parties have a

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[1] 'Summary of Marriages' http://www.statistics.gov.uk (30/11/08).
[2] Information derived from parish marriage registers.

previous spouse who is still alive. In dealing with this issue, as with others surrounding weddings, clergy must consider how they might maintain an authentic Christian narrative, of marriage, as of life more generally. In the celebration of weddings, an Anglican priest is obliged to struggle with what H. Richard Niebuhr describes as 'the enduring problem' of the proper relationship of Christ and culture, between the church and human aspirations.[3]

Much of the Church of England's theology of marriage is done in this way; on the ground, by clergy (and other Christians as well) attempting to relate a received tradition concerning marriage to specific circumstances encountered in pastoral ministry.[4] This 'received tradition' is, however, a most slippery commodity. While it can, for argumentative purposes, be separated from dealing with specific issues in particular contexts, it has actually been largely formed by precisely that kind of activity. The whole history of the theology of marriage has consisted of a conversation between established wisdom and new, or persistent, exigencies in human lives, both individual and social.[5] This conversation does not just inform the ethical decisions of individuals or the moral and legal codes of societies, it also informs the 'tradition', changing the established wisdom. This 'tradition' consists not just of ideas, or even of practices that are prompted by those ideas, but also of structures and institutions, in which an individual priest participates whatever his or her personal convictions.

The Church of England, in the course of its institutional life, through formal structures like General Synod with its sub-committees and special commissions, addresses the issues that the parish priest and the Christian individual encounter in everyday life and ministry. Conclusions reached in such contexts become an 'official line,' a doctrine of marriage in the Church of England. This consists, as at less institutional levels, of the application of a tradition to particular circumstances. The tradition of the Church of England, with respect to marriage, shares a great deal with that of other Christian Churches but it distinguishes itself from them in several characteristic ways, especially in pursuing a *via media*

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[3] H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (London: Faber, 1952), p.26.
[4] See Wesley Carr, *The Pastor as Theologian* (London: SPCK, 1991)
[5] See Schillebeeckx, pp.xv-xxx.

between the theological extremes of the Roman Catholic Church on the one hand and thoroughgoing Protestantism on the other. Accordingly, the Church of England does not formally regard marriage as a sacrament, but nevertheless rejects a wholly 'secular' definition. The *Book of Common Prayer* (hereafter *BCP*) describes marriage as an 'honourable estate, instituted of God in the time of man's innocency, signifying unto us the mystical union that is betwixt Christ and his church.'[6] *Common Worship* (hereafter *CW*) says 'marriage is a gift of God in creation through which husband and wife many know the grace of God'.[7] It is important to note that such doctrinal statements are embedded in liturgical texts.

Distinctive theologies of marriage go alongside distinctive policies with respect to marriage. Many of these are the direct consequence of the particular history of the Church of England following the protestant Reformation. Protestant scepticism about the religious life and the consequent closure of the monasteries extended to England, as did the acceptability of married clergy.[8] The rejection of papal authority located control of the institution of marriage firmly within the state. Unlike other protestant churches, the Church of England retained control of marriage through the ecclesiastical courts until late in the eighteenth century and made no provision for divorce. This resistance to allowing divorce, and to extending the grounds for it, has characterised Anglican involvement in public debates on the subject in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.[9]

The 'catholic' threefold pattern of ministry of bishops, priests (or presbyters) and deacons, was, again uniquely in protestantism, retained. This had little immediate impact on the theology of marriage. However, the retention of catholic order was a significant factor in the anglo-catholic revival.[10] The upheavals in the relationship of church and state occasioned by various acts of parliament in the 1830s prompted a re-evaluation of Anglican identity. The Tractarian fathers

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[6] Church of England, 'The Form of Solemnization of Matrimony', in *The Book of Common Prayer* (Oxford: OUP, 1662), p.183.
[7] *Common Worship: Marriage,* p.15.
[8] David Edwards, *Christian England* (London: Collins, 1981).
[9] See Chapter 1, footnote 24.
[10] Alec R.Vidler, *Church in an Age of Revolution* (Harmondsworth: Pelican, 1971), p.50.

looked to doctrinal sources that predated major church schisms: the Church of England was the catholic church in England and catholic doctrine and practices were not incompatible with Anglican identity. Though much contested, this ultimately gave theological respectability to the belief, on the part of Anglicans, whether lay or ordained, that marriage was a sacrament in the full and defined [Roman] Catholic sense of the term. What it means to talk of marriage as a sacrament will be discussed later in this chapter. Of course the nature of marriage and the implications of this for pastoral and liturgical practice cannot be reduced to the question of whether marriage is, or is not a sacrament. As John Witte[11] points out, understanding marriage as such is only one of several ways in which marriage has been understood, many of which have been influential on Anglican thinking. Again, Witte's categories will be outlined later in this chapter.

While the practice of church weddings developed alongside ideas about the sacramentality of marriage they are not particularly closely connected. A church wedding is not a requirement in western catholic thinking for a sacramental marriage to be made. Equally Churches that repudiate any idea of marriage as a sacrament maintain the practice of church weddings. Contemporary church weddings combine blessing with the public expression of consent that effects the marriage: two things that developed separately, as will be described later in this chapter. It was the position of the Church in public life that made church buildings appropriate places for couples to express their consent to a marriage. Churches, both catholic and protestant retained this central social role after the reformation, notably the Church of England.

The Church of England also likes to contrast its own 'pastoral' approach to marriage with the 'juridical' approach of the Roman Catholic Church.[12] This means that the Church does not concern itself with the validity of particular marriages. Legal aspects of marriage are the responsibility of the state; the Church simply addresses their pastoral consequences. This rather obscures the fact that the Church of England has had a long and persistent involvement with

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[11] Witte, *From Sacrament to Contract*, p.2-3.
[12] *Marriage and the Churches Task*, p.23.

English marriage law, as will be seen later in this chapter and also in the next chapter, which addresses marriage and weddings in England. The unity of church and state in England contributes to the persistent Anglican conviction that secular and Christian marriage should not be sharply distinguished.

Anglican positions represent a particular branch of a wider western theological tradition. It is this that will be outlined next. It is a commonplace observation that marriage is simultaneously a personal relationship, a legal institution and the ritual act that brings both into existence. These categories will be explored in turn, with an additional section on the theological or spiritual significance that has been attributed to it in Christian thought. So these four categories will form the next four sections of this chapter. Each area will be looked at in the same way: an overview of the present state of play will be located and interpreted in its historical context. It must be emphasized that these categories are not, in any sense, watertight. This taxonomy represents only a convenient way of distinguishing certain types of discourse about marriage within the Christian tradition, as well as certain kinds of practices associated with it. A great deal that might have been included will of necessity be omitted. The focus of this thesis is on the contemporary wedding in the Church of England. Theological positions that have a direct bearing on that will be given more room.

Marriage as a Personal Relationship

It would be hard to overestimate the importance of personal relationships in contemporary English society. People talk about relationships constantly. In many respects this is far from novel, and is certainly not unique to the west. What some commentators see as distinctive about the contemporary west is the way personal relationships are valued more for their intrinsic qualities than for any extrinsic purposes,[13] on the widespread understanding that individuals enter relationships to gain high levels of personal satisfaction. A good marriage is not simply a stable and fertile marriage, but one from which both spouses derive a high level of personal, sexual and romantic satisfaction. Though many people

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[13] See Anthony Giddens, *The Transformation of Intimacy: Sexuality, Love and Eroticism in Modern Societies* (Stanford CA: Stanford University Press, 1992).

doubtless marry to have children, or for company, there is a widespread reluctance to admit to such motives. Being ‘in love’ is widely regarded as the only proper reason for marriage, the absence of any such emotion a distinct failing on the part of that marriage, being ‘out of love’ a sufficient reason to end it. A relationship is good for as long as it serves purposes in terms of making the parties to it experience certain emotional states and derive satisfaction from it.
Giddens talks about a ‘transformation of intimacy’ in western society from the late twentieth century onwards. His influential analysis combines a critical reading of existing accounts of sexuality with an analysis of attitudes in self-help literature and popular magazines. He describes a new ideal, that of the ‘“pure relationship”, a relationship of sexual and emotional equality’[14], to be pursued for its own sake, its terms negotiated freely by the parties to it. The pure relationship is an egalitarian version of the older ideal of romantic love, in which fairly rigid expectations of gender roles combined with intense emotional experience. An important aspect of the pure relationship is what Giddens describes as ‘plastic sexuality’, sexuality that is ‘decentred’ and ‘freed from the needs of reproduction.’[15] Sex, like relationships, is to be pursued and engaged in for its own sake. Both sexuality and intimate relationships are concerned with the individual’s pursuit of his or her own identity, rather than with more collective goals.

Giddens is in part describing an ideal to which contemporary individuals aspire in their intimate relationships, and against which actual relationships can be measured. He is also describing a process, which has preoccupied many others, and will be described in more detail in the next chapter. As the economies of the west industrialised, the household lost its role as the primary place for work and economic production: work and family life were separated. Women were increasingly confined to the home, which was increasingly removed from actual economic production. Marriage was therefore less a partnership in a venture of central importance to the economic life of society, than a personal relationship

[14] Giddens, p.2.
[15] Ibid, p.2.

that offered some respite from the hard realities of working life.[16] Another aspect of the philosophical and political changes that gave rise to industrialisation is individualism, in which individual autonomy is held to be of paramount importance. From its political-philosophical origin in the eighteenth century individualism has gained considerable ground in western society as a value to be aspired to and also as an observable characteristic of personal and social life, especially in marriage and other intimate relationships.

In practice individualism is a very slippery concept. Where Giddens see an aspiration, others see a social malaise: selfishness elevated to a social ideal.[17] Many popular accounts of contemporary marriage lament the malign effect of individualism. The sexual revolution of the late 1960s, the liberalisation of divorce, the rise in proportion of unmarried births, even increasing equality between the sexes, have all, on occasion, been attributed to a society in which people feel entitled to pursue their own interests and desires with scant concern for the welfare of other individuals or society as a whole, in short to individualism. Individualism has profound implications for an understanding of human identity too, located in the modern world in the 'autonomous individual,' rather than in any group, ethnic or religious, to which a person might belong. This 'autonomous individual,' is often contrasted with the pre-modern person whose identity was a matter of location in a web of social relationships and obligation, whose personal welfare could not be separated from the group.[18]

This is important for Anglican involvement in marriage. Christian responses to the relational aspects of marriage proliferate, in both pastoral practice and in print. There is a lot of self-help literature from an explicitly Christian perspective as well as many publications aimed at those engaged in pastoral work, mostly directed towards improving the quality of marriage relationships. *Relate*, formerly the *Marriage Guidance Council*, formed in 1947, was the idea of a clergyman, concerned that marriages were bearing the brunt of the pressures of

[16] See Edward Shorter.
[17] Bauman, Zygmunt, *Liquid Love: On the Frailty of Human Bonds* (Cambridge: Polity, 2003)
[18] J.A.Holstein and J.F. Gubrium, *The Self We Live By: Narrative Identity in a Postmodern World* (New York: OUP, 2000), p.4.

modern life.[19] Marriage Encounter, originating in the Roman Catholic Church in the late 1960s, holds weekend courses for married couples that aim to 'make good marriages better.'[20] Many clergy, and other Christians, have a significant commitment to such organisations. There is a distinct continuity in this with the pastoral ministry of the church, individual clergy (and the church as a whole) having persistently had an involvement in the marriages of parishioners. The desire to do this more effectively led, from the 1960s, to an appropriation of insights from 'secular' psychotherapy and counselling by Christian pastoral theology and practice.[21]

Responses to Contemporary Culture

All this indicates, on the part of the Christian church in recent years, a general concern for the quality of marriages. That the church has broadly endorsed the importance that people impute to relationships should not distract from the considerable variation in attitudes to marriage, within the Church of England. Christian attitudes vary so widely that it is very hard to speak generally, though certain trends are discernible. The loss of economic function for the family, and consequent concentration on relationship, is welcomed by some. Schillebeeckx,[22] taking a historical approach to the theology of marriage, and Jack Dominian[23] a pastoral one, as well as many others, see the relationship as the centre of Christian marriage, occasionally obscured because of other, secondary purposes that marriage has served. The consent of the couple has been central to Christian understandings of marriage and the quality of that mutual commitment a key issue in wedding liturgies and in the handbooks on family life popular in the English church since before the Reformation.[24] A marriage might have secured inheritance, cemented political alliances, and kept the family business viable, but

[19] 'Relate' www.counselling4London.com (22/03/06).
[20] 'Marriage Encounter' www.wwme.org.uk (22/03/06).
[21] Paul Ballard, 'The Emergence of Pastoral and Practical Theology in Britain' in James Woodward and Stephen Pattison, *The Blackwell Reader in Pastoral and Practical Theology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), pp.64-84.
[22] Schillebeeckx, *Marriage.*
[23] Jack Dominian, *Marriage, Faith and Love* (London: DLT, 1983).
[24] See the later section on marriage ritual. Also Anthony Fletcher, 'The Family, Marriage and the Upbringing of Children in Protestant England' in Stephen C. Barton, (ed.), *The Family in Theological Perspective* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996), pp.107-128.

nevertheless it was to be understood, for all that, as a relationship of mutual self-giving in the service, not just of the greater family good, but of God.

Notwithstanding the importance of the marriage relationship, contemporary Christian thinking is often critical of individualism. The self-giving, understood as essential to marriage, is impossible where people feel entitled to pursue their own interests and desires in an unconstrained fashion. Jon Davies, amongst others, offers robust criticisms of such behaviour, and of the cultural values which give rise to it.[25] Davies sees in the pursuit of individual satisfaction in sexual relationships negligence of the welfare of other people. 'Traditional' gender roles and attitudes to commitment had the virtue of offering a structure in which the welfare of the weakest, namely children, was protected from the vicissitudes of the personal inclinations of adults. Some (until recently, perhaps most) see the leadership of men and the subordination of women in marriage as an essential, revealed truth. Others hold no particular affection for gender hierarchy *per se*, except in so far as a structure, a collective culture with moral force, even when imperfect and arbitrary, offers stability and therefore protection to those unable to assert their own individual desires. A third category, including Browning, also concerned about the threat to marriage posed by individualism, find much in the Christian tradition of marriage that not only counters this, but also endorses an egalitarian understanding of humanity.[26]

The gender equality that Browning commends is gaining ground in western society as an accepted ideal and, more slowly, as a reality in social relationships. This important subject cannot be adequately addressed here. What must be said, however, is that understandings of gender have profound implications for marriages, for, if men and women are equal, marriage becomes a relationship between equals. The familiarity of such an assertion can easily mask the fact that this is a comparatively recent perception, at least in mainstream popular thinking. Such a move in public understanding is as evident within the Church of England

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[25] Jon Davies, 'A Preferential Option for the Family' in Barton, *The Family in Theological Perspective*, pp.219-237 and 'Welcome the Pied Piper'.
[26] Don S. Browning, *Marriage and Modernization. How Globalization Threatens Marriage and What to Do About It* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003).

as it is in society at large. Contemporary Christian understandings of gender, for the most part, assert the fundamental spiritual equality of men and women, significantly in liturgies of marriage.

Others are much more radical, reflecting the (now) conventional wisdom that men and women are equal and that a marriage, in broad terms, ought to reflect that. There have always been radical streams in Christian thinking, on marriage, as on other areas, which see in Christianity a radical challenge to conventional mores. Again, socially radical Christianity is a large and diverse subject, but what is pertinent to the present argument is the way some attempt to expose the extent of sexist bias in Christian discourse, including the extent to which Christian marriage has enshrined mistaken conceptions of the human person. Some reject Christianity altogether, on the basis of irredeemable sexism, as offering any sort of truthful account about humanity.[27] Others argue that Christianity has been hijacked by those whose interests are served by maintaining inequitable gender relationships; so the historic sexism of the church masks truths about the human person and wisdom about human relationships that are present within the Christian tradition. A considerable variety of perspectives can be found within this broad second category. It includes theologies that see in the ideals and experience of some same-sex relationships the possibility of profoundly egalitarian relationships proper to Christian fellowship.[28] Sometimes such relationships are presented as an alternative, and more authentically Christian, model for marriage between Christians. More generally, marriage does not need to be about maintaining the social *status quo*, but can be a personally liberating challenge to it. There is continuity in such thinking with earlier radical Christian, and often feminist, understandings of marriage. In addition to such alternative imaginings of the marriage relationship on the part of radical Christian groups is the idea that Christian vocation can perhaps best be pursued outside of marriage. Residential religious communities, from monastic orders to

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[27] Mary Daly, *Beyond God the Father: Towards a Philosophy of Women's Liberation* (Boston MA: Beacon Press, 1973).

[28] See Thatcher, *Marriage after Modernity* and Elizabeth Stuart, 'Is Lesbian or Gay Marriage an Oxymoron? A Critical Overview of the Contemporary Debate?' in Thatcher, *Celebrating Christian Marriage* pp.255-283.

temporary communities of both married and single people, offer radical alternatives to conventional family structure. Such practices are designed, often deliberately, to challenge conventional mores about individualism, locating human identity in a communitarian web of social relationships, even where some members are married. Voluntary community, in its various forms, also tends to endorse the single state as a positive option for the Christian: an insight with a long and honourable tradition in Christian thinking about the human person.

Singleness as a contemporary social phenomenon will be addressed in the next chapter. It would be hard to see this as a widely held contemporary social ideal. It is more an accepted and relatively unremarkable aspect of the social landscape. Contemporary Anglican attitudes take no view on singleness. Marital status is a matter for personal choice, neither marriage nor singleness being intrinsically superior. England, with much of northern Europe, has historically seen a relatively large proportion of its population never marry. Doubtless it is this persistent social fact that limited the acceptance, following the Reformation, of the continental reformers' attitudes to marriage. Luther, in particular, disapproved thoroughly of the single state. With other reformers he was reacting strongly against an earlier set of attitudes that regarded celibacy as unequivocally superior to marriage. Monasticism had been an important stream in Christian practice, in both the east and the west from well before the fourth Christian century. What monasticism does in principle, though not always, historically, in practice, is to locate human identity within the Church rather than the family and secular community. Natural relationships are rejected in favour of spiritual ones. A Christian 'religious' embraces not only chastity, renouncing all sexual intimacy, but also poverty and obedience. The Christian self is to be found when the worldly self is renounced. This is a concentrated and articulate version of something more widely present in Christian thinking on human identity, which persistently informs Christian understandings of the relationship of marriage: namely that the Christian's primary identity is not as someone's mother or father or sister or brother, nor as someone's husband or wife, but is 'in Christ'.[29] This perception is evident in Christian marriage liturgy as will be seen later on.

[29] See Schillebeeckx, p.155.

Marriage in Society

Most theologians concerned with marriage explicitly state that the 'lived reality' of marriage is vital to any attempt to reflect theologically upon it.[30] This 'lived reality' should be understood as both the personal experience of marriage and the realities of marriage as an institution in society. The following chapter will describe recent trends in marriage and related areas in England, including decreasing rates of marriage, increasing rates of divorce, cohabitation and extra-marital births. Such widely evident social trends provoke opinions from a very wide range of people and organisations, including, inevitably, the Christian Churches. Again, it is impossible to generalise about Christian responses, though certain broad approaches can be outlined.

As for the relationship of marriage, Christian approaches to the institution of marriage can be categorised, following Browning[31] as 'progressive' or 'conservative'. While few would argue that the changes mentioned above have been wholly beneficial, some, broadly those taking a progressive position, would tend to approve of certain positives, while regretting the disruption in personal and domestic circumstances. The family disruption might be regarded an inevitable social change. Economic deprivation associated with things like divorce and single-parenthood can be alleviated, often with public or voluntary sector initiative, but little can be done to address the causes. A conservative position would typically see such disruption as a consequence of the overweening individualism that makes a wider range of sexual relationships and household forms more acceptable. Browning's 'conservatives' tend to see defined gender roles as well as commitment beyond inclinations, as important to the personal relationship of marriage. They extend such attitudes into their understanding of marriage in society. Marriage is to be preferred to other kinds of relationship because it maximises the capacity of the family to support itself. Public resources should be directed towards its support as an institution, rather than towards relieving the consequences of less benign lifestyles.

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[30] Thatcher, *Marriage after Modernity*, p.9., Schillebeeckx, p.xv., House of Bishops, *Marriage*, p.5.

[31] Browning, *Marriage and Modernization* p. 39.

This might imply a clear binary split in contemporary Christian attitudes to marriage in society running along wider left/right ideological lines, with two distinct groups supporting particular kinds of legislation and arguing in public for certain kinds of attitudes. There is some truth in this, but it must be noted that this is a considerable over-simplification of the realities. As suggested in the previous section, many of those advocating the support and promotion of marriage from a Christian perspective do so with an explicit commitment to gender equality. Browning and Thatcher, for example, both feel that marriage is a vital institution for the welfare of adults, and particularly children, agreeing with their more conservative peers that marriage offers a stable environment which is emotionally and socially beneficial for all involved, especially children. They think that there is no necessary oppression of women in this sort of arrangement and argue that religious institutions in general, and Christianity in particular, have a great deal to offer marriage as a social institution. Browning sees this in terms of the capacity for the churches to prompt cultural renewal.[32] Thatcher is rather more interested in offering an ethic of marriage for Christians, which accepts pre-marital cohabitation, for example, but affirms the importance of the commitment of marriage.[33]

The Church of England is by no means of one mind on this sort of issue. A report such as *Something to Celebrate*[34] and much of the material produced by FLAME[35] falls into Browning's 'progressive' category, accepting recent social change in respect of the social institution of marriage and advocating a greater degree of tolerance and practical support towards households other than that of the heterosexual, married family. Other, 'conservative' Anglican voices advocate 'traditional' patterns, in particular commending the virtues of marriage over cohabitation, and objecting to a blurring of the distinction between such states.[36] Other, not necessarily identical, voices object to marriage in church after

[32] Ibid, p.186.
[33] Thatcher, *Marriage After Modernity*, pp.103-132.
[34] Church of England *Something to Celebrate.*
[35] Family Life And Marriage Education (FLAME) is a voluntary Anglican association that provides information and training courses on various areas pertaining to marriage. See 'FLAME' http//:www.flamefamily.co.uk (22/03/06).
[36] Jon Davies, 'A Preferential Option for the Family'.

divorce.[37] Helen Oppenheimer's 'rigorist' and 'liberal' responses to this issue are helpful here.[38] A participant in the late twentieth century Anglican conversations on divorce and remarriage, Oppenheimer distinguishes persons according to the rigor with which they apply the arguably biblical and certainly traditional western prohibitions on divorce.

Divorce

The Church of England has, historically, been very resistant to divorce, arguably operating the strictest marriage discipline of any church during the twentieth century. It resisted broadening the grounds for divorce each time it became an issue, which it did at intervals from the late nineteenth to the late twentieth centuries. The Church of England has formally refused to conduct the marriages of divorced persons, although individual clergy have conducted such weddings, especially after 1979,[39] often with the support of their bishops. Such a stance is predicated on the indissolubility of marriage: that once a marriage has been effectively contracted (and there has been considerable debate about how this happens) a permanent change has occurred. Divorce is not just wrong; it is impossible. Such a stance the Church of England shares with the Roman Catholic Church, though not its mechanism for annulment. Eastern Christianity allows for the death of a marriage and remarriage in church after divorce. Most protestant churches permit divorce (and remarriage) within circumstances indicated in the New Testament. Contemporary Anglican attitudes to divorce vary. Recent synodical decisions mean the Church is now willing to conduct weddings for divorcees, with discretion, though individual clergy may conscientiously refuse. On the whole, it would appear that attitudes are softening, though some retain the old 'hard' line.

Indissolubility is a vital theme in Christian thinking about marriage. While the New Testament records few statements about marriage by Jesus, indissolubility

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[37] Andrew Cornes, *Divorce and Remarriage: Biblical Principles and Pastoral Practice* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1993).
[38] Helen Oppenheimer, *Marriage* (London: Mowbray, 1990), p.6-7.
[39] See *Marriage and the Churches Task.*

features very strongly in those that do exist.[40] As the Church expanded it encountered diverse cultural practices and attitudes, in respect of marriage. Many of these were challenged. The Church rejected polygamy, which was never in any case very widespread in Western Europe. It rejected marriage between close relatives and gradually expanded the prohibited degrees to include, by the eleventh century, people related by up to seven 'canonical degrees.'[41] It insisted that the consent of the couple rather than that of the parents effected a marriage. Most importantly, the Church was adamant about the impropriety and later the impossibility of divorce. Jesus spoke of marriage as God joining spouses together. St Augustine of Hippo spoke of divorce as wrong as it disrupted the sacred bond of marriage. Scholastics spoke of divorce as impossible because the marriage bond was, in fact indissoluble, whatever anyone did.[42] Of course, considerable effort was devoted to ascertaining how this indissoluble bond was actually effected and under which circumstances such a bond might not, in fact exist, despite apparent evidence to the contrary.

The Church of England has, historically, had a huge influence on marriage as defined and practised in society. The story of increasing ecclesiastical control of marriage will be told in some detail in the next chapter. This is not simply a matter of the church supporting, by whatever (often considerable) means at its disposal, social structures liable to endorse attitudes and behaviour that the church approved of. Actually being possessed of the intellectual and political means to influence social institutions is itself a contentious issue in Christian theology.

Radical Christian perspectives exist on the marriage relationship. These extend to the social institution of marriage. This is implicit in many of the radical responses to marriage noted in the previous section, in which the business of Christianity is to unsettle established preconceptions, in society as in the individual, in the interests of necessary and profound moral and spiritual change.

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[40] The key texts are Mark 10:7-12 and Matthew 5:32.
[41] Jack Goody, *The Development of the Family and Marriage in Europe* (Cambridge: CUP, 1983), p.57.
[42] Schillebeeckx, *Marriage*, p.284.

Stanley Hauerwas is an important contemporary proponent of such social ethics, condemning what he describes as a 'Constantinian compromise'[43] in which the goods of the 'world' are conflated with those of the kingdom of God. It is not the proper business of the Church simply to provide useful ideological ballast for moral projects that are not fundamentally motivated by a radical Christian commitment. Rodney Clapp applies Hauerwas' approach to marriage.[44] Such scepticism about the importance of the social institution of marriage is somewhat problematic, reflecting that longstanding theme in Christian social ethics, described by H. Richard Niebuhr as a 'Christ against culture'[45] position, contrasting such a view with four other positions more accommodating to human culture. Such perspectives have often struggled with marriage as worldly. The first problem is theological. However much marriage might serve the social ends of the state, or individual powerful people, it is nevertheless something in which Christianity, from its earliest years, has found much of value, and not only things which can be cravenly manipulated to increase the political influence of the church. The second problem is empirical. Distinguishing the secular and spiritual in marriage is tantamount to impossible, especially in England, where the Church has been such an important player in the formation of the legal reality of English marriage.

John Witte understands this legal aspect of marriage as a vital part of the Church's theology of marriage. Employing a similar method to Niebuhr on culture, Witte identifies five models for Christian involvement with marriage: the 'Catholic Sacramental', 'Lutheran Social', 'Calvinist Covenantal', 'Anglican Commonwealth' and 'Enlightenment Contractarian'. All of these are variations on the same theme, that of the 'interplay among law, theology, and marriage in the West.'[46] These approaches are not 'Weberian ideal types but… Niebuhrian conceptual constructs' soundings at various key points in ' "the endless western dialogue" on marriage … to test its theological meaning and to take its legal

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[43] Stanley Hauerwas and W.H. Willimon, *Resident Aliens; Life in the Christian Colony* (Nashville TN: Abingdon, 1989) cited in Elaine Graham, *Transforming Practice. Pastoral Practice in an Age of Uncertainty* (London: Mowbray, 1996), p.115-6.
[44] Rodney Clapp, *Families at the Crossroads* (Leicester: IVP, 1993).
[45] Niebuhr, p.58.
[46] Witte, p.1.

measure.'[47] So while Witte identifies the 'Catholic Sacramental' approach as being 'religious' and concerned with the church as a community and its credal systems, the other approaches are no less theologically informed. The 'Lutheran Social' sees marriage in connection with Luther's two-kingdom view of the world. The 'Calvinist Covenantal' applies the biblical idea of covenant to the relationship of marriage and the 'Anglican Commonwealth' sees marriage as a microcosm of a society characterised by a unity of church and state. The 'Enlightenment Contractarian' is similarly informed by a theological understanding of the equality of persons. Witte's subject is western marriage law, but his perspective is theological.

The Theological Significance of Marriage

The Church of England has no document that authoritatively states its doctrine of marriage apart from liturgical texts. While these texts will be addressed in some detail shortly, they must also be referred to briefly here. The prefaces to Anglican marriages services describe the purposes of marriage: a legitimate context for sex and for the birth and upbringing of children and a source of companionship and mutual support. The declarations and vows reiterate the same themes, differentiating in some cases between the roles of husbands and wives, as do the suggested readings. Interwoven into the purposes of marriage, both personal and social are ideas about the significance of marriage. The *CW* marriage service includes the following in its introductory passages: 'marriage is a creative relationship,' 'marriage is a gift of God in creation,' and 'marriage is made holy by God.'[48] The *BCP* says that 'Holy Matrimony is an honourable estate, instituted of God himself, signifying unto us the mystical union that is betwixt Christ and his church.'[49]

Such statements are open to a range of interpretations reflected in the various theological understandings of marriage to be found in the contemporary Church of England. Some see marriage as a sacrament, one of the seven canonical

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[47] Witte, p.3.
[48] *CW Marriage,* p.3.
[49] *BCP Matrimony.*

sacraments enumerated and defined in the Middle Ages.[50] Such a view is common among Anglicans in the catholic wing of the church. Others think that sacramental language, if broadly interpreted, can be usefully applied to marriage. Some would also interpret other relationships of mutual self-giving this way[51]. Sacramentality is not the only theological idea that informs contemporary understandings of the nature of marriage in the Church. All of the approaches outlined by Witte see the social and personal purposes of marriage as important to increasing and establishing God's rule, and employ marriage as a symbol of the relationship of God and the church.[52] Here the social and personal goods of marriage have theological significance. This is a perspective often encountered in official publications. Official Anglican publications are reluctant to distinguish 'Christian' marriage from other kinds of marriage.[53] While there can be a Christian view of marriage, the Church does not establish a new kind of marriage, but offers a distinctive interpretation of something already there, part of the created order.

'Christian Marriage': Early Developments

While the contemporary Church of England is loath to distinguish kinds of marriage, the Church in other times and places has thought differently. The nature of marriage, and whether and how Christian marriage differs from marriage in general was a concern of the Church from its earliest years. As Christianity expanded into the Roman Empire and northern and western Europe it encountered understandings of marriage and practices with respect to marriage that differed from its Semitic, near Eastern roots. Marriage existed everywhere, but varied from place to place. The Church had to decide what its approach should be, whether distinctively Christian practices should be adopted and promoted.[54] Christian marriage for the early, voluntary Christian communities of Europe, and later for Christendom as a whole, was distinctive. There were several main areas of concern from the beginning. Some derived from Roman

[50] Schillebeeckx, p128.
[51] Thatcher, *Marriage After Modernity.*
[52] See Witte.
[53] *An Honourable Estate*, p.71.
[54] See Chapter 3.

legal practice: the importance of consent in the formation of a marriage. Some from biblical and early Christian sources: prohibitions on marriage with near relatives, monogamy, indissolubility, and the sense that marriage was symbolic of the relation of Christ and the Church, and special because of that.

Indissolubility was a particular concern. Jesus made explicit statements about the impropriety of divorce,[55] in particular a divorce that suited the immediate interests of the husband. This was an issue in northern Europe at the time of the arrival of Christianity, where divorce, often because of the childlessness of a marriage, was commonplace. Where marriage is focussed on securing heirs, the idea that a marriage can persist where there are no heirs met with some resistance. While indissolubility seems an immutable concept, it did develop. Augustine, in the fourth century felt that divorce should not happen because of the sacred nature of the marital bond[56]. Divorce was a logical possibility, but one unacceptable for Christians because of the moral seriousness of the undertaking of marriage. Later thinkers expanded this concept so that divorce was not only wrong, but also actually impossible.

Such ideas were closely associated with the development of sacramental thinking about marriage. The term ‘sacrament’ is a Latin translation of the original Greek *mysterion*, still the term employed in the eastern churches. Ephesians 5.32 asserts a symbolic equivalence between the relationship of Jesus and the church that of husband and wife, describing this as ‘a holy mystery.’ On the strength of this, Christian theologians started to speak of marriage in sacramental terms, most significantly, again, Augustine, who described the marriage bond as a ‘sacred sign,’ which pointed towards another higher reality.[57] Such an insight persisted in the western church and was used in disputes with eleventh century heretical groups. Against their rejection of marriage as irredeemably worldly Catholic theologians commended marriage because of its status as a symbol of the interrelation of Christ and the church. Parallel with this sort of argument went the development of sacramental theology more generally. There developed an

[55] See footnote 29, above.
[56] Augustine, *De bono coniugali*, 21 in Schillebeeckx, *Marriage Vol.II*, p.73.
[57] Stevenson, *Nuptial Blessing*, p.29.

increasing concern in the west to define sacraments precisely. In the course of these conversations, marriage became one of the seven sacraments, clearly enumerated. Hugh of St Victor's *On the Sacraments of the Christian Faith* of 1143 was important here as was Peter Lombard's *Book of Sentences* of 1150.[58] Schillebeeckx argues that the liturgical celebration of marriage, considerably elaborated from the ninth century in the west, gave additional impetus to such thinking. Inclusion in this list did not immediately impute the full salvific status of other sacraments to marriage, apparent in the thirteenth century in Thomas Aquinas' writing.[59]

The meaning of marriage is complex and multi-layered. Individual spouses invest their marriages with personal meaning, marriage represents a whole range of other social values: permanence, faithfulness, order and conversely custom and repression. The contemporary Anglican Church continues, tentatively, and in a variety of ways, to understand marriage as possessed of theological meaning too. Here definite answers are even harder to come by. Marriage in some sense, continues to represent the relationship of Christ and the church, marriage is also, in some sense, a means by which individuals might experience both spiritual growth and personal holiness.

It can be easy to distinguish too sharply the marriage relationship in Anglican thinking from the promotion of a social view of marriage within legal systems and either of these from ideas about the significance of marriage for the spiritual lives of those involved and for Christian theology. It is also easy to represent this thinking about marriage as rather abstract. In reality this thinking is woven into the actual practice and the experience of marriage. This is particularly evident in the Church of England's involvement with weddings.

Marriage and Ritual

It is the ritual of marriage that is the main concern of this thesis. Marriage is a

[58] Witte, p.22.
[59] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, III,q.65 in Schillebeeckx, *Marriage Vol.II*, p.140.

human universal, and marriage ritual is a universal feature of marriage.[60] Marriage, as we have seen, is something about which the Church, individual Christians and Christian theologians of various stamps have things to say and courses of action to advocate. Not only have such stances, on a whole range of associated issues, varied, but so too has the extent to which any Church has had the power to impose its ideas: on its own membership, or on whole societies. Such power is comprised of actual legal and political power: the ecclesiastical control of the legal mechanisms that govern and police marriage in a society, and also of intellectual or ideological power. To apply Marxist terminology very loosely, the first of these concerns control of the 'means of production' of the social institution of marriage; the legislation, the courts, the delineation of entries and exits to the institution, and of its legitimate personnel. The second concerns what could be described as 'consciousness'; how people think about marriage, decide to act and interpret their experience. Both of these are relevant to the ritualisation of marriage in the contemporary Church of England, and will be investigated further in this thesis, the second area being of particular interest.

While the origins of the liturgical phenomenon 'the church wedding' lie in theological and devotional processes, the legal involvement of the Church in marriage had a considerable influence on the form of that rite and on the extent of its use. The church wedding became part of the means by which the church expressed its understanding of marriage in England, though it was only obligatory between 1753 (when the Hardwicke Act required all marriages, excepting those of Jews or Quakers take place in the parish church) and the 1836 Marriage Act (which introduced civil marriage).[61] Still, a church wedding increasingly became the way people established a marriage that had full public recognition. For many years it was the business of ecclesiastical courts, where there was any dispute, to decide on the validity of marriages and a church wedding provided legally unambiguous forms in which the vital 'consent' could be expressed.[62] Even now, though the practice is waning, the denial of church weddings to divorced people is a means by which the church asserts its

[60] William N. Stephens, *The Family in Cross Cultural Perspective* (Washington: UPA, 1963).
[61] Gillis, *For Better, For Worse*, p.140 and p.232.
[62] Ibid, p.18-19.

understanding of marriage as indissoluble. But the church wedding is more than a tool of social control. For Anglicans liturgical texts rather than statements of official doctrine have often represented normative Anglican thinking on an issue (and to be seen as doing so by anyone looking for Anglican identity) in marriage, as in other areas of life and faith.[63]

The Church of England no longer has the legal power it once had in respect of marriage, but it retains an important role in the contemporary ritualisation of marriage. The number of weddings has declined over recent years, and the proportionate number of Anglican weddings as well. Nevertheless, weddings continue to be a significant part of the work of an Anglican priest and Anglican weddings account for about 23% of all weddings.[64] Such weddings are built around authorised Anglican liturgical texts. At present these are the marriage service of *CW* and a 'traditional form,' derived from the 1662 *BCP*. The original *BCP* text remains an authorised service; this 'traditional form' is the *Series One* marriage service, *Series One*' being the designation for various alternative forms of worship that received legal recognition in March 1965 under the 'Prayer Book (Alternative and Other Services) Measure.'[65] This replicates almost exactly the marriage service from the ultimately unsuccessful 1927-8 attempts to revise the *BCP*. The *Series One* service differs only slightly from the *BCP*. Sexuality is presented rather more positively (or less crudely), the references to 'brute beasts' and 'carnal lusts' being removed from the pastoral introduction. The bride no longer must promise to obey (though in the 1928 text she could make no such promise even if she wanted to) and the groom was to 'honour' rather than 'worship' his wife in the promise associated with the ring giving. Other changes from the 1662 text involved various additional prayers and set readings in the event of a nuptial Eucharist. Underlying this process of liturgical revision, which went on to produce the *Alternative Service Book* (hereafter *ASB*) and *CW*, is a history of often extremely acrimonious disagreement and debate.

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[63] See R.C.D. Jasper, *The Development of the Anglican Liturgy 1662-1980* (London: SPCK, 1989).
[64] 'Life Events' www.cofeanglican.org (20/3/06).
[65] Jasper, p.244.

The *BCP* of 1662 was the product of a hundred or so years of wrangling about the identity of the English church following the Reformation. The finished text combined reformed, protestant theology with liturgical forms that owed much to earlier catholic patterns. This was especially the case with the 'Form for the Solemnisation of Holy Matrimony.' Much of this, notably the two sets of vows and most of the pastoral introduction, follows very closely the form and words of the Sarum rite, the most widely used of the pre-reformation English rites. The wedding vows were brought into the church from their medieval location at the church door and the idea of a 'nuptial mass' was lost, although the couple were encouraged to attend Holy Communion together as soon as possible after their wedding.[66] The *BCP* service consists of a pastoral introduction outlining the nature of marriage in Christian thinking, which excludes sacramental language, but instead speaks of marriage as 'instituted of God', a 'holy estate' 'signifying unto us the mystical union that is betwixt Christ and his church.'[67] It goes on to outline a Christian vision for the marital relationship. Marriage exists so that children can be born and brought up within the Christian faith. Marriage is a 'remedy against sin,' being the legitimate context for sex, and offers 'mutual society, help and comfort.' This is followed by two sets of vows that the couple take. The first, 'espousals', derive from betrothal rites and consist of promises made in the future tense: promises to get married, not promises that effect a marriage in the here and now. The second sets of promises, the 'nuptials,' are actual wedding vows; they represent a form of present-tense consent to marriage that is legally effective. These vows put the duties of husbands and wives, outlined in the pastoral introduction, into the mouths of the couple. Then the groom puts a ring on the fourth finger of the bride's left hand with a set form of words, which extends the relational themes of the vows into the economic unity of the household: 'With this ring I thee wed, with my body I thee worship, and with all my worldly goods I thee endow...' The celebrant then says a prayer of blessing for the couple, followed by the statement 'what God hath joined together let no man put asunder' and a declaration of the marriage. Other prayers and set psalms follow, and possibly a sermon or briefer set scriptural exhortation.

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[66] Stevenson, *Nuptial Blessing*, pp.134-152.
[67] *BCP,* pp.183-7.

This rite was used to conduct weddings from its publication until 1965 and remains an option. From the early twentieth century there was a considerable movement for liturgical reform, not inhibited by the rejection by parliament of the 1928 Prayer Book. This was motivated, variously, by a desire to incorporate scholarly findings into liturgical practice, to develop forms of worship that were more culturally relevant to the contemporary context, and to establish a more flexible 'common worship' so that clergy might be less likely to use unauthorised, illegal forms. In 1954 the Convocations of Canterbury and York agreed to appoint a Liturgical Commission, which would be responsible for overseeing liturgical revision, including an on-going process of experimentation. This process led to the publication and 'experimental' use of what came to be known as 'Series One,' 'Series Two' and 'Series Three,' each of which included an incomplete range of services. The last of these saw the first services in modern English. In 1980 the *ASB* was published, with services for all occasions in contemporary English, and its use, as an official alternative to the *BCP* was authorised until the end of 1990, a period subsequently extended to the end of 2000. During these years the more permanent rites of *CW* were developed.[68]

CW, unlike like the *BCP* or the *ASB* is not entirely contained in one book, from which individual services can be extracted where necessary (particularly important for weddings). It is a series of texts of services that are bound into different configurations for reference and available on the internet, so clergy and others leading worship can produce orders of service from this material for actual liturgical use. A fair degree of variety is possible, although it remains the case that Anglican worship is supposed to conform to the patterns, albeit more flexible, which are formally authorised.

The *CW* marriage service draws heavily on that in the *ASB* and its overall structure differs little from that of the *BCP*. This service is the primary liturgical text around which the contemporary Anglican wedding is constructed. It begins with a prayer, emphasising the wedding as an act of worship. A pastoral introduction follows. There are many similarities with that in the *BCP*: a

[68] See Jasper.

declaration of the purpose of the service, an outline of the nature of Christian marriage, into which the three purposes of marriage are inserted. The *BCP* order of children, sex and comfort is altered, with sex taking first place, then children and then 'strength, companionship and comfort.'[69] The *ASB* order was 'comfort and help,'[70] sex and then children. The *ASB* pastoral introduction has been retained as an alternative to the new *CW* one. The final reading of the banns is followed with the 'spousal' vows, or 'declarations,' where the priest asks first the bridegroom and then the bride the following:

> N will you take N to be your wife [husband]?
> Will you love her [him], comfort her [him], honour and protect her [him],
> And forsaking all others,
> Be faithful to her [him] as long as you both shall live?

Each responds 'I will' and then a question is put to the congregation, requesting their support for the couple in their future marriage, in the same basic form as the declaration. The collect is followed at this point with one or more Bible readings and a sermon. Then there are the marriage vows. This differs from previous rites, which concluded the marriage before moving on to the readings and the sermon. The couple stand before the celebrant and the groom and then the bride make their vows. Three alternative sets of vows are given. The preferred option, in the main body of the text, rather than the 'alternative vows' appendix, is as follows:

> I, *N*, take you *N*,
> to be my wife [or husband],
> to have and to hold,
> from this day forward;
> for better for worse,
> for richer for poorer,
> in sickness and in health,
> to love and to cherish,
> till death us do part;
> according to God's holy law.
> In the presence of God I make this vow.[71]

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[69] *CW: Marriage,* p.3.
[70] Church of England, *The Alternative Service Book* (London: SPCK, 1980), p.288.
[71] *CW: Marriage*, p.6.

The vows for husband and wife are the same. It differs from the *ASB* vow only in the concluding line, the *ASB* having ‘and this is my solemn vow’[72] instead of ‘in the presence of God I make this vow.’ The alternatives consist of a form as above, but adding ‘and obey’ after ‘cherish’ in the bride’s vows. Again, this largely replicates the *ASB* vow, except that there, in the event of the bride promising to obey, the husband was to promise to ‘worship’ his wife. The ongoing controversy on the appropriateness of such a promise long precedes the *ASB*. The other set of vows are those from the *BCP*, with the option of omitting the ‘obey’ clause.

The exchange of vows is followed by the blessing and giving (or where both partners have rings, exchange) of rings, these acts being accompanied with set forms of words:

> *N*, I give you this ring
> as a sign of our marriage.
> With my body I honour you,
> all that I am I give to you,
> all that I have I share with you,
> within the love of God,
> Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Where only the bride has a ring, her words differ only by replacing ‘I give’ with ‘I receive.’ The celebrant then ‘proclaims’ the marriage and blesses it, using one of a number of prayers of blessing. The marriage is then registered, either at this point or at the end of the service. Then there are prayers. If there is going to be a Eucharist this follows. In such circumstances, the marriage can be blessed immediately before the breaking of the bread and distribution of the bread and wine. The service ends with a ‘dismissal’ and a blessing of the whole congregation.

[72] *ASB*, p. 290.

A liturgical text expresses ideas. It is the product of what Adrian Thatcher would describe as both the internal and the external discourses on marriage:[73] the conversation within the churches about the nature and purpose of marriage in Christian faith and practice, and, respectively, the conversation between the church and the wider world. In short, a marriage service reflects understandings of the human relationship, the social institution and the spiritual significance of marriage. Contemporary marriage rites attempt, with other recent exercises in liturgical revision, to reflect contemporary sensibilities about the human person and marriage in society. As we have noted, these are far from uncontested areas, not least within the Church. Nevertheless, recent liturgical innovation reflects an increasing appreciation of equality between the sexes that extends to roles within marriage and in society. There is, however, an ambivalence about this, which is evident in the contemporary texts: the 'obey' clause' remains an option; attempts to remove it altogether, as has happened in the wedding rites of other churches have not been successful. It is hard to determine exactly what this might mean. Liturgical texts offer an insight into such attitudes, but it is not often possible to read them as straightforward, normative statements, especially when more than one such statement is being made, in this case that wives should not (or should) promise to obey their husbands.

An additional question is the vexed one of the 'giving away' of the bride, to which many Anglican liturgists are hostile.[74] Traditionally the bride enters the church with her father, and is 'given away' following the final reading of the banns and the couple's declarations of willingness to marry. This is a part of the *BCP* service: 'Who giveth this Woman to be married to this Man?'[75] The *ASB* notes that the 'Giving Away' ceremony is optional, and provides no form of words to accompany it. The notes to the *CW* service say 'the bride may enter the church escorted by her father or a representative of the family. Or the bride and groom may enter church together.'[76] It goes on to observe that the 'traditional ceremony' of 'Giving Away' is optional, and offers a form of words: 'Who

[73] Thatcher, *Marriage After Modernity*, p.31.
[74] Spinks, p.209.
[75] *BCP: Matrimony.*
[76] *CW: Marriage*, p.38.

brings this woman to be married to this man.'[77] The terms 'escort' and 'bring' are intended to soften the implication that the bride is the property of her father and then husband. *CW* offers an additional optional section at this point, as an alternative to 'giving away.' The celebrant asks the parents of both bride and groom:

> *N* and *N* have declared their intention towards each other.
> As their parents,
> will you now entrust your son and daughter to one another
> as they come to be married?

Both sets of parents respond:

> we will.'[78]

All of this reflects a desire, in the words of Stevenson, to incorporate 'many of the insights of the marriage relationship of the present age, in particular, the complementarity of the sexes.'[79] It also indicates a considerable degree of ritual conservatism and reluctance to dispense with familiar liturgical and ritual forms. This cannot be reduced to a reactionary reluctance to accept sexual equality. While only a small minority of brides now promise to obey, the vast majority are still given away.[80] The impulse to keep liturgy familiar, and this is especially true of the liturgy of marriage, is as constant a theme in liturgical revision, as is the impulse to make something new.

The post-Reformation story of weddings in the Church of England has been addressed. Such wedding rites were built on, or at least reacted to, an inheritance of earlier Christian rites. The English reformation, coming comparatively late, drew on both pre-reformation English rites and the rites of the earlier continental reformers. Marriage rites, while implicit in the New Testament are not explicitly instituted, in the way that baptism and the Eucharist are. It has rarely been the case, in Christian thinking, that a church wedding has been essential to the establishment of a marriage. The liturgical celebration of marriage is a product of a number of different things coming together: the universal ritualisation of

[77] Ibid, p.39.
[78] Ibid, p.39.
[79] Stevenson, *Nuptial Blessing,* p.191.
[80] This will be considered further in Chapter 7.

marriage, the involvement of the Church in the personal, and especially the sexual and familial life of its members, the involvement of the Church in the social structures that regulate marriage, and the interest of the church in the theological significance of marriage. All of these things, which have been outlined above, have contributed to the simple existence of Christian marriage rites, and to the particular character that those rites have had.

The early church fathers had an interest in marriage; in much the same way as the New Testament writers did, as an area of life that ought to be conducted with proper reference to the life of faith. Ignatius of Antioch, Clement of Alexandria and Tertullian commented on the subject. It is possible to read things like Ignatius' advice that Christians should 'contract their union with the advice of the Bishop'[81] or Tertullian's 'How will we ever be able adequately to describe the happiness of that marriage which the Church arranges'[82] as early evidence for liturgical celebration of marriage, but it is far from clear that this is the case. From the fourth century AD there is documentary evidence of marriages being celebrated by clergy and there are also liturgical texts: nuptial blessings. It is thought that newly married couples would come to church and have their marriages blessed in the ordinary Eucharistic celebration. From this time on evidence for specifically Christian marriage ritual proliferates. Theological discussions about marriage increasingly assume liturgical celebration, and clear categories of rites develop. The nuptial blessings continue. Stevenson argues persuasively that it is blessing that stands at the heart of the Churches marriage liturgy. To the consent, in Roman thinking and the sexual consummation in Jewish thinking, which effected the marriage, was added the blessing that only the church could offer.[83] In addition 'domestic blessings' developed, throughout the Christian world, though taking various regionally distinctive forms, as was the case with every aspect of marriage liturgy. These were rites where the household of the new couple, or perhaps their bed or bedchamber was blessed by

[81] Ignatius, *Ad Polycarpum* 5.2 in Stevenson, *Nuptial Blessing*, p.13.
[82] Tertullian, *Treatises on Marriage and Remarriage, To His Wife, Exhortation to Chastity, Monogamy*, 2.8, 6-9, cited in Stevenson, *Nuptial Blessing*, p.17.
[83] Stevenson, *Nuptial Blessing.* p.21.

a priest.[84] It seems that such rites followed on from the nuptial mass. What preceded the mass were rites of betrothal and later consent. Betrothal is the agreement to marry, and is a formal act in many societies including those in which Christianity arose and into which it expanded. Betrothal involves a commitment to marry in the future and consent involves a commitment to marry in the present. Betrothal was normal practice and consent was a requirement for a valid marriage in western Christian thinking at least. Forms of words for these commitments date from the eleventh and twelfth centuries respectively. All these elements combine in the fourteenth century liturgical manuals of the English church: Sarum, York and Hereford,[85] which differ in only insignificant ways. Sarum was very important to 'The Form of Solemnization of Matrimony' in Cranmer's 1552 prayer book, and therefore also to the 1662. The early part of the service, until the nuptial mass, is taken with very few alterations into later Anglican rites. Final calling of the banns is followed by the spousal or betrothal vows, the giving away of the bride, and then the consent formulae: the wedding vows. These vows are in the English of the period, a liturgical novelty in the western church. Here the only difference for the groom is a pre-reformation 'if holy chyrche it woll ordeyne'[86] in contrast to the later 'according to God's holy ordinance.'[87] In addition to this, the bride promises to be 'bonere and boxsom, in bedde and atte bord' instead of, subsequent to the reformation, 'to love, cherish and to obey.' The consent was followed by a nuptial mass, numerous blessings and other domestic rites[88] at home, afterwards.

These late medieval rites, so important to subsequent Christian ritualisation of marriage, were repositories for all kinds of ritual involvement in marriage on the part of the church. The ideas of consent and of blessing were central to the whole enterprise. Wedding rites articulated the importance of the consent of the couple and made an effective expression of that consent possible. The shape of these late medieval marriage services is still very evident in contemporary rites; and that

[84] Ibid, pp.49-52.
[85] Ibid, p. 9.
[86] 'Sarum Rite', in Searle and Stevenson, pp.163-178.
[87] *BCP,* p.184.
[88] Many of which were retained in popular practice, without ecclesiastical sanction, into the seventeenth century. See Gillis, *For Better for Worse*, p.63.ff.

shape is the consequence of a very particular history of marriage. Betrothal is no longer, in England at any rate, what it once was. The 'engagement' that replaced it is a weaker commitment. Nevertheless the first set of vows is retained in the wedding service. It would be easy to remove them, on the grounds that such things are a legal cultural anachronism. That this does not happen indicates something very important about liturgical texts in general and marriage rites in particular, namely that a liturgical text is never complete, because it exists to be performed and is never really finalised, given its ongoing development. The late medieval texts have been described above as 'repositories of different kinds of ritual involvement with marriage on the part of the church.' This is equally true of the more recent rites. Liturgical texts have a history and a future. All texts are, of course, written in a particular time and place. But, a liturgical text is always the next stage in an ongoing process in which the text is enacted in a particular context, which imparts to the text new layers of meaning, which in turn inform subsequent performances, and ultimately effect changes in the text. Such changes are not random and arbitrary, at least they are not supposed to be, but constantly refer back to the sources of the tradition which gave rise to the text, in this case to the Bible and to the practices of the primitive church.

So *CW* represents a stage in the development of the Anglican rites of marriage; one that derives from earlier practices and earlier texts and one that will give rise to future practices and texts, in turn. 'Practice' is equally important for contemporary, present tense Anglican marriage ritual. A wedding ceremony is not just a point in an historical discourse. It is also something that is enacted, or performed in the here and now. This performance of the rites of marriage will be examined in much more detail in later sections of this thesis, but, first, several points need to be noted. An Anglican wedding is the *performance* of a text, not just that text. The text itself includes hints as to how this should be done, but most aspects of the performance rely on, largely undocumented, convention.

An account of one particular wedding service was given in the introduction. More detailed accounts of weddings will be given in Chapters 6 and 7, which address the contemporary wedding from the perspectives of clergy and couples respectively. To reiterate, it is of great significance that an account of the liturgy

of marriage can only ever be partial when presented as a history of texts.

A particular Anglican wedding is an event in which a crucial point in the life of a couple and coincides with a point in the working life of an Anglican priest. A wedding is a very clear example of the more general truth that the Church of England's forms of worship are not just the business of those who use them for worship. They are much more widely 'owned' than that. They are part of an English, and not just an Anglican, heritage. Herein lies something very important to the liturgical celebration of marriage in the Church of England, and something that will be an important theme later in the thesis. The Church of England wedding is a phenomenon that exists in both cultural and theological space. Christian Liturgy, of marriage perhaps more than any other, is a place where the particularities of the interaction of theology and culture are especially evident.

CHAPTER 3

MARRIAGE IN ENGLISH CULTURE AND SOCIETY

The contemporary Anglican wedding is not simply an aspect of the liturgy of the Church of England. A 'church wedding' is a meaningful term in society at large; the wedding described in the introduction would be familiar to many more than regular churchgoers. The Office of National Statistics (hereafter ONS) distinguishes weddings by 'type', whether 'religious' or 'civil' and then, further, according to denomination, in the case of religious weddings, and 'register office' or 'approved premises' for non-religious weddings.[1] Such distinctions are not only technical distinctions of interest only to the authorities, but also reflect indigenous folk-models.

This chapter will examine marriage in contemporary English society. Consideration will be given to marriage law, to patterns of behaviour and attitudes in society with respect to marriage, weddings and the wedding industry. 'Contemporary English Society' is, in some ways, a problematic concept. It might appear to indicate a belief in 'English society' and thus, by extension, 'English marriage' as some kind of bounded and homogenous category completely distinct from society or marriage elsewhere. This is not the case. England has most things in common with the rest of Britain. Although there are minor differences in weddings in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, these are no greater than those between different regions in England. In a similar way, much that can be said about contemporary British society, in terms of measurable social life, is also true of other western countries. Nevertheless, certain aspects of English society that have an important bearing on contemporary weddings are the product of the distinct relationship between church and state that has existed in England. Marriage law is a most important aspect of this.

English Marriage Law

Any marriage law defines the institution, and the legitimate means of entry and

[1] National Statistics, *Population Trends No. 123 Spring 2006* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2006), p.72.

exit to it, as well as adjudicating on uncertain cases and applying sanctions where aspects of the law have been flouted. In England, at the present time, a marriage is a legally recognized permanent sexual relationship between one man and one woman. Such a relationship is brought into being by one of various legally approved ceremonies, which may be either religious, taking place in a church or other place of worship and using forms of words imbued with the theology of that tradition, or wholly secular, with no reference, however oblique, to any kind of religious or spiritual belief. The ceremony must be conducted by someone legally empowered to register the marriage: registrars, Anglican clergy (automatically registrars) or the clergy or officials of other churches who have been authorized as registrars by the General Register Office. The ceremony alone is not sufficient to effect the marriage. It is also necessary that both parties be over the age of sixteen with, or eighteen without, parental consent. Neither party may be married to anyone else; all previous marriages must have been ended by legal divorce, or the death of a former spouse. Both parties must consent freely to the marriage. If any of these requirements is not met, or if a marriage is not consummated, then that marriage can be annulled, or formally discounted as a marriage. Otherwise a marriage, and the legal rights and obligations consequent on it, persists, either until death, or until a divorce is finalised. Adultery, cruelty and desertion are grounds for divorce, as is extended separation or the 'permanent breakdown of the relationship'. These do not automatically end a marriage, but can be cited as evidence of its demise.

Marriage is a legal relationship. In most situations marriage exists alongside other similar, but not identical, relationships. What distinguishes cohabitation from marriage in contemporary England is legal status. What makes a relationship a marriage, rather than something else, is not the affection felt by the spouses, nor their mutual commitment, nor their conformity with prescribed gender roles, whatever importance those things are accorded in a culture, but whether that relationship is, in law, marriage.

However, law is not universal; a body of law operates only within defined limits, often corresponding with international boundaries. So a person can be married in one country, their relationship fulfilling that state's legal definition of marriage,

but not in another country. This is most evident in the case of polygamy, but it also applies to divorce. Brochures advertising 'wedding packages' abroad for example emphasise the need to fulfill English legal requirements for a marriage to be valid.[2] Overlapping bodies of law complicate the matter further. Religions, as well as states, have marriage law: defining marriage, controlling entry to it, and, to some degree directing behaviour within it. Where a religion is not coterminous with a state, religious individuals can be subject to both religious and statutory marriage law, which might conflict.[3] In culturally heterogeneous societies the situation is even more complex. Here, state, religion and cultural group, generally an ethnic group, peer group or social class, can all demand compliance with rules of behaviour.

In England there has been a very particular conversation between social *mores*, the state and the church. The limiting of parental influence in marriage is also a product of the extended dialogue between the Church and secular powers. The Church, following Roman practice, asserted the indispensability of the consent of the couple, over that of their parents, against customary practice throughout northern Europe. The widening grounds for divorce over the twentieth century indicate not only the declining influence of the Christian Church, or perhaps a more liberal spirit within the Church, but also changing convictions about what marriage should be, and how that might best be achieved. The Church has, furthermore, not just had an influence on marriage law. For many years, as will be seen, marriage law was the exclusive responsibility of the Church. It was the Church that defined what marriage was, which controlled entry to it and which ran the courts that adjudicated, in doubtful cases, about the status of specific marriages. This account of English marriage law therefore makes frequent mention of the Church.

Proper behaviour with respect to marriage was an explicit concern of the Church in very early encounters with the culture of what would become England. The

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[2] For example, 'Kuoni Weddings' http://www.kuoni.co.uk/weddings/legalrequirements.html (27/09/08).
[3] For example, Gillis, *For Better For Worse*, p.205.

Venerable Bede, writing in the mid eighth century AD,[4] records a correspondence between Augustine of Canterbury and Pope Gregory the Great, dating from the very late sixth century AD. Augustine reportedly asked the Pope for advice on various issues concerning the behaviour appropriate to those who convert to Christianity; four of the nine questions asked being to do with sex and marriage.[5] As well as concerns about the dangers posed to spiritual purity by sexuality, Augustine was concerned with the issue of who may marry whom. Not only was the Church possessed of moral authority with respect to its membership's sexual lives, but also the institution of marriage was something the ordering of which could not simply be left to the dictates of local culture and custom. Pope Gregory prohibits the marriage of close cousins, which was a common practice among many people in Europe. He presents his position as a revision of classical Roman law in the light of the alternative authority of the Christian scriptures, supported by the observation that children of close relatives are characteristically prone to ill health.

The consequence of this for English people who accepted Christianity was twofold. They acquired an additional set of matrimonial obligations and became participants in narratives about marriage, alien to local community and kin. By establishing rules about the marital behaviour of its members, the Church opened the way for itself to hold a key position in the policing of matrimonial affairs in the future, when it had gained more influence. In limiting the legitimate personnel of marriage, the Church additionally gained influence in kinship organisation, patterns of inheritance and the transfer of wealth.[6]

Establishing these principles meant that later, when canon law developed a higher degree of sophistication and when church courts were established, the Church had already considerable influence in society. A network of church courts developed in Western Europe after the Carolingian reforms of the eighth

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[4] Bede, *A History of the English Church and People,* trans. Leo Shirley-Price (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1955).
[5] Bede, pp.73-83.
[6] See Goody, *Development of the Family*, p.59.

century[7] and with this came an increasingly complex system of canon law. From an English perspective this meant the introduction into a legal system run on Anglo-Saxon principles, principally concerned with the household, a system of Roman law, pre-occupied with agnatic (male) lineage.[8] By the twelfth century these courts were well established in England. It was the task of the church courts to punish moral offences such as sexual immorality and drunkenness, and to control marriage and probate.[9] In practice this meant deciding, where it was disputed, whether a relationship that might be a marriage was in fact one. This was important where marriage to another party was a possibility, especially when canon law had removed the possibility of divorce. It was therefore increasingly necessary for the church to define marriage precisely. Following Roman thinking, canon law stressed the centrality of consent of the parties in rendering a marriage valid, and downplayed the importance of parental consent, vital in traditional Northern Europe. While the church courts regarded parental consent as valuable and desirable, it was not necessary for the validity of a marriage. It was mutual consent, and not participation in a church ceremony that rendered a marriage valid according to the canon law of the period. The church also increasingly set limits as to whom a person might marry, by the eleventh century asserting that people should not marry anyone within seven degrees of kinship: cousins who shared a common ancestor seven generations back.[10] This was later relaxed somewhat, but still had the effect of seriously reducing the number of potential spouses, and of increasing the churches power, as the body able to grant dispensations.[11] Limiting the rights of inheritance, together with the growing popularity of the religious life, meant that noble families in England increasingly bequeathed land and other property to the church. It is estimated that by 1060 AD ‘about a sixth of the land south of the Humber and the Mersey’ was in the hands of the Church’s sixty or so religious houses.[12] The Church acquired influence through land, and therefore a pragmatic as well as authoritative role in

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[7] See P. Toubert, ‘The Carolingian Moment’ in André Burguire *et al* (eds.), *A History of the Family. Volume I: Distant Worlds, Ancient Worlds* (Cambridge: Polity, 1996), p.397.
[8] See P. Guichard, and J.P. Cuvillier, ‘Barbarian Europe’ in Burguire *et al*, *A History of the Family. Volume I.* p.370.
[9] Goody, *Development of the Family*, p.14.
[10] Ibid, p.56.
[11] Ibid, p.45.
[12] David Edwards, *Christian England*, p.95.

marriage practices and inheritance. Goody suggests that the severe restrictions on the legitimate parties to a marriage were part of a deliberate strategy on the part of the Church not only to promote a Christian view of marriage, but also to extend its influence in society more generally.[13] Others see in such events a manipulation of the Church's teaching on marriage by those powerful families who had something to gain from limiting the claims on their estate.[14] Either way, the church had acquired a great deal of power in the legal control of marriage. Marriage as a legal reality was defined and regulated by the Church.

The Reformation affected not only the Church, but corresponded with enormous political changes throughout Western Europe. The fragile political and religious unity of 'Christendom' was broken, and political and religious institutions began to take on new, and increasingly independent, forms. Every schoolchild knows that the occasion for the Reformation in England was Henry VIII's divorce, and certainly a consequence of the English Reformation was the end of Roman jurisdiction in matrimonial matters. One of the reformers' many objections to catholic ecclesiastical practice was that the Church abused the power it had in the control of marriage. As noted above, the reformers' radical re-appraisal of sacramental theology meant that marriage was no longer regarded as a sacrament; marriage was defined as intrinsically secular. Nevertheless, in England, the Church retained much of its political power. With the suppression of the monasteries, marriage became the only spiritually legitimate path to take in life. The rise of the bourgeois merchant class saw the rise of the family as an economic unit.[15] Reformers identified the key unit of social organization and Christian corporate identity as the family.

Lord Hardwicke's Marriage Act of 1753 was a critical piece of marital legislation. It meant that the marriages of everyone, with the specific exceptions of Jews and Quakers, had to take place in the Anglican parish church after the publication of banns, public announcements of the forthcoming marriage. All

[13] Goody, *Development of the Family*, p.45.
[14] Katherine Verdery 'A Comment on Goody's "Development of the Family and Marriage in Europe"'. *Journal of Family History,* vol.13, no.2 (1988), 265-270.
[15] See Stone, *The Family* and Edward Shorter, *The Making of the Modern Family*.

marriages had to be entered into the parish register and signed by both parties and witnesses. Marriages previously celebrated at times and in places declared illegal by the 1604 canons were declared invalid. These required a marriage to take place between 8am and noon in the parish church of one of the couple to be married, after the reading of banns for three weeks. Spouses had to be over twenty-one to marry without parental consent.[16] Lastly, the enforcement of marriage legislation became the responsibility of secular rather than ecclesiastical courts.[17] The declared intention was to prevent clandestine marriages, particularly those of minors, who could thwart their parents' matrimonial ambitions by marrying or even just becoming betrothed secretly, rendering subsequent marriages invalid. An additional effect was to end the situation where customary marriage,[18] contracted without the ceremonial assistance of either church or state, was nevertheless regarded as real marriage by both. Of course, such legislation was only possible because of the nature of the relationship between the Church of England and the British state, a product of the English reformation and subsequent upheavals. The Hardwicke Act was passed in the face of considerable opposition. It was argued that the aristocracy would use the powers allocated to parents in this bill to prevent the marriage of their heirs to commoners, thereby concentrating wealth in the hands of the few, that it would lead to arranged, loveless marriages which would encourage adultery and furthermore it would make marriage much harder for poor people, which would increase illegitimacy and other social evils.[19] In addition it represented, in Trevelyan's words, 'an intolerable insult to the religious feelings of Protestant Dissenters and still more of Roman Catholics.'[20] Nevertheless the act was passed. It marked an important turning point in the legal history of marriage, introducing a rational secular law of marriage, defining the legitimate personnel and the acceptable legal process, and marking the end of a situation where theological definitions of marriage carried the weight of law. The Church gained the responsibility to solemnise all marriages, but lost the right to adjudicate in

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[16] Stone, p.32.
[17] Ibid, p.35.
[18] This would include marriage by popular rites, and also betrothal followed by cohabitation.
[19] Stone, p.36-7.
[20] G.M.Trevelyan, *English Social History* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, new ed. 1986), p.528.

marital disputes, and even to define marriage in an enforceable way without reference to the secular law of the land. The Hardwicke Act, while apparently reasserting the unity of the English state and the Church of England, nevertheless marks the effective removal of marriage into the secular sphere. Subsequently, the role of the Church in marriage legislation was to be very different, in accordance with wider changes in relations between church and state.

The inadequacy of the Hardwicke Act to cater for the actual population of England and Wales was acknowledged by the 1836 Marriage Act, coming into force in 1837. This allowed civil marriage and permitted Roman Catholics and Non-Conformists to be married in their own churches. Such an act could not have been passed had the bonds between state and established church not been loosened, 'the secular' and 'the spiritual' increasingly regarded as separate spheres. The privileging of the Church of England as the place where the religious obligations of the English must be met proved to be short lived.

The 1949 Marriage Act made no significant changes, but restated in a more systematic form the existing rather piece meal provisions. In 1995 the 1994 Marriage Act came into force, which allowed civil ceremonies for couples outside their district of residence and also made provision for civil ceremonies to be performed in 'approved premises' other than register offices, such as hotels. It remains the case that civil wedding ceremonies, of whatever kind, must be wholly secular. Not only must they exclude prayers, but also any reading or even music with religious associations. From December 2005 same sex couples have been able to register 'civil partnerships', with the option of a civil ceremony almost identical to a civil wedding. While such partnerships are not designated 'marriage' the same rights and limitations are attached to them as regards inheritance or the freedom to marry or enter into a civil partnership with someone else.

Marriage in Practice

Statistics

Law is only ever a partial guide to people's actual behaviour. Marriage law functions less to establish enforceable rules of behaviour, than to clearly define categories with which to order and describe sexual and domestic behaviour. With

certain exceptions[21] people are legally free to live or have sexual relationships with whomever they choose. However they do this in a legal context that describes certain patterns of behaviour as 'marriage,' in order to define and limit specific rights and responsibilities. By marrying, people are not obeying the law, any more than they are disobeying it. They are, however, entering a legally meaningful state, the entry and exit of which are clearly marked. Because these entrances and exits are formal legal acts, and because marriage itself is a formal legal category, marital behaviour can, in part be measured. It is this measurable aspect of marriage in contemporary England that is the subject of this section.

In 2005 51.7% of men and 49% of women, aged 16 and over in England and Wales were married, and more than 63.3% and 70.7%, respectively, had been married at some point in their lives.[22] In 2006 there were 236,980 weddings in England and Wales. Of these 144,120 were first marriages for both partners, and 92,870 were remarriages for one or both partners.[23] Most wedding ceremonies were civil, with religious ceremonies accounting for 33.5% of all marriages.[24] Religious weddings were proportionately more popular for couples neither of whom was divorced.[25] The average age for first marriages in 2006 was 31.8 for men and 29.7 for women.[26] For remarriages couples were inevitably older: 46 and 43.1 respectively.[27]

A substantial number of people are not married. 36.8% of men and 29.4% of women are currently single and have never been married, 8.1% and 10%, respectively, are divorced and 3.5% and 11.7% are widowed.[28] Household type

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[21] See 'Brook Advisory Services' http://www.brook.org.uk/consent/55_1_consent.asp (27/09/08).
[22] 'Population estimates over 16 by marital status, 1991-2005.' from National Statistics, *Population Trends Spring 2007 No. 127* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2007), p.66.
[23] 'Summary of Marriages, 1981, 1991, 1996, 2001-6' National Statistics, *Population Trends Summer 2008 No.132* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2007), p.66.
[24] 'Marriages by previous marital status and manner of solemnisation, 1991, 2001-2006. England and Wales.' *Population Trends 132.* p.68.
[25] 'Table 3.31. Marriages: previous marital statuses of bride and bridegroom, type of ceremony and denomination, 2005.' *Marriage Series FM2 no. 33. Marriage, Divorce and Adoption Statistics. Review of the Registrar General on Marriages and Divorces in 2005, and Adoptions in 2006 in England and Wales* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2008), p.58.
[26] 'First marriages: age and sex.' *Population Trends 132* p.60.
[27] 'Remarriages: age, sex and previous marital status.' *Population Trends 132* p.62.
[28] 'Population Estimates over 16 by marital status, 1991-2005' *Population Trends 127*, p.66.

records a similar pattern. The General Household Survey for 2006 found, in Great Britain as a whole, that 31% of all households consist of a single person, 47% consist of a married couple and 9% of a cohabiting couple (with or without children). Single-parent households account for 10% of the total.[29]

This represents marked changes in behaviour in recent years. While marriage is popular it is significantly less popular than it was. As recently as 1991 60% of men and 56% of women were married, and 69% of men and 77% of women had been married at some point. Marriage became increasingly popular over the twentieth century, reaching a high point of popularity in about 1971, when 71% of men and 65% of women were married.[30] It was around this time that weddings reached their peak in popularity too. In 1971 there were 404,700 weddings in England and Wales[31] for a total population of 49,152,000,[32] a marriage rate of 69 per thousand of unmarried population over the age of 16. By 2000 this rate was 26.7 per thousand[33] and by 2005 it was 23.1 per thousand.[34] Other aspects of marital behaviour have also seen significant change. In 1971 19.8% of weddings were second or subsequent marriages for one or both partners, but by 2005 the proportion was 40.1%.[35] The average age at marriage declined steadily over the twentieth century from 27 for men and 26 for women in 1900 to 24 and 22 respectively in 1970. Thereafter age at first marriage increased, reaching the 1900 level by about 1991,[36] and continuing to increase subsequently.

These changes in patterns of marriage relate closely to other characteristics of contemporary English society. An increasing number of people either co-habit

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[29] 'Table 3.5. Type of Household: 1979-2006' National Statistics, *General Household Survey. Results for 2006* (Norwich: HMSO, 2008), p.284.
[30] 'Table 2.8: Proportion of the population: by marital status and sex. (Great Britain).' National Statistics, *Social Trends. No.33: 2003 Edition* (London: TSO, 2003), p.45.
[31] 'Table 2.1: Vital statistics summary' National Statistics, *Population Trends 107 Spring 2002* (London: TSO, 2002), p.65.
[32] 'Table 1.7: Components of population change.' *Population Trends 107*, p.64.
[33] 'Table 2.1 vital statistics summary' *Population Trends 107*, p.65.
[34] 'Table 2.1: Vital statistics summary.' National Statistics, *Population Trends Spring 2008. No.131*. (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000), p.50.
[35] 'Table 4. Marriages by previous marital status and manner of solemnisation, 1991, 2001-2006' *Population Trends 132*, p.68.
[36] 'Table 9.1:First marriages: age and sex (England and Wales)' National Statistics *Population Trends Spring 2004 No.116* (London: TSO, 2004).

with a partner without being married or live alone. Divorce is common and is one of the reasons why substantial numbers of children live in one-parent or stepfamilies, the other being an increase in the proportion of births to single women.

Cohabitation is an important contemporary alternative to marriage, though not something that government agencies collected data on until comparatively recently. The first questions about cohabitation were put to women between the ages of 18 and 49 in the General Household Survey of 1979. In 1979 11% of women in the age group questioned said that they had cohabited at some time. In 1998 the proportion of women in the same age group saying they had cohabited was 29%.[37] If anything this is a rather conservative estimate; in 1998 71.2% of all marrying couples gave identical addresses in the marriage register.[38] By 2005 the figure was 79.8%, though it remained less common for the youngest couples and couples marrying in religious ceremonies.[39] Cohabitation has an interesting history, which cannot be adequately addressed at this point.[40] Suffice it to say that it is not an invention of the late twentieth century western world. In most cultures there exist similar categories of relationship. This was certainly the case in pre-modern England. Indeed it was well into the nineteenth century before formal, legal marriage had achieved the normative role in heterosexual relationships that it enjoyed for most of the twentieth century. Some argue, on the strength of this, that contemporary cohabitation represents a return to flexible pre-modern patterns of marriage.[41] This may be so, but contemporary co-habitation is not simply an informal kind of marriage or betrothal. It is a complex and an imprecise category, including the most casual and temporary of sexual relationships, 'trial marriages' and faithful, committed relationships between

[37] National Statistics, *Social Trends 2001 No.31* (London: TSO, 2001), p.44.

[38] 'Table 3.39: Marriages (numbers and percentages): previous marital statuses of bride and bridegroom, type of ceremony and whether bride and bridegroom gave identical residential addresses before marriage, 1998' National Statistics *Series FM No.26. Marriage, Divorce and Adoption Statistics 1998*. (London: TSO, 2000), p.69.

[39] 'Table 3.39: Marriages (numbers and percentages): previous marital statuses of bride and bridegroom, type of ceremony and whether bride and bridegroom gave identical residential addresses before marriage, 2005' *Series FM No.33. Marriage, Divorce and Adoption Statistics* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2008), p.67.

[40] See Gillis, *For Better, For Worse.*

[41] For example, Adrian Thatcher, 'Living Together before Marriage' in Adrian Thatcher (ed.), *Celebrating Christian Marriage*, 55-70.

people who have made a conscientious decision to cohabit as a permanent alternative to marriage. However, for most people cohabitation is a stage on the way to marriage. *Social Trends 2001* cites the finding that 75% of 'never married' childless co-habitees, under 35 years of age, questioned in 1998, expected to marry each other. It goes on to observe that 'for most people cohabitation is part of the process of getting married and is not a substitute for marriage.'[42]

Co-habitation is by no means the only contemporary alternative to marriage. The population of single adults has increased steadily. A relatively high proportion of the adult population is presently single. In 2005, 36.8% of men and 29.4% of women were currently single and had never been married.[43] This represents an increase from 24% and 19% respectively in 1971.[44] This is mirrored in the contemporary prevalence of single person households. In Great Britain, in 2007, 29% of households were inhabited by one person, in contrast with 18% in 1971 and only 7% in 1931.[45]

It is impossible to consider marriage in contemporary England without considering divorce. Of marriages contracted at the present time, many anticipate that around 45% will end in divorce.[46] Until 1857 divorce was possible for men, though not women, in Britain, but required the passing of a private act of parliament. The 1857 Matrimonial Clauses Act meant that a divorce petition could be made, and granted in a civil court, to either a man or a woman. A man was required to show adultery on the part of his wife. A woman had to demonstrate adultery and an 'additional offence.' In 1924 these additional conditions for wives were removed, and in 1938 the grounds for a divorce were

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[42] *Social Trends 31*, p.45.
[43] 'Population estimates over 16 by marital status, 1991-2005.' *Population Trends 127.* p.66.
[44] 'Proportion of the population by marital status and gender. (Great Britain)' National Statistics, *Social Trends 2002 No.32* (London: TSO, 2002), p.42.
[45] 'Table 2.2: Households: By type of household and family' *Social Trends 38: 2008 Editio*n (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), p. 17. 1931 figure from 'Table 1.1: Trends in the Family, United Kingdom' in A.H. Hawsey (ed.), *British Social Trends Since 1900* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1988), p.21. From 1991: From 'Table 3.5:Type of Household:1979 to 2000' National Statistics, *Living in Britain 2000* (London: TSO, 2001), p.17.
[46] B. Wilson & S. Smallwood, 'The Proportion of Marriages Ending in Divorce' pp.28-36 *Population Trends 131*, p. 28.

widened. The Legal Aid Act of 1960 meant people of limited financial means could pursue cases, including divorce, in the civil courts. The 1969 Divorce Reform Act, which came into force in England and Wales in 1971, meant that divorce could be granted on the basis of the 'irretrievable breakdown of the marriage.' A person petitioning for divorce had to prove adultery, desertion, separation or unreasonable behaviour. It was this last Act of Parliament that appeared to prompt a marked increase in the rates of divorce, which stood at less than 3 per thousand of the married population in the United Kingdom, until 1971. Since then the rate increased until reaching 13.5 per thousand in 1991 and there has been little variation since.[47] Divorce has implications for marriage as a social institution. It is sometimes argued that marital instability increases in proportion to the ease of divorce. Equally, where divorce is an option, people who remain married can be seen as actively choosing to do so. Divorce has implications for household formation. The rise in numbers of marriages ending in divorce is one of the factors that contribute to the rise of single person households, described above. Divorce also accounts for part of the increase in lone parent families, and for most contemporary stepfamilies.

Lone parent families are another common feature of contemporary domestic life. In 2007 in Great Britain approximately 10% of households contain lone parent families, an increase from 7% in 1971.[48] Lone parent households are not a recent phenomenon. However the origins of contemporary lone parent families are different from what they were. Divorce overtook the death of a spouse as the main cause of lone parent families in the late 1960s and lone families headed by women who had never married numerically overtook those headed by divorced or separated women in 1991.[49] These continue to increase as a proportion of the total, as a consequence of the rise in the relative number of births to unmarried women. Until 1960 the rate of births to unmarried mothers in the United

[47] From 'Table 2.11: Divorce by Gender and Age' National Statistics *Population and Vital Statistics 1997*(London: TSO, 1997), p.16. Also 'Table 4.1 Divorces (numbers and rates): sex and age at divorce, 1995-2005) in *Series FM2 No.33 Marriage, Divorce and Adoption Statistics,* p.72.
[48] 'Table 2.2: Households: by type of household and family.' National Statistics, *Social Trends 2008. No. 38* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2008), p.17.
[49] 'Families headed by lone parents as a percentage of all families with dependent children. By marital status, 1971-1998/9' 'National Statistics, *Social Trends 30,*' http://www.statistics.gov.uk (30/11/08).

Kingdom stood at about 5% of all births, rising briefly to a little less than 10% immediately following the first and second world wars. Since 1970, the proportion has increased rapidly.[50] In 2006, 44% of all births in England and Wales were to unmarried women, though 64% of these were joint registrations, with both mother and father named.[51]

Measurable behaviour in respect of marriage and partnership formation has evidently changed considerably in recent years. This extends to where couples choose to get married. Numbers of weddings have decreased consistently in England since the early 1970s, with church weddings decreasing at an even faster rate. From the introduction of civil weddings in 1836 they have grown as a proportion of all weddings. In 1971, the year that saw the greatest total number of weddings in England and Wales, 58.7% of wedding ceremonies were religious, 39.6% being Anglican.[52] In 1983 civil ceremonies overtook religious ones as the most common form of wedding ceremony. This is partly accounted for by an increase of the proportion of total weddings where one or more partners had been previously married and divorced, many churches being reluctant to celebrate such marriages. However, even for first marriages for both partners, religious weddings in general and Church of England weddings in particular have decreased in popularity. The introduction of civil weddings in 'approved premises' had a noticeable effect on this. Such weddings have grown in popularity since their introduction and in 2006 accounted for 40% of all marriages in England and Wales. Much of this increase was at the expense of civil weddings in register offices, but the decline in religious weddings is marked, numbers having nearly halved since 1991 to 34% of the total.[53] This declining enthusiasm for religious weddings is often cited as key evidence in accounts of secularisation in the west:[54] evidence that religious institutions have

[50]'Births outside marriage: EU Comparison.' 'National Statistics *Social Trends 34'*, http://www.statistics.gov.uk (30/11/08).
[51] 'Annual update: births in England & Wales, 2006', *Population Trends 131*, p.68.
[52] 'Marriages, 1837-2000: Type of ceremony and denomination. b. Proportions' From Table 3.8B in Marriage and Divorce Statistics (Historical Series FM2 No167) Table 3.10. FM2 Vol. No.20, Tables 3.29.FM2 Vols.No.26,27,28, 'Marriage and Divorce Statistics' http://www.statistics.gov.uk (30/11/08).
[53] 'Report: Marriages in England and Wales, 2006.' pp.65-70. *Population Trends 132.* p.65.
[54] Ross McKibbin, *Classes & Cultures: England 1918-1951* (Oxford: OUP, 1998), p.294.

lost influence in society and that religious ideas no longer have the influence they once did.

Attitudes

Such statistics are necessary for a truthful picture of the place of marriage in contemporary England, but seldom sufficient, for the fact that people marry reveals very little about why they marry. There is as much diversity in the opinions of individuals as there is in their behaviour. Marriage is widely understood as a very important form of sexual relationship, in some sense an ideal type of relationship against which others are measured. The General Household Survey[55] research indicates that most cohabiting couples intend to marry, regarding marriage as the goal of a committed relationship.[56] The NCSR's[57] *BSA 18th Report* elaborates on this positive attitude to marriage.[58] Noting the 'dramatic changes over the last few decades in people's behaviour in relation to marriage and cohabitation,' it describes its task in the following way: 'to assess whether these changes have been accompanied by changing attitudes towards marriage and cohabitation.'[59] 59% of its respondents agree that 'marriage is still the best kind of relationship' and only 9% think that it is 'only a piece of paper.' This research also indicated the prevalent view that marriage was to be properly regarded as a serious undertaking, 69% of people thinking that 'too many people just drift into marriage without really thinking about it'. The same research also concluded that while 'marriage is still widely valued as an ideal' it 'is regarded with much more ambivalence in terms of its role in partnering and (especially) parenting.' The positive attitude people have about marriage in principle does not extend to believing it has 'any advantage over cohabitation in everyday life.'[60] This rather ambivalent attitude to marriage was

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[55] The General Household Survey is a continuous social survey run by the Social Survey Division of the Office of National Statistics since 1971 to gather information from private households on a number of areas, including households and families.
[56] *Social Trends 31*, p.45.
[57] The National Centre of Social Research (NCSR) is an independent social research body, investigating a wide range of social attitudes. It has published *British Social Attitudes* annually since its foundation in 1969.
[58] 'Just a Piece of Paper? Marriage and Cohabitation' in Alison Park (ed.), *British Social Attitudes - the 18th Report*. (London: NCSR/SAGE: 2001).
[59] Ibid, p.31.
[60] Ibid, p.51.

also seen in the conclusions of several other substantial pieces of research into social attitudes.[61]

Attitudes to marriage cannot be separated from attitudes to sexual and domestic behaviour more generally. The *BSA* survey also indicates increasingly 'liberal' social attitudes to things such as divorce, pre-marital sex, extra-marital births, same-sex relationships and cohabitation.[62] Cohabitation is a complex area on which to establish attitudes. As noted above, it is something of a catchall term covering all domestic sexual relationships that are not legal marriage. Consequently, cohabitation, like marriage, is not simply something that people are 'for' or 'against'. Notwithstanding this, it is certainly the case that social attitudes have moved very rapidly away from the idea of cohabitation as 'living in sin'. The rapid increase in the numbers of people cohabiting corresponds with social attitudes that regard cohabitation as both normal and acceptable. The *BSA 24th Report* includes extensive considerations of cohabitation. It corroborates earlier research about the normative status of cohabitation and its widespread contemporary acceptability.[63]

Singleness is an equally complex issue, but for rather different reasons. Cohabitation is a way of life that is chosen. Indeed in many ways cohabitation in contemporary England is symbolic of choice, of diversity of options for the ordering of domestic life and of the requirement to choose for oneself, rather than proceed along some inevitable course. Singleness on the other hand is not necessarily chosen at all; many people living alone are widowed or divorced. While an increasing proportion of single people are younger people who have never married or cohabited, it would be premature to conclude that all younger people living alone do so in preference to marriage or cohabitation. Questions were put to the respondents of the 1993 *International Social Attitudes: The 10th BSA Report* as to the advice they would give to young men and women on their

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[61] For example, Elsa Ferri (ed.), *Life at 33: The Fifth Follow-up of the National Child Development Study* (London: National Children's Bureau, 1993) and Susan McRae (ed.), *Changing Britain, Families and Households in the 1990s* (Oxford: OUP, 1999).
[62] Park, 'Just a Piece of Paper?'.
[63] Alison Park, *et al* (eds.), *British Social Attitudes. The 24th Report* (London: Sage: 2008).

living arrangements. In Britain only 4% of people advised such people to ‘live alone, without a steady partner’. A further 4% advised cohabitation without marrying, and 43% and 37% respectively advised marriage after cohabitation, and marriage without first cohabiting.[64] Singleness tends to be regarded as a state of life that might have certain advantages, rather than one to be chosen from a range of options.

Divorce is unlikely to be regarded entirely positively; being inevitably occasioned by unhappy circumstances. However attitudes here have changed markedly as well. The considerable social stigma attached to divorce in the recent past, and the difficulty and expense of obtaining a divorce, meant that people were inclined to remain in a marriage, even when it was unhappy. At present people are much less inclined to endorse the view that others should persist in difficult or unsatisfactory marriages. Equally important to contemporary social attitudes is the normalisation of divorce; like cohabitation it is a familiar part of the social world of contemporary England.

So too are single parent, most commonly single-mother, families. Such families are by no means a unique social phenomenon of the late twentieth century. Until well into the twentieth century death rates were such that substantial numbers of parents died before their children grew up. However, divorce overtook death as the cause of one-parent families in the early 1970s and from the mid 1980s births to unmarried women accounted for the majority of single parent families. Attitudes to single parents are ambivalent. While most of the stigma that once attached to giving birth outside marriage has been lost, what remains tends to be focused on those, often very young women who are financially dependent on the state.

Interpretations of the patterns of behaviour and attitudes outlined above are complicated, involving as they do answers not only to ‘what is happening?’ but also ‘is what is happening a good thing?’ That change is happening is not in

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[64] ‘The Family Way’ in *International Social Attitudes: The 10th BSA Report* (London: Sage: 2001), p.26.

doubt, but where some see revolutionary change and the rapid, unprecedented decline of marriage (and the family) at the expense of a burgeoning individualism, others see a more complex picture that includes important continuities. As to the desirability of change, responses mirror the Christian theological interpretations of contemporary marriage, outlined in the previous chapter.[65] Some are positive about this 'individualisation',[66] and sanguine about its possibilities for individual happiness and the democratization of human relationships. Others also perceive radical change, but are anything but sanguine about the implications of this for society or for individuals.[67] Here, the decline of popularity of marriage in favour of co-habitation or non-domestic, short-lived sexual relationships is taken as a symptom of the declining cultural value of faithfulness. Divorce is further evidence of a declining capacity for unselfish commitment. The increased level of paternal absence, a consequence of both divorce and the increasing frequency of births to single mothers is an area of particular concern, because of the considerable levels of poverty for women and children that result and conversely, the suspicion that men are peripheral to the contemporary family. Those who question the extent of 'individualisation' in practice[68] are inevitably less inclined to interpret the contemporary situation as a cultural crisis, whether positive or negative. So while Duncan and Phillips, for example find significant change, they conclude that 'the social rules surrounding marriage have relaxed rather than vanished entirely' and that 'people ascribe centrality to maintaining good relationships and functional family lives, not to their own self-projects in isolation.'[69]

A common theme is the great importance attached to the quality of a relationship in contemporary England, again discussed in the previous chapter. The relational quality of a marriage has been a longstanding concern: companionship and

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[65] See Don Browning's 'World Family Trends' in Gill, R. (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Christian Ethics* (Cambridge: CUP, 2001) pp.242-259. Also his 'The World Situation of Families: Marriage Reformation as a Cultural Work' in Thatcher, *Celebrating Christian Marriage* pp.3-20.
[66] Giddens, *The Transformation of Intimacy*.
[67] See, for example P. Morgan, *Marriage Lite: the Rise of Cohabitation and its Consequences* (London: Institute of Civil Society, 1999).
[68] See Simon Duncan, and Miranda Phillips, 'New Families? Tradition and Change in Modern Relationships', in Park, *BSA: The 24th Report*, 1-28.
[69] Duncan and Phillips, p.25-26.

mutual affection have been perennially seen as important to marriage. Gillis' conjugal ideal[70] is embodied in the 'companionate marriage,' characterised by mutual affection and co-operation instead of a rigid hierarchy and distinction of roles.[71] The success of a marriage is liable to be judged less by the number of children, or the family's prosperity and status, than by the extent to which the couple derive satisfaction from their relationship. Such satisfaction is variously seen as deriving from the couple's 'compatibility': the extent to which they get on well as friends or companions, or from their being 'in love.'

As a necessarily wholly subjective emotional state it is impossible to describe love accurately. This does not, however, restrict attempts to do so. The state of being in love is generally taken to mean overwhelming emotional and sexual attraction to a particular person. Such an emotional condition is not a recent discovery, but many historians of the family note that it is only recently it has been seen as something to be acted upon, rather than an emotional storm to be weathered.[72] While the rather sweeping assumptions about the unimportance of affection for previous generations, on the part of Stone and Shorter, can be regarded with some scepticism,[73] it is evident that sentiments are accorded a great significance in the contemporary establishment and maintenance of sexual relationships. Many commentators would agree with Allan and Crowe when they say 'romantic, sexual love in particular is used to justify behaviour which in other contexts, and in other eras, would have been unacceptable.'[74]

Closely related to the high value attached to the romantic and sexual quality of a relationship, is the individualism, or personal autonomy, mentioned above and in the previous chapter. Giddens associates the 'pure relationship'[75] with a sexual ethic emancipated from any restrictions, 'save for those entailed by the

[70] Gillis, *For Better for Worse*, pp.3-8.
[71] See, for example Dominian, p.30.
[72] Stone, p.272 and Edward Shorter, p.140.
[73] Goody, *The Development of the Family*, p5.
[74] Graham Allan, and Graham Crow, *Families, Households and Society* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001), p.57.
[75] See Chapter 1.

negotiated norms of the pure relationship.'[76] Chief among the abandoned restrictions are those imposed by religion; in an English context the Church. Such liberation from theological limits on sexual behaviour is associated by many with the decline in church weddings; both taken as key evidence of secularisation.[77] But the freedom and autonomy of which Shorter and Giddens speak are by no means the only observable features of marriage or relationships more generally in contemporary England, as will be seen in Chapter 7. Notwithstanding the loosening of the bonds of social obligation, people still live in networks of family and friends, who have opinions about their friends' or relatives' conduct and who are affected by that conduct. Also, there still exist certain expected patterns of behaviour and accepted social categories with which to describe and interpret such behaviour, [78] as well as accepted means of moving from one such category to another, including weddings.

Weddings in Contemporary England

While marriage is declining in popularity, most people still do marry. Indeed, weddings are thriving in ordinary lives and in the collective imagination; evident in the persistent enthusiasm for stories, both fictional and factual, about weddings. Romantic love and marriage have long provided material for all forms of narrative, consolidated by the rise of the novel. The development of photography and cinema introduced a visual element into the collective imagining of weddings.[79] Photography, as Lansdell demonstrates, allows people at a considerable social or geographical remove to copy the wedding fashions of the wealthy, especially royalty. Film extends this influence further, combining narrative and image and enacting, rather than simply displaying or describing, 'proper' ritual behaviour.

Doing things 'properly' is no less a concern in actual weddings.[80] Who might

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[76] Ibid, p.194.

[77] Callum Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain. Understanding Secularisation 1800-2000* (London: Routledge, 2001).

[78] Duncan and Phillips, p.25.

[79] See Avril Lansdell, *History in Camera. Wedding Fashions 1860-1980* (Princess Risborough: Shire, 1983).

[80] See Chapter 7.

have the authority to determine what constitutes 'properly' is, however, not easily determined. There exist certain legal requirements. A wedding, in England must be celebrated indoors between 8am and 6pm in a building approved for weddings. Anglican parish churches and register offices are automatically licensed. Most churches and many non-Christian places of worship are also authorized for weddings[81] and since 1994 many 'approved premises' have been licensed for weddings. A wedding must conform to a fixed form to be effective: vows must be exchanged in the present tense in the presence of a recognized registrar and two witnesses. There is also much customary practice associated with weddings, transmitted by several means. Firstly, friends and family, especially when a wedding is being planned, tell marrying couples about the 'traditional' or the 'right' way to do things. Secondly, there are numerous wedding etiquette books. From *Debrett's Wedding Guide*[82] to the *Bloke's Guide to Getting Married,*[83] the once thriving market for instruction manuals on etiquette is now squarely, and almost exclusively focused on the wedding. These books are widely read and referred to. Some wedding customs are enormously widespread. Processions, feasting, flowers, and special clothes are associated with weddings in most societies.[84] Other practices are more peculiar to England, sometimes to particular regions or social classes.[85] The white dress as normal wear for brides originated with Queen Victoria. The tiered white wedding cake,[86] engagement rings, and honeymoons evolved into their present form in the same period. While such practices originated among the Victorian middle classes, they become common for all classes of British society by the mid twentieth century and indeed have proved attractive additions to weddings in very diverse cultures.[87] This is not a one-way process. Weddings seem to be occasions that invite elaboration and attract additional practices.

Church weddings in general and Anglican weddings in particular demonstrate

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[81] 'Table 3.43. Buildings of Worship in which marriages may be solemnised: area of location as at 30 June 2005, and denomination' *Marriage Series FM2 No.33,* p.70.
[82] Debrett's, *Debrett's Wedding Guide* (London: Debrett's, 2007).
[83] Jon Smith, *The Bloke's Guide to Getting Married* (London: Hay House, 2007).
[84] See Stephens, *The Family in Cross Cultural Perspective* (Washington: UPA, 1963)
[85] See Gillis for examples of local customs associated with weddings.
[86] Charsley, *Wedding Cakes.*
[87] See Vassos, *Tradition and Modernity* and Edwards, *Modern Japan Through its Weddings*.

this. As described above, church weddings took some time to develop and much longer before any Church regarded them as essential. In England the period when a wedding had to take place in church was very short: from the Hardwicke Act of 1753 to the 1835 Marriage Act, which allowed civil ceremonies. This set up the persistent firm distinction in England between 'religious' and 'civil weddings. The form of a religious wedding is determined by its denomination as well as legal requirements. Until 1983 the majority of English weddings were 'religious,' which accounts for the fact that a 'traditional English wedding,' and its near synonym a 'white wedding,' both widely used, is a church wedding, and most likely also an Anglican one. Gillis maintains that most civil weddings up to his time of writing took place because family disapproval, pregnancy or military service necessitated a quick or unobtrusive ceremony,[88] though a minority were chosen for conscientious reasons. Cost was also a significant factor. Ironically perhaps, while Christian commentators have regularly criticized the ostentation and expense of weddings, a civil, register office wedding is widely seen as the economical option. It remains the case in popular thinking and in wedding etiquette guides,[89] that the choice for couples, at least until 1994, was between a 'big', 'traditional' church wedding and a 'simple', cheap register office wedding. This subsuming of the 'religious' into the 'traditional' is often assumed, in scholarship as well as in etiquette books. [90] While such a position is not, as I will argue later, wholly adequate, the understanding of a church wedding as an important aspect of the elaborate whole that constitutes a 'proper' English wedding is important.

The Wedding Industry

It is never easy to determine the influences that animate such elaboration of tradition. A persistent desire to re-emphasise the special, set-apart nature of the event must be important. The wedding industry must also be considered here. The 'wedding industry' is a term applied to those businesses that depend, either wholly or partially on weddings. Hotels, photographers, car hire firms and

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[88] Gillis, *For Better for Worse* p.298.

[89] Among many others: Cathy Howes, *Weddings. All the Information, Advice and Inspiration You Need for the Perfect Wedding* (London: Collins, 2005).

[90] See Boden, p.83 and Purbrick, p.24.

florists are part of the latter category, though some may focus almost exclusively on weddings. Wedding dress shops are the clearest example of the former. With the exception of a few national chain stores and franchises, most of the firms that constitute the wedding industry are small businesses, with few employees beyond the owner. What brings them together is a collective infrastructure of promotion. The least assertive aspect of this is the listings in the Yellow Pages.[91] Innumerable websites supply similar, but more detailed information.[92] 'Wedding Fayres' are another significant promotional strategy. From the enormous National Wedding Show at Earl's Court and the National Exhibition Centre in Birmingham, 'with over 300 experts and its inspirational features'[93] to small events organised by local hotels, these have a similar form. Businesses, which offer things that marrying couples might want, hire stalls, which are set up to display their products or services, to attract potential customers and, if possible, to take bookings or orders. Lastly are the numerous[94] bridal magazines currently available in Britain. Published, in most cases bi-monthly, these are thick magazines, the bridal counterpart of the monthly 'glossies' and published by the same publishing firms, in some cases with titles that associate the bridal publication closely with an ordinary magazine.[95] Where the bridal magazines differ from the ordinary glossies is that they consist, almost entirely, of advertisements for goods and services associated with weddings, wedding dresses being the product that dominates.

Taken as a whole the wedding industry is big business. While precise figures are impossible to come by, in 2000 the United Kingdom wedding market was estimated to be worth £4.5 billion per annum.[96] The cost of the average wedding has been estimated at £15,000.[97] While the figures are open to question as an

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[91] 'Wedding Guide' *Yellow Pages. Wakefield & Huddersfield 2007/8* (Reading: Yell Ltd, 2007) pp.1230-1244.
[92] For example: http://www.confetti.co.uk and http://www.weddingguideuk.com (26/09/08).
[93] http://www.nationalweddingshow.co.uk (26/09/08).
[94] *W.H.Smith* in Huddersfield stocked eighteen in September 2008.
[95] *Cosmopolitan* and *Cosmo Bride*, for example.
[96] Boden p.53. (Boden cites data derived from *You & Your Wedding*, printed in *the Guardian* 18/05/03).
[97] S. Haurat, 'Average Cost of Wedding Tops £15,000' http://www.guardian.co.uk/money/feb/12/planning yourwedding.business [Source: *You & Your Wedding*] (12/05/08).

accurate picture of what people really spend, deriving as they do from organisations with a considerable interest in establishing high expenditure as normal,[98] still they represent a significant increase in wedding expenditure in real terms.[99] Such expenditure is not universal, of course. Nor is it mandatory. Apart from the option of a small wedding, there still exists a kind of informal wedding economy, where friends and family members provide the food, drink, flowers and special clothes that correspond with cultural norms, but with little involvement of the wedding industry as such. The significance of this is suggested by Boden's and Purbrick's observations that the wedding industry in general, and bridal magazines in particular, have deliberately represented friends and family as a threat to brides' pursuit of the ideal wedding.[100]

The wedding industry, while it has seen considerable expansion in recent years is not a new thing. Floristry, photography, dress and cake-making on a professional basis have attracted custom from weddings for a long time.[101] Nevertheless the upturn in its fortunes, corresponding with a decline in numbers of weddings overall is interesting. Boden, as described in Chapter 1, has considered this issue at length, amongst other things concluding that the promise of choice, a key theme in contemporary wedding media, is somewhat illusory; possible choices being often between very similar products. A wedding remains a cultural set-piece event, easily identifiable.

The wedding is not simply a familiar cultural phenomenon. It is something in which a great deal of meaning and significance is invested, as will be investigated in Chapters 6 and 7. Much of this is positive, but there are serious criticisms too. Excessive consumption is a significant aspect of this, and a theme to which the contemporary media return often. While excess of any kind always makes good copy, a strong thread of disapproval runs through these treatments.

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[98] Data about average weddings derives from consumer surveys in bridal magazines, readers being asked to say how much they spend on various items. This tends to select higher spenders, thriftier individuals being less likely to complete such surveys or buy the magazines in the first place.
[99] Rebecca Mead, 'The White Lie' pp.38-45 *The Guardian Weekend* June 9 2007 p.44.
[100] Boden, pp.68-70 and Purbrick, p.146.
[101] See Charsley, *Rites of Marrying* and Boden.

In an extensive piece of investigative journalism on this subject, Mead describes the stereotype of the 'bridezilla,' a term coined in the North American media in the early twenty-first century to describe a woman obsessed to the point of tyranny with the details of her wedding. Mead is far from sanguine about lavish weddings, unfavorably contrasting contemporary extravagance with the cheaper and simpler weddings of the recent past, but she questions the 'bridezilla' designation, arguing that it shifts responsibility for the excesses of contemporary weddings onto brides, overlooking the industry that encourages and manipulates desires.[102] Such criticisms of excessive wedding consumption are not confined to the media, but form a part of ordinary conversation about weddings, evident in Boden, Leonard and Charsley's studies and in Chapters 6 and 7 of this one. While much of this turns on the idea that contemporary couples spend large amounts on their weddings in contrast with the thriftier practices of previous generations, it must be emphasised that consumption, even excess in relation to weddings is no new thing, nor is it something confined to western countries. Criticisms of lavish weddings are equally widespread.

Also, the line between criticism of extravagance and criticism of taste can often be quite thin. Avril Lansdell in her history of wedding clothing notes a middle class Victorian censure of popular practice:

> Gertrude Jekyll, recording the changes of the country people in West Surrey at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, deplored this hankering after fashion by working folk and wrote 'A lamentable example was shown me lately. It was a photograph of a wedding party of the labouring class. The bride had a veil and orange blossom, a shower bouquet and *pages.* The bridegroom wore one of those cheap suits aforesaid and had a billycock hat pushed back from his poor anxious excited face that glistened with sweat. In his buttonhole was a large bouquet and on his hands white cotton gloves. No more pitiful exhibition would well be imagined. Have these poor people so utterly lost the sense of the dignity of their position that they can derive satisfaction from the performance of such an absurd burlesque?'[103]

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[102] Rebecca Mead, *One Perfect Day. The Selling of the American Wedding* (New York: Penguin, 2007).
[103] Lansdell, p.30.

Such judgments rest on an understanding that consumption, in respect of weddings at least, ought to conform to some evident idea of propriety, derived from the relation of social position and aesthetics. If the 'wrong' clothes and other accoutrements undermine the 'dignity' of a person's 'position,' it follows that the purpose of material culture, properly understood and enacted is not just aesthetic but also moral, promoting dignity (and in this case a hierarchical social order).

Christian theologians have frequently articulated not dissimilar views. In the third century Cyprian of Carthage forbade 'Christians to take part in riotous pagan marriage feasts.'[104] Much more recently, Stevenson cites the following description of a wedding service ' "a more or less equal mixture of the Chelsea Flower Show, Trooping the Colour, the Miss World Competition, and a film company on location."'[105] Here the excess and vulgarity of the popular material culture of weddings do not so much undermine the dignity of the participants' 'position' as they threaten the proper meaning of weddings and marriage.

Geller's[106] and Ingraham's[107] radical critiques of the wedding in contemporary North American culture, introduced in Chapter 1, are value judgments of a different order, seeing in the popular material culture and ritual of weddings not social or theological impropriety, but an obscuring of the real economic and ideological significance of weddings. In Geller's words weddings support the '"romance" of heterosexuality, the myth of white supremacy …and the insatiable appetite of consumer capitalism.'[108]

These diverse comments share the suppositions that the material culture and also, importantly, the ritual action of weddings, constitute both a message about and a powerful medium with which to express certain perspectives about the nature of marriage and society. As Barley, more positively, says

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[104] Cyprian of Carthage 'De Habitu Virginum' 18. Cited in Stevenson, *Nuptial Blessing,* p.20.
[105] Stevenson, K. 'The Marriage Service' in Michael Perham (ed.), Liturgy for a New Century' (London: SPCK, 1991), pp. 51-61 p.59.
[106] Geller, *Here Comes the Bride*.
[107] Ingraham, *White Weddings*.
[108] Ibid, p.ii.

> A wedding is a time when social relations are displayed on the ground like a map. As the major ritual event left in contemporary life, a wedding is a time when relationships are redefined and made public.[109]

Ritual is the subject of the next chapter, where is will be considered as an interpretive tool with which to investigate the social realities of the weddings that are the subject of this study.

[109] Nigel Barley, *Native Land* (London: Viking, 1989), p.14.

SECTION II: RITUAL AND NARRATIVE

CHAPTER 4

RITUAL

This study aims to offer a detailed account of the contemporary Anglican wedding, one such wedding being described in the introduction. In the elucidation that followed this description and at numerous points thereafter, this wedding and weddings in general have been described as 'rituals.' Describing a wedding as a ritual is far from being controversial, but equally far from being a straightforward, unambiguous statement. Ritual is a sprawling, complex concept, extremely hard to capture and define. Such complexity can be attributed to disagreements about the nature and purpose of ritual in human society and to the legitimate application of the term.

To say that certain things are rituals is to employ a system of classification, which necessarily involves making distinctions and deciding the grounds for those distinctions. In the case of ritual, this means deciding whether a particular action is a ritual. This might appear straightforward: a class of action will either meet or fail to meet the relevant criteria. However, classifications of social and cultural behaviour are never that simple. Social and cultural life is a complicated mixture of behaviour and perceptions, many of which are simply not open to scrutiny. While ritual is generally understood as a special kind of human action, set apart from mundane activities, there are substantial disagreements as to whether it is better understood as 'a clear and closed category' or 'a dimension of all or any forms of social behaviour.'[1]

Problems about the boundaries of the category do not necessarily invalidate the concept. Rappaport, conscious of such difficulties in theoretical accounts of ritual, makes a case for a definition of ritual that emphasizes its 'obvious' qualities. For Rappaport ritual consists, therefore, of 'the performance of more or less invariant sequences of formal acts and utterances not encoded by the

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[1] Catherine Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* (Oxford, OUP, 1992), p.74.

performers.'[2] Ritual is also a form of communication.[3] Ritual can be rooted in a religious tradition, but it is not necessarily so. Ritual is purposeful and often effective, but not in a material sense. It must be emphasised that the 'obviousness' of Rappaport's observation has yet to attract universal agreement, as will be seen shortly. Ritual is regularly divided, both by those who perform it and those who study it into various sub-categories.

Given the focus of this study, this chapter will begin with an examination of the relationship between the Christian Church and the concept of 'ritual'. Issues surrounding emic and etic interpretations of ritual will be discussed in this context. The development of theoretical approaches to ritual in the social sciences will then be outlined. The emphasis here will be on the fact that any one theoretical stance on ritual is a part of an ongoing argument. This does not mean that the entire multi-faceted discourse that constitutes the scholarly study of ritual, in all its forms, needs to be rehearsed and subjected to new criticism before any of it can be put to use. Rather, it underlines the important point that a theory, in this area of scholarship, is not a final statement of what ritual is and how it works. It is a way of looking at and a tool for interpreting the social world, the empirical reality under investigation. Certain important themes in ritual will then be considered, of particular relevance to weddings in general and contemporary Anglican weddings in particular: passage, performance, symbolism and embodiment.

The Christian Church and the Concept of 'Ritual'

This thesis is concerned with weddings in the contemporary Church of England. Weddings have a particularly interesting role in the study of ritual. Actual weddings, in diverse contexts (though rarely England) have excited a considerable amount of ethnographic interest. In addition, weddings, including English weddings, are regularly mined for examples of wider ritual phenomena. Two examples:

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[2] Roy A. Rappaport, *Ecology, Meaning and Religion* (Berkeley CA: North Atlantic Books, 1979), p.175.

[3] Roy A. Rappaport, *Ritual and Religion in the Making of Humanity* (Cambridge: CUP: 1999), pp.50-52.

> In 1987 I extended this list of terms and concepts as follows:
>
> Ritual: the prescription/script (written or not)
>
> Rite: the smallest building-block of a ceremony (e.g. exchanging rings at a wedding)
>
> Ceremony: a group of rites (e.g. a church wedding)
>
> Ceremonial: a group of ceremonies (e.g. all of the wedding, including reception and dinner)
>
> Rite: the total cult of a tradition (e.g. the Russian Orthodox Rite)
>
> Ritual: a 'role' or 'part' played in a ceremonial (e.g. bride or priest)[4]

> The "I do" voiced by the man and woman at the proper moment in a wedding ceremony as well as the officiant's proclamation, "I now pronounce you man and wife" actually render the two people married. These words do not *describe* the deed they *are* the deed.'[5]

It would seem that for many scholars a wedding is a kind of archetypal ritual in which major characteristics of this abstract concept are displayed, to use Barley's phrase 'on the ground, like a map.'[6]

To describe Anglican weddings as 'ritual' is to apply an abstract concept, in this case 'ritual' to an empirical reality, in this case weddings in the Church of England. This might suggest that 'ritual' is a concept that is foreign to the thinking of either the Church or marrying couples. While far from the case, this raises an important methodological issue: the distinction between 'emic' and 'etic' interpretations of social phenomena.[7] According to this scheme, 'ritual' might appear an 'etic' concept. In some respects, this is certainly the case. However, the reality is rather more complicated.

In the first place, the emic/etic distinction tends to indicate rather firm boundaries

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[4] Jan Snoek, 'Defining Rituals', pp.1-14 in Jens Kreinath, Jan Snoek and Michael Stausberg, *Theorizing Rituals. Issues, Topics, Approaches, Concepts* (Leiden: Brill, 2006), p.8-9.

[5] Catherine Bell, *Ritual, Perspectives and Dimensions* (Oxford: OUP, 1997), p.68. Bell is explaining Austin's 'performative utterance.' See J.L. Austin, *How to Do Things With Words* (Cambridge MA: HUP, 1975).

[6] Barley, p.14.

[7] See Chapter 1, fn.38.

between 'insiders' and 'outsiders'. In the case in hand there are insiders who marry and participate in weddings in the contemporary Church of England, and outsiders who dispassionately observe this behaviour. Given the ubiquity of marriage, it is very doubtful that such a firm distinction can be sustained in this context.[8] Secondly, 'ritual' is not, in fact, a concept that is alien either to the Church of England, or to contemporary popular culture. Many contemporary people, in ordinary explanation of their lives will invoke the concept of 'ritual' to describe important events like weddings.

As was discussed in Chapter 2, the Church has had a long-standing interest in marriage as a social institution and in the actual marriages of its members and also an interest in the manner in which marriages were effected. So rites in church, and other rites over which the Church had power became a part of English weddings as in the rest of the Christian world. This might be taken to mean that while the church employed ritual it did so in some unconscious manner; with no deliberate strategy to use ritual to further some theological ends. This is not so. While it is an undoubted anachronism to claim an abstract understanding of 'ritual' in the contemporary sense for ancient Christians, ritual is a subject that has excited the interest of Christians throughout the history of the Church. The propriety of certain kinds of ritual behaviour was a concern for the earliest Christians. There were fierce debates over the extent to which Jewish ritual restrictions were binding[9] and also about the consumption of 'meat sacrificed to idols.'[10] With the development of Christianity and the expansion of the church, a complex pattern of ritual, in the shape of liturgy, also emerged. However, an explicitly critical attitude is regularly also apparent. There have been numerous deliberate attempts to change rites in order to better articulate particular doctrinal positions. Furthermore, the idea of 'ritual' in general, quite apart from the propriety of particular rites carries significant weight within Christianity. Very different values are attached to it in different Christian traditions. The Catholic and Orthodox churches, and much of the Anglican

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[8] See Elizabeth Arweck and Martin D. Stringer (eds.), *Theorizing Faith: The Insider/Outsider Problem in the Study of Ritual* (Birmingham: UBP, 2002) for a consideration of this issue.
[9] Acts 15:1-29.
[10] 1 Corinthians 8.

Church[11], ascribe a positive value to the 'ritual' in the prescribed words and actions of liturgy. Protestant churches have been generally more suspicious, tending to associate it with 'inauthenticity of faith'.[12] This all amounts to something of a theory, or rather competing theories, of ritual within the Christian churches. Such debates have left their mark on the rites of the churches, in the area of marriage as much as in any other.

So, the Church's own 'emic' understanding of its actions includes the category of ritual, as a special form of acting or speaking, variously, as something to be avoided, or performed properly and with due care and attention. The development of the abstract, 'etic' concept of 'ritual,' inevitably proceeded from the fact that religious ritual is an observable characteristic of human behaviour. It was not just the performance of religious ritual that was significant; the internal reflection on ritual, on the part of theologians working within their own tradition, was also very important. Davies points out that Robertson Smith's *Religion and the Semites*[13] had a vital role in this respect, having a key influence on Durkheim, Malinowski and Mary Douglas.[14]

The 'secular' social sciences, within which systematic abstract reflection on ritual takes place, are by definition completely external to any particular religious group. However, many ways of thinking that developed within the social sciences fed back into theology, again complicating the distinction between 'emic' and 'etic'. Ideas about society, culture and psychology have had a profound impact on the church's pastoral practice, as on academic theology, despite the dissenting voices of those theologians[15] who regard the whole enterprise of modern social science as antithetical to Christianity. The idea of culture as plural and relative has had a particular impact on western churches,[16] in both theology and approaches to mission and to liturgy. The practice of

[11] See 'Of Ceremonies, Why Some be Abolished and Some Retained', *BCP*, pp.viii-x.
[12] Douglas Davies, *Anthropology and Theology* (Oxford: Berg, 2002), p.111.
[13] William Robertson Smith, *The Religion of the Semites* [1889] (Edinburgh: A&C Black, 1894).
[14] Davies, *Anthropology and Theology*, p.81.
[15] See Milbank.
[16] See Aylward Shorter, *Toward a Theology of Inculturation* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1988).

pastoral care has increasingly been informed by the human sciences.[17] Ritual has taken longer to find acceptance. Mark Searle attributes this partly to the anti-ritualism in Protestantism noted above, to some extent mirrored by catholic perspectives which distinguish the 'sacramental kernel' of an act of liturgy from the 'mere ceremony' that surrounds it.[18] In addition, Searle argues, earlier social scientific definitions of ritual (as 'the public counterpart of private obsessive practices,'[19] for example) were such that Christian thinkers were unhappy to apply them to liturgy until very recently. Searle retains some caution about doing so even now, though he finds Victor Turner and Erik Erikson's interpretations of ritual more compatible with Christian perspectives. Contemporary liturgical theology has found ritual a compelling idea with which to interpret liturgical texts and liturgical practice. As noted in the introduction, accounts of marriage liturgy make frequent reference to theories of ritual: rites of passage especially.

One final aspect of Christian attitudes to ritual needs to be mentioned. For many decades Christian theology in the west has been, often painfully, articulately aware of significant cultural change. This includes the declining influence of the Church in public life, with respect to the state and to popular culture. It is a commonplace to talk of 'secularisation': declining church influence and declining church attendance as causally associated with changes in sexual behaviour or family life.[20] Added to this is a sense of cultural loss, widely expressed, which perceives a loss of whole ways of life. For some this is another aspect of secularisation. Jenkins describes this attitude as follows.

> Within such a perspective, the study of society becomes defined by two tendencies, the decline of community and the rise of individualism, described in such terms as the exchange of belonging for becoming or of status for contract, and so forth; and in such an economy of concepts, religion is perceived as in some respects the essence of what is being lost.[21]

In such a view, and there are many Christian thinkers who take this view, ritual

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[17] See Stringer, *On the Perception of Worship*, pp. 8-20.
[18] Mark Searle 'Ritual' pp.51-58 in Cheslyn Jones, *et al* (eds.) *The Study of Liturgy. Revised Edition* (London: SPCK, revised ed. 1992), p.52.
[19] Searle, p.53.
[20] See Chapters 2 and 3.
[21] Jenkins, *Religion in English Everyday Life,* p.27.

loses the negative associations it once had (of superstition) and gains positive associations as the expression of the communitarian values of an integrated and properly religious society. The 'anti-ritualism' which Mary Douglas detected (and disliked) in the liturgical and devotional innovations associated with the Second Vatican Council,[22] has its opposite also in contemporary theology; a pro-ritualism inclined to see ritual as a key means to recreating church and society as they ought to be. The implications of this will be explored in the next section.

Ritual Theory

Human societies have been performing ritual, and reflecting upon it, throughout recorded history. However, conceiving of all that ritual activity as, in some essential sense, the same thing, is much more recent. Such a concern has its roots in the late nineteenth century 'scientific' study of religion, which sought to explain the existence and persistence of religion in non-theological terms. Bell identifies three strands in this enterprise, all of which have proved significant for the study of ritual. While these are not mutually exclusive categories, each raises distinct issues. These are the 'Myth and Ritual' approach, particularly associated with Sir James Frazer, the sociological approach, associated with Emile Durkheim and the psychological approach associated with Sigmund Freud. For Frazer, religion was a kind of evolutionary relic, retained in culture, and derived from a primal ritual act. Durkheim, in contrast, was particularly interested in the role religion played in terms of social identity and cohesion. Freud attributed much more importance to the individual psyche and its disorders. For all of these people, ritual was a vital aspect of religion. Frazer saw it as the counterpart of myth, Durkheim as a vital tool of social control and Freud a symptom of neurosis. What united these diverse accounts was an understanding of religion and therefore also ritual as a human enterprise and 'a universal category of human experience.' This approach to ritual, as a thing that in certain circumstances human beings do, is of central interest to Bell herself.

Several important themes in these studies of religion were taken up in subsequent

[22] Mary Douglas, *Natural Symbols. Explorations in Cosmology* (London: Barrie & Rockliff, 1970), p.19.

studies of ritual in the social sciences. Bell describes this in great detail.[23] In brief, a concern to explain religion persisted; the 'myth and ritual' theorists continued to investigate the significance of ritual in religion and the rival claims for the primacy, in an evolutionary sense, of either myth or ritual. 'social functionalists' took up Durkheim's ideas of the place of religion in society and 'explored ritual actions and values in order to analyse "society" and the nature of social phenomena.'[24] Later approaches include a concern with 'culture'. Here ritual is a key not so much to the structure of society but to a deeper 'level of meanings, values and attitudes.[25] The symbolism employed in ritual is very important for these accounts. This emphasis on symbolism, and consequently on the meaning of ritual, has prompted the contradictory position that ritual is not best understood as the expression of meaning. What is distinctive about ritual is that it is a particular kind of action, performance, or practice.[26]

While this typology has a dialectical dimension, functionalism is in many respects a critique of an earlier emphasis on ritual as the counterpart of myth, the concerns in each approach have persisted in the disciplines concerned with ritual: anthropology, sociology, social psychology and, more recently, ritual studies. While these approaches differ in terms of focus and conception of the social world, they are not necessarily contradictory. Theoretical approaches to ritual offer different conclusions about the social world, but they also offer different interpretative tools, different ways of looking. To say that ritual 'is' a key constituent of social order, for example, is to make an ontological statement about the nature of ritual. But it is also to ask a structured series of questions about how rituals promote social order, which can be illuminating whether or not ritual turns out to be important to social organisation.

Each of these theoretical approaches could constructively be applied to the contemporary Anglican weddings with which this thesis is concerned. That Christian wedding rites vary according to differing Christian theologies of

[23] See Bell, *Ritual Theory* and *Ritual: Perspectives.*
[24] Bell, *Ritual Theory*, p.14.
[25] Bell, *Ritual: Perspective*, p.61.
[26] See James Laidlaw and Caroline Humphrey, 'Action' in Kreinath *et al*, *Theorizing Rituals: Issues*, 265-285.

marriage suggests a systematic correspondence between rite and theology in this area. Within Christian reflection on the subject there is a tendency to assume that wedding rites will reflect theological perceptions of marriage; that it is the theory that guides the practice, the myth that gives rise to the ritual. However, the fact of the debate, in the study of ritual, over the relative importance of myth and ritual offers an alternative perspective. Perhaps the ritualisation of marriage in a Christian context has rather greater significance than simply articulating ideas. A theory of ritual, even when used in a very crude way, as here, offers a fresh perspective on a reality that is often simply assumed.

In a similar way, wedding rites have an obvious social function. While marriage in general is a social institution, a particular marriage involves considerable social upheaval; the constitution of households and interpersonal loyalties change, and individuals occupy different places within a society. It is often argued that weddings in general bring about social change, while resolving the inevitable conflicts of such change. They thus allow social movement, without destabilising social structure. The Christian Churches have, at many times made considerable theological capital out of the importance of marriage in a stable society. The control of wedding rites by the Church, particularly evident in England, has been an important aspect of the Church's influence in society. Many see the contemporary waning of ecclesiastical involvement in English weddings as key evidence of secularisation.

Weddings are also rich in symbolism. Objects, actions and words used in weddings are often those associated with values accorded to gender, sexuality (in particular virginity, fidelity and fertility), family, and other personal relationships. Weddings not only display attitudes, they also embody actual relationships, and their relative importance. There is nothing metaphorical about seating plans and invitation lists at an English wedding. They do not represent some other more abstract set of social values, they embody the actual importance of the people involved, and those excluded, to the couple.

However, ritual is a concept that is not without problems. In addition to the 'emic' debates about the propriety of ritual in Christianity (and similar debates

exist in all religions and most cultures), there are concerns about the limits of the category. Jack Goody expresses a common concern when he says ‘Any analytical system that cannot (or does not) discriminate between performances of Rattigan’s *French without Tears*...the State Opening of Parliament and the Mass is wasting our time by trivialising the study of social behavior.’[27] Even those inclined to extend the concept of ritual outside of its traditional territory, like Richard Schechner, express not dissimilar qualms, though in less bombastic terms.[28] Goody’s concern is for the anthropological study of religion as a whole. He argues that abstract universal, categories distort the multifarious social realities on which they are brought to bear. For Goody, implicit in concepts like ‘ritual’ is a ‘we = science/logic, they = religion/magic’ dichotomy.[29] Bell has a similar concern when she argues that many theoretical accounts regard ritual as ‘a type of critical juncture wherein some pair of opposing social or cultural forces comes together... theoretical discourse on ritual is highly structured by the differentiation and subsequent reintegration of two particular categories of human experience: thought and action.’[30] She thinks that this dichotomy is one ‘that runs particularly deep in the intellectual traditions of western culture.’[31]

Again, etic strategies for interpretation are potentially distorting. Goody’s solution to this problem is to abandon the attempt to look for universal structures in social behaviour, in favour of close examination of particular events. Bell is concerned with the way a particular culture distinguishes one kind of action from another. She calls this process ‘ritualization.’ This consists of ‘various culturally specific strategies for setting some activities off from others, for creating and privileging a qualitative distinction between the ‘sacred’ and the ‘profane’ and for ascribing such distinctions to realities thought to transcend the powers of human actors.’[32]

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[27] Jack Goody, ‘Against Ritual’ in Sally F. Moore and Barbara G. Myerhoff, (eds.), *Secular Ritual* (Assen NL: Van Gorcum, 1977), p.28.
[28] For example ‘Victor Turner’s Last Adventure’ in Victor Turner, *The Anthropology of Performance* (New York: PAJ Publications , 1986).
[29] Goody, ‘Against Ritual’ p.25.
[30] Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*, p.16.
[31] Ibid, p.25.
[32] Ibid, p.74.

These are serious criticisms, and should not be lightly dismissed. But the potential for distortion implicit in applying some etic interpretive scheme is matched by the limits of interpreting a society entirely in its own terms. In many respects the understanding of humanity as culturally diverse in a pluralist rather than hierarchical sense is as characteristic of contemporary western thought as is a radical distinction between the religious and the secular. Such an understanding lies behind the ethnographic method of careful, scrupulous participant-observation and the 'thick' description of Clifford Geertz.[33] Geertz' method of dealing with the inevitable limitations of theories of ritual is, he says, to regard them as 'strategies to be used when usable, to be ignored when not.'[34] Rappaport makes a similar point: 'to say that an analysis does not illuminate everything does not mean that it illuminates nothing. The most that we can ask of any analysis is that it tell us something that is worth knowing and that we otherwise wouldn't know… that it add significantly to our understanding.'[35] Furthermore whatever the problems of ritual theory in general or of particular theories, the empirical reality, which theories of ritual exist to interpret remains. 'Ritual' is a helpful term because it provides a way of speaking about an observable and significant area of human life.

The aim of ritual theory in general is to make sense of forms of human social behaviour. The aim of this thesis is to make sense of one form in particular: the contemporary Anglican wedding. Goody and Bell emphasize the potential for misunderstanding rituals in unfamiliar contexts. The situation with respect to Anglican weddings is very different, such a wedding being very familiar to most western people, and because of globalization, to many others. The wedding is such a familiar event that it is regularly evoked to make points about ritual more generally. Every scholar cited so far has done so from time to time. The problem is not of incomprehensibility, but of over familiarity. To gain an understanding of something very familiar it is necessary to question assumptions, to consider various possible interpretations, to de-familiarise the subject. The theoretical

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[33] Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973).
[34] Clifford Geertz, *Local Knowledge: Further Essays in Interpretative Anthropology* (New York: Basic Books, 1983), p.x.
[35] Rappaport, *Ecology, Meaning and Religion*, p.36.

concept of 'ritual' is useful here. A theory, amongst other things is a way of looking at something. Ritual theory may well be a product of internal processes in the western social sciences, but it also offers categories and classifications that might make the Anglican wedding seem less an inevitable part of the social or ecclesiastical landscape, and more a product of complex social, cultural and theological processes.

This should be a two-way process. Theoretical models of a practice like ritual can be evaluated in a rational, abstract manner. However, these are theories that aim to clarify practices. Any attempt to use a theory must also be, inevitably, a critical account of that theory, and equally inevitably, something of a modification of it. It is surely only in the attempt to do this, to interpret practices in the light of and according to the criteria suggested by a theory that the utility of such a theory can be seen.

A contemporary Anglican wedding is a ritual. It consists of 'the performance of more or less invariant sequences of formal acts and utterances not encoded by the performers.'[36] It is also a very particular kind of ritual, which invites the consideration of several ritual themes. It is the means by which a man and a woman stop being 'single' and become 'married'. Such terms have both legal and cultural import. A wedding is therefore a special kind of ritual: a rite of passage, by means of which people move from one defined social state to another. A wedding has to be performed to be effective, and it must be performed in a particular way, a way determined by quite other processes than the immediate wishes of the people involved. Symbolism and embodiment are similarly persistent themes.

Passage

The idea of passage rests on the notion that human life consists of a related series of social states, which an individual enters into and departs from as they proceed through life. Some of these social states will be gender or class specific: 'women' are always female, peers of the realm are, on the whole the sons of other peers.

[36] Ibid, p.175.

The fundamental social states concern the life cycle: birth, infancy, childhood, adolescence, adulthood, old age, death. Overlaying a pattern of physical growth and then decline is one of broad occupational change: school child, worker, retired person. Similarly, there is a pattern of differential involvement in family structures: child, single adult, married adult, parent, grandparent, widow(er). Religions understand the life of a believer in similar terms. For Christianity the scheme might be: unbeliever, catechumen, convert, communicant. These might vary somewhat from one society to another, from Shakespeare's 'Seven Ages of Man'[37] to the Hindu Samskaras, but to say that life is always understood as a series of stages, is a reasonable generalisation. These schemas are not immutable. Categories change over time, as well as from place to place. Furthermore, they overlap to form immensely complicated patterns, especially in the complex heterogeneous societies of the contemporary west. However, the general point that life is composed of a series of defined states, and the structured movements in and out of them, remains.

The movement from one state to another is, in many societies, an occasion for ritual. While the individual rites associated with birth, puberty or marriage were of perennial interest to social anthropologists, this broad class of rites was identified by Arnold Van Gennep in *The Rites of Passage.* 'Rites of passage' has proved a very suggestive idea, in both the formal study of ritual and cultures and in less specialist discourse about human behaviour. William Golding's novel *Rites of Passage*[38] evokes both simmering social tensions and life changing experiences. Set on a ship sailing to Australia from Britain, the title alludes to 'passage' in the sense of a sea journey. This is not incidental. A clearly delineated social world and a sense of purposeful movement are central ideas in Van Gennep's understanding of this class of rites.

The Rites of Passage draws on Van Gennep's own primary research and that of others. It consists of a cross-cultural analysis of rites by means of which individuals pass from one state of life to another. Van Gennep's project shares its aims and methods with other anthropology of the period and is characterised by

[37] William Shakespeare, *As You Like It* Act II, Scene 7.

[38] William Golding, *Rites of Passage* (London: Faber, 1980).

is 'a positivist... insistence that general laws of social process should be derived from empirical observation rather than metaphysical speculation.'[39] Social anthropology has two important commitments, often in tension: attending to both the particular narratives and institutions of a given society and to the common threads between diverse cultures. Van Gennep is interested in the nature and function of ritual, including the purposes it serves in a given context, and what this might reveal about a particular society, or about human social life in general. He argues that it is most important to see rites in their entirety and in context for cross-cultural comparisons to be profitable. He is critical of previous work, in particular on marriage rites, which 'isolated segments of rites, instead of comparing entire ceremonies with one another.'[40]

Van Gennep regards an individual human life and the life of a society as a series of transitions between different socially defined statuses, movement between which is facilitated by rites of passage. He argues that such rites have three clear stages; 'separation,'[41] in which initiates leave their old position or status; 'liminality,' where they exist between these two states of life, in a kind of social limbo; and 'incorporation', in which they re-enter society with a new status. These stages may be spread over a considerable period of time and will involve, in many cases, many different ritual acts. Rites associated with birth, initiation into adulthood, betrothal and marriage and death are discussed in turn. The rituals associated with each of these transitions share a similar structure, but the occasion determines which of the three stages predominates. For rituals associated with death it is separation, and for marriage, incorporation.

Van Gennep sees marriage as 'the most important of the transitions from one social category to another,'[42] since many people are affected by a marriage and at least one of the parties must change household. By his time of writing, a great deal of material had been collected on the rituals associated with marriage, but in his view, often misinterpreted. Prior to Van Gennep, anthropologists tended to

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[39] Solon T. Kimball, 'Introduction' in Van Gennep, p.vii.
[40] Van Gennep, p.116.
[41] Ibid, p.21.
[42] Ibid, p.116.

interpret marriage rites as only 'prophylactic, cathartic and fertility inducing,'[43] protecting the spouses from supernatural assault and guaranteeing fertility. Van Gennep thought that this resulted in too individualistic an understanding of marriage ritual. If marriage rites are seen in their entirety, their function as means of social transformation, for the whole group as much as for the couple, will be apparent.

This process of social transition is described in spatial or territorial terms. The word 'passage' indicates spatial movement, and deliberate purposeful movement at that. The middle stage in Van Gennep's scheme, liminality, uses the threshold of a house as an image to describe territory that belongs neither to the household, nor to the outside world. Social movement is analogous to departure from home, travelling through a 'no man's land', and arrival and acceptance in a new country. The rite of passage is a similarly hazardous journey. Performing the correct rituals not only ensures supernatural assistance, but also defines a person's social status at any given time.

The ritual associated with marriage often takes place over several years. This is especially the case where marriages are arranged by families when the putative spouses are very young. Even where this is the case, there comes a time when a betrothal, or formal agreement to marry is finalised. Betrothal ceremonies characteristically distinguish groups associated with each spouse, representatives from which negotiate the marriage. Rites of betrothal are rites of separation. They do not unite a couple; rather they serve to remove each of them from their existing social position. The period of betrothal corresponds with Van Gennep's liminal phase; the betrothed are not married, but they are not single either. The wedding itself is what turns the betrothed into married people, re-incorporating them into a defined place in the social order. Significantly it also re-integrates the society as a whole, so that the social order is not, ultimately, threatened by the considerable upheaval involved in the social movement of a wedding. Van Gennep sees the three-fold pattern not only in the broad scheme of ritual entry into marriage, but in the individual rites that make up each stage. So there is

[43] Ibid, p.117.

separation, liminality and incorporation within a wedding ceremony, which also serves as a rite of incorporation at the end of a period of liminality.

Victor Turner found Van Gennep's understanding of rites of passage, especially the idea of liminality, most compelling. Turner argues that the importance of rites in a society, and of rites of passage in particular was that they re-enforced the notion that persons had no intrinsic identity, but only one that society gave them. By progressing through defined stages of life, and necessarily through liminal periods, this sense of personal identity as rooted in a particular society is established.

However, for Turner this liminal stage, occupying the space between defined social statuses or identities, has a wider significance. He employs the term 'communitas' to describe the essential quality of this state of being and 'liminality' to describe the social state characterised by communitas. Turner explores the nature of these liminal states, and the importance of them in and of themselves, not just as a means of underlining social structure, arguing that they are characterised by an absence of normal social divisions. Here, gender, class and age distinctions become blurred with respect to clothing and 'appropriate' activities and time is ordered differently. Patterns of work and rest are disrupted. Turner extends the category of liminal states beyond the liminal periods of seclusion or exuberant misbehaviour in wedding or puberty rites, to include events like pilgrimages or festivals, which take place within the 'interstices of social structure.'[44]

While liminal states render marriage an irrelevance (members of monastic communities do not marry, for example), liminality is intrinsic to marriage. Both Turner and Van Gennep identify important liminal stages in marriage ritual. For Turner, liminality is an essential counterpart to structure. Marriage very clearly belongs to structure, regulating as it does both physical and social reproduction. Marriage is a relationship, but also a social artifact, a creation of cultures and societies to regulate sexual behaviour, household formation and mutual duties of

[44] Turner, *The Ritual Process*, p.125.

care. The liminal aspects of marriage rites underline the extent to which identity, in this case as a married person, is the gift of society.

Also important is the vital symbolic value of those Turner identifies as 'liminal', living in 'transition', on the margins of organised society. Turner says 'members of despised or outlawed ethnic and cultural groups play major roles in myths and popular tales as representatives or expressions of universal human values,'[45] both holy and dangerous: holy, by virtue of their association with such compelling ideas or types; dangerous, by being inadequately impressed by and consequently submissive to the claims of a particular culture or society. The central figures in a marriage rite are the bride, and to a lesser extent in most societies, the groom. While these can appear the very opposite of liminal figures, belonging as they do to that orderly institution: marriage, this is not in fact the case. Bride and groom are not actually married but a woman and man in the process of getting married.[46] It is only when the marriage is concluded that they enter the structured social roles of husband and wife. Brides and grooms are widely regarded as very vulnerable, to temptations to abscond from the marriage and with it society, or to be damaged by being thus abandoned, and possibly stuck in a ritual space from which they cannot escape.[47] Consequently they are attended and escorted throughout the wedding rituals. They are therefore properly regarded as liminal figures. The bride in particular has a key position in the way that weddings and marriage are imagined. Clearly, the bride is a woman getting married. But the bride is also, very often a symbolic focus of the whole wedding, and marriage more generally.

Van Gennep's work is descriptive, not prescriptive. He aims to identify, describe and define particular aspects of social action and to discern the function of such action in the life of a society more generally. The same is largely true of Turner, though he makes trenchant criticisms of some of the liturgical innovations of the

[45] Ibid, p.110.
[46] Richard Schechner, *Performance Theory* (New York: Routledge, 1988), p.171.
[47] Miss Havisham exemplifies such ritual entrapment. Charles Dickens, *Great Expectations* [revised edition 1868] (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1965), p.87.

Second Vatican Council.[48] The Christian liturgists and pastoral theologians mentioned earlier in this chapter do not simply find rites of passage a useful idea with which to interpret Christian liturgy. Grainger sees ritual in general and Christian ritual in the liturgy in particular as psychologically beneficial, and therefore to be encouraged. In his *To Join Together* Stevenson uses Van Gennep's scheme[49] to draw contrasts between ritually impoverished contemporary western rites and earlier, longer and richer rites. He goes on to suggest ways in which the liturgical practice of the church might be revised in order to correspond better to Van Gennep's scheme, which Stevenson sees not just as the way things are generally done, but also the best and most effective way of doing things.

Ronald Grimes[50] shares many of the concerns of these theologians. Like them, he sees rites of passage as serving distinct and positive social and psychological purposes. However Grimes sounds an important note of caution. While he makes considerable use of it in his own analyses of rites in contemporary North America, he notes that many scholars see Van Gennep's tripartite structure as imposing an order on reality, rather than deriving a pattern from the empirical reality he observed.[51] Grimes says that too often 'invented patterns, treated as if they were discovered, came to be prescribed as if they were laws determining how rites should be structured.'[52] This is, perhaps a particular temptation for liturgists or pastoral theologians, as much concerned with how things should be done as how they are done.

Another qualification is necessary before any attempt is made to interpret contemporary Anglican weddings as rites of passage. A Church of England wedding is a rite of passage within English society. It is also a performance of Christian liturgy. It is a point in which two systems of ordering the human life

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[48] Victor Turner, *Dramas, Fields and Metaphors: Symbolic Action in Human Society* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1974), 231-271.
[49] Stevenson, *To Join Together.*
[50] See Ronald L. Grimes, *Marrying and Burying. Rites of Passage in a Man's Life* (Boulder CO: Westview, 1995) and *Deeply Into the Bone. Re-inventing Rites of Passage* (Berkeley CA: UCAP:2000).
[51] Grimes, *Deeply into the Bone*, p.107.
[52] Ibid, p.107.

cycle intersect. Considerable theological implications are implicit in this, which will be addressed elsewhere. But it is also significant when looking at these weddings as ritual. Davies describes rites like a wedding service as 'dual or multi-purpose rites.'[53] In addition to this the actual wedding ceremony in an Anglican church is only a part of the ritualisation of marriage, even an explicitly 'Christian' marriage. To understand an Anglican marriage as a rite of passage it is necessary to, as far as possible, look at the whole sequence of rituals that constitute the wedding, not just that aspect of it that takes place in church.

Performance

The introductory account of a Yorkshire wedding described it as a 'performance.' It is axiomatic that a ritual must be performed. While some rituals are shaped by texts, including, of course, Anglican weddings, the text must be performed to be effectual. It must also be performed in a particular way. A 'wedding' performed in a theatrical context, or as an anthropological exercise,[54] is not a wedding. How something is performed determines what that thing is, with the 'how' including the context, the intentions of the participants as well as what is included in the actual performance and how that performance is structured.

While performance has been a constant theme in theoretical accounts of ritual, 'performance theory,' particularly associated with Richard Schechner, sometimes collaborating with Victor Turner, consists of the application of concepts derived from anthropology into theatre studies. Goffman's ideas about social roles, and Austin's ideas about 'performative utterances'[55] have also been influential. Performance theory identifies 'performance,' as a quintessentially human activity. It expands the concept of 'performance' from theatrical performance to other areas of human life where people take on roles and behaviour appropriate to those roles. Schechner identifies several distinct types of performance, including theatre, rites and ceremonies, shamanism, the 'eruption and resolution

[53] See Davies, *Anthropology and Theology*, p.120ff.
[54] Victor Turner, *The Anthropology of Performance* (New York: PAJ Publications, 1986), p.141-144.
[55] Bell, *Ritual: Perspectives*, p.73.

of crisis', 'performance in everyday life,' sport, play, making art and 'ritualization.'[56] Elsewhere he distinguishes such categories rather differently, though he retains the formal similarities between the various different performative activities. These are 'a special ordering of time...a special value attached to objects...non-productivity in terms of goods and…rules. Often special places - non-ordinary places - are set aside or constructed to perform these activities in.'[57]

A performance is not just any unit of human action, but is clearly bounded in time and space. Special ordering of time exists within a performance, which might take one of several forms: 'event time,' where a set sequence must be completed irrespective of time taken; 'set time,' where start and stop times are fixed; and 'symbolic time,' when the activity represents some other period of time than it actually takes.[58] Performance frequently takes place in specially designated places. Both within and without such places, performance involves ordering space. This parallels the re-ordering of time in performance. The same is true of objects, which, often possessed of a quite different function, take on a special meaning in a performance. This is most evident in the case of theatrical productions, but is also seen in religious ritual, where special objects are closely related in type to mundane ones. Performances are non-productive, in a material sense. This is not to say that employment and commerce are not frequent adjuncts to performances, whether theatrical or religious. But this is not why people perform. Performance takes out time and space from the mundane, productive world to do something or to make something without ordinary substance. Most important is the behaviour of the actors. Schechner makes considerable use of Goffman's idea of ordinary life as a performance in which persons take on, often unconsciously, various roles.[59] The performance begins as people take on their roles and ends as they 'become themselves' again. This has implications for human identity generally, but is central to performance. Roles

[56] Richard Schechner, *Performance Theory* (New York: Routledge, 1988), p.xii.
[57] Schechner, *Performance Theory*, p.6.
[58] Ibid, p.6.
[59] See Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1959).

are taken on in many different ways. Physical appearance is crucial; clothing, facial expressions, gestures are adopted intentionally. Role-playing is the opposite of spontaneous 'natural' behaviour. Schechner employs Lévi-Strauss' binary distinction between 'the raw and the cooked'[60] in his interpretation of this aspect of performative behaviour, coining the term 'twice- behaved'.

> The basic transformation from raw to cooked is a paradigm of culture-making: the making of the natural into the human. At its deepest level this is what theatre is "about," the ability of frame and control, to transform the raw into the cooked, to deal with the most problematic ... human interactions.[61]

There are close parallels here with Turner's idea of the 'social drama,' a concept which echoes Geertz' understanding of the social conflicts and crises that ritual resolves.[62] A social drama is a crisis or an acute conflict in ordinary social life. Turner identifies a common dramatic structure in such events. 'The breach of a norm, the infraction of a rule of morality, law, custom or etiquette in some public arena' is followed by a 'tendency for the breach to widen and spread until it coincides with some dominant cleavage in the widest set of relevant social relations to which the parties in conflict belong.' At this point attempts are made to address the problem. The episode ends either with reconciliation or a permanent break in relations.[63]

Turner goes on to claim that 'there is an interdependent, perhaps dialectic, relationship between social dramas and genres of cultural performance in perhaps all societies.'[64] This is evident in rites of passage. Such rites ritualise and therefore dramatise life crises. The ritual sequence mirrors the actual social upheavals occasioned by birth, puberty, marriage or death. Life crises and the rites associated with them are often also the subject of aesthetic drama, as well as children's play, which act as both a description of those rites and a commentary upon them. Rites of passage are both social dramas and cultural performances.

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[60] See Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Raw and the Cooked: Introduction to a Science of Mythology: I* (London: Jonathon Cape, 1970).
[61] Schechner, *Performance Theory*, p.170.
[62] Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), p.146.
[63] Victor Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play* (New York: PAJ, 1982), pp.70-71.
[64] Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre*, p.72.

Performance theory takes concepts useful for the interpretation of a very narrowly delineated human activity, in this case, what Schechner describes as 'aesthetic drama', and applies them to increasingly broad areas of human action. Schechner himself identifies this as problematic when he says 'It is hard to define "performance" because the boundaries separating it on the one side from the theatre and on the other side from everyday life are arbitrary.'[65] There are problems, as others have asserted, with respect to 'ritual', with a concept so broad that everything can be included in it. However, that there are performative aspects to all kinds of human activity, does not mean that all human action is a 'performance'. What has been identified, and named, 'performance' is an important and significant aspect of human life, as actually lived and experienced.

Victor Turner makes this point explicitly, when he says: 'the anthropology of performance is an essential part of the anthropology of experience. In a sense, every type of cultural performance, including ritual, ceremony, carnival, theatre and poetry is explanation and explication of life itself.'[66] On this basis, Turner employs Wilhelm Dilthey's concept, *Erlebnis*, which translates as that which has been lived through, a unit of 'lived experience.'[67] Performance theory, like many theories of ritual delineates particular aspects of experience, not so much to generate a category of 'performance', whose nature can then be debated, but to capture some crucial aspect of what human experience is.

Weddings are archetypical performances: the special framing of time and place and the adoption and performance of distinct roles are all important. What is implicit in most of life is explicit in a wedding.

Symbolism

'Symbolism' is, like 'performance', a term that describes a necessary aspect of ritual behaviour and a major theme in the scholarly study of ritual. Where performance indicates deliberate, framed, expressive behaviour, symbolism

[65] Schechner, *Performance Theory*, p. 85.
[66] Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre*, p.13.
[67] Turner, *The Anthropology of Performance*, p.84.

describes the way that something, some object or action (or word), is used to indicate something else. Various taxonomies of symbolism are in use, including Rappaport's symbol-icon-index scheme[68] and the sign-symbol-sacrament[69] usage often employed by liturgical theologians. This needs noting, but not pursuing, as it is the broader issue, the multilayered meaningfulness of actions and objects, that is pertinent to the present study. Weddings are, as the introduction suggested, laden with symbolism, with words, gestures and objects, all understood as proper to the occasion. For individuals, virtually anything can take on meaning: people, places, any sort of object or action can represent more than itself. The ordinary processes of living, forming attachments and reflecting on events are to some degree symbolic. Symbols also exist at a public level, for whole cultures and societies and in religions, including Christianity.

Like ritual, symbolism is something inherently human, an aspect of the way people think and orientate themselves in the world. People also, in their various ways think and argue about symbolism: a national flag can excite loyalty in some and hostility in others. In religions symbols can be hotly debated. Most Christians practise baptism, but argue over how much water is needed and in what circumstances it can be administered. Again, like ritual, interest in symbolism as such, as an abstract category to reflect upon, rather than an aspect of life whose precise application could be argued over, came with the rise of the scientific study of culture in the late 19th century. Anthropological accounts of symbolism have tended to mirror accounts of ritual very closely. All tend, however, to treat symbolic systems as public property. Symbols such as flags, monuments, or in religion crosses, altars and fonts are meaningful in the sense that they communicate either some aspect of social structure or some pattern of meaning which informs, at a deeper level, that social structure. So symbolism is rather like language. It is to some degree arbitrary, but shared, conventional and sustained by continued public usage.

Some psychological accounts have, in contrast, argued that the source of

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[68] Rappaport, *Ritual and Religion*, p.54.
[69] Christopher Irvine (ed.), *The Use of Symbols in Worship* (London: SPCK, 2007), pp.6-12.

symbolism is not public, but private. The meaning of symbols is not arbitrary and conventional, but informed by archetypes intrinsic to human psychology, not learned. Freud interpreted a wide range of objects as sexual symbols. Jung, while not excluding sexuality from private symbolism, located its source at a greater remove from the individual's conscious experience; in the so-called collective unconscious.

Obeyesekere, in *Medusa's Hair*[70] identifies a tendency for these positions to polarise into two mutually exclusive categories. Symbols are seen as either public and therefore not to do with individual sentiment or private and therefore irrelevant to public concerns. He disputes this, particularly taking issue with E.R. Leach's paper on the meaning of Hindu and Buddhist ascetics' neglected or shaven hair.[71] Leach interprets this practice as having public meaning, but no psychological import for the individuals concerned. Obeyesekere points out that there is no reason to suppose that the public and the private are as distinct as such a position would require. On the one hand, individuals attribute meanings of their own to acts which are enjoined by some public body, even if these meanings are not those which are publicly endorsed, whether by a religious or cultural authority, or, for that matter, by psycho-analytic orthodoxy. On the other hand, private patterns of symbols can be informed by cultural context, as well as by sub-conscious archetype.

This has important implications for this study. On the one hand a wedding, such as the ones under consideration, is a cultural set piece, with an established shape and structure. It is laden with symbolism. Indeed a wedding seems to attract symbolic actions and objects to itself, as will be seen. Such symbolism has very diverse sources, and it is tempting to treat it as a complicated code that can be cracked, to believe that each symbol has a particular and accessible meaning. Even if this were possible, for the couple and their guests any wedding is meaningful in a much more personal sense, as will be seen in Chapter 7. A

[70] Gananath Obeyesekere, 'Medusa's Hair: An Essay on Personal Symbols and Religious Experience' in Michael Lambek, (ed.), *A Reader in the Anthropology of Religion* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), 383-397.
[71] E.R. Leach, 'Magical Hair', *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 88 (1958), 147-64.

wedding is an occasion not only for the display of public symbolism, but also a means by which individuals understand themselves and orient themselves in the world.

Embodiment

Embodiment is a technical model for the ways in which social values are encoded within bodies and their behaviour.[72] 'A wedding', to repeat Barley's observation, 'is a time when social relations are laid out on the ground like a map.' Moreover, it is, 'as the major ritual event left in contemporary life... a time when relationships are redefined and made public.'[73] A wedding does not just display values or relationships it embodies them. The body is the medium for the articulation of these values in many cases. It is also, quite often in a wedding, the subject of the values in question.

Anglican wedding liturgies list the purposes that marriage serves. These are the procreation and subsequent upbringing of children, a legitimate context for sexual intimacy, emotional comfort and affectionate companionship. Pre-reformation rites required the bride to be 'bonny and buxom in bed and at board.'[74] Even allowing for significant abstract speculation about the nature of marriage in Christian theology, its embodied nature is a persistent theme. Sexuality and children are vital and explicit themes in a wedding, to which much symbolism points, from the cutting of the wedding cake[75] to the inclusion of small children in the wedding party.[76]

Gender is also, inevitably, important. The rites that constitute a wedding distinguish the bride's and groom's 'sides' very sharply. In addition, men and women, on the basis of gender rather than association with bride or groom, are clearly distinguished by dress. The same is true of roles within the rites, for the bride and groom especially, but also for other key participants. The exception

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[72] Davies, *Anthropology and Theology*, p.19.
[73] Barley, p.14
[74] 'The Sarum Rite', in Searle and Stevenson, p. 163-178.
[75] See Charsley, *Wedding Cakes and Cultural History.*
[76] See Chapter 7.

here, of course, is the priest, who, male or female is simply ‘the vicar.’

Embodiment as an idea highlights the importance of the material aspects of a wedding. A persistent feature of weddings across wide spans of time and space is conspicuous consumption. Relatively expensive food, drink, clothes, transport and photography are all part of a contemporary Anglican wedding. Almost equally persistent has been the objection on the part of religious and other figures to such extravagant expenditure and consequent intemperate celebrating. It is easy to dismiss these things from consideration as simply ephemera of serious interest only to those with a financial stake in the process. However these embodied, material aspects of a wedding are a part of the whole ritual process, not separate from the ‘important’ symbolism and performative speech of the ritual. Material objects are important aspects of any culture. They are also absolutely vital to the way people talk about their weddings. In part this is because such objects are important for their own sake, as representative of couples’ taste, wealth or the significance of their wedding to them. In addition, talking about material culture is a way into talking about other significant things, including family, friends and values, religious or otherwise, as will be seen in Chapter 7.

CHAPTER 5

NARRATIVE

This chapter will introduce narrative as vital interpretative tool for this study of contemporary Anglican weddings. Narrative, like ritual is both something that people do in connection with weddings and also a conceptual tool to interpret that behaviour. I will use the terms 'story' and 'narrative' interchangeably, following the literature, some scholars employing 'narrative' and others 'story.' While there are those who make a case for one term over the other, or who distinguish between them,[1] there is at least as much variation of meaning within the uses of either term as there is between them. 'Story' has advantages in certain contexts. It is a term employed in ordinary speech, where people often 'tell stories' but rarely 'construct narratives.' 'Narrative,' on the other hand, has the virtue of being an adjective as well as a noun, so can qualify other concepts or phenomena without the need for awkward constructions: narrative theology, for example.

What is a Story?

A story is a bounded account of an incident or experience possessed of a plot and characters. Something must happen in a story. Someone has to be doing something, or having something done to them, or both. There are, of course a great many stories where very little happens, but this is not the point. A story focuses attention on an occurrence, however small. Plot arranges occurrences into a pattern, perhaps of cause and effect or of action and response. A story is selective, ordering events, real or otherwise, for effect, not necessarily in the chronological order to which even fictional stories refer, though do not reproduce. A story does not just note an event; it describes it, locating it in a time frame constructed for the telling of the story,[2] as well as in other possible contexts. The same is true of character. A story needs characters: persons who act or to whom things happen. A character is, for the purposes of a story, a

[1] E.M. Bruner, 'Ethnography as Narrative' in Victor Turner and E.M. Bruner, (eds.), *The Anthropology of Experience* (Urbana: UIP, 1986), 139-155. Bruner understands 'story... the abstract sequence of events' as one aspect of 'narrative,' the others being 'discourse (the text) and telling.' p.145.

[2] See Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, vol.3 (Chicago: UCP, 1988).

specific person, or actor, not a generalisation. While a story need not be about human beings, non-humans: animals, inanimate objects, abstract ideas must be rendered as characters, as actors or passive recipients of action, for a story to be told. Characters bring to events personality, and with that motivation. Character, action and motivation contribute to plot, and all of this points towards the necessity, in narrative, for particularity, or specificity. Also implicit to this idea of specificity is that of boundedness. A story must have a beginning and an end.

This might all sound very unnecessary. Definitions of terms are rarely adequate and never perfect. But ‘story’, not unlike ‘wedding’, is a term so widely used and so rarely defined (in ordinary life) that even an imperfect definition is a constructive place to start. While narrative is very common in human discourse, not all human discourse is narrative. A story is a particular kind of discourse, a particular way of talking. A story can be contrasted, for example, with general, abstract accounts of the nature of things. A great deal of discourse, especially academic discourse, is of this nature, but so is a lot of other conversation. Opinions are most often expressed in this sort of way, and not only on matters of great moment. ‘I prefer fresh flowers’ is the same *type* of talk, as is ‘I believe in the indissolubility of marriage.’ Statements of opinion or of fact, like these, operate in a sort of continuous present tense. Stories always refer to the past. Even when the story concerned is on ongoing one, it is told up to the time of telling. Present and future tenses in storytelling indicate an invisible narrator with a perspective so broad that they see the present or the future (from the listener or reader’s perspective) as completely as the past.

Stories are told in conjunction with other kinds of discourse, regularly inserted into arguments or descriptions of general states of affairs, often to illustrate a more general point. This shift will be clearly highlighted. In a given cultural context there exist conventional ways of demarcating a story.[3] The phrase ‘once upon a time’ has a familiar currency throughout the English-speaking world. But other phrases perform the same function: ‘there was once...’, ‘there was this time...’, ‘you remember so and so? Well, he...’, ‘I was in...’ All of these, and

[3] See Harvey Sacks, *Lectures on Conversation* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995).

more like them, serve to mark the beginning of a story, focussing on a specific time, place and set of characters. The endings of stories are less frequently formally marked, not least, in ordinary conversation, because of interruptions and distractions. Nevertheless, summaries, such as ‘so that’s what happened,’ ‘that’s it really,’ and non-verbal markers, such as pauses, nods, and laughs and changes of subject or focus are common ways of ending a story.

Story Telling in Everyday Life

In ordinary life people tell stories frequently, often ‘personal experience stories,’[4] giving accounts of what they have done or what has happened to them. It is conventional to tell such stories and to solicit them. Such stories vary in form, content and complexity. A story might well recount a funny incident, or a sad one, or a telling one, which demonstrates behaviour typical of a person or a situation typical of an institution; personal narratives of this kind often being serial affairs, with an established cast of characters, and familiar settings, perhaps a part of someone’s ‘life story.’[5] People not only tell stories about their own actions and experiences, but also repeat stories told to them: the personal experience stories of their acquaintances, and both ‘true’ and fictional stories from further afield. Some stories told within families persist and from generation to generation, some belong to wider communities. Stories belong to people, both individuals and groups.

This ‘ownership’ of stories explains something of the popularity of stories and why they might be told. Sometimes stories are told simply for entertainment, usually perceived as a valuable thing. But story telling serves other purposes too. Telling stories serves to consolidate a group, to define its boundaries as well as roles within it. Michael Wilson observes several specific aspects of this, from keeping the conversation going, through increasing the status of the storyteller, to building social cohesion and intimacy.[6] It is important to give some attention not just to what stories do, but to how they do it. It is one thing to say that stories

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[4] See Michael Wilson, *Performance and Practice: Oral Narrative Traditions Among Teenagers in Britain and Ireland* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1997), p.135.
[5] See Charlotte Linde, *Life Stories: The Creation of Coherence* (Oxford: OUP, 1993).
[6] Wilson,, p.145.

'consolidate group identity', but it is also necessary to show how this happens. Firstly, a story *belongs* to an individual or to a group. So familiarity or lack of familiarity with a repertoire of stories distinguishes insiders from outsiders in a given context. Secondly, intimacy between individuals grows incrementally by sharing confidences, often stories, known to increasingly few others. In both these cases, stories are a form of relational currency. What gives that currency its value is the emotive force of narrative. A story is not irrational, it has to make sense, but it is not an abstract argument. Instead a story invites identification with characters, often the teller. Moreover, stories are an important part of the keeping and sharing of secrets. A person who hears a certain sort of story from another has, it is often said, been 'entrusted' with something precious.

People do not tell stories irrespective of the enthusiasm of any listeners; they are also enthusiastic hearers, even consumers of narrative. 'Family narratives' bleed into traditional stories, with a wider ownership, transmitted informally, frequently orally: 'folklore.' This continues with professionally produced narratives: plays, novels, films, and television drama. While the construction of these narratives is at a remove from 'ordinary conversation,' they nevertheless constitute an important aspect of narrative in everyday life. Moreover, people write novels or plays for reasons that differ little from those that prompt people to, for example, give an account of their day, or tell a ghost story in a tent at a Scout camp: to entertain and amuse, to describe some experience, to explain the relationship between things or people, to explain an abstract concept, to explain themselves.

Just as some personal or family narratives enter a wider cultural repertoire of stories, public narratives feed back into ordinary conversation. People talk about books and plays and television programmes. But more than that, such narratives enter the grammar of ordinary human conversation and everyday story telling. So, for example, a person might be referred to as a 'Cassandra,' a 'Don Juan' or a 'Bridget Jones.' Writers of fiction draw on individuals with whom they are familiar, but readers of fiction use fictional characters as short hand descriptive tools when attempting to describe real people. It is worth examining what is happening here. When a person, in conversation, attempts to describe a third

party they are, themselves, engaged in telling a story, specifically in introducing the characters that will populate the story. This story might be some ongoing saga, implicitly entitled ‘my life at work,’ or it might be an account of a particularly interesting, one-off event. Either way, the effective telling of the story will rest on the establishment of the characters. One of the things that allow stories to ‘work,’ to make their point and communicate their meaning, is the teller’s judicious selection from the material available with which to construct a story. The complexity of reality makes it virtually impossible to reproduce without substantial editing. Indeed, in order to make an account seem real, it has to, nearly always, differ considerably from reality. The presentation of character is vital here. A person’s working life might easily be populated by fifty people, many more in some contexts, but when that person tells stories about their life, only a few of these people will be included. Of these people there will be a clear hierarchy of importance, personal detail supplied being in proportion to the importance of a particular character. A way of distinguishing minor from major characters is designating them as ‘types’ or generic figures. Of course, such a character has to be familiar, within the context in which it is used. So storytellers constantly refer to other stories, sometimes explicitly, often tacitly, and in so doing are able to tell a lot more story. My point is this; all conversation, which includes the story telling in ordinary life, employs building blocks derived from stories. Any culture is possessed of a repertoire of stock characters and narrative themes. These are an invaluable resource in personal story telling. So much so that it is often not necessary to actually tell a story, to illustrate some point. Just indicating a story, pointing out some familiar character or themes can be sufficient.

So stories are important in everyday life. But many people with an interest in narrative would take things further and regard everyday life as not just the context for story telling, but as a story. To some degree this is self evidently the case. Life consists of people doing things and things happening to them. Given that things happen in time, then events happen in a kind of order. They might not be experienced or understood as especially orderly, still less meaningful, but nevertheless order exists, if only chronology. Moreover, events are not entirely random. Causality is a reality, if often a complex and opaque one; many events

happen because something else happened. This is important. Stories can be of interest as cultural artefacts, or as sources of information, without the narrative form having much wider relevance. But if life, whether individual or social is somehow narrative in character, then all sorts of interpretative tools, initially applied to the study of literary narratives, and, more recently to the stories people tell in ordinary life, might also be applied to the study of human social life. People very often do understand their lives in this way, applying a narrative structure to events they experience.

Genre

The formal study of literary narratives has as long a history as does the generation of such narratives. From Aristotle onwards, the academy has been interested in the way in which works of literature not only *tell* a story, but in so doing how they imitate, or *show*, reality, holding a mirror up to the everyday world.[7] There is a very great deal that could be said about this, but I would like to concentrate on one area, of particular relevance to the present study: genre. The classification of literary texts into different types originates in the *Poetics*, and has been a persistent theme of literary studies ever since. Aristotle distinguished 'comedy' 'tragedy' and 'epic,' comedy indicating a literary imitation of the behaviour and responses of an inferior [and hence laughable] class of person, and tragedy, in comparison was concerned with superior persons, who ought therefore to be taken seriously. 'Epic' was tragedy with a longer time frame, and generally verse, rather than drama.

Even this sketch indicates some of the problems of establishing a taxonomy of literary genre. Literary texts vary in form (poetry, prose, drama), in the voice and perspective of the narrator, in narratee, in the time frame invoked, and in the overall tone or mood of the story (comic, tragic and so on). Precisely what is meant by a term like 'tragedy' tends also to shift over time, and according to context. Aristotle's understanding of tragedy as presenting the 'best' of humanity in the face of suffering contrasts with Shakespeare's flawed tragic heroes, and

[7]Aristotle, *Poetics*, trans. James Hutton (London: Norton, 1982).

again with the contemporary popular understanding of tragedy as, simply, a sad story.

The aim is not to construct some perfect theory of genre, some meta-taxonomy to account for every kind of story or text. Genre is not just some abstruse academic concept, but part of the ordinary apparatus of interpreting the world, and it is closely connected with the widespread practice of interpreting experience as narrative. Genre is a basic, learned, cultural tool, applied as stories are read and heard. An enormous number of terms are regularly used to indicate types of story. In addition to the, now familiar, 'tragedy', 'comedy' and 'epic', there are 'fairy tales', 'folk tales', 'melodramas', 'romances', 'mysteries', 'detective stories', 'science fiction', 'fantasy'. All terms used in combination with one another and with other adjectives. That such terms are meaningful, that the *Radio Times,* for example, can designate a film a 'comedy thriller' or an 'epic western drama'[8] indicates the extent to which such categories, often originating in very abstract academic discourse on poetics or rhetoric, enter ordinary, conventional vocabulary and operate as useful, everyday ways of interpreting, not only fiction, but all sorts of things we might be told. Literary genres are regularly applied to stories, in all contexts: libraries, video shops, cinemas and so on, but also to describe real life events. A series of incidents in the life of a family might well be described as a 'melodrama' or a 'soap opera.' This is an extension of the process noted above, in which fictional characters are invoked to describe real characters. Literary genres, and the idea of the narrative nature of reality that is implicit in that, are not simply abstract notions, but ideas implicit in a great deal of popular thinking.

The most obvious example of this is to be found in the 'fairy tale wedding'. This term designates a very specific aesthetic and suggests an aspiration that the relationship of bride and groom mirror those of the chief protagonists in fairy tales. It is also very strongly focussed on the bride. Fairy tale language and images might designate a particular style of wedding, but more important is the way such language and imagery is deployed alongside and combined with other

[8] *Radio Times, 25 November -1st December 2006*, p.59.

stories, and other images. The fairy tale is one of a range of stories that are told and participated in over the course of getting married. Others will include long, ongoing stories about the families involved, about survival and flourishing, about commitment, and, in the case of church weddings about God's blessing. A wedding is an occasion where a great many kinds of story meet, and where they inform each other. This can be described in terms of argumentative positions, or ideas. But a wedding is not just an expression of a set of ideas. Any wedding is a ritual possessed of a narrative structure. It has a beginning, an end, and a plot. As, simultaneously, a social and a religious ritual, an Anglican wedding can helpfully be regarded as a dual-purpose rite.[9] The ritual function of a wedding corresponds with what could be called its 'plot': the journey to marriage of two people. This journey is susceptible to many kinds of interpretation: as a private romance, as a sacrament symbolising the relation of God and the church, as a dynastic contract between families. These are not mutually exclusive. In the same way a wedding can be, but does not have to be, read as an account of inequitable gender relations. The people involved in a wedding, the bride and groom, the attendants, the celebrant and the family and friends are all playing roles, roles they did not themselves create, but which they made their own. On other occasions they will perform other roles. These roles have considerable symbolic value. Being complex and multifaceted, they can suggest many different layers of meaning at the same time. The familiarity of such a figure as the bride allows for different kinds of stories to be told using very familiar characters.

Narrative and Scholarship

Narrative, it has been established, plays a significant role in everyday life, including that aspect of everyday life that surrounds weddings. It is this empirical reality, including the sense, again empirically grounded, that life is like a story, that gives rise to the increasing interest in narrative in both the social sciences and theology.

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[9] See previous chapter.

Story and the Social Sciences

The frequency and importance of story telling in everyday life has not escaped the attention of social scientists. Indeed it is attention to this social fact that has prompted the increasing interest in narrative in many areas of social research: social anthropology, sociology, socio-linguistics and clinical and social psychology. Much has been written on the subject of narrative in recent years, in each of these areas. In addition to myth, of interest to anthropologists from Robertson Smith[10] onwards, there is a lot of talk of a recent 'narrative turn' in social research.[11] This indicates a move on several fronts towards an appreciation that narrative is, in some sense, an important consideration in any attempt to describe and interpret the social world. While impossible to describe this move exhaustively here, it is useful to highlight several areas relevant to this thesis in which narrative has been employed.

Before doing that it must be noted that 'story' is a very slippery word, in social science perhaps more than in any other area. It can enter a sentence meaning one thing and leave it twenty words later meaning something quite different. There are two fundamental and distinct ways in which 'narrative' or 'story' is used. These have already been mentioned in respect of narrative in everyday life but the distinction is so important for the use of narrative in the social sciences that it stands reiterating. First, there are the stories told by individuals and secondly 'story' can be an overarching, interpretative device. There are a great many different ways of handling stories told, and a great many ways in which 'story' might serve as some kind of broad explanatory concept, but the basic distinction still holds.

These two basic uses of the term 'narrative'; respectively indicating an empirical reality and an abstract, interpretive category, mirror the wider methodological

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[10] William Robertson Smith, *Lectures on the Religion of the Semites* (Edinburgh: A&C Black, 1889).

[11] Jane Elliott, in *Using Narrative in Social Research. Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches* (London: Sage, 2005) identifies two texts as being particularly important in encouraging the current attention to narrative: Daniel Bertaux's *Biography and Society. The Life History Approach in the Social Sciences* (Beverley Hills: Sage, 1981) and Elliot Mishler's *Research Interviewing. Context and Narrative* (Cambridge MA: HUP, 1991).

concerns of social science. Social science grew out of the epistemological shift of the Enlightenment, which privileged reason over tradition (or canonical text), as the means to accurate understanding and gave philosophical grounds for investigating both the natural and the social world empirically. All areas of life are, in principle, open to this sort of analysis: politics, economics, criminal justice, social class, and of particular relevance to the task in hand, marriage and religion. Considerable confidence is placed, according to this system, in the capacity of human beings to perceive reality accurately and to interpret it according to rational principles. This posits an objective, intellectually detached researcher. This is problematic, especially when what is under investigation is social or cultural. To the general, practical problem of perceiving and interpreting anything accurately and objectively is added the problem of the social sciences' subject matter. Contemporary 'culture' or 'society' is something in which the social scientist is an active present tense participant, as a human being. This revisits the insider/outsider problem introduced in the previous chapter. The nature of cultures and societies is such that a great deal about them is not immediately evident at an 'objective distance,' but only to participants. It is possible to maintain objectivity by discounting information about some social or cultural phenomenon, except that which *is* evident from the outside. So, the social reality of marriage might be restricted to laws or the rites and ceremonies and exclude the feelings of the participants.

The problem with this objective, generalising strategy is that it is at odds with its own subject matter: empirical social and cultural reality. Culture or society may be general, abstract concepts, but particular cultures are very specific, and general theories are no substitute for at least a basic familiarity of the grammar of what is being observed. Handling personal (and indeed other) stories requires knowledge of the conventions that inform story telling in a particular context. In any cultural context people learn how to hear as well as how to tell stories. Misunderstanding is easy if a hearer fails to distinguish fiction from non-fiction, for example. Genre is important and ordinary conversation, in any culture, is possessed of clear, but not necessarily obvious, markers of genre. 'Once upon a time' should raise very different expectations from 'this afternoon, at work.' Devices like irony, hyperbole, metaphor and tone also indicate ways in which a

story is to be understood. Anthropology, in particular, has always been interested in the specifics of cultures, concerned to describe and understand cultures from within, according to their own rationales, which inevitably attributes considerable importance to the perceptions of participants. More recently, post-modern scepticism about universal, abstract explanations has tended to increase interest in the 'indigenous'[12] understandings of participants. 'Stories' and 'story' mirror this tension between observation and interpretation, but also offer some possibilities for reconciliation, deriving interpretative categories from the realities observed.[13]

Stories reach the social scientist in ordinary conversation, or as the fruit of a deliberate attempt to solicit narratives. Social research as a set of empirical disciplines relies upon two basic methods, distinct, but overlapping: observation of human activities, and listening to participants describe and explain those activities, usually in stories. 'Observation' includes the collection and analysis of quantitative data on all measurable aspects of social life, as well as qualitative methods like participant observation. Listening is an intrinsic part of participant observation, in particular, and ethnography more generally, the researcher actually participating in the situation he or she is investigating. Conducting interviews is manifestly concerned with listening to people. While some interviews are structured to minimise the telling of stories, many are not and some are designed specifically to solicit extended narratives.[14] The results of this research include, besides abstract accounts of social phenomena, stories.[15] One set of stories gives rise to another. An ethnographer solicits accounts of rites from various participants and writes a monograph, which is used by others in a comparative study, and so on. There is a sort of layering effect, talk giving rise to more talk, every interpretation of stories involving telling yet more. But all these stories are sources of information about society.

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[12] Turner and Bruner, p.3.
[13] Ibid.
[14] Tom Wengraf, *Qualitative Research Interviewing: Biographic, Narrative and Semi- Structured Methods* (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 2001).
[15] Turner and Bruner, p.139.

Stories are a fact of social life, in any possible social or cultural context, though they vary in form and in subject matter from one context to another, and within a particular context. The stories people tell might include the 'personal experience stories,'[16] 'life stories'[17] as well as various tales from a wider folk-cultural repertoire, mentioned earlier in this chapter. They also include published stories of every kind. These are recently established categories, in a formal sense (and by no means mutually exclusive), within the social scientific literature. But stories, told by ordinary participants in a culture or society have always been a source for social research. I shall now consider ways in which these stories are a valuable source.

People's stories provide information about their subject. The classic areas of interest for sociology or anthropology derive a great deal of information from such stories. Stories about work, or crime and punishment, or institutions provide information about those subjects. Stories about a ritual sequence, or patterns of friendship in a particular society provide information about that culture. At this level it is the content of a story that is important. A story is the container for some important insight, which could equally (perhaps) be expressed in a different way. So, in respect of the stories I have collected, in the course of my empirical research, a key question is what these stories say about weddings in Anglican churches at the present time. I can describe, on the strength of them, for example, the use of flowers in weddings: bouquets and buttonholes, trends and fashions and the role of professional florists, assuming that what I have been told is an accurate account of what has occurred. The relevant issue is not narrative form, or the way in which a story has been deployed in argument or conversation, but the accuracy of the story in respect of the information it communicates. Unfortunately there is no way of guaranteeing truthfulness, still less accuracy. Conversation proceeds on the assumption that participants are telling the truth (or else giving conversational pointers towards the fictional character of what they are saying), but they do not always do so. It is of course possible to test the truth claims of one source against those of others, as with written material. Sometimes

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[16] See Wilson, *Performance and Practice* and Ken Plummer, *Telling Sexual Stories: Power, Change and Social Worlds.* (London: Routledge, 1995).
[17] See Linde, *Life Stories.*

this might be necessary. But this might miss something very important about narratives of this kind. I could, perhaps, to return to the flowers, cross check the accounts of couples, clergy and florists, and perhaps watch the wedding video, or look at the photographs, or, if I attended the wedding myself, check my own field notes. However, it would be difficult to see this as remotely appropriate because stories told by people about events in their lives or their societies do not just communicate discrete 'facts' about their ostensible subject matter, but also reveal a great deal about other aspects of reality, not least their tellers. Indeed certain aspects of reality are only really accessible via stories. I will consider three areas, from many, of particular importance to this thesis: perception, experience and identity.

Perception concerns the way that people see things. Like many things in the investigation of the social world, there exists a strict and a popular use of the term. Strictly speaking, perception is a concept deriving from cognitive psychology.[18] Perception is the application of some kind of mental map of the world to sensory observations, a kind of ordered seeing of the world around. This is not some specialist activity, but part of the ordinary process of engaging with the surrounding world. Perception is, of course, informed by the perspectives of a particular culture as well as by more individual influences. Like any other aspect of subjective experience, it is extremely difficult to investigate. Even assuming people are willing to explain their perceptions to a researcher, it is often very hard to do so, because of the inherent difficulty of articulating states of mind directly. Martin Stringer, interested in the way that participants perceive Christian worship,[19] addresses some of these problems. He highlights the privileging of the anthropologist's perspective, which, while 'sometimes using "native exegesis"[20] as part of the data' does not ask 'how the "native exegesis" is arrived at.' In contrast to this, he aims to ask 'what kind of meaning the ritual has for individual participants and how that meaning is arrived at.'[21] Stringer

[18] Michael W. Eysenck and Mark T. Keane, *Cognitive Psychology: A Student's Handbook* (Hove: Psychology Press, 2005), p.111-140.
[19] Stringer, *On the Perception of Worship.*
[20] Victor Turner's term to indicate the way people within a group describe and explain an action.
[21] Stringer, *On the Perception of Worship,* p.10.

identifies 'story' as one of several means by which members of a congregation express their experience of worship.

> The interviewees could not tell me exactly how they understood worship; they did not have the analytic language to do this. Even those who did have access to suitable analytic language failed to use it. For those who took part in worship week by week turning to such language would have reduced the whole experience of worship to gibberish. What the interviewee could do, however, was to tell a story, to recount previous services that were important to them... These stories... engaged me on the empathetic level: "The experience of worship is like this, you know, you were there also." What this should tell us is that the understanding of worship is an understanding that fits in with the nature of the story. It is an understanding in the form of lived experience, an experience that cannot be classified analytically, but an experience that can be communicated empathetically, through the medium of story.[22]

Stories are an important way of gaining access to the perceptions of individuals because people use stories to articulate their perceptions. Perceptions are not simply emotions or opinions, which can be represented in an abstract way. Stringer goes on to look at the way stories work, in this way, as the expression of perceptions. This is enormously helpful for my own study of marriage rites. Stringer describes the way different stories 'interact,' in the context of worship. So a story told in a sermon might mention another story, a Bible story perhaps, or a hymn. This account suggests to a hearer other occasions in which the same Bible story or hymn have been heard. Stringer draws attention to the popular phrase 'it spoke to me' as a way of highlighting the 'point in time in which two stories, our own and the liturgical, are instantaneously superimposed in such a way as to allow a flow, of meaning or emotion between them.'[23]

Perception can be defined as the way people look at and understand their experience. This is what concerns us now. Experience is a qualitative term that includes what people do, what happens to them and what goes on around them, insofar as all those things have an impact upon the person. Experience is an

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[22] Ibid, p.101-2.
[23] Ibid, p.105.

important concept in the literature concerning narrative in the social sciences. Bruner attributes this interest in experience, as an important theme in anthropological enquiry, to Victor Turner.[24] Turner (with others interested in experience) was concerned to find alternatives to what he saw as the undue generalisation (of either descriptive ethnography, or structuralism)[25] to which anthropology in particular and social science more generally, were prey. He found Wilhelm Dilthey's understanding of experience very helpful. For Dilthey, experience is what has been lived through. This is an essentially internal thing, as opposed to 'behaviour', and includes non-verbal states of consciousness. Despite its intensely personal nature, experience is communicated to others by means of 'expressions', such as stories, rituals, dramatic performances and other artefacts, which attempt to describe and communicate something experienced. These expressions are what anthropologists interested in experience tend to study. The importance of such expressions for the anthropological enterprise is expressed by Bruner as follows:

> The basic units of society are established by the people we study rather than by the anthropologist as alien observer. By focussing on narratives or dramas or carnival or any other expressions, we leave the definition of the unit of investigation up to the people, rather than imposing categories derived from our own ever shifting theoretical frames.[26]

A wedding is such an expression, both on the part of the church and the couple. The experience of marriage is of great interest to many in the social sciences and in theology, as something that has an enormous bearing on the social institution of marriage and its theological significance. It has been difficult to fit weddings into accounts of marriage, because weddings are all too easily seen as frivolous, in contrast to the seriousness of marriage and sexuality.[27] The concept of the expression of experience, in weddings and in stories about weddings, suggests a possible way forward.

Narratives are also constitutive of personal identity; how people understand

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[24] E. M. Bruner, 'Experience and Its Expressions' in Turner and Bruner, p.3.
[25] Bruner, p.8.
[26] Ibid, p.9.
[27] See Charsley, *Rites of Marrying*, p.5.

themselves. While ‘perception’ and ‘experience’ are etic categories, albeit ones that pertain to the inner life and outlook of the subject of a piece of research, ‘identity’ is something that such a subject is more aware of, and therefore something about which direct questions can more easily be asked. However, the area is rendered much more complicated by the importance of ‘identity’ to many contemporary debates in, not only the social sciences, but also psychology, philosophy, theology, history, literary studies and even the science of consciousness. In many ways this is a perennial concern. Ideas about humanity develop over time, and are informed by religious and political interests as well as ideals. Specific cultures have their own understandings of human nature, and of the relation of the individual to society. This can be a relatively simple matter of the relative importance of the interests of individual or the group in a particular culture. But even this tends to assume the category ‘individual.’ Many contemporary social scientists would dispute this, arguing that the ‘autonomous, individual self’ is a product of recent western history, rather than a description of a universal reality in human life. This is seen in, amongst other places, the difficulty that ethnographers sometimes have in extracting personal life stories from their informants, where ‘narratives about the self, particularly what we would call intimate or revealing narratives, were simply not known.’[28] Scepticism about the idea of the individual finds a comfortable home in a vigorous postmodernism, which, with its rejection of explanatory ‘grand narratives’, understands all existence, beyond the physical as ‘discourse’: there being discourses about power, sex, religion, science and so on. There is no such thing as an individual here: what might be thought of as such is really just a point in a great complex web of discourses. It is not possible to address these ideas here. Like many critical philosophies that have preceded it - dialectic materialism, Freudian psychoanalysis, and the demythologising of religious and deconstruction of literary texts - post-modernism provides acute strategies for exposing the weaknesses and ideological bad faith of prevailing orthodoxies. People, however, have a tendency to cling to their illusions, if such they are. On the whole, at least in contemporary England, people think of themselves as individuals, if not, perhaps, entirely immutable autonomous ones. If one is

[28] Linde, *Life Stories,* p.47-48.

interested in the perceptions, the experience and the identity of people in the context of the contemporary rites associated with weddings, it is necessary to accept this.

One does not, in any case, have to entirely endorse the postmodern view, in its most concentrated form, to accept that personal identity is a flexible thing, taking different forms in different contexts. Linde investigates the way the personal life story, the linked, but discontinuous narrative about one's own life that every 'normally competent adult'[29] in our culture has, contributes to the development of a sense of self. Such a story, and by extension, the sense of self which it promotes is dependent on context. She observes 'at different times, on different occasions and to different people, individuals give different accounts of their lives.'[30]

Linde's field is social linguistics. Her principle interest is in the life story as a unit of discourse. But what she says has connections with other areas of social science. She is not just concerned with the life story as a source of information about the details of a person's life, or about things that person might have encountered in life. She says

> Narrative is among the most important social resources for creating and maintaining personal identity. Narrative is a significant response for creating our internal, private sense of self and is all the more a major resource for conveying that self to and negotiating that self with others... the qualities or characteristics of the self that the narrative creates and maintains.[31]

Linde does not just claim that people's stories are an important source of information about themselves or other matters, but argues that the action of constructing and telling a life story, of the thinking through of one's experience and interpreting it that is necessitated by such a process, is vital to the development and maintenance of personal identity. In other words stories, and story telling, do not just say things, they do things, they serve a vital function.

[29] Ibid, p.20.
[30] Ibid, p.4.
[31] Ibid, p.98.

Holstein and Gubrium make a similar point in *The Self We Live By*[32]. As social psychologists they are operating in a tradition that has its origins in the symbolic interactionist[33] understanding that people's identity is formed by the nature of their participation in social groups. So, persons treated as though they are intelligent, interesting and so on become such people. Persons, in contrast, allocated negative roles, acquire self-identities accordingly. Holstein and Gubrium critically trace the development of this kind of thinking, to the point of its floundering on postmodern rejection of the idea of the 'empirical self.'[34] They see in the study of the way personal narratives construct a sense of self, a way forward that takes due account of postmodern criticisms.

Both Linde and Holstein and Gubrium emphasise the fact that people do not have only one life story, or in Holstein and Gubrium's words, only one 'construction of the self.'[35] Different accounts, arguably different selves, are brought out in different contexts. Such stories are not mutually contradictory, or not necessarily. Linde describes the way a person might give a different account of some major life event to different audiences, but will also have a 'meta-narrative' which unites and accounts for the various stories.[36] Holstein and Gubrium emphasise the twin agencies of the person and their context when they say 'the self-constructor is involved in something like a salvage operation, crafting selves from the vast array of available resources, making do with what he or she has to work with in the circumstances at hand, all the while constrained, but not completely controlled by the working conditions of the moment.'[37]

Stories do not just communicate information, whether deliberately or accidentally. They actually serve a purpose in human life. Telling stories is not just a way people explain some aspect of their character. It is the way people acquire that character in the first place. To some extent this is quite unconscious.

[32] J.A. Holstein, J.A. and J.F. Gubrium, J.F. *The Self We Live By. Narrative Identity in a Postmodern World* (New York: OUP, 2000).
[33] See Herbert Blumer, *Symbolic Interactionism: Perspective and Method* (Berkeley CA: UCP, 1969).
[34] Holstein and Gubrium, *The Self We Live By,* p.56.
[35] Ibid, p.153.
[36] Linde, *Life Stories,* p.34.
[37] Holstein and Gubrium, *The Self We Live By*, p.153.

Linde talks about the construction of a life story as part of the normal social competence of an adult in the western world. In addition to the life-story telling that is a relatively unexamined aspect of ordinary adult life, stories are also told quite deliberately, for very particular reasons. One such reason is to demonstrate what *type* of person they are, or want to be seen as being. Here, a person is one thing and not various other things. This is often attempted by applying one of numerous possible typologies. Some of these have an established status and are widely familiar. Gender, sexuality, marital status, age, racial or ethnic group, social class, occupation, religion are all familiar examples, but people routinely construct others, as they explain what they are like. The same is true of types of stories. This sort of typological thinking runs right through story-telling, offering short cuts and anchoring the story being told, and its plots and characters to other stories, other characters and other plots, which while different, operate along the same sort of lines. People do not tell a story in isolation, they contribute it to an existing, and to some degree at least, familiar collection of stories, and in so doing offer a critical commentary on what has gone before.

People communicate their perceptions and experience; they establish their identity, by locating themselves within certain kinds of story. Stories do not just establish individual identity, but the identity of groups. Religious traditions, ethnic and regional groups, families and groups of friends or colleagues all have their stories, the telling of which helps perpetuate the group. Indeed it is the possession and the telling of stories that establishes a group as a group. This is by no means inevitable, not every possible story is actually told. Bruner says 'Some experiences are inchoate, in that we simply do not understand what we are experiencing, either because the experiences are not 'storyable', or because we lack the performative and narrative resources, or because the vocabulary is lacking.'[38] But contexts change, and what was once not storyable becomes so, and what once was, stops being so.[39] Weddings are, however, very 'storyable.' Plummer notes this, somewhat in passing, when observing how hard it was, for a

[38] Bruner, p.6-7.
[39] See Plummer, K. *Telling Sexual Stories. Power, Change and Social Worlds.* (London: Routledge, 1995).

long time, to tell stories about other kinds of sexuality.[40] He is quite right. There are a great many stories about weddings. Weddings feature in novels. The novel of romance, courtship and marriage is an established genre, with the whole plot framed by the course of one or more couples' paths to marriage. The wedding itself is a useful narrative device in other fictional genres, allowing, like other similar rituals, for the gathering of a dispersed group of characters together. As performed rituals, with clear and familiar visual characteristics, weddings have proved very useful in films. Weddings feature in stories in everyday life; people expect to hear stories about weddings their friends and colleagues have attended. What might this prevalence of wedding stories mean? It doubtless indicates the persistently privileged status given to heterosexual marriage over other kinds of sexual relationship. It also suggests the usefulness of a familiar set piece ritual to story telling, whatever the subject, stories in which weddings feature prominently being by no means limited to stories about the marrying couple, or marriage at all.

A possessor of particular kinds of story is understood as a particular kind of person. The ability to tell a certain story is often a necessary qualification for group membership. Part of the process of getting married is being inducted into the folklore of the wedding.[41] The wedding stories of parents and friends are important for many of the marrying couples I spoke to, and it is in the context of getting married themselves that they learn these stories. This is not just a matter of knowing a story but owning it, of its being one's own story. For this it is not sufficient to be familiar with the stories that comprise a relevant tradition. One has to be able to tell the story on one's own account too. This importance of the story in forming identity is a key factor in recent theological interest in narrative.

Story and Theology

Narrative has been important to theology firstly because people tell stories about God and about humanity in relation to God. Secondly, ideas of 'tradition'[42], the

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[40] Plummer, *Telling Sexual Stories,* p.49.
[41] See Charsley, Leonard and Boden.
[42] Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Theology. An Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 3rd ed. 2001), p.15-16.

authoritative theological conversation running through the history of the church and ‘salvation history’[43], which approaches the Bible, and subsequent human history as a coherent narrative in which truths about God are progressively revealed, have proved attractive to many theologians. Both these insights have been taken up recently by ‘narrative theologians’, who collectively identify a tendency in ‘modern,’ post-Enlightenment, theology towards excessive generalisation and abstraction, and also, paradoxically, individualism. Concerns to treat the narrative character of much of the Bible seriously as well as abstracting the interpretation of the Bible from the community of faith form one main branch of narrative theology,[44] the other being concerned with theological ethics. Again there is a reaction against abstraction and individualism and an emphasis on locating the moral life within the community of faith and its formative narratives.[45] Such ethicists share with writers like Holstein and Gubrium an understanding of human identity as reflexive, derived from participation in groups. This approach has yet to be applied widely to marriage,[46] still yet to weddings.

Parallel with the move to promote the importance of narrative in Biblical hermeneutics and ethics, there exists a growing trend to talk about ‘human experience’ as an important theological source. While this ‘experience’ is not always construed in narrative terms, narrative is often an important aspect of it: whether ‘life-stories’, or literary and artistic expressions of experience. Steven Crites expresses this as follows:

> The stories people hear and tell, the dramas they see performed, not to speak of the sacred stories that are absorbed without being directly heard or seen, shape in the most profound way the inner story of experience. We imbibe a sense of meaning of our own baffling dramas from these stories, and this sense of its meaning in turn affects the form of a man’s experience and the style of his action. Such cultural forms, both sacred and mundane, are of course socially

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[43] ‘Saving History’ in Church of England Doctrine Commission, *The Mystery of Salvation* (London: CHP, 1995), pp.58-84.
[44] See Hans Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative* (Newhaven: Yale, 1974).
[45] See Stanley Hauerwas *The Peacable Kingdom. A Primer in Christian Ethics* (London: SCM, 1984) and *A Community of Character* (Indiana: NDP, 1981).
[46] Hauerwas, ‘The Family as a School for Character’ in *Religious Education* 80, no.2 (1985), 272-285 is an exception.

> shared in varying degrees, and so help to link men's inner lives as well as orientating them to a common public world.[47]

This is important to the present study for several reasons. Experience, as has been noted above, is widely regarded as vital to a contemporary theology of marriage.[48] It is often heralded as the antidote to excessive abstraction and idealism. But it is not always very easy to investigate. While people's ideas about marriage (or even weddings) can be investigated in abstract terms, as Crites says, experience really has to be described in narrative terms. If so, attention to stories is important for a theology of marriage. A great deal of the empirical material derived from interviews with people involved in weddings is in narrative form: accounts of particular activities and conversations that happened in the course of preparing for a wedding. There are several ways of approaching this data. The stories can, and will be treated as a valuable source of information about wedding ritual. But I would like to argue that story is more significant than that, that an Anglican wedding as social ritual and liturgy is usefully understood as a story, or rather as several interwoven stories. In a wedding the personal story of the relationship of the marrying couple intersects with the ongoing stories of their respective family and with that of the ritual involvement of the church in marriage. Narrative is not, it must be re-iterated, incidental here. The stories that meet at an Anglican wedding do not just run on parallel tracks, nor do they simply exist as rival interpretations of the significance of events. They inform each other, as will be seen.

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[47] Steven Crites, 'The Narrative Quality of Experience' in Stanley Hauerwas and L.G. Jones (eds.), *Why Narrative: Readings in Narrative Theology* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 1997), p.79.
[48]See Chapter 2.

SECTION III WEDDINGS: CLERGY AND COUPLES

The aim of this study is to gain understanding of the contemporary wedding from the point of view of both the couple and the celebrant. This two sided aspect of any particular wedding: part of the ordinary work of the parish priest on the one hand and yet a very special event from the point of view of the couple is one of the things that makes the analysis of the wedding a challenging task.

Weddings are things that people talk about. Not everyone likes weddings, not everyone approves of weddings, or of any individual aspect of them, but everyone has something to say on the subject. A wedding is an extraordinary event, but talk about weddings, telling stories about weddings is constantly happening. This talk can be taken in two ways. Firstly, it is a source of information about what weddings are like, what happens, why this might matter and to whom. Secondly, it demonstrates *how* people in a particular time and place talk: patterns of speech, what sorts of things people find interesting or amusing, which subjects are suitable for particular ears, the patterns people see and the sense they make of things.

I designed the interviews, as far as possible, to replicate informal conversations I had already had (or overheard) on the subject. People are often very keen to talk about weddings: their own and also those they have attended, describing material aspects in minute detail: clothing, food, flowers, transport, or accounting for their choice of a particular ceremony or venue, or their opinion of someone else's choices. The same is true of clergy: stories about their involvement with weddings are very common.

The Local Context

That people have a great deal to say about weddings means there is a great deal of potential information available. Given that this study is concerned with Anglican weddings an approach was also needed that allowed something of the variety of contemporary Anglican theology and practice to be evident. To keep the study within manageable proportions I decided to focus on one deanery in the Diocese of Wakefield, in West Yorkshire. Centred on a medium sized town and

several surrounding smaller towns, the total population, according to the diocesan handbook is a little less than 90,000.[1] The area is mostly built up and urban, although two of the congregations are in villages. Historically the area had a great deal of heavy industry, particularly heavy woollen textiles, and also mining. There is considerable deprivation.[2] The development of the area is reflected in the foundation of the parish churches. Four pre-date 1300 and the remainder were all founded between 1825 and 1881. The Non-Conformist churches of the area mostly date from the same period. Roman Catholic churches are rather more recent, in line with migration from Ireland.[3] The mosques are more recent still, and serve the substantial Muslim community, originating in migration from the Indian sub-continent in the 1950s.[4] One of the parishes has the largest Muslim population of any parish in the UK.[5] Although greatly declined, manufacturing is still a significant employer.[6] This is an urban area, but not a city; there is no institution of higher education here and no cathedral, no cinema and no theatre, nor are there the large financial and legal institutions of a city or large town. About half the parishes are dormitory towns with most working residents commuting to employment elsewhere.

There are twenty Anglican congregations in the Deanery, divided into twelve groupings: one 'team,' four 'united benefices,' and four churches with their own incumbent, one of whom is non-stipendiary. In addition to clergy of incumbent status the deanery has a number of curates in training positions as well as several non-stipendiary clergy (NSMs) including locally ordained ministers, known in this diocese as 'OLMs'. There are also a considerable number of authorised voluntary lay workers in the area: readers and lay pastoral ministers. When I conducted the interviews there were eleven incumbents in post and two vacancies. In the past ten years three churches have closed and seven full-time

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[1] The Missionary Diocese of Wakefield *Directory 2003-2004* (Wakefield: Diocese of Wakefield, 2003).
[2] 'Indices of Deprivation 2001' www.statistics.gov.uk (23/11/08).
[3] David Hey, *Yorkshire From A.D.1000* (London: Longman, 1986), p.275.
[4] Hey, 308-310.
[5] C2. See Appendix 1.
[6] 'Neighbourhood Snapshot' www.statistics.gov.uk (23/11/08).

stipendiary posts have been abolished, NSMs and OLMs making up clergy numbers to some degree.

This is not an area especially representative of England, though England contains many such areas: loose associations of small industrial towns on the peripheries of large conurbations. Still, the issues that impinge upon contemporary society as a whole are experienced here too: cultural and religious diversity, changing patterns of employment, changing sexual mores, housing costs. It is even harder to say whether this deanery is representative of the Church of England. A considerable variety in style of worship between the churches is reflected in the diverse vocabulary used to describe it. Four churches, all of which have passed 'resolutions A & B' have 'Mass' as their main Sunday service. Four more have a 'Sung Eucharist,' two a 'Parish Eucharist', one 'Parish Communion' and one, 'Holy Communion. The remainder alternate 'Holy Communion,' or in one case 'Family Communion,' and either 'All Age Worship' or a 'Family Service.'[7] Overall attendance at worship has fallen in most congregations over the past ten years, and congregations are, with a few exceptions, elderly rather than youthful. Apart from Sunday worship, these congregations have many activities in common (and in common with the Church of England as a whole); lunch clubs for the elderly, toddler's groups and pastoral visiting, among them, often done by the clergy, but equally often undertaken by other members of the church. In addition there are the occasional offices: baptisms, numbers of which have declined, funerals, and of course weddings.

The Interviews

I spoke to all eleven clergy of incumbent status in post in 2006, when I conducted the interviews, as well as the administrator in one of the parishes. The interviews were semi-structured, designed to solicit extended responses and to encourage the interviewees to talk freely.[8] I was aiming to solicit accounts of how these clergy understood their involvement with weddings, as far as possible avoiding distortion by prematurely introducing 'etic' concepts into the

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[7] Diocese of Wakefield, *Directory 2003-2004.*

[8] See Appendix 3 for the Clergy Interview Schedule.

conversations. I was not so much interested in typical responses as in the range of concerns and preoccupations that clergy have in this area, the ways in which they think about and articulate those concerns, and the ways in which conducting a wedding can be a focus for reflection on wider areas of theology and pastoral practice.

After a pilot interview with a couple who married outside of the area, (and in a Methodist church), I talked to thirteen couples, twenty-six people in all, contacted through the clergy. I asked all the clergy if they could put me in touch with couples they had recently married, or were shortly to marry. Three clergy felt unable to suggest any couples to me, mostly because they had very few weddings. Most of the priests spoke to couples first and then let me know names and contact details. One gave me the list of all couples married over a two-year period, so that I could make first contact myself. I had some reservations about the first approach, but the couples I spoke to were diverse in terms of age, occupation and previous marital status, and in these respects at least, reflected wider patterns evident in the marriage registers. In addition, the reluctance of many couples, approached 'cold' to speak to me, demonstrated an important strength of the other approach. I wanted to speak to couples together, and apparent reluctance on the part of some grooms also limited the number of willing informants somewhat. As for the clergy, interviews were semi-structured, as far as possible to replicate the 'wedding stories' mentioned above.[9]

To gain a more comprehensive picture of the immediate context in which these couples were planning their weddings, and the clergy conducting them, I visited and interviewed various local wedding industry professionals. Some of these I met at a local wedding fair and others at their business premises. I also consulted the marriage registers in the parishes of the study and observed weddings and wedding rehearsals, both proving most illuminating. It was plain from the interviews that while weddings are things people talk about, certain aspects of weddings are very hard to narrate. Clergy have collections of stories about weddings, as do couples. None of these stories, however, include the detailed

[9] See Appendix 4 for the Couples' Interview Schedule.

movement-by-movement accounts of the wedding ceremony and other key ritual moments. Such points are referred to, as though already familiar, but not readily described. Such actions, familiar, but not easily narrated needed to be observed. The next two chapters address the question: ‘what is an Anglican wedding?’ from the perspective of clergy and couples respectively.

CHAPTER 6
CLERGY

Weddings are social and ritual occasions of great importance to marrying couples and those close to them. This is consolidated by their rarity: people attend few weddings and, ideally, people marry only once. Where involvement in weddings is an aspect of ordinary working life, weddings are rather different. They are not the time-out-of- time, liminal events set apart for the profound re-ordering of one area of the social world, but familiar theatres for the performance of established professional roles. This is so for all involved with weddings in a professional capacity, including clergy. Moreover clergy are not simply professionals whose (wedding) services are hired by marrying couples, but persons with distinctive understandings and aims with respect to weddings.

The following chapter will answer the central question of this thesis: 'what is an Anglican wedding?' from the distinctive perspective of clergy, and the clergy of this deanery in particular. Of these all but one were men and all but one were stipendiary. There were considerable variations in other respects. Ages ranged from thirty-six to sixty-five and all but one were themselves married. Length of time in the ministry varied from thirty-nine to seven years, the majority having spent most of their working lives as priests. In addition to parochial ministry, clergy had also worked in hospital chaplaincy and in diocesan posts. All had moved around at various points in their lives for study or work, mostly within the north of England, half being brought up in the region and half of the remainder moving here for university. Such overall geographical mobility contrasts with the comparatively small distances the clergy moved in their ministries. Apart from three first curacies, all ministerial experience was in Yorkshire, nearly all in Wakefield Diocese; only one had been an incumbent elsewhere. Their present post was a first incumbency for five of the clergy, including one experienced priest with a long career in hospital chaplaincy.

Churchmanship also varied considerably, though this was hard to pin down. While many, perhaps most, clergy apply some category of churchmanship, like

'evangelical' or 'catholic,'[1] to themselves this is a complicated issue. There are numerous possible categories of churchmanship and individuals are quite likely to change their position over time.[2] Affiliation to a particular wing of the Church is of enormous importance to some, and almost none to others. I did not ask the clergy about this issue, not wishing to distort the way clergy were inclined to talk about these things, by introducing categories, which while not unfamiliar, were not the ones with which people preferred to think.

Churchmanship did not appear a major preoccupation for most of these clergy. The two priests who explicitly applied a category of churchmanship to themselves did so when describing their own changing attitudes to marriage. One said that he had moved 'from a conservative evangelical background … I would now describe myself as an open charismatic evangelical, very gentle charismatic... I would say we've moved on since Ephesians 6 was written. Talking about men being head of the house and women obeying her husband. The two of you need to work out how you do it together and who is the boss.'[3] Many of the clergy related changes in their thinking on marriage, not to churchmanship as such, but to a broader theological rethink.

All of the clergy had a lot to say about weddings and apparently welcomed the opportunity to do so; an enthusiasm to talk matched by an equal enthusiasm, in many cases, for conducting weddings. Parish clergy enjoy talking about weddings because they are interesting in their own right, and also because they are useful to think with, occasioning as they do reflection on, in particular, the role of the church in the community, contemporary social mores and their own identity as clergy. There is no immediate reason to suppose that these thought processes: considerations of weddings reminding speakers of other things, is a unique property of reflection on weddings. To some extent, at least, this is just how people think: one thing reminds them of another, and so on: 'losing the

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[1] See Kelvin Randall, *Evangelicals Etcetera: Conflict and Conviction in the Church of England's Parties* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005).
[2] See Douglas Davies and Mathew Guest, *Bishops, Wives & Children. Spiritual Capital Across the Generations* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007).
[3] C2,p.3. Interviews with clergy are coded 'C1', 'C2' etc. See Appendix 1 for further details.

thread', 'going off at a tangent'; English is rich in metaphors for this very thing. But this is not quite what is happening here. The clergy who were interviewed were not being diverted from the subject of weddings when they considered liturgy or pastoral ministry; they were very much on the subject. While other aspects of a priest's work, not least funerals, might occasion similar reflection, the specific nature of Anglican involvement in weddings makes them particularly suggestive. Weddings involve clergy in pastoral work, and in the conduct of liturgy. They bring them into contact with parishioners with no other involvement with the Church. Weddings also make it impossible for a priest to ignore the established status of the Church, and the material and legal realities attendant upon this: parish boundaries amongst other things. Weddings bring clergy into face-to-face contact with contemporary culture in both its material aspects, and its values. From divorce to cohabitation, from conspicuous consumption to aesthetics, weddings oblige clergy to address contemporary cultural realities. Weddings are good things 'to think with.'[4] Weddings are also good things to think with about the embodied practice of work as a parish priest. The clergy all referred to their increasing competence at, and confidence in, the performance of the pastoral and liturgical tasks associated with a wedding over the course of their ministry. Beyond satisfaction at the mastery of practical skills, such tasks are performed in role, as a priest. The performance of such a role, and moreover its narration, consolidates the identity of a parish priest.

The Parish Priest

Before addressing weddings specifically, it is helpful to consider parochial ministry more generally. Like many ostensibly utilitarian activities work often carries a considerable burden of additional meaning. Work is an answer, to the question 'what do you do?' and also 'who are you?' For stipendiary parish clergy, as for many people, work is both the means by which they make a living and a way in which they establish their identity. In many areas of employment the identity aspect of work extends considerably beyond tasks undertaken in that capacity, much more so for skilled work or permanent employment, than for unskilled or casual work. This is particularly true for clergy, who are actively

[4] Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Totemism*, Trans. Rodney Needham (London: Merlin, 1962), p.89.

encouraged throughout the process of selection and training for ordination to think about the nature of their work and about their own identity as clergy, an identity istinct from any particular post.

Anglican clergy go through a long drawn out process of selection, training and ordination, before taking up any particular post. Candidates for ordination must demonstrate, not only aptitude, but also their conviction that God is 'calling' them to ordination. During an extended series of interviews a candidate is required, repeatedly, to narrate their life in such a way to make ordination a vital part of it, a particular deployment of Linde's 'life story.'[5] This continues throughout training and indeed after ordination. In addition to academic theology and practical ministerial skills, theological training is supposed to be 'formative.'[6] Ordinands do not just acquire knowledge and skills, they take upon themselves the nature of a Christian minister; being 'formed' as an ordained person. While sometimes described in abstract terms, in practice formation is an embodied process. Ordinands rehearse and perform roles as pastors and liturgical ministers alongside reflection on ministerial identity. They also refine and narrate the story of their calling and ministry. In sociological terms they acquire a *habitus*.[7] The focus is not on performing a particular job (being a vicar, rather than a hospital chaplain for example), though the expectation is that most who are ordained will work in parishes, but on *becoming* and then *being* a deacon and then a priest. Clergy are ordained deacon at the end of their training, and priest usually a year later, in post as a curate. While deacons dress as clergy and are active in pastoral and liturgical work, only priests may preside at the Eucharist and pronounce the blessing and absolution. After a curacy, lasting three or four years, stipendiary clergy move to more responsible posts, usually, but not always, as 'incumbents' of parishes: vicars, rectors or priests-in-charge. It is important to emphasise that clerical identity is distinct from that specifically associated with being a parish priest. Not only non-parochial clergy, but also

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[5] See Chapter 5.
[6] 'Ministry in the Church of England: What About Training?' http://www.cofe.anglican.org.lifeevents (07/12/08)
[7] Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction. A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice (London: Routledge, 1984), p.101.

non-stipendiary clergy, deriving their income from other sources, undergo the same pattern of discernment of vocation, selection and training.

Parish priests are also just that: the priests of particular parishes. The incumbent of an Anglican parish is instituted and inducted into the 'cure of souls'[8] of that parish; he or she is responsible for the spiritual welfare of all those living in the parish, not just regular worshippers. Official thinking on Anglican ministry, as well as its actual practice, is deeply imbued with a distinct understanding of place. Not only England, or even the United Kingdom, but also the entire world is divided into the provinces, dioceses and often also parishes of this specific ecclesiastical geography. The complex history and diverse implications of this aside, this is important in a number of practical ways for parish clergy, and for couples wishing to marry in an Anglican ceremony. A parish is a defined geographical area, which imposes distinct responsibilities and distinct limitations on the work of a parish priest.

A parish is not simply an administrative unit; it is possessed, by virtue of its particular geography and history, of social institutions and cultural characteristics, shared to a greater or lesser degree with surrounding areas. The clergy in this study were all keenly aware of the character of their parish, and the implications of this for their ministry, including weddings. The Church of England contributes to this. Some churches have strong and distinctive traditions, not just of worship, but of pastoral engagement with the parish. Churchmanship is a significant, but by no means the only, factor here. A priest also inherits the fruits of his or her predecessor's policies with respect to baptism or weddings, as well as the charm and diligence with which such policies were implemented.

Parochial clergy, while theoretically accountable to the bishop of the diocese, have considerable latitude as to how they organise their working life, though certain things are required and others expected. Some of these relate to the parish church and its congregation: conducting public worship on Sundays, attending meetings pertaining to the running of the church and initiating people into the

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[8] 'Service of Institution and Induction' http://www.gloucester.anglican.org/worship/downloads (11/12/08).

Christian faith through baptism. Other things concern the parish as a whole: maintaining connections with local institutions, an active role in civic occasions and conducting funerals and weddings. Clergy make categorical distinctions between tasks that comprise their jobs. Some tasks, though demanding, are central: pastoral and liturgical work, typically. Others are peripheral, though they may demand considerable time: administration chief among them.

This chapter is concerned with the significance of weddings for clergy. Clergy, when conducting weddings are doing part of their job. In so doing they are performing specific roles, something that has considerable implications for the establishment and consolidation of personal identity. Weddings involve a parish priest in activities of central importance: pastoral care and liturgy. The concerns, which emerge in doing the ordinary job of weddings, provide a definition of that job and a kind of reflection upon it. If weddings, as will be seen, contribute to the consolidation of identity as priests, and as parish priests in particular, this is because weddings, and the tasks associated with them, are good things to think with. In this chapter a description of the tasks necessitated by a wedding will be followed by a consideration of several areas of professional interest to clergy: pastoral care, conducting worship, and involvement in society at large. I will then consider clergy as observers of weddings and as cultural commentators more generally. Each of these sections will begin with a description of the way in which the clergy in the study expressed their concerns and then consider wider implications.

The Wedding as Work

The national decline in numbers of church weddings is reflected in the 'study churches', although the number of weddings individual clergy celebrate varies considerably. In 2005, numbers of weddings in the churches studies ranged from none to twenty-two.[9] Such variation was attributed by clergy to local sociological factors, the aesthetic qualities of church buildings and to the pastoral policies of clergy. Nevertheless, all clergy received requests for weddings and all had clear procedures in place when presented with such requests. I asked them to tell me

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[9] Information derived from Marriage Registers.

what happened when someone contacted them wanting to be married. All described their response in considerable detail. While there was a degree of variation in procedure, differences were small. For this reason I will describe a standard approach noting variations where relevant. One priest described the first conversation as follows:

> Well they ring me up and say 'can I get married in your church?' Immediately on the phone I do the initial checks… so I ask them the questions: 'have either of you been married before?' (Because if the answer's 'yes, and I'm divorced' it's down another route)... 'Where do you live?' (Because there is no point in me starting anything if neither of them lives here or has any reason to be married here). So on the phone I am doing those initial checks to establish if they're of the legal age to get married, whether they're too closely related.[10]

While this was the most detailed account, all of the clergy described similar conversations early in their contact with couples, in which they explained the rules about residence and about marriages after divorce. Age and consanguinity were less frequently mentioned, though not only a concern of this priest. The issue of marriage after divorce will be considered shortly.

Some clergy described their approach to couples' entitlement to be married in quite bald terms; people either live in the parish, or have a clear connection with the parish church, or else they do not, in which case marriage in that church is not possible. Others expressed frustration with the system that means that in addition to a widespread ignorance about the parish system, parish boundaries, especially in urban areas, are frequently not coterminous with what are locally perceived as distinct districts. All the clergy were prepared to conduct weddings for people who live outside of the parish, and to go to some trouble to make this possible. Some clergy said they required attendance at church, so a couple would qualify to be put on the electoral roll. No one actually said they were happy to do this without the couple attending church, although a number observed that they were not the sort of people to do that sort of thing, suggesting they knew other clergy who did.

[10] C1,p.2.

Following this first conversation, clergy arrange an initial meeting. Generally the couple goes to the vicarage, though one priest prefers to visit couples and two see couples after the main Sunday service. The vicar of one of the churches with many weddings had a more formal system in place, arrangements being mostly made by the parish administrator, who worked partly in the evening so she could do this. This first meeting is an opportunity for the priest and couple to get to know one another, and includes booking a date, explaining procedures, occasionally taking a deposit and getting couples to fill in the banns form (or giving it to them to take away and return later). While banns cannot be called until three months before the wedding, clergy often like to have the form completed sooner so they have 'the basic detail about the couple … the stuff that will eventually land in the registers.'[11] Apart from keeping on top of administration, this confirms previous verbal information about the couple's address, ages and marital history.

The preceding conversations usually take place over a year before the wedding. About half of the clergy in the study expect the couple to get back in touch with them three to six months before the wedding date, the rest saying that they contact the couple at a similar point. This is when serious planning for the wedding begins, possibly including 'marriage preparation': a term in common currency, but without precise definition, though tending to combine instruction on the significance of marriage with practical advice. Most of the clergy said they did this, though they varied considerably in what they meant by it. There are several published courses,[12] but only one priest made significant use of such material, and then in very attenuated form.

The three churches with the largest numbers of weddings arrange group marriage and wedding preparation, bringing all of the couples to be married over either a year or a six-month period together for a few sessions. Several clergy with few weddings said that if they had more they would consider such an approach, and

[11] C1,p.3.

[12] For example, Nicky and Sila Lee, *The Marriage Book. How to Build a Lasting Relationship* (London, Alpha International, 2nd ed. 2000).

others indicated that they had done just that in their previous parishes. It was felt to be appropriate to work out a strategy that suited local circumstances. Others work through marriage preparation material with individual couples, in most cases using the text of the marriage service as a basis for discussion. One priest said he used the wedding rehearsal in this way, and while others did not say so, in the wedding rehearsals I observed it was evident that they did just that. One priest said he did no preparation, arguing that as all of the marrying couples already lived together, there was little that could be usefully added. Nevertheless, other comments indicated he was as enthusiastic as the others to communicate his understanding of marriage to the couple and to encourage couples to think seriously about the commitment they are making in marriage. While marriage preparation varied in approach, what the clergy wanted to communicate varied little. What clergy included in marriage preparation paralleled their wider understanding of the church's involvement in weddings and marriage. Practical advice offered (principally on communication) mirrored the pastoral assistance that the Church offers couples. Liturgical preparation, introducing and explaining the ritual and the theological significance of marriage, mirrored a wider theological concern to make explicit the presence of God in people's lives. Clergy evidently felt they did this work capably, and that it was an area of work in which they had grown in competence over the course of their ministerial life. In some cases they compared their present approach favourably with that of previous bosses or more recent colleagues. Some were very positive about the approaches of neighbours and expressed a wish to emulate some aspects of their practice.

A similar professional confidence was evident in the clergy's celebration of liturgy. Anglican weddings have a clearly defined form, described in the introduction and in Chapter 2, though there are a number of options. All the clergy felt that they had a flexible approach to the wedding service and were happy to let couples make choices. This includes choosing between *CW* and the *BCP*; though several clergy said they did not offer a *BCP* service, and only used it if asked specifically. Couples have to choose vows, bible readings, hymns, prayers and music and whether or not to have friends and relatives involved in the service. All of the clergy said that a significant number of couples had

difficulty making those choices, having little familiarity with either hymns or the bible, but they preferred to help people make a choice rather than choose for them. While the majority of couples were felt to want guidance in their choices for the service, a minority had wishes that clergy felt they could not accommodate. Increasing, though infrequent requests from couples to write their own vows were rejected on the basis that the vows in the wedding service have a legal status as well as a fixed position in the liturgy. Non-biblical readings were generally accepted; all felt that they needed to be 'appropriate to the occasion' and expected to see and approve any such reading before it was used. Clergy exercised little control over choice of processional music, and all let people have recorded music instead of the organ, if they so chose. The administrative process of negotiating the details of the service was similar for all clergy. They tended to print out copies of suggested readings and prayers and the text of the service so couples could more easily choose, often including a sheet for couple to note their choices and return.

<u>The Rehearsal</u>

All the clergy held wedding rehearsals as a matter of course. None offered any explanation or justification of this, until asked directly. What follows derives from their comments and from my own observations of rehearsals. The rehearsal takes place at the church a few days before the actual wedding, usually in the evening. Other key participants in the wedding besides the couple and the priest attend: bridesmaids, best man, parents of the couple, especially of the bride, and anyone else taking part in the service. The photographers also attended one rehearsal I observed, though the surprise of the priest suggested that this was far from common practice. All parties wear ordinary clothes. The priest describes the wedding service with reference to the space in which it will take place and walks the participants through an attenuated version of it. As this goes on the priest explains the significance of certain aspects of the service, as regards Christian theology and folklore. Anyone present who is reading in the service practises this, along with their walk to and from the lectern. Similarly, couples practise their declarations and vows. Particular attention is paid to movement in the service, in particular the 'giving away,' not a compulsory part of the *CW* service, or even one warmly encouraged by its compilers, but persistently

popular with marrying couples. Here, whoever is escorting the bride to the front of the church passes her hand to the priest who passes it on to the groom. This is widely seen by clergy as a rather awkward manoeuvre and one that needs to be done carefully, so that physical clumsiness does not obscure the symbolism of the action. Clergy also offer advice about the passing of the bride's bouquet to the chief bridesmaid and the way in which couples need to turn at the points in the service where they need to move position, taking necessary account of the dimensions of the bride's dress and train. The point at which a veil, if worn, is to be lifted is also settled. While the basic structure of the wedding service is nearly always the same, very few couples opting for the *BCP* service, clergy vary in the way in which they perform it. Some clergy have couples repeat their vows after the priest, where others have couples read them. Some clergy, at the nuptial blessing, bind couples' hands in their stole. The general practice is for couples to make their vows facing the priest with their backs to the congregation, though one priest had the couple face the congregation at this point, keeping his own back to the congregation. Another altered the order of *CW* so that the readings and sermon came right at the end, immediately before the register was signed, rather than between the declaration and the marriage. Besides running through the service, many clergy confirm the details for the marriage registers and take the fees at the rehearsal. They often also deal with practical queries about access and accommodation for wheelchair users, the proper sides of the church for brides' and grooms' guests to sit and the organisation of bridal and wedding processions.

The term 'rehearsal' highlights the performative nature of weddings. While regular worship is prepared and the details of occasional services discussed with participants, weddings are the only church services, in the experience of these clergy, that are routinely rehearsed. At the rehearsal the priest acts as not only 'the priest', but also a choreographer-director, telling people what to say and how to move and explaining the service as a whole. This is the point at which the wedding as a performance begins. When the clergy described how they would dress to conduct the wedding they were offering reassurance, but were also clearly delineating roles. Every detail of the rehearsal added to this. Those present were referred to by their roles ('the bride', the 'best man' etc) rather than

their names. Frequent references to the material culture of the wedding day: dresses, rings and flowers established the rehearsal, to those present, as the point at which a regular social order of first name terms and casual clothes ended and a ritual order took over in anticipation of a performance.

The Wedding Service

This section describes a wedding service from the priest's point of view.

> You get used to doing these things over the years... It doesn't feel like you're doing anything out of the ordinary. You know, I'll say to my wife 'I'm just off to church to do a wedding.'[13]

The priest arrives at the church early, although rarely first. Generally a member of the regular congregation acts as verger, opening the church before the guests arrive, assisting the ushers and running the PA system. Groom and best man are also there early. One priest escorted the bride's mother to her pew when she arrived, before returning to wait, like the other clergy, at the back of church for the arrival of the bridesmaids and then the bride and her escort, usually her father. By this time guests are seated, and the groom and best man in their places at the front of the church to the right. When the priest sees that the photographs of the bridal party have finished, he or she signals to the organist, or the person responsible for recorded music, who then begins the processional music. The priest then leads the bridal procession into the church, walking a short distance in front of the bride, who is on the arm of her father. The bride is joined by the groom, waiting at the front of the church. The priest then takes the service as rehearsed. A description of a particular wedding having been included in the introduction, what follows concerns the action of the priest as he or she conducts the wedding service.

After a welcome and a request that protocols about throwing confetti and taking photographs are respected, there are introductory prayers. The priest reads the theological introduction to the service in a measured manner, before reading the declarations of intent to marry, posing them to the bride and groom, who respond

[13] C1,p.13.

'I will.' The service includes hymns, usually two, though sometimes three and normally a sermon. Clergy often said they have several 'standard wedding sermons' that they alternate, though the wedding sermons I heard made frequent mention of the couple themselves. After the sermon, the section of the service entitled 'the marriage' follows, in which both husband and wife make vows, usually preceded by the 'giving away', which in the *CW* text happens without accompanying dialogue, although some clergy use a formula from previous wedding services. Following the vows the priest asks the best man for the rings (or ring), and placing them on his prayer books blesses them and leads the couple in the promises associated with the exchange of rings. The priest proclaims and then blesses the marriage before leading the couple and two witnesses (and often the parents of both bride and groom) to wherever the register is to be signed, a location dependent upon the internal ordering of the church. Sometimes the register is signed in full view of the congregation and at others in a vestry. The priest must keep the marriage registers with meticulous care, the kind of ink as well as the accuracy of all information being obligatory. Next, the couple return to the front of the church for the prayers. Then the priest reads the prayer of dismissal and the wedding party leaves the church. The priest does not lead this procession, but slips out quietly, often to ensure the congregation can get out without interrupting the photographer. Following the service the priest is usually photographed with the couple, the most common shot being one of the register being signed. Clergy may stay and chat to guests, but often they leave unobtrusively, after speaking to the verger and organist.

The Reception and Afterwards

Apart from weddings of people in the regular congregation or personal friends and relatives, the clergy all said that it was rare for them to be invited to wedding receptions, longer serving clergy adding that invitations were more common in the past. All distinguished between the receptions of couples they knew well through church or other personal connections, and those of couples whom they had met because of the wedding. In the case of the former, attending such a wedding reception was plainly not regarded as work. For other weddings clergy responses were divided.

> By and large I haven't gone to them... people feel 'we ought to ask the vicar,' but actually, what do you do with a vicar at a wedding reception? You put him with Aunty Mabel because she used to go to church… it's a total waste of time, because you don't gain any pastoral contact really with people.[14]

> I do if I can, particularly if its people who I've got to know well in preparation. More often than not though the invites will come from church based couples, if they've got family in church… But if its people outside the church then I may be invited and sometimes at the rehearsal the father of the bride will say 'do come down to the cricket club'… Sometimes I go. I don't always, because I've normally got other things in my diary.[15]

This response was by far the most positive attitude to attending wedding receptions. The reception seems to be the point where a clearly defined and positively regarded role for clergy ends and an ambivalent, questionably 'useful,' one begins. The social awkwardness of the situation, for both clergy and wedding party was a common response. Many clergy are as reluctant to continue a professional role in a party situation, as they are to engage in the drinking and dancing of a wedding reception with company that only know them as priests. There is no role for the clergy, as clergy, at wedding receptions.

Nevertheless, a priest's role does not end with the wedding ceremony. Clergy are often called upon to say prayers or perform ceremonies for 'important' wedding anniversaries. These are more frequent for regular worshippers, but not restricted to them. Such events often include a 'renewal of vows,' which couples occasionally want at times other than anniversaries, after their marriage has weathered trouble of some kind. Clergy are also asked to bless wedding rings when the originals have been lost, and, not least, clergy often find themselves providing pastoral care for couples or individuals occasioned by problems in their marriages.

The clergy's detailed accounts of how they planned and conducted weddings offer glimpses into the working life of a parish priest, significant information

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[14] C1,p.14.
[15] C10,p.5.

about the practicalities of this work. Parish clergy, beyond the regular worship and meetings associated with their church, have extremely irregular patterns of work, both in terms of hours and place of work. They go in and out of other people’s houses and use their own houses for work, spending a lot of time in conversation with people, and also in administration, few having secretarial assistance.

But the clergy in the study did not simply describe a series of tasks, they also reflected on the significance of those tasks. Such reflections extended beyond weddings to include the nature of parish ministry more generally, its aims and priorities: pastoral work, liturgical celebration and the ways in which the work of an Anglican priest is rooted into English life.

Thinking About Pastoral Care

Weddings involve clergy in a considerable amount of ‘pastoral’ care or work. A key focus of ministerial training, this is regarded as valuable and necessary, and clergy like to feel that they do it well. This is such an assumed aspect of priestly ministry that defining why it might be valuable is not an easy task for clergy. The term ‘pastor’ has its etymological roots in the Greek word for shepherd and its application to Christian ministry is biblical in origin. Christ uses shepherding imagery in his teaching and applies it to himself, as the ‘good shepherd, who lays down his life for his sheep.’[16] Pastoral imagery suggests service, self-sacrifice and identification with Christ. Pastoral work consists of the care of individuals, with an emphasis on their spiritual welfare. Recipients of pastoral care are the sick, dying and bereaved and anyone else who asks for this kind of help, as well as those who do not, but are perceived by others to be in need.

Weddings are another occasion for this sort of work, and it is here that many of the clergy in the study located the value of the Church’s involvement in weddings. Pastoral care has several distinct aspects. Putting time and effort into weddings and doing so in an appropriate manner was seen as important.

[16] John 10:11.

> If you're friendly you tend to get friendly reactions. If you do this well and pastorally carefully they then value the ministry of the church towards them. To put it crudely [laughs] they like it if you smile at 'em. And therefore something quite deep happened.[17]

This is partly a matter of courtesy and conscientiousness. But the clergy share the conviction that they, as representatives of the church, have something significant to offer to marrying couples beyond the practical services that have been described. They certainly wanted to communicate (by action and manner more than by assertion) that the church in general, and their church in particular, was a place of welcome, help and acceptance, correcting misconceptions where necessary. But this too served a greater goal of commending the Christian faith to marrying couples. Thomas[18] expressed this as follows:

> It is a way in which we connect with people who are completely outside the church… They are a way in which we are showing hospitality to people. Its… not that often that I will get people coming back to the church … But it does happen... it does have... an evangelistic... note to it.[19]

It was, unsurprisingly, a common conviction of the 'study clergy' that being involved with a church was a good thing, and that such involvement brought with it personal benefits in terms of support and friendship as well as opportunities to discover and practise faith in Christ. In addition several clergy expressed the conviction that God's work in people's lives was not restricted to what happened in church, and certainly not in a particular church. While weddings provided what were variously described as 'gospel,' 'spiritual,' 'pastoral' or 'ministry opportunities,' these were widely seen as what Simon described as 'just one step, in their spiritual journey.'[20] This corresponds with the idea that God is at work in people's lives and the responsibility of the minister lies in co-operating with that work rather than in making it happen, a view expressed particularly clearly by Colin:

[17] C1,p.14.
[18] All names have been changed. See Appendix 1.
[19] C3,p.1. and p.7-8.
[20] C7,p.7.

> It's another occasion when I think that we can give people an opportunity to see God at work in their own lives, regardless of whether they come to church or not. And it might not even be articulated in that way, by the couple or by the families... Actually I can't think of anything where that can happen more powerfully than in marriage.[21]

The desire, on the part of clergy, to encourage people to 'see God at work in their lives' as Colin said, above, should not be understood as just a matter of inner convictions. When the clergy in the study talked about the 'spiritual' lives of the couples they married, this included the way in which they conducted their relationships on day-to-day basis.

The focus of pastoral ministry at weddings is the couple. Several of the clergy mentioned this might include supporting them in the event of any conflict with families.

> Sometimes it's really a problem and I've had to be amazingly stroppy… basically I will do anything... if I ever get the feeling that the poor couple have been shoved into a corner. Sometimes the couples… are victims of other people's expectations, which is awful.[22]

Sometimes concern for the welfare of family members, as well as the couple, was evident:

> I normally say to the brides they can give their Mum permission to wait with the bridesmaids to watch the bride and her Dad, normally, arrive, so that the bride looks as her Mum always thought she… ought to look, on the day of her marriage. And when they come to the door I then bring Mum into the church… because otherwise they're walking down the aisle on their own.[23]

While consideration for parents and other adult relatives of the couple was often evident, all the clergy expressed serious concern for the children of couples. Many of the couples married in the study churches had children, either with their present or with previous partners. The welfare of children from previous

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[21] C9,p.1.
[22] C11,p.12.
[23] C10,p.3.

marriages took a central place in negotiations about remarriages. Even those most accommodating to divorcees wishing to marry in church, refused to celebrate such a marriage where they had concerns about the welfare of children within it. Such concern was expressed without direct, or even indirect, communication with the children themselves; children's welfare is protected by encouraging behaviour on the part of their parents that is in the children's best interests.

One aspect of this is the baptism of children. Most of the clergy said it was rare for people to start attending church following their wedding, but quite common for them to ask for their children to be baptised. In some cases existing children were baptised at the wedding itself, an increasingly common occurrence in Britain as a whole.[24] In others, children born after a wedding were baptised as babies. A similar effect with regard to funerals was widely observed. Not only the couples, but also other members of wedding congregations, acquired at the wedding a familiarity with a particular priest and a particular church building, which made both approachable in the event of bereavement. Funerals and baptisms were often mentioned at the same time, reflecting the widespread idea, in both society and the church, that weddings, baptisms (or 'christenings') and funerals are the same sort of thing. This connection was evident in the comments of all the clergy, not only the two that used the phrase 'rites of passage' in this context.[25] This is not simply a convenient category. Rites of passage, whether or not they are explicitly designated as such, are understood as having a positive effect on participants: ritual helps people as they proceed through life. Pastoral care is not, therefore, to be properly understood as distinct from ritual, in this case liturgical performance, but deriving from that performance and informing it, certainly as regards these key rites of passage. Nevertheless the comments of the clergy in this study indicated a categorical distinction in their thinking between liturgy and pastoral care.

[24] Only anecdotal evidence available.
[25] C2 and C5.

Thinking About Liturgy

Weddings occasion a considerable amount of pastoral work on the part of clergy, but they are liturgical acts. ‘Liturgy,’ meaning public work or service, was applied to Christian service in general and then to ‘the supreme Christian service of an act of worship’[26] very early in the history of Christianity. Christian liturgy has always had characteristic forms and in most contexts has also had prescribed texts, for marriage as for other, more central acts of Christian worship. Chapter 2 describes the development of marriage rites in some detail. The focus here is on the parish priest as a liturgical celebrant. Leading acts of worship is central to the job of a parish priest. While churchmanship and other factors might alter *how* a priest conducts worship, they do not alter the fact *that* he or she does so, and that they do so because of any particular aptitude or skill (though these may well be present), but in their capacity as clergy. So saying, all the clergy demonstrated confidence in their conduct of worship and in their capacity to improve through critical reflection on past performance.

Ordained status is immediately marked in a day-to-day context by dress. While most of the clergy I spoke to were quite informally dressed at the time of the interview, only one wearing a cassock and another a suit, all but one wore a clerical collar: the daily working clothes of Anglican clergy. In the liturgical context of a wedding all wear the vestments they would otherwise wear to celebrate the Eucharist; cassock and surplice or cassock-alb (or cassock and alb) and stole: they dress as priests to perform a priestly function. The priestly function at a wedding is actually restricted to the blessing, as deacons are able to preside at a wedding, though in the study area there were no deacons at the time of the interviews. Even where deacons conduct weddings they are still ordained people, whose presence is marked in a liturgical context by distinct dress. The role of the priest at a wedding, like that of other participants, by is marked by dress.

Information about clerical dress at weddings was derived entirely from observation, the clergy saying almost nothing about it. The use of liturgical space

[26] J. G. Davies (ed.), *A New Dictionary of Christian Worship* (London: SCM, 1986), p.314.

is another matter, and one it was clear, both from observation and comments, that clergy gave a lot of thought to. Clergy were very conscious of the general attractiveness of their church buildings and shared a view that this had a considerable impact on requests for weddings:

> The building isn't attractive for people who just feel moved toward the photographic.[27]

> All Saints is often used, because it's the most attractive.[28]

Buildings were not just perceived as an aesthetic given. Clergy described the ways in which they deployed the liturgical space available for weddings. Those whose churches had chairs rather than pews said that they arranged them for weddings to enable the guests to have a good view and to create an aisle which would accommodate the bride's train, if worn, and allow her an impressive entrance.[29] The internal layout of the churches affects the bridal and wedding processions, and also where the register can be signed. Clergy often described thinking about how the movements necessitated by this section of the wedding could best be negotiated. The placing of flower arrangements and the best places for photographers and videographers to stand was also of interest. This was part of a wider consciousness of the effect of the space of a church as a whole on the performance of a wedding. For example:

> The bride at Brierley can come in from one of two doors. Through the tower door, which means negotiating quite a few steps and its amazing how many brides want to come in that way because its… quite an entrance coming down the steps. And I'll lead the way down... followed by the bride and her dad, followed by the bridesmaids.[30]

The structure and words of the marriage service are as fixed as the church building, and clergy stand in a similar relation to them. Those interviewed expressed no frustration with the limits placed upon liturgical creativity by the Church of England, with regard to the wedding service, apparently accepting the

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[27] C1,p.1.
[28] C11,p.4.
[29] C3,p.8, C7,p.8. and C12,p.3.
[30] C10,p.3-4.

authorised texts as the raw material out of which they produced weddings. Similarly the change from the *ASB* to *CW* was accepted with equanimity, as were earlier changes that introduced the *ASB*. While there seemed no question of disputing the authority the Church had to make such decisions and very little disquiet with the actual decisions made, the clergy all expressed articulate views on both the text of the wedding service and its performance, when asked for their observations on *CW*, and at other points in the interviews. The basic options of *CW* and the *BCP* have been outlined above, and the structure of the texts of the services described in detail in Chapter 2. What follows concerns the use that clergy make of those texts, the importance they attribute to performing weddings and to their own expertise as liturgical celebrants.

The clergy made generally positive comments about the *CW* service. Two observed that the move to *CW* from the *ASB* made little difference.[31] Most expressed a liking for the flexibility offered by *CW*, one priest particularly liking the blessings from the new service. One expressed a personal preference for *Series 1* as being 'more prayerful.'[32] The structure of the service attracted the most comment. *CW* separates the 'declarations' from the 'vows,' locating the ministry of the word between the two sets of promises. While one priest was indifferent to the new structure and one re-ordered it to follow the pattern of the *ASB*, most of the clergy liked this, the observations of Thomas being mirrored by many:

> The previous structure was very much: welcoming people, saying 'do you want to get married?' marrying them and then saying 'lets reflect about what you've done.' By that time people don't really want to do it… Now what we have, it's much more measured. There's an element of a journey in the service... It feels like they're not just going straight into the wedding. They've got time to settle down… and then come together and have this really serious issue of vows, proclamation, blessing. Then we register the wedding, rather than do it later. Because it's a public part of the service. Then we have another hymn and I take

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[31] C7 and C11.
[32] C10,p.4.

> them up to the high altar and have a kind of quiet end to the service… And then we have the great walk.[33]

While having views on the wording of sections of the marriage service, Thomas saw it as a whole: the text not simply making assertions, or expressing things in beautiful language; but facilitating a particular kind of action. The structure of the service has a bearing on movement during its performance and upon the mood at different points. Clergy, including Thomas, see liturgical texts in terms of performance and themselves, at weddings, as performers in a liturgical drama.

This is not to say that the clergy are unaware of the theological import of the content of the marriage liturgy, though none of them expressed the view that the present liturgy articulates a different understanding of marriage, even in minor ways, from earlier services. As noted above, many of the clergy used the text of the marriage service in marriage preparation with couples. Indeed *CW* was commended by several clergy for the way in which it leant itself to being used to explain a Christian understanding of marriage. There appeared a considerable agreement about this, marriage, according to these clergy, being a permanent relationship of mutual self-giving, in which couples can encounter God, and for which couples' need the help of God. It provides the proper context for sex, and for the upbringing of children and offers comfort and companionship to marriage partners. Most clergy talked marrying couples through the service in considerable detail, explaining biblical references prior to their wedding and emphasising the view of marriage expressed in the text as well as describing the overall structure. The descriptions of these conversations reveal the distance that most of the clergy perceived between their own knowledge about the wedding service and that of marrying couples. At numerous points during preparation, rehearsal and the actual wedding, clergy impress upon couples that it is the job of the priest to make sure things run smoothly; that their knowledge of the wedding liturgy and experience of performing it are resources upon which couples can safely rely. Knowledge and expertise of clergy is not restricted to liturgical texts

[33] C3,p.5.

and theological matters. Music is an area where couples are expected to exercise choice, but where clergy's experience and knowledge can be of help.

> Virtually everyone wants a CD playing at some point in the service. Either signing the registers or maybe even to come in to and I'd advocate that if you hadn't, maybe, got a competent organist. But we have a cathedral standard organist and it seems a shame that most brides who like a bit of a grand entrance on this special day we don't maximise it for them. Usually there's a frisson of excitement when, you know, bridal parties get ready to come down the aisle.[34]

Music, the clergy would agree, has a vital role to play in the celebration of a wedding. But choice of music is important. While all the clergy agreed to the increasingly frequent requests to play recorded music instead of organ music for the processions, all of them felt this music should be 'appropriate' and many, like Morris were inclined to think that organ music, done well, was most likely to help generate the overall effect the couple were seeking.

In addition to hymns, there is processional music as the bridal party enter, and the wedding party leave the church, as well as incidental music before and after the service and during the signing of the register. All of the churches in the study have an organ and a paid, part-time organist. Some also have a choir, though only two have one of any size. The fee for the organist to play at a wedding is included in the basic cost of a church wedding. A choir, where available, attracts an additional fee, though choir members, unless children are not usually paid. Some churches have bands or music groups, though these tend to be more informal and, where they exist within the study, do not play at weddings. In the study area there are also a number of choirs that will sing at weddings for a donation to charity.

Wedding music, like church music more generally, needs clergy to cooperate with musicians. The study clergy all spoke warmly of the musicians in their churches, both organists and choirs, and felt that they made a significant

[34] C5,p.7.

contribution to the overall feel of a wedding. Several clergy said that their organists were happy to play through various pieces of music for couples so they could decide what they wanted, though it is normally clergy themselves that are called upon to offer guidance to couples making choices about music. All said that the overwhelming majority of couples chose to have Wagner's 'Bridal March'[35] for the bride to come in to and Mendelssohn's 'Wedding March'[36] to leave. This was so common that a number of clergy referred to these choices of music in such terms as 'Here She Comes and There She Goes'[37] or 'Wagner in, Mendelssohn out.'[38] Clergy associated the limited range of processional music with an equally limited knowledge of hymns. Those in the ministry for some time noticed this increasingly; couples needed considerable help to choose hymns for their weddings. Various choices remained popular: *All Things Bright and Beautiful* and *Praise my Soul the King of Heaven* chief among them as well as the popular school hymns of ten years ago. Clergy had strategies to help people make decisions about hymns, where they struggled, asking them to think of hymns that had been sung at previous family occasions, for example. Ruth took this assistance to some lengths: 'usually they try and remember something they've learnt at school and that's where I come in because they can't remember the tunes [laughs] I have to sing down the phone.'[39] Several clergy noted that congregational singing was often very thin, Luke expressing this as follows: 'if its active churchgoers, they'll sing the hymns. But otherwise, it's not as bad as funerals… where you pick a hymn and no one sings except the vicar.'[40] Another priest had one bride who 'when we talked about music, it never entered her head that there might be hymns... She immediately thought "what songs can I get my friends from the world of show business to sing." '[41] But for all this there was no question in the minds of any of the clergy that a wedding could happen in church without hymns being sung.

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[35] The 'Bridal Chorus' from Richard Wagner's opera *Löhengrin*, first performed in 1850.
[36] The 'Wedding March' from Felix Mendelssohn's incidental music for a production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in 1842.
[37] C8,p.3.
[38] C1,p.7.
[39] C12,p.5.
[40] C2,p.6.
[41] C9,p.4.

Ritual Expertise

The liturgical expertise that clergy possess is something that they see as developing over time, though having its foundations in theological training, at college and during curacies. Many felt that repeated practice was important, several observing that their curacies were in churches which had a lot of weddings. Similarly, many felt that the capacity to conduct worship was not a skill that was learnt once and then simply repeated, but something that required continuous critical self-evaluation.

> I've never, ever been happy at any point with anything that I've ever done in liturgy, and so there's always been this kind of ongoing critique: how can we move this on? How can this become more appropriate? How can this be more participative, more engaging? And those probably have always been questions I have never stopped asking. So how I do a wedding has always been something that's evolved.[42]

While Colin makes this point the most strongly, it expresses a shared perception. Confidence to instruct others, in this case marrying couples, in liturgical performance also grew over time, as did a parallel confidence to add distinctive symbolic action to the wedding service. Two clergy had used a 'candle ceremony,' for several years. North American in origin this centres on a stand with three candles, in these cases placed right in front of the altar. Early in the service, following the declarations, the bride and groom each light one of the two outermost candles. After the exchange of rings both bride and groom light a taper from their respective candle and together light the central one.[43] Clergy that used this ceremony thought it offered a helpful and 'accessible'[44] symbolic representation of the marriage. Other clergy included lighting candles in memory of close relatives, and in some cases former spouses, who have died. Similar memorial use was made of arrangements of flowers. Such deliberate deployment of symbols not only suggests categorical connections between different life crises and associated rites, but actual connections, the ritual continuities contributing to a narrative of the extended family.

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[42] C9,p.5.
[43] C9,p.5.
[44] C9,p.5.

The considerable confidence in conducting liturgy, exhibited by the clergy went with a shared conviction that such competence was worthwhile, a conviction underpinned by a belief in the value of liturgy, including wedding liturgy. In addition to the opportunities weddings provided for pastoral care, clergy felt that wedding services, in and of themselves were of value. All the clergy felt it was appropriate that weddings took place in a Christian liturgical context. Beyond the opportunities in weddings for communicating a Christian view of marriage to couples, ritual at significant moments in life was seen as most important. A Christian liturgical context was important, many comparing church weddings favourably with civil weddings, noting the brevity of the civil ceremony, the frequent lack of music or readings, the complete absence of any reference to God, the relatively utilitarian quality of the venues, and consequently, the ritual poverty. The Church, in contrast, is equipped to do ritual well. Clergy are, among other things, ritual specialists with ritual texts (neither bleakly bureaucratic or sentimentally saccharine) at their disposal and with experience in performing those texts and in guiding others, less familiar with them, through their performance. Clergy have access to and substantial control of buildings designed with such ritual in mind and considerable choreographic resources to draw on to use such space to maximum effect. That ritual is helpful at major life crises was simply accepted by the clergy in the study.

Wedding ritual is deeply imbued with tradition, in both the theological sense of it deriving from a historical narrative of Christian thought and practice and in the (related) popular sense of it being a set-piece cultural event whose performance should correspond to precise patterns. All the clergy[45] observed that ‘tradition’ was an important motivating factor for many of the couples that got married in church. They wanted a church wedding in general because it was ‘traditional’ and wanted music and particular liturgical texts because they too were so regarded. So clergy report that couples do not, on the whole, want just to be married in church, but to be married in church in a fairly narrowly defined way. Significantly, this is less the case for couples who are regular church attenders, as

[45] Both Boden and Purbrick make similar observations.

will be discussed in Chapter 7. For all the suggestions in the popular media and wedding industry publications that weddings can and should be statements of personal style and values, there remains a strong conviction, at least among people marrying in church, that weddings should visibly conform to a familiar pattern. Why couples might think like this will be examined in Chapter 7. The clergy themselves do not seem particularly inclined to analyse this attitude to the ritual details of weddings, although it is something they all observe. It is also a sort of wedding in which they themselves play a vital role. Anglican clergy see themselves as able to perform a certain kind of wedding. This kind of wedding, with a priest as celebrant, in command of both the legal and ritual process, corresponds with what many marrying couples understand as a 'proper,' 'traditional' wedding.

Thinking About Society

Weddings are occasions when clergy perform roles as pastors and liturgical celebrants in such a way that these roles are delineated clearly. Weddings also bring into sharp focus the parish priest as a minister of the established church. While individual clergy, according to theological conviction and personal preference understand pastoral and liturgical work in different ways, they share a conviction that these are important things, of the essence of Christian ministry. The clergy were more equivocal about the established status of the Church of England, at least insofar as it impinges upon their own life and work, yet the established status of the Church is very much in evidence in weddings.

The relation of church and state has a considerable bearing on parish priests, in respect of weddings. Marriage is, amongst other things, a legal matter and one in which the Church of England has historically had a considerable investment. The clergy in the study were clearly aware of the legal implications of their position as parish clergy, especially in relation to parish boundaries and divorce. The question of parish boundaries and their profound implications for parish clergy, defining and limiting their involvement with weddings has been addressed above in 'The Wedding as Work'.

<u>Divorce</u>

The situation with respect to divorce is rather different. Divorce law has an impact on clergy not just because of their legal status, but also because it has a profound effect upon the circumstances of people in the parish. While a parish is a defined space in which a priest's responsibility for weddings is contained, divorce is an area within which a priest must negotiate between his or her own convictions, the pastoral needs of prospective wedding couples, the civil divorce law and the current thinking of the Church of England. From 2000, the position of the Church of England has been that divorce and remarriage are ontologically possible and that such marriages may take place in church, though individual clergy are not required to celebrate such marriages. (This reverses a *de-facto* situation where remarriage in church was generally impossible, but where individual clergy, were sometimes prepared to conduct such marriages.) Where clergy choose to do so they are expected to conduct searching interviews with couples, who must convince the priest that they are entering into the new marriage having reflected carefully upon the reasons for the break down of their first marriage(s). Specifically, a marriage must not take place within a year of a divorce being finalised, or where the new relationship is the cause for the break down of the first marriage. Concerns about the welfare of children might also cause a priest to refuse to conduct a second marriage. All the clergy who did conduct second marriages (all but one in this study) said that they followed these guidelines, though one felt the procedure was cumbersome and unhelpful. All observed that no matter how extensive interviews were, couples that were really determined might well be able to deceive them about either their attitudes or past behaviour, if it was in their interests to do so.

The one priest never prepared to conduct weddings for divorcees took the view that while there were some 'very deserving'[46] cases, marriage in church after divorce undermined the idea of marriage as indissoluble. He favoured a change in approach in which the Church of England adopted some system for annulment, similar to that of the Roman Catholic Church, arguing that accepting that some apparent marriages were not actually marriages would meet the

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[46] C8,p.6.

pastoral needs of people with very unhappy experiences without compromising the Church's understanding of the indissolubility of marriage

Several clergy noted the distastefulness of having to 'sit as judge and jury' when deciding whether or not a particular couple, one or both of whom was divorced, should be allowed to marry in church. Some said that this had put them off taking any second weddings, and all found this an uncomfortable responsibility, though they also pointed out that the serious reflection required for divorced persons might also be of benefit to people marrying for the first time. Those more recently ordained, with the exception of Timothy, had always been prepared to marry divorcees. The more experienced clergy described how their attitudes and practice changed over time, talking of a 'softening' of a 'hard line' position, weaving accounts of particular cases that made an absolute veto on marriage after divorce hard to justify into their stories. Linde's argument, introduced in Chapter 5 is illuminating here. Changing one's mind on a significant matter has implications for maintaining a coherent sense of self. The flexibility of what Linde identifies as 'a coherent, acceptable and constantly revised life story'[47], which generates 'continuity through time'[48], allowed these clergy to change their attitudes and practice without losing faith with their former selves. The incorporated stories of people encountered in ministry combine with a more abstract process of reflection to constitute, in Linde's words 'adequate causality'[49]. I would also argue that this attention to the life stories of others constitutes a kind of 'subjectifying' strategy, to coin a term, used to increase empathy with others. All the clergy, including Timothy, were not only concerned about difficulties people experienced, and anxious to think of ways in which the church might better respond, but also convinced that such concerns were theologically and ministerially proper. The response of the clergy to the question of divorce and subsequent remarriage is also an aspect of a wider question, that of the manner in which clergy interpret and attempt to respond to contemporary culture.

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[47] Linde, p.3.
[48] Linde, p.100.
[49] Linde, p.127.

<u>'The Vicar'</u>

This wider question will be considered shortly, but it is appropriate to point out here that the legal status of Anglican clergy exists alongside their social status. Not only have Anglican clergy had distinct rights and responsibilities; they have also had a distinct social position, both in the country as a whole, and in particular parishes, historically enjoying a higher social status than their counterparts in other churches. The 'Hunting Parson' is not just a literary type and the English novel from *Joseph Andrews* to *Bridget Jones* has generated a familiar taxonomy of types of 'vicar,' which has left a persistent impression on the popular imagination. Evangelical and Catholic reformers in the Church of England, in their different ways, campaigned to emphasise an understanding of ordained Christian ministry as a 'spiritual' calling,[50] rather than a respectable profession for gentlemen, establishing theological colleges to promote such a view. But the understanding of ministry communicated in theological training does not alter the expectations parishioners might have of their clergy, which derive from numerous cultural sources, as well as knowledge of actual priests.

Popular conceptions of 'the vicar' are a reality for actual parish clergy. Timothy observed that the behaviour and policies of clergy on soap operas generated unrealistic expectations of actual clergy:

> The television soaps don't help, you know: Tracey decides to marry Gary and they've all been married three times before, but they get married in a chapel, and everyone thinks: oh they do it on the soaps.[51]

Expectations of a priest also derive from more local sources. Where predecessors were perceived in the local area as unapproachable, current clergy were particularly conscious of the need to communicate to marrying couples warmth, acceptance and an awareness of their own professional competence. While the focus of this good practice was certainly the marrying couple, clergy were also aware that doing things well enhanced their reputation and made other members of the wedding congregation more likely to approach them for occasional offices

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[50] Alec R.Vidler, *The Church in an Age of Revolution* (Harmondsworth: Pelican, new ed. 1971), pp.35-6 and 50.
[51] C8,p.6.

and much more amenable to the church and the Christian faith in general. Other local expectations can result in disquiet where a priest does not visit in the expected manner following a birth or a death. It seems unlikely that similar expectations in connection with weddings do not exist, although I have not found evidence of them. Unfamiliarity with local customs and expectations derives from the fact that parish clergy are usually 'incomers,' people who have moved into the area as adults.

This outsider status of parish priests allows them to operate as observers of their parishes with a kind of social distance, if not objectivity. Clergy have to learn what a parish is like, not by a process of unconscious enculturation, but by deliberate observation of social and cultural context; something they are prepared for during ministerial training. Weddings, like baptisms and funerals, are a window on the culture of a particular place, and as such good to think with, about local character, as much as personal ministerial identity.

<u>Local Character</u>

All of the clergy were acutely aware of their parish as a distinct place. Notwithstanding frustrations with parish boundaries, their thinking about ministry was focussed on the parish. Comments made were sometimes of an impressionistic order and included such things as 'in certain parts of the country there are going to be more weddings than others'[52] and terms like 'cultural setting,'[53] or 'round here,'[54] which allude to a tacit taxonomy of place. Other clergy added more detail and defined the categories they employed:

> I've worked in two different contexts. One is leafy Hertfordshire, in a market town and the other is West Yorkshire, former mill town, still pretty depressed, which is Felton and where I'm now the vicar of two churches... There's been a church in Felton since before the Doomsday Book.[55]

Themes of wealth, poverty and regional difference along those lines are juxtaposed with the particular history of the parish. The almost poetic rhythms of

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[52] C8,p.1.
[53] C5,p.1.
[54] C8,p.1.
[55] C2,p.1.

this observation suggest this has been said on numerous occasions. The same is true of the next observation, which focuses on the contemporary sociology of the parish and locates it within a more immediate, though still fairly extensive geographical setting.

> It’s a self-contained town that doesn’t relate well to other places, apart from for shopping… it’s a bit of a soulless place. People commute… to Leeds, to Wakefield, to Barnsley, Manchester, Sheffield. But people do tend to be here for several generations.... It’s a fairly stable population... It’s all sort of mixed up, on one street a few council properties, but also some detached properties. It’s a very mixed housing regime… a rather pleasant place to be.[56]

These are brief, though wide ranging descriptions with a strong and focussed sense of place. Disparities of wealth at both national and local levels are seen as important and potentially divisive, but negative consequences can be partially mitigated by patterns of housing and other integrating factors. The absence of large employers in an area renders it a pleasant place to live, but undermines the ‘soul’ of a place, obliging people to travel for work. Ancient parish boundaries retain significance even after the enormous upheavals of the establishment and decline of heavy industry. Families living in a place for several generations lend a degree of social stability, a sense of ‘community’ to it, though this can be problematic for ‘incomers’. Associated with this was a clear category distinction between people who move around, and people who are ‘really’ local to a place. This latter category was accorded considerable respect, at least in connection with their weddings. Cases of people who grew up in a parish, but were obliged to move out of it because of property prices were cited on several occasions to justify marrying people not strictly meeting residence requirements. The sense here that a person’s ‘real’ home (or parish) might not be where they actually live is a widespread perception in the church.[57] The strong sense of place explicit in the descriptions of parishes above suggests that place is not just a physical reality, but also something imagined and narrated. This issue is pursued further in Chapter 7.

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[56] C7,p.1.
[57] This lies behind the 2008 Marriage Measure.

Social Class

Alongside wealth and poverty, the clergy were keen observers of cultural class distinctions and their implications for weddings and ministry more generally.

> I don't like to profess economic variables, but if we talk about a more middle class environment where couples are … comfortable with social interaction, that's fine, but if you're working in essentially a working class environment, you need to be very careful about the mix of couples.[58]

> One we did was an officer's wedding. Very interesting, issues of class and so on. And then I did an able seaman's wedding the following week. It was fascinating; the difference in accent, all the things you don't really want to talk about: class, upbringing, the officers with their swords, the able seamen throwing their hats in the air… great family celebrations, but done slightly differently because of the background of the people involved.[59]

For these clergy, as for the others in the study, social class has a profound effect on the character of a wedding and on the way in which preparation for the wedding can best be undertaken. At the same time social class is a sensitive subject, something 'you don't really want to talk about.' Money, while important, is only one aspect of this. Indeed the clergy, alert though they were to the social and cultural characteristics of their parishes and the couples they married, were not particularly astute observers of expenditure, or of the material aspects of weddings. Wedding dresses were mentioned only twice, one priest referring to 'fifty yards of wedding dress'[60] and another describing his surprise when a bride feared he might object to her wearing 'this wonderful red dress.'[61] Only one made any observation about male wedding clothes, noting that for most weddings grooms now wore morning suits, or as he put it 'monkey suits.'[62] Two noticed unusual forms of hired transport.[63] Receptions attracted no comments except as either pleasant or potentially awkward social occasions. Two clergy

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[58] C5,p.6.
[59] C2,p.6.
[60] C1,p.8.
[61] C2,p.5.
[62] C9,p.10.
[63] C2,p.6. and C9,p.10.

regarded flowers in church beyond a certain, though unspecified point, as indicative of great extravagance, in particular 'pew ends.'[64] Photographers were often commented upon, with respect to their competence and cooperativeness, not their expense, though many clergy observed that weddings were getting more expensive and more ostentatious.

> The people, you know, do read the magazines and all the rest of it and they can just be caught up in all this. The bride has got to look a million dollars, the groom's got to look washed [laughs]… the whole thing can just be a little O.T.T... You can't get across the idea to people that its possible to get married… for less than a thousand pounds.[65]

<u>Contemporary Values</u>

This perplexity at how much couples were prepared to spend on weddings was widespread and allied closely with an aesthetic that seemed to regard fancy material objects, irrespective of cost, with disfavour. Simplicity of style, conversely, was associated with simplicity of lifestyle and thrift. It is perhaps this that lies behind the association in the mind of at least one priest, that an ostentatious wedding is not just a waste of money, but also indicative of weakness in the relationship.

> I can think of marriages where I've thought 'that was a fat lot of good' and quite often these are the occasions where everybody's overdressed… You can always tell, flowers pop up on pew ends everywhere. You can read the signs. Everything's just slightly over the top and then you rapidly spot the vacuum in the middle.[66]

Notwithstanding this disquiet about expensive weddings, the clergy were not, on the whole, censorious about the way in which couples conducted their relationships, in particular the fact that most now live together before getting

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[64] Arrangements of flowers attached to the side of pews.
[65] C3,p.6.
[66] C1,p.13.

married. One priest said that in the context of the regular congregation he and the other preachers in the church

> Take a very clear line… that sex is for marriage. We recognise that for most of the people who come to us for marriage, that isn't where they are at, at all. In terms of our own congregation we take an orthodox view that God intends marriage to be the context for sex.[67]

This idea that conscientious Christian discipleship might preclude sex outside of marriage was implicit in the comments of some other clergy, but set against the pastoral imperative to 'meet people where they are.'[68] One priest said, having researched the subject, he had concluded that cohabitation should be understood as betrothal, and was therefore not incompatible with Christian discipleship.

Those who had been ordained for some time said that this pattern of nearly universal cohabitation represents a substantial and significant change over quite a short period of time.

> Twenty years ago it wasn't the done thing. These days, I think, it's seen as quite important, a road test.[69]

> When I first started doing weddings, let me see, nineteen eighty-seven. Of the twenty- five weddings that year only one couple gave the same address, and did so sheepishly, expecting their knuckles rapped. And now it's the other way round... In twenty years there's been a huge turnaround in the way that relationships work.[70]

This priest was one of two who analysed this change in social and sexual mores, observing:

> I would actually lay the door at the media to a great extent… There's been portrayed a lifestyle as if it's normal before it *was* normal. That the first thing you do in a relationship is sleep together and you move in together and you do that before you really know each other and because its repeatedly represented

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[67] C7,p.7-8.
[68] C5, p.3.
[69] C3,p.6.
[70] C7,p.6.

> through the media, all the dramas assume that, then couples think that's what happens.[71]

Another priest attributed the trend to the experience of parental divorce, which made couples wary of marriage. This was one of numerous occasions where divorce was mentioned in a cultural context, as a feature of contemporary life, not only an occasion for pastoral care. So saying the number and frequency of stories about divorce and responses to divorce are examples of the extent to which divorce is a significant feature of the social and cultural world in which clergy must conduct weddings.

Thinking About Theology

At the end of the interview I asked clergy whether they thought weddings were a valuable part of the Church's ministry. All responded positively, often in considerable detail and certain distinct benefits were frequently identified. The wedding is widely seen as an opportunity to 'meet people I otherwise wouldn't.'[72] Why this is so widely perceived as a good thing derives from the clergy's sense that they have a pastoral responsibility for the parish as a whole, which has certain distinct elements, availability to parishioners being the first.

> It's ministry handed on a plate. We don't have to go out to the customers, as it were. People willingly and gladly and hopefully come to us to, invite the Church to be involved in a special part of their lives and I think it would be very uncharitable for the Church just to say 'no,' where people really want to hear the Church say 'yes.'[73]

> They need to know that the Church is there for them… it gives them some bond… a connection with the Church and a familiarity and fondness.[74]

> It's an opportunity for the Church to serve the community.[75]

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[71] C7,p.6.
[72] C10,p.1. and C11,p.1 both used this phrase. Many others made a similar point.
[73] C19,p.8.
[74] C8,p.8.
[75] C7,p.7.

The clergy hope that this hospitality will itself communicate the welcome of not only the Church, but of God. Weddings enable clergy to prompt marrying couples into thinking seriously about many things, including, but not limited to, their relationship and the Christian gospel.

> Some of the preparation has spun off into conversations at home.[76]

> I feel that it's a chance to talk to couples. It's a chance for the couple to realize that they are making vows. That's one of the things we talk about: 'you know these are vows before God... you know, you are promising that you are going to stay together for the rest of your lives.'[77]

> Now, you know, people can take the moral high ground on these kinds of occasions, but each one is a gospel opportunity.[78]

Weddings also provide clergy themselves with a location to think about the theology of marriage, of liturgy and of the way in which God might be at work in the world.

> Things have happened in society to make marriage… higher up on my personal agenda... the influence of the gospel on people's lives, rather than their attendance at church has been of increased significance, therefore it seems an opportunity to spend time with people and not so much ram the gospel down their throats, with a view to getting them to sit on my church pew, but actually as a way of encouraging them in their relationships with each other, the world, and also somehow, to engage with this God.[79]

Many of the clergy used phrases such as 'in the presence of God' or 'before God' to express what they saw as the distinctive benefits of a church, over a civil wedding. While they were all well aware of the potential attractiveness of their

[76] C1,p13.
[77] C4,p.6.
[78] C5,p.3.
[79] C9,p.1.

church buildings, in an ordinary aesthetic sense, for wedding couples, they still concluded that the main attraction of a church wedding was its explicitly religious character. Some emphasised the theological importance of the church building as a sacred space.[80] Others explicitly noted their own presence at a church wedding, as a priest, and therefore able to bless the couple.[81] Many went to some lengths to emphasise that a church wedding did not make a couple somehow more married, in the eyes of God, than did any other kind of wedding, though liturgical context was understood as very significant. In addition to prayer for God's help and blessing, it also meant that a marriage was brought into the worshipping life of the Church. As such the liturgical celebration of marriage has significance not just for marrying couples and their families and friends, but also for the Church as a whole.

These issues of presence and location: of marriage 'in Christ' and of Christ's presence in a marriage are perennial themes in Christian theologies of marriage, as was seen in Chapter 2. The Christian Church has, historically, been much involved in life cycle ritual. People have used rites of Christian initiation (like baptism and confirmation) and rites of penance and purification, (like the churching of women) in this way. Such ritual aligns ordinary, embodied life with the Christian life, which begins with baptism and is sustained by the Eucharist until physical death brings a person into the decisive spiritual crisis of judgement. Church weddings suggest the significance of ordinary life for the Christian life and the material for the spiritual. Historical wrangling over church weddings: as to their necessity, their propriety or their appropriate form suggests no easy agreement about this significance.

While there are various theological models of marriage in Christian thinking,[82] the area has been dominated by the question of whether or not marriage is a sacrament. In reply to my question on the subject,[83] only two clergy explicitly rejected such an idea, contrasting their view with the position of the Roman Catholic Church, and quoting the *CW* introduction, that describes marriage as 'a

[80] C6.
[81] C2,p.11.
[82] See Chapter 2.
[83] See Appendix 3.

gift of God in creation.'[84] Of the others, one said that while sacramentality was 'not the kind of language that I relate to... in the sense of... an outward sign of an inward reality, that's clearly so,' though he rejected any notion of the wedding as operating as a 'kind of spiritual magic.'[85] Others were much more enthusiastic about the idea that marriage is a sacrament, (though few habitually talked in such terms.) While none felt the Church of England's official position binding in this regard, the immediate citation of the catechism and Prayer Book's definition of a sacrament, or something very close to it, stood out in all the clergy's responses to this question. This was apparently used as a kind of stalling tactic, while they thought out an answer, and also suggests a capacity to use phrases of the liturgy for off the cuff theological reflection, a strategy more extensively and deliberately employed by many of the clergy in marriage preparation. Almost none of the clergy related the sacramental status of marriage to church weddings. What a church service adds is blessing, prayer, the church building as both public place and liturgical space, and ritual propriety.

Thinking About Weddings: Ritual and Narrative

There is no one straightforward answer to the question of what weddings mean for the clergy who conduct them, though there are certain characteristic features of clergy's understanding that are markedly distinct from those of marrying couples. Weddings are certainly occasions for the deployment of professional skills: liturgical, pastoral and administrative. But weddings are not simply work for clergy (assuming, doubtfully, that there is ever such a thing as 'simply work'). Weddings, for clergy, I have argued in this chapter, are 'good things to think with', confronting them with numerous social realities: kinship, sexual mores, taste, social class and local geographies both empirical and imagined and in addition providing a theologically motivated model for responding to those realities. Couples, as will be seen, do not on the whole experience their weddings as representative of anything else in this way but neither do they see their weddings as work. Such differences of perception are partly a consequence of the different points of view of persons performing distinct roles in a wedding. Of

[84] C2,p.11.
[85] C7,p.4.

much greater importance are the distinct meanings attributed to weddings as a whole by couples and clergy. Such meanings become clear in the kinds of stories told about weddings by the interested parties and when weddings are considered as 'ritual'. This chapter will conclude with an analysis of the significance of the wedding as ritual and occasion for story telling for clergy. A similar analysis for couples will conclude the next chapter.

The nature of clergy participation in weddings means that clergy stand at a certain remove from many of the wedding activities. This might be expected to give them a long view of proceedings not afforded to people more personally involved. In some respects this is so, clergy perceiving weddings as representative of contemporary society in a way that the couples do not. However, clergy perceptions of weddings have a clear, but narrow focus on the wedding *service*, highlighted by their comments about involvement in receptions (and lack of comments on earlier stages in the wedding arrangements). Indeed for many clergy the wedding *is* the wedding service, the reception and material culture peripheral to this central ritual act. This points to two things. Firstly, clergy are not just disinterested observers of weddings, or even celebrants who perform a rite for the benefit of others; the wedding has a ritual significance for them too. Secondly, this ritual significance is very different for clergy than it is for couples. Clergy *understand* the wedding as a ritual, specifically a rite of passage, initiating marrying couples into married life. However, they *experience* the wedding, themselves, as a rite of intensification[86] in which their existing identity as clergy is embodied, performed and thus consolidated.

Distinctive clerical perspectives are also evident in a further consideration of rites of passage. To apply the concept 'rites of passage' to weddings is to ask what weddings are unlike and what they are like and to what degree, technical categories of any kind arising from an analytical need to distinguish one sort of thing from another or to associate them. The category 'ritual' is useful because it underlines significant differences between kinds of human action. Conversely, as

[86] Davies, Douglas and Mathew Guest, *Bishops, Wives & Children. Spiritual Capital Across the Generations* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007) p.177.

Van Gennep was concerned to assert, rituals associated with changes in social status: birth, initiation, marriage and funerals are the same type of action, the purpose of which is the social transformation of individuals such that social order in general remains intact.

Clergy classify church weddings as liturgical events, one of the 'occasional offices'[87], others being funerals and baptisms. As such they are particular kinds of church services, especially similar to the Church's festivals, which also draw extra people into a church's liturgical life. There are considerable overlaps here with the way the couples classify rites, but by no means an absolute correspondence, as will be seen later.

'Rites of Passage' has proved an attractive idea in another important way for clergy, probably influenced directly or indirectly by works of pastoral and liturgical theology that make use of such thinking.[88] Here rites of passage in general, and weddings in particular are understood as socially and psychologically beneficial events, not the invention of the Church, but in which the church can have a worthwhile and active involvement. This allows these clergy to understand weddings as offering something worthwhile and helpful to marrying couples, including the perception that actually getting married; as opposed to 'just' living together is a positive thing in a relationship.

Van Gennep was not only interested in identifying a type of ritual, but in describing this structure: separation, liminality and incorporation. Such a structure is apparent in the wedding from proposal to the end of the reception, as will be seen in the next chapter. While clergy think of their involvement in weddings as a *participation* in something important in couples' lives, and valuable as such, they tend to restrict the (beneficial) ritual qualities of a wedding to the church service. In practical terms this makes sense, as clergy have no influence on other ritual acts: proposal and reception chief among them. Also, the ritual structure of the wedding involves the repetition of the overall ritual

[87] Carr, *Brief Encounters*, pp.1-5.
[88] See Chapter 4.

structure in each separate ritual act. The consequences of ignoring wider wedding ritual for the Church's theological understanding of weddings are considerable, however, and will be addressed in Chapter 8.

While clergy expressed little interest in the overall ritual structure of weddings, they had a keen interest in the structure of the wedding service, as has been seen, finding increased ritual knowledge and competence gratifying. This included a keen appreciation of not only the theological meaning of the texts, and the practical possibilities of the buildings, but of their optimum deployment in performance. If ritual theory, particularly rites of passage, highlights the way in which the speech and action of a wedding distinguishes it from other kinds of human speech and action, performance theory draws attention to the way in which the wedding, as a whole is framed, roles are allocated and space is used. The performative nature of the wedding in the minds of clergy is clear. As described above, in both the rehearsal and the wedding service, clergy understand their task as including assisting the participants in their adoption and performance of wedding related roles. The concern of clergy to use the internal space to its optimum advantage: both arranging furniture and flowers and choreographing movement also indicates that a wedding can be usefully understood as a performance. This matters because the intensity of the experience of the deliberate, framed behaviour ('twice behaved', according to Schechner[89]) of a performance has an important role in the wedding as a whole, which will be seen in the next chapter.

Weddings are performed rites of passage. They are also laden with objects and actions imbued with great significance by the various participants. The specific objects particularly susceptible to interpretation as symbols have been mentioned above, and will be considered in some detail in the next chapter: the wedding dress and veil, flowers, rings and cake. So too have similar kinds of movement and gesture: processions with their distinct personnel, the holding of hands and exchange of rings in the service and the dancing in the reception. Ascertaining the public meaning of any of these is deceptively straightforward: the white dress

[89] See Chapter 4.

is a symbol of the virginity of the bride, the flowers the fertility of the couple, and so on. However, contemporary participants do not appear to perceive these objects in this way. In their conversations with me, clergy, while commenting occasionally on an exceptionally ostentatious display of flowers or elaborate dress, demonstrated no great interest in these objects, except sometimes as indicative of a couple failing to understand the 'real' significance of a wedding, located in the exchange of mutual consent and the blessing of the wedding service. This sense of the symbolism of weddings being somehow compromised is also apparent in the comments of some of the couples, which will be explored in the next chapter. While these accounts of weddings provided no extensive reflection on the symbolism of wedding services, clergy did make some mileage out of the symbolism during the wedding rehearsal, explaining to couples various actions in terms of their meaning. One described his taking of the bride's hand from her father and giving it to the groom as symbolic of entrusting the marriage to God. Others explained symbolic objects that they themselves had introduced: a candle lighting ceremony and memorial flower arrangements. In the context of actual weddings such explanation was omitted. This apparent lack of interest in the symbolism of weddings suggests that either clergy do not think or, more likely, do not think it important whether a wedding dress is symbolic of the virginity of the bride or flowers of fertility. What clergy do interpret as symbolically significant is the location of the wedding in church. Having the wedding ceremony in church is a symbol of the interest and involvement of God and the Church in marriage in both an abstract theological and a local, embodied sense. How couples understand this, and the other symbols in weddings, and the implications for this for a wider understanding of symbols in weddings will be considered in the next chapter.

It is not just objects or locations that carry the meaning of the wedding, but also the human body. While, in various ways, clergy express the view that the mission of the Church extends beyond 'getting [people] to sit on my church pew'[90], the actual, embodied, presence of people in church is of considerable importance. The significance of this extends to a concern not just with the movement of

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[90] C9,p.1.

individuals to maximise performative effect, but also to maximise their sense of participation in the wedding. So when Colin escorts brides' mothers into church he is making a performance out of an inevitable action and thereby underlining the importance of this woman for the wedding. When many of the clergy took pains to seat the children of the wedding party so they could get a good view, this was aimed at both making them feel involved and at displaying their presence. Children are much in the minds of these clergy at weddings, their welfare and their involvement in the wedding of great importance. Clergy were more equivocal about notions of gender embodied in the service, expressing some bemusement at the wishes of couples to retain aspects of the service that embody inequitable relations between the sexes, some brides still promising to obey, and most choosing to be 'given away' by their fathers. None of the clergy expressed the (logically possible) view that the wedding service was somehow dissonant with the reality that most couples were sexually experienced. Clergy accepted this as a social fact, and emphasised the wedding as a decisive commitment within an existing relationship, rather than the beginning of a new one.

Contemporary weddings in general bring a private relationship between two individuals into the public domain. A wedding in an Anglican church brings those individuals bodily into a particular parish church for ritual acts that combine legally efficacious ceremony, the performance of liturgical texts, and which employ symbolic objects and actions of diverse origin. This can usefully be expressed in narrative terms: by physically bringing their marriage into the church building and into an act of Christian liturgy marrying couples bring the stories of their relationships into the meta-narrative of Christian marriage. This contact with Christian perspectives on marriage is one that all the clergy felt constituted a strong case for marrying in church. Here 'narrative' operates as a metaphor for a coherent pattern of values or an integrated life, where 'meta-narrative', similarly indicates that Christian theological discourse and ecclesiological involvement with marriage is like a story, one both internally coherent and with wide reaching explanatory power.

Narrative is not just a metaphor. Following Linde and others[91], I would argue that personal life stories are a powerful tool for the construction and maintenance of personal (including professional) identity. Indeed, the closer that ‘being’ and ‘doing’ come in a profession, the more important this is and for clergy they are very close indeed. The accounts of the clergy in this study suggest, furthermore that there is both a passive and an active way that this is the case. Clergy are themselves formed by the stories in which they find themselves. This includes the Church’s meta-narrative of marriage just mentioned. Actively participating in the performance of what can, metaphorically, be understood as a story (the liturgy, and pastoral care associated with weddings) consolidates ministerial identity. But actual stories are also important. These clergy tell stories about their own professional involvement with weddings and also narrate the stories of people they have encountered in the course of such involvement. Such stories, as described above, offer accounts of developing professional competence and confidence and even more importantly justify changes in theological position and pastoral practice. Locating changes in attitude to things like divorce or cohabitation within a personal life story enables clergy to maintain a sense of themselves and their values as consistent, while allowing for change of mind about some things. This is not just something that clergy do spontaneously and unreflectively as they encounter challenging issues. Indeed, they make deliberate, conscious use of stories. Just as clergy tell stories in wedding sermons and marriage preparation to enliven abstract argument and invite the sympathy of hearers, so do they make use of the stories of marrying couples as they consider the value and significance of conducting weddings in church. The value of such stories for wider theological reflection on marriage will be addressed in Chapter 8. The stories of couples themselves are the focus of the next chapter.

[91] See Chapter 5.

CHAPTER 7
COUPLES

Couples perceive weddings very differently than clergy. While weddings are part of ordinary working life for clergy, for couples they are extraordinary, defining moments in their relationships with each other, and with family and friends. This chapter begins with couples' shared accounts of their relationships, before describing the practicalities of planning a wedding. Much of this concerns the choice and purchase of material objects. Interwoven into descriptions of the selection and use of material commodities are accounts of the planning and performance of ritual acts, of which the wedding ceremony is only one, if a vital one. Not only a source of information, couples' talk about their wedding constructs shared narratives of their own romantic relationships and of their extended families and friendship groups. An Anglican wedding is a rite of the church, but from many of these couples' perspective it also operates as a rite of the family, in both an abstract and a particular sense. The concluding section 'Why Church?' takes up this theme and describes the various distinct ways in which couples relate to the church in respect of their wedding, suggesting a more general model for the relationship between church and society.

Our Story

I started the interviews by asking the couples where and when they met and when and how they decided to get married. All the couples answered with detailed narratives of their first meeting and the course of their subsequent relationship. These accounts provide information about their relationships, and also about the way in which they talk about those relationships: the vocabulary they employ and the kinds of narratives they construct.

While there were considerable variations, the couples' stories of their relationship from first meeting to marriage had many similarities. After their initial meeting there was often an equivocal period before a committed relationship was established. Some time later couples moved in together, either buying or renting a new home together or one partner moving in with the other. Then the couple got engaged and later the wedding was arranged and, finally, took place.

While the couples varied considerably in the amount of detail they included in their accounts of their first meeting, several common themes emerged. Though, with two exceptions all were over twenty-five when they married, mostly between twenty-five and thirty-five, five couples had met when much younger. Couples where one or both spouses had been previously married were older. Several couples met at work and more at parties and other social occasions. In the case of the latter, friends and relatives (always siblings and never parents) were important, either deliberately encouraging a relationship, or, more commonly, arranging a social event and asking people to it. Several couples described their meeting as a series of encounters, rather than just one; having met initially at work, they met again in a social context, possibly an engineered one. Two of the couples had met at school, one other on the internet and two in specifically Christian contexts. The implications of explicit religious faith for marriage will be considered later.

While the very small number of interviewees means that the experiences of these couples cannot be taken as representative, they do tally with broadly based research into relationship formation in the UK at present.[1] None of the couples married from the parental home and most lived, at some point, in shared houses, one couple meeting when one of them moved into a shared house. With one exception all lived together before their wedding. For three of the couples, one partner had been previously married and divorced and five couples mentioned other previous serious relationships. While contemporary young adults are free to live with and marry whoever they choose, networks of friends and relatives remain significant as the locations in which, with or without the deliberate intervention of third parties, people meet their partners and spouses. No comment at all was made on this social freedom, even by the older couples. That people might have a series of sexual relationships and that they would live together before marriage was apparently assumed. This contrasts with the responses of the clergy, for whom the contemporary pattern of relationship formation, even if

[1] Susan McRae (ed.), *Changing Britain, Families and Households in the 1990s* (Oxford: OUP, 1999).

regarded with culturally relativist equanimity, represents both a personal and a pastoral challenge.

The selection of appropriate terms to describe the early stages of a sexual relationship is problematic, not least because 'relationship' is not only a general term for any kind of association between people, but also, in contemporary parlance, indicates a specifically sexual relationship. There have been enormous changes in society at large in respect of both sexual behaviour and attitudes to sex. This includes a much greater acceptability of talk about sex in public, including, but not limited to the use of explicit language and images in the arts and media. Conversely, in many contexts, British people at least are evasive rather than explicit when it comes to talking about sex. There is no agreed short-hand term for a relationship in which a couple have sex, nor for a relationship in which a couple are in some sense committed to one another, but have not yet had sex. So the minority of couples who do not have sex before marriage talk about their relationship in very much the same terms as the majority who do. It is apparent that while 'going out together' or 'getting together' or being 'in a relationship' indicate a relationship that includes sex (or will do at some future point), whether or not it does is a matter that is private to the couple themselves, and certainly not the business of visiting interviewers. Furthermore, what distinguishes this sort of relationship from a friendship is as much the nature of the couple's emotional attachment as it is sex. Even this is something alluded to, rather than explicitly stated. Only two of the couples used the phrase 'love' at any point, interestingly two of the three who gave the most detailed accounts of their relationships. No other direct description of feelings for a partner was given. Instead such feelings and the commitments with which they were associated were the subject of gaps and elisions in accounts.

> **Linda** You came and joined in the house. There were seven of us living in the house and we hit it off straight away, didn't we?
> **Paul**… Pretty much. We did hit it off straight away, yeah.
> **Linda** And we were both coming out of relationships anyway, weren't we? Old relationships, and I didn't want to get involved in another relationship, but he persuaded me to [laughs]

Paul I pursued her relentlessly [all laugh] I call it my blitzkrieg approach to romance. That's the long story… The short story is that I chucked a pan of water over her and, er, she kissed me. Basically we were washing up one night and we just had a bit of a laugh really and started a water fight. I think we knew something was happening because we'd sat down one night, had a glass of wine and stayed up til four in the morning, talking.[2]

While there is direct mention here of 'romance' and kissing, which is more than most of the other respondents mentioned, the crucial emotional shifts are suggested by the understated 'hit it off' and 'something was happening.' In part this narrative works as an efficient means of communicating growing intimacy and affection because it makes use of familiar motifs: the easy 'joking' relationship, the staying-up-all-night talking, as well as an established narrative structure, in which many stories about the start of romantic relationships are told. So familiar is this structure that all reference to emotions and to romantic gestures can be removed without undermining the force of the story.

Liz It was at work.
Mike You started in residential social work, didn't you?
Liz… I was already working at Haslam House and you joined the team, didn't you?
Mike Mmhm
Liz And that was that, really. We kept it a secret for ages, didn't we? [Laughs]…
Mike… basically, we met at work, but actually
Liz We moved in after
Mike Confirmed it, didn't we, at the work party?
Liz We moved in together after three weeks and engaged after three months.[3]

Mike and Liz got engaged quickly. Others took much longer. From first meeting to marriage took between two and fifteen years, in which time a relationship passed through several distinct stages: being 'just friends,' 'going out,' 'living together,' 'being engaged,' and planning a wedding. Apart from 'going out

[2] A1,p.1.
[3] A4,p.1.

together' and actually planning a wedding, any of these stages might be omitted, and the duration of each stage varied considerably. While the couples typically moved in together within six months of meeting, they took very different lengths of time to get engaged. Engagement generally includes a proposal of marriage and the gift of an engagement ring from the man to the woman, worn like a wedding ring on the third finger of the left hand. Engagement rings are typically gold rings with stones, often diamonds, in a setting that allows the wearing of another ring on the same finger. The first thing all the couples did, on getting engaged was to phone relatives and friends and most had an engagement party. While none of the couples put a notice of their engagement in the local newspaper, all were familiar with the custom. Engagement is not a private matter; other people are expected to be interested.

Some couples got engaged early on in their relationship, but made no plans to marry for several years. Others started planning their wedding as soon as they got engaged. This suggests a degree of ambiguity about what 'engagement' means: a committed relationship with marriage on the horizon, or a liminal period of preparing for an imminent wedding and then marriage. Terms like 'getting engaged' and proposal' were used by the couples to indicate either of these approaches, but with no suggestion that another meaning might be possible.

Proposal

Things are not rendered much clearer when the 'proposal' is taken into account. In this context 'proposal' means asking another person to marry them. This is an event over which the prospective groom has almost complete control. Most took considerable trouble to make the event special, arranging an evening at a favourite restaurant, often on a significant date. Two grooms proposed at big social events, with other people present. Given the widespread understanding that it is his job to propose, the prospective bride simply has to wait for it to happen, even where the couple has discussed the possibility of getting married and has a general intention to do so. Such discussions, for most of the couples, were not sufficient to constitute either engagement or a definite plan to marry; a deliberate proposal from the man to the woman was also necessary. Some men bought an engagement ring in advance, sometimes having chosen it with their potential

wife beforehand. Others bought rings as a couple, either before the proposal, the groom keeping the ring until he proposed, or afterwards. For one of the couples both partners had engagement rings. The man’s control over the proposal is reflected in the fact that it was the men who had the most to say about the proposal, several grooms telling detailed stories about it. These included how they planned the event and various acts of subterfuge to discover what size of ring the bride needed, so they could propose while in possession of an engagement ring. Significantly, these narratives exclude the words and actions of the proposal itself, a narrative gap suggestive of the transformative ritual space of the proposal[4], a phenomenon that will be seen later in with the wedding ceremony.

Of the thirteen couples, eleven said that the groom proposed to the bride. Of the others, one bride, Jane, laughed and said ‘I made him get married.’[5] And the other couple described matters as follows:

> **Tina** Well he didn’t just ask me. We’d discussed it, you know, both of us had discussed it and then we just rung and got us date and stuff.
>
> **SF** Did you get engaged?
>
> **Patrick** No
>
> **Tina** No, not really. He never proposed, we just discussed it.[6]

For Tina ‘engagement’ indicates not just a plan to get married, which she and Patrick certainly had, but a relationship inaugurated by a formal proposal. Nevertheless both Jane and Tina had engagement rings, though the accounts associated with the purchase of these rings lacked the romantic gloss supplied by the other grooms.

If Tina and Patrick felt that one could plan a wedding without, exactly, being engaged, most of the couples assumed that one got engaged and then started planning a wedding, though there were some for whom engagement indicated a commitment, but no immediate plan to marry. These couples needed to make an

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[4] See Turner, *The Ritual Process*, p.129.
[5] A2,p1.
[6] A10,p1.

additional decision to actually get married. There is some residual sense of this in the fact that 'setting a date' or 'naming the day,' is a meaningful phrase and additional to 'getting engaged.'

Engagement is a key step towards greater mutual commitment and the point at which a private relationship becomes the legitimate business of friends and relatives. The proposal is vital. Without it one can get married, but not engaged. The importance of the ritual act of a proposal is most evident in the behaviour of couples that avoided it, and consequently also, engagement. Such reluctance to engage in the protocol and ritual of an engagement does not necessarily indicate either a lack of commitment to a relationship or scepticism about the value of marriage in general. It can also be that some people cannot comfortably incorporate either the mandatory sociability, or the sort of deliberate ritual act in which they take the initiative, into their own account of themselves. Those who see themselves as private, quiet people, uncomfortable with fuss can think engagement is not for them. That engagement rings are still bought and given by such people, stripping such decisions and actions as far as possible of ceremony, highlights the issue as a specific reluctance to engage in ritual.

Engagement is the period between deciding to marry and actually marrying. There are continuities with the practice of betrothal, the rites associated with which being more fixed in form, less individualistic and much more binding. Nevertheless, engagement is a liminal period, between defined states of life for the couple, characterised by a renegotiation of relationships, not only with a prospective spouse but also with relatives and friends. Much of this renegotiation happens in the process of planning the wedding.

Wedding Planning

The couples took between one and two years to plan their weddings. This was felt a sufficient time to save up to pay for everything (whoever was paying), to make the necessary arrangements and to be sure of availability of the various services: reception venues and photographers in particular booking up very early. Planning a wedding was widely understood by these couples as a major undertaking, involving much effort, in terms of the number and complexity of the

tasks associated with organising a wedding and the keeping close relatives happy while doing so.

> **Lisa** My Gran planned my Mum's wedding and they had very little involvement. Didn't realise, it's a lot more complicated, all the different arrangements... Because my Mum couldn't understand why I couldn't just say 'yes'…
> **Robert** You have to learn, you take their ideas on board and use some of them… to keep people involved…
> **Lisa** We wanted both the parents to know what was happening, so they really felt part of the day, not just a guest.[7]

> **Liz** My Mum especially… Your Mum probably did but she was very
> **Mike** Reserved
> **Liz** Politically correct, in that she'd take a back seat about things... And my Mum… had a lot of ideas of how it should be... and how could we possibly think about spending such a lot of money [laughs] they couldn't comprehend it really on one day.
> **Mike** That actually was a big issue… and the amount of planning… tying up little bits and bats.
> **Liz** And you're constantly talking about it…
> **Mike** People think… it's only a wedding… but it's your perfect day…
> **Liz** Mum and Dad… weren't contributing as much financially, but that was never an issue and I think they thought it was, and it really wasn't, I didn't care.[8]

These responses touch on several important themes. Concern about *negotiation* with parents, clearly a considerable pre-occupation, will be considered later in the section on 'Friends and Family.' Money, one aspect of this negotiation, will be considered shortly, but several other perceptions about planning a wedding are important. A contemporary wedding is seen as a complicated management task, different in important ways from weddings in the past, being planned by the

[7] A13,p.19-20.
[8] A4,p.9.

bride and groom, rather than the bride's mother.[9] A wedding is also seen as an event that can, reasonably, be expected to be 'perfect.'

Contributing to this desire for perfection is the fact that a wedding is an event widely imagined in advance of its actual occurrence. Many of the couples here justified decisions about their weddings by saying that they wanted to do it 'properly.' For many, a 'proper' wedding is a 'traditional' one: the terms were interchangeable. The concern for propriety and tradition appeared little influenced by gender: both brides and grooms were animated by such ideas. Much more gendered, however, is the imagining not of an ideal type of wedding, but of the specific details of one's own future wedding. Lucy talked about imagining her future wedding as a little girl, in considerable detail.

> **Peter** Very determined on what she wants. I mean she's been planning this for God knows how long.
> **Lucy** Always wanted a horse and carriage.
> **Peter** Wanted a horse and carriage and she got a horse and carriage.[10]

Other brides were less concerned about material details, but had other very definite plans:

> **Clare** Me and Ali… my Mum was chief bridesmaid to her… ever since Ali and me have been tiny we've always said 'you'll be my bridesmaid'
> **Matt** You were her bridesmaid.
> **Clare** 'And I'll be yours.'[11]

People have very definite ideas about what they want their weddings to be like. Where they get these ideas from is harder to discern. Given that a wedding is a set-piece cultural event, much of the material culture and ritual associated with it is not decided by any particular couple, but simply assumed to be appropriate. None of the couples made a decision to have a wedding dress or bouquets, or a reception or wedding cake: these are just what one does if one gets married.

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[9] See Boden, pp.68-70.
[10] A12,p.11.
[11] A5,p.9.

Decision-making does not focus on *whether* to have a wedding dress, but *what sort* of dress (or other commodity) and how much money to spend on it.

In addition to long standing personal fantasy, social convention and family custom, most of the brides bought and read bridal magazines, most claiming that while they did look at such magazines they were not really influenced by them, already knowing what they wanted. Each saw her wedding as a product of her own imagination and planning, rather than a response, still less a capitulation, to commercial pressure. This suggests a working distinction between the wedding-as-imagined and the wedding-as-planned. The fact that the actual work and purchasing occasioned by a wedding takes place well in advance of the wedding day adds to this distinction. A successful wedding according to this way of thinking is one in which the wedding-as-planned corresponds closely to the wedding-as-imagined.

However unmoved these brides were by wedding magazines, all of these weddings involved considerable expenditure on the sort of products promoted in them. Couples planning their weddings encounter a wide range of enterprises offering goods and services related to weddings. This loose grouping of enterprises is now widely referred to as the 'wedding industry,' both by those working within it and those commenting on the phenomenon.[12] While 'wedding industry' is not a term that the study couples use this does not mean that they are unaware of its existence or unswayed by its blandishments. Decisions about specific purchases will be considered later in this chapter, under the heading 'The Wedding Day.' What follows here concerns the way in which couples use and perceive the wedding industry overall.

Though large and diverse, the wedding industry consists mostly of many very small businesses. The couples favoured local firms for both the purchase of wedding dresses and the hire of suits, the familiarity of national brands like *Pronuptia* and *Moss Bros* carrying little weight. Local reputation was significantly more important, certain local reception venues and clothing hire

[12] See Chapter 3.

firms being particularly popular. Personal recommendation was a common source of information, and felt to be a reliable guide to a high quality of service. The *Yellow Pages*, which has a special section devoted to weddings, was also used, especially to locate car hire firms and photographers. Most of the couples said that they went to wedding fairs too. These local events that the study couples attended tend to be held at hotels, often as part of their marketing strategy, being themselves interested in recruiting custom for wedding receptions and civil wedding ceremonies. A number of goods and services were accessed this way, though the couples expressed very scant enthusiasm for wedding fairs, only one bride claiming to actually enjoy the experience. Overall, couples did not think in terms of a 'wedding industry' bent on persuading them to spend money in ways that had not previously considered; they did not think in terms of a wedding industry as some kind of coordinated commercial enterprise at all. Rather, they perceived numerous individual businesses with which they enjoyed a straightforward contractual relationship.

As observed, local reputation and personal recommendation were very important to couples, most products being sourced within five miles of their place of residence. Reception venues fell within a similarly narrow geographical area. Some suppliers were not just recommended by friends and relatives, they were friends or relatives. In most cases these were professionals, offering competitive rates to friends. In others, a voluntary economy was evident: of relatives and long standing friends who sewed, or took photographs or arranged flowers or, most common of all, made and decorated wedding cakes. Aspects of weddings that derived from such personal voluntary sources were valued very highly, a theme pursued later, in the section 'Gift Giving.'

Notwithstanding a preference for the local and the personal in wedding arrangements, all the couples included in their weddings the following: a new wedding dress and bridesmaids dresses, the hire of suits for groom and attendants, bouquets for bride and bridesmaids and buttonholes for groom and other members of the wedding party, professional photography, hired cars, a professionally catered reception and a cake. Most of the couples also had a wedding video and either a ceilidh band or disco with a DJ on the evening of the

wedding. All of the couples went on honeymoon. Decisions made in all of these areas reflect wider fashions. And most of these things cost money.

Money

A great deal of money is spent on weddings. This is not a new thing and it is certainly not restricted to the contemporary west. Weddings are widely reported to be occasions of conspicuous and extravagant displays of wealth and social status, marked by special material goods, distinctive in kind, and in quality. There exists in most cultural contexts a hierarchy of material goods, a number of factors contributing to the status of a particular object: quality of materials, rarity, newness or antiquity (depending on the product) and craftsmanship. Wealthy people always have high quality material goods, but other people can have these sorts of things at their weddings. A sliding scale of luxury and quality is in operation with all couples consuming in a style generally associated with people richer than them.

While all weddings cost something, the pursuit of the 'perfect' wedding is understood by Liz and Mike to involve expenditure at a level likely to arouse criticism in others. None of the couples told me how much was spent on their weddings as a whole, or on specific items. Nevertheless, they all had much to say about cost and expense in general. In the first place, many of the couples were operating within a budget that imposed considerable limitations on overall expenditure. Some people expressed pleasure and satisfaction when they found something they wanted for their wedding at a discount:

> **Tess** Tried on all these dresses and we found this dress and I was like whingeing and we bought it and it should have cost £800 and I got it for £200. So we had to get it.
>
> **Mark** But when she tells anyone later, especially my sister...
>
> **Tess** [laughs][13]

Many said the number of guests they were able to invite to their weddings was restricted by available funds.

[13] A6,p.8.

> **John** And the people we had there, to be honest, was relative to the cost[14]

> **Rachel** Eighty to ninety, I think... We chose a number initially, didn't we?
> **Ian** Because of price. [15]

One couple went rather further:

> **Tina** We didn't look at no big place. You know, it were the money what were holding us back a bit… But then we just decided to have something cheap and cheerful.[16]

Notwithstanding considerable practical constraints upon expenditure, as well as a feeling on the part of some of the couples that it was foolish to spend a great deal 'on one day,' a wedding, even for the thriftiest of these couples, occasioned considerable expense. Some of the couples, including all older and second marrying couples, paid for everything themselves. Most younger couples shared costs with brides' parents, grooms' parents and other relatives also often contributing.

Expenditure on weddings is a complex and vexed subject. People do spend, conspicuously,[17] on weddings, and others think that this is ill advised. The objections to such consumption these couples encountered, and less frequently had themselves are considerably removed from the ideological objections described in Chapter 3. Here the concern is not that an expensive wedding reinforces inequitable gender relations, or distracts from the higher goals of life, but that a cheaper, simpler wedding is just as effective and money can be more usefully spent on other things.

Wedding related consumption cannot usefully, as a whole, be designated as ritual, although brides' accounts of the purchase of their wedding dresses demonstrate such similar behaviour that this event, at least, is not just done, but performed. The special status of a wedding, as a ritual, and moreover a key rite

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[14] A11,p.5.
[15] A8, p.9.
[16] A10, p.2.
[17] Thorstein Veblen, *Theory of the Leisure Class* [1899], ed. Martha Banta (Oxford: OUP, 2007).

of passage, is however most important. The couples, while constrained to varying degrees by available funds and by a disinclination to spend, were inclined to interpret their wedding expenditure as a necessary adjunct of their wedding, not as an optional extra. Indeed the special status of a wedding certainly justified, if not necessitated expenditure in certain distinct areas. Conversely, forgoing any of these was felt to necessitate explanation.[18] These areas are as follows:

Ceremony
Reception
Hired Cars
A wedding dress and other clothing and accessories for the bride
Groom's clothing
Clothing for bridesmaids, best man, ushers and other attendants
Photography and videography
Flowers
A wedding cake
Stationery

What follows concerns the choices and purchases that were made to make the wedding day happen and an account of the use of these things in the course of the wedding day. It would be possible to describe the process of *deciding* on (in these cases) a church wedding, a certain kind of reception, a certain dress, a particular photographer, etcetera, then to return to the same commodities and services with an eye to the processes of consumption before covering the same ground a third time in an examination of the way these things are used, and acquire meaning in the course of their use, in a wedding. Not only would this be repetitive and inordinately time consuming, it would also obscure the fact that while it is possible to make a category distinction between the mental exercise of planning something, the commercial processes of facilitating it and its actual execution, in fact all of these are bound up with one another. Furthermore the nature of their entanglement reveals a great deal about the significance of material culture to weddings. With this is mind the next section will proceed with the pattern of the wedding day providing a structure for an examination of these

[18] See Boden, pp.77-86.

goods and services and the way in which they contribute to the ritual performance of a wedding.

The Wedding Day

Invitations and Other Correspondence

The wedding day is framed by correspondence. Guests are invited to the wedding formally, by written, usually specially printed invitation. Cheaper, ready printed invitations are sometimes used, with the couple filling in the details of their wedding by hand. Printed invitations are one item from a potentially much longer list of wedding related stationery, including service sheets and name cards for places at the reception, invitations for guests only invited to the evening reception and thank you cards. Some couples produced their own wedding stationery, or had a friend or relative do it. In most cases this meant using desktop publishing software, though the mother of one of the brides hand-embroidered all the invitations and place cards. Others used either independent printers or stationers, or chain stores such as *WH Smith*. Such firms keep a catalogue with a range of designs and offer all of the items above in each design.

While the couples in this study paid some, if not all of the costs of their wedding themselves, and chose, completed and posted their own wedding invitations, most of the wedding invitations were sent as if from the bride's parents. This behaviour was explained as being 'traditional' and as something that would please parents. Using forms of words prescribed by wedding etiquette manuals and by the stationers who supply wedding invitations, these couples' wedding invitations were variations on the following:

> Mr and Mrs John Smith
> request the pleasure of the company of
> (Name of Guest)
> at the marriage of their daughter
> Susan Ann to Mr James Jones
> at St Matthew's Church, Upton
> on Saturday 10th August
> and Afterwards at Upton Old Hall Hotel,
> High St, Upton. UP1 1AB

RSVP 1 Market Drive, Upton, UP1 1BC

The older couples sent out their own invitations, altering the opening section as follows:

Mr James Jones and Miss Susan Ann Smith
request the pleasure of the company of

at their marriage...

While there is more variation in etiquette now than in the past in this regard, the convention of writing formal invitations in the third person persists. People are less meticulous about replying in the third person, though some do and most reply in writing. The form of words, while widely used, is something on which couples need expert advice. Unfamiliarity with formal etiquette is not just a contemporary issue; English weddings having provided work for etiquette experts for over a hundred years. Some aspects of behaviour associated with weddings belong to a largely oral folk culture: 'groom on the right, bride on the left' or 'something borrowed, something blue'; others, like invitations, need written reminders. This may be because a wedding invitation is an aspect of a wider practice of formal invitations. While written invitations for social occasions, like birthday parties, are quite common, there is little need for these to conform to precise stylistic rules. The wedding invitation belongs to a kind of formal correspondence generally the preserve of a small social elite and a wedding includes the brief enjoyment of the lifestyle of much wealthier people. But there remains an emic distinction in England between being wealthy and belonging to the upper classes (often referred to as 'posh'). While being wealthy for a day is quite easy, being 'posh' is much trickier, and necessitates much more careful negotiation. This issue will be addressed throughout this chapter.

Although churches keep copies of the wedding service and have hymnbooks most couples have special printed orders of service, generally including an outline of the service, with music and readings indicated and the words of the hymns. One couple included the whole text of the wedding service as well.

Following the wedding correspondence continued, with couples writing to thank guest for presents, and with guests writing to thank either the couple or their parents for an enjoyable time at the wedding.

Couples expressed no great concern about choosing stationery, talking about it as an exercise of budgeting and taste. This exercise of personal choice seems rather at odds with the fact that, for the most part, invitations were sent by parents. These two threads: choice, including consumption, the preserve of the couple and the observance of protocols, much more socially embedded, run throughout the wedding as understood by couples. The adoption of such unfamiliar behaviour without question is also curious and also goes beyond capitulation to commercial pressure. The repetition of invitations: verbally and informally, in formal written invitations and sometimes also in ‘save the date’ pre-invitations is most suggestive of Schechner’s term ‘twice behaved’ to characterise strategies that impose order and significance on mundane realities.[19] Such ‘twice behaving’ is evident throughout the practical tasks occasioned by a wedding.

Getting Ready

All of the couples described a very similar pattern for their wedding day. While all but one couple lived together before their wedding, all younger couples began the wedding day in separate houses with either the bride or the groom staying the night before at a friend’s, or more commonly parents’ house. As for the invitations, many couples like their weddings to embody domestic and familial patterns that no longer apply. Still, there is a clear ritual logic to this separation. At this stage in the day brides’ and grooms’ parties are clearly demarcated, and bride and groom are identified strongly with their own gender and with their family of origin. The groom is with his friends, though this may include family members. The bride is with her family, though friends may be included. The groom goes to the church first, in advance of the guests, with best man and ushers. His family conventionally arrive at the church as ordinary guests, though where the groom and his attendants hire special suits for the occasion, as all the grooms did in the study, the groom’s father does also. The bride typically begins

[19] Schechner, *Performance Theory*, p.170.

the wedding in her parents' house, her attendants either sleeping there or arriving early in the morning. The bride's party, mainly female, but including small boys as pages, and crucially also the bride's father, get ready. The bride's mother and the attendants leave for the church together. Last to arrive at the church is the bride and whoever is giving her away. More will be said about the roles played in weddings. What follows here concerns the clothing worn by these participants, a significant aspect of the process of taking up and performing those roles.

Clothes

All of the couples said a lot about the clothing that was chosen and worn for their wedding. The bride's wedding dress attracted the most interest, but couples also described in detail grooms' suits, outfits of bridesmaids and other attendants and clothing worn by close relatives, especially parents. Following the pattern of the wedding day in which a strict demarcation of bride's and groom's friends and family is in place until the wedding ceremony is completed, I will consider the clothing of the bride and her attendants, then that of the groom and his best man before concluding with the couples' parents and other guests. Everyone in the wedding parties and most wedding guests took a great deal of trouble over their appearance.

All the brides wore what were recognisably wedding dresses: long and white (more often a shade close to white: 'champagne' or 'ivory'). A vocabulary of colour specifically associated with wedding dresses exists, which the brides in this study learned when planning their weddings. Following current fashion, most of the brides wore dresses with a closely fitted strapless bodice and a big full skirt and a train. Older brides favoured dresses with sleeves, though, as they pointed out, these are difficult to find at present. Two of the brides talked about their wedding plans as corresponding with the way they had 'always' imagined their wedding. Both employed similar vocabulary, talking about 'a little girl's dream.' For both these women, a central feature of the wedding as imagined was a certain kind of dress: 'a big dress' (big in the context of wedding dresses meaning a dress with a big, full skirt and long train.) Other brides had not given much thought in advance to their wedding dress, but still had decided preferences. The enthusiastic tone of Tina is typical:

> First of all I got my dress, which were ivory, strapless. I always wanted a strapless one, but I didn't want something too big, so I just got summat simple.[20]

While some chain stores sell off- the- peg wedding dresses, and thousands of second hand dresses are listed on *ebay* amongst other places, none of these brides bought such a dress. Except for the bride who employed a dressmaker, all bought their dresses in bridal boutiques, mostly small independent ones. Going to choose a dress was a performance in itself, bridal shops encouraging brides to try on numerous dresses in pursuit of the 'perfect' dress. Also, brides chose their dresses accompanied by close friends or relatives, most often their mother. Bridal shops did not always encourage this sociability, one manager I spoke to noting that bride's mothers exercised a considerable restraint on expenditure. The purchase of a wedding dress from such a shop differs considerably from most contemporary clothes shopping. Brides choose dresses from the range carried by a boutique, where they are measured. Dresses in an approximate size are ordered from the manufacturer, and, arriving several months later are altered, after a 'fitting' to fit the bride exactly, by dressmakers employed by the shop.

Two of the brides said that they rarely wore dresses at all, one describing herself as 'a bit of a tomboy' and the other as 'not very girly' and were rather surprised that they rather enjoyed the process of choosing and wearing a wedding dress:

> **Rachel** What I wanted was a nice straight dress with nothing to it at all.
>
> **Ian** She said 'the dress I've bought, it's *so* not me.' But it looked really nice.[21]

While all the brides were pleased with their choice of dresses and enjoyed choosing and wearing them, the close identification with the dress described by Charsley[22] was not something they expressed. Nevertheless, only one bride considered wearing anything else:

> **Susie** We just went looking for ideas, because you know, at advanced years, you're getting married, you think: 'well what do you wear?'… I was looking more for your mother-of-the-bride type outfit, but Alan always said 'ladies

[20] A10,p.5.
[21] A8,p.15.
[22] Charsley, *Rites of Marrying*, p.68.

> shouldn't wear pastels. You know, you look like my mother.' So. And I just saw that, that was it.[23]

For the others, and in this rather different way (wishing to avoid looking older than she in fact was) for Susie as well, performing the role of the bride necessitated dressing accordingly. While the wedding dress is the key item in the identifying costume of a bride, it is not the only one. Most of the brides wore a veil, though not generally over their face, and a headdress, usually a wire and crystal tiara. Shoes were chosen to match the rest of the bride's outfit, as were jackets or shawls, where worn. The purchase of bridal shoes tends to be a practical chore unlike the entertaining performance of buying a wedding dress. Considerations, apart from 'matching' the dress, are comfort and height of heel. Following a wider convention, though more diligently observed in these circumstances, brides try not to look taller than their husbands and choose heel heights accordingly.

All the brides completed their outfit with a bouquet of flowers, an ancient custom, Isidore of Seville giving a rationale for the (even then conventional) use of flowers in weddings in church in his early seventh century *De Ecclesiasticus Offficiis.*[24] All but one of the brides in the study had fresh flowers made into bouquets by professional florists, the remaining bride having silk flowers. These bridal bouquets were usually white or ivory in colour, though a large minority of the brides had more colourful bouquets. In either case there were continuities between the bridal bouquet and those of the bridesmaids and the bridesmaids' dresses and with the flowers used to decorate the church, either in colour, or type of flower, or both. Roses featured in most bouquets, though a range of other flowers were also used.

There is much that can be said about wedding dresses: about their significance in fashion, their meaning in social ritual and their manufacture.[25] The white dress is

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[23] A7,p.6-7.
[24] Stevenson, *Nuptial Blessing*, p.53.
[25] See Ingraham and also Mead for detailed accounts of the manufacture and distribution of

widely understood as 'symbolising' virginity, as ideally possessed by brides. Until relatively recently, there existed some popular sentiment that sexually experienced brides should not marry in white, though, as John Gillis[26] points out, in practice this extended only so far as brides who by virtue of divorce or visible pregnancy were obviously not virgins. For contemporary brides, including those in this study, the idea of a white wedding dress as a public statement of sexual inexperience is wholly alien.

Even before the radical changes in sexual mores of the past forty years, an interpretation of the wedding dress as a symbol of virginity was never adequate. White wedding dresses were occasionally worn, by the wealthy, from the late eighteenth century (the less wealthy simply wearing their best clothes), but white was not the 'right' colour for a wedding dress until Queen Victoria married Prince Albert in white in 1840.[27] Thereafter white dresses became increasingly popular for brides with the wherewithal to have a wedding dress. Wealth was the important consideration, the production of white cloth being difficult and expensive. Even in its origins a white wedding dress was as much about wealth as it was about the virginity of the bride. With the rise of the couturier houses in Europe, wedding dresses were and remain the final item in fashion house collections: a kind of definitive dress. This meaning of the wedding dress, as the most exclusive and desirable article of clothing possible, strikes most chords with these brides. A wedding dress is the most expensive article of clothing most brides have ever owned, probably the only one that has been made to measure. Like many areas of wedding related consumption, brides buy wedding dresses in the way that richer people, and specifically richer people of previous generations, buy other clothing.

From the couples' perspective, the history or symbolism of the wedding dress, if a consideration at all is secondary to the simple, but incontrovertible fact that brides, especially younger brides wear wedding dresses. It is never easy to

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contemporary wedding dresses.

[26] Gillis, *For Better, For Worse*.

[27] Shelley Tobin, Sarah Pepper, and Margaret Willes, *Marriage à la Mode. Three Centuries of Wedding Dress* (London: National Trust, 2003).

account for behaviour that has acquired a conventional status, and much of the material culture as well as the ritual of a wedding has just that. The white wedding dress has a particularly secure status in this, its unambiguous association with weddings and its visibility contributing to this. The equally powerful influences of custom and fashion coincide in such dresses: a general expectation that *a* white dress would be worn if possible meets the idea that there exists *the* perfect dress for every bride. Indeed, the deliberate, often aggressive, marketing of wedding dresses is central to the wedding industry, advertisements for them occupying nearly half the space in bridal magazines;[28] the wedding dress, it would seem, the most important purchase. The wedding industry can market dresses with such ease because of the significance of the dress to brides in the use they make of them. A wedding dress allows a woman to inhabit the role of ‘the bride’. Wearing the dress in the shop when choosing it, and later on for fittings anticipates the final, wearing of it as a bride.

One further observation needs to be made. It was very important for the brides in the study that their future husbands did not see them in their wedding dress until the wedding, or even see the dress. None of the brides I spoke to before their weddings would show me pictures or give a description of their dress in the hearing of their fiancés. On the one hand this added to the specialness of the occasion and of the dress:

> **SF** Had you seen the dress before?
>
> **Patrick** No, I hadn’t.
>
> **Tina** No, I’d actually kept it, and I can’t keep a secret…I kept saying ‘oh, do you want to know what its like?’ and ‘I’ve been for a fitting today’…But I didn’t tell him.[29]

On the other hand, it marked the limit of the grooms’ involvement in the wedding plans, emphasising gender roles even for those couples keen to do everything together:

> **Lisa** Robert had quite a lot of involvement…

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[28] See Purbrick, p.130.
[29] A10,p.13.

> **Robert** It was just the wedding dress I didn't have any involvement in. Everything else, I even went over and had a look at the bridesmaids' dresses.[30]

The contemporary bride is distinguished from her attendants by her clothes. All of the brides in the study had bridesmaids and many had pages. One adult bridesmaid was designated by most of the brides as the 'chief bridesmaid', usually the bride's witness in the marriage register. Otherwise bridesmaids help brides get ready on their wedding day and with general wedding plans. While in several cases it was bridesmaids who organised hen nights, capacity to fulfill the role of a hard working assistant did not dictate choice of bridesmaid. Rather, being a bridesmaid indicated closeness of relationship to bride or groom. This will be considered in 'Friends and Family,' later in this chapter.

Numbers varied from one to six attendants, ages varying from less than two to the late thirties, though the under-threes were seen as too unreliable to count as 'proper' bridesmaids. They were dressed up, and walked up and down the aisle with the other attendants if feeling co-operative on the day. 'Page-boys,' sometimes called 'ring bearers,' were all under the age of eight. The groom and bride together chose clothes for pageboys. With one exception, dressed in a kilt, they wore scaled down versions of the groom's outfit, sometimes without the jacket. Bridesmaids' outfits were chosen by the bride, in consultation with the bridesmaids, taking into account styles and colours that would 'suit' them.

Bridesmaids under the age of ten were dressed in white or cream dresses, matching the bride, sometimes in an A-line style and sometimes with big, netted skirts. These were worn, in most cases, with a sash of the same colour as the older bridesmaids' dresses. Older bridesmaids wore coloured dresses, Shades of pink and purple predominated and the straight, closely fitted styles fashionable at the time, usually full length, though 'tea' (ankle) length was chosen by several. Teenage bridesmaids were sometimes distinguished in dress from older women, as were bridesmaids of different heights or hair colour. While individuals do not necessarily dress identically, there are visible continuities; the bridesmaids in any

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[30] A13,p.16.

one of these weddings forming a visible group. Shoes and bouquets carried by bridesmaids consolidate this group effect. Rather smaller and often in different colours than the bridal bouquet, there were usually similarities in flower, style of arrangement and colour. Little girls often carried baskets of flowers, and had flowers in their hair.

The bride and bridesmaids form a very distinctive group. So do the groom and his best man, though in a rather different way. The grooms in the study all hired suits to be married in, from national chains or local firms, one in particular enjoying a very favourable reputation. Some of the grooms chose morning suits with tailcoats and others suits with long four buttoned jackets, variously called 'Prince Edward,' 'Edwardian' or 'Maverick.' Couples were not confident with the technical vocabulary of men's formal suiting and employed terms like 'a Wyatt Earp style' or simply 'long jacket' or 'tail coat.' Range of colours and styles was limited, grey suits or black jackets with striped trousers being overwhelmingly popular. In addition to a formal suit, grooms also wore waistcoats and, with one exception, who wore a collarless shirt with a stud at the throat, white dress shirts and cravats or ties. Waistcoats and neckwear were chosen in a colour that matched bridesmaids' outfits and flowers: either exactly, or in a grey tone that would 'go' with anything. Grooms took fabric samples to the hire shops when choosing ties and waistcoats. Several grooms commented that after the proposal, which was very much their event, choosing and collecting their suit was their only responsibility beyond turning up at the wedding.

> **Peter** I do get to choose my own suit…
> **SF** Are you going with him to choose the suits?
> **Lucy** Yeah.
> **Peter** But I'm allowed to choose my own suits, honestly.[31]

> **Steven** I didn't sort the wedding out… all I had to do was go for a suit fitting and I just turned up on the Saturday.[32]

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[31] A12,p.11.
[32] A2,p.5.

Besides grooms, best men, the fathers and stepfathers of bride and groom, and, on occasion, ushers hired suits. Any sons of the couple, or other child attendants also wore them. These suits were always exactly the same as that worn by the groom, the groom's clothes only distinguished from other men in the wedding party by colour of neckwear or waistcoat, buttonhole, or possibly not even that. Several clergy said that where morning suits were occasionally seen twenty years ago they are now nearly universal. This would be corroborated by my own, necessarily limited, experience of attending weddings as a guest. Many contemporary marrying couples apparently assume morning suits for grooms to almost the same extent as they do a wedding dress for a bride.

Quite apart from the obvious visible differences between the wedding clothes of a bride and a groom, the partners stand in a rather different relation to their clothes. While some wedding dresses are hired and some grooms own morning suits, the general pattern, which applies to these couples is the reverse. Brides choose a dress from hundreds of minutely different examples, trying on numerous different ones until they find the one they feel suits them best. They buy their dress and have it altered to fit them exactly. Grooms hire a suit from a range of no more than five. After the wedding, the wedding dress is kept carefully, but the suit is returned to the shop. One reason for this is a simple commercial one, few bridal boutiques regarding it as economically viable to hire wedding dresses: the work necessary to restore a dress once worn to a pristine condition being too great. Suits, on the other hand are resilient. These practical distinctions do tend to increase the focus on the bride's dress, and by extension the bride in her dress, as a central material representation of the wedding.

Getting the clothing right for a wedding is a matter of considerable importance to wedding couples, a vital aspect of doing a wedding 'properly.' But this appropriate clothing raises a number of issues. While the details of conventional wedding dress in contemporary England are of a comparatively recent origin, wearing special clothes to get married in is in no sense a new idea, or one peculiar to an England. In part this is one aspect of a complex cultural dress code, which informs the selection of clothing for different occasions; there are ways of dressing for getting married, as there are for other activities. Practical

considerations govern some of this, but clothes are also important for the performance of a social role, a vital aspect of social role being gender.

While gender is less determinative of dress in the contemporary West than in some contexts it remains hugely important, especially where considerations other than utility predominate. There remain powerful conventions about how men and women should dress for certain occasions, informed, inevitably by prevalent ideas about masculinity and femininity. A wedding can be seen as a rite of intensification, 'a kind of pause within the ordinariness of life' inviting 'popular engagement with the values its symbols enshrine and express.'[33] It is also a 'site of cultural intensification',[34] an enactment, in miniature, of society; a concentrated display of social protocols and roles. Male and female dress at weddings embodies and performs ideas about gender that are rarely explicit in ordinary life.

The clothing in an Anglican wedding is temptingly easy to interpret: the bride, as discussed, an unmistakable and iconic figure. The groom, in contrast, in formal daywear, as might be worn for other formal daytime events, including other peoples' weddings, his dress conveying no information about previous sexual experience and distinguishing him much less sharply from other men in the wedding party. Encoded in conventional wedding clothes are notions of the sexual double standard, feminine decorative helplessness contrasted with masculine (comparative) practicality, and of the wedding as an event that principally concerns the transformation of the status of the bride.

While there is some truth in this it does not do justice to the felt motivations of marrying couples. More helpful is to return to the idea of social role and look at wedding clothes not only as examples of the gendered clothing of a particular time and place, but as ceremonial clothes, like clerical vestments. The contemporary Anglican wedding is not just an event that displays the couples' personal taste or their attitudes and values, it is a rite in which individuals

[33] Douglas Davies and Mathew Guest *Bishops, Wives and Children. Spiritual Capital Across the Generations* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), p.177.
[34] Ibid, p.177.

participate in pre-determined ways, and through which their social relationships are transformed. Any ceremonial function is aided and abetted by costume. The persistent popularity of the white wedding dress lies in its distinctiveness. The rarity and impracticality of a long white dress ensured its visibility and consolidated its association with weddings. That there exists no equally distinctive 'groom's outfit' lies in a similar process of consolidation of norms of dress, though with opposite consequences. From the early nineteenth century the dark suit became firmly established as appropriate male clothing for most occasions,[35] overwhelming the ostentatious attire worn as frequently by men as by women in earlier times.

All members of a wedding party dress for distinct roles: bridesmaids, best men, ushers and the parents of bride and groom, clothing inextricably bound up with the performance of those roles. The bride's mother and to a marginally lesser extent the groom's mother (the members of the wedding party without a prescribed costume) are especially smartly dressed, in outfits chosen to blend in with the bride and bridesmaids, often with large or elaborate hats. There was no uncertainty about the social rules that govern such sartorial decisions. Guests who have no particular job to do are also performing a role, and dress accordingly. Virtually all the men attending the weddings as guests wore smart lounge suits, with dress shirts and ties and often buttonholes. Women wore smart outfits, a proportion wearing hats or fascinators, and some a buttonhole or corsage. Such clothing is an established aspect of social behaviour in contemporary England and exists in a symmetrical relationship with clothing for funerals, which is dark, often black in colour, and where men wear a black tie. It is noticeable that visitors to the wedding, generally the church verger, or acquaintances too distant to be wedding guests, who have come to 'watch' the wedding, while tidy in appearance, are in ordinary clothes, as might be worn for work. The role of interested observer, while peripheral to proceedings, is still one that is, deliberately, performed.

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[35] James Laver, *Costume and Fashion: A Concise History* (London: Thames and Hudson, 4th ed. 2002), p.168.

Transport

While all of the couples owned a car, they still all hired a special car and driver for the wedding, except the couple who had a horse and carriage instead. Exactly how much transport was hired varied. Some had one car, which took bride and escort to the church and then bride and groom from the church to the reception venue. Others hired two cars, so that other significant members of the wedding party could also be transported in similar style, or arranged for one car to do multiple journeys before the wedding. Even where the distance between house, church and reception venue were very short, cars were hired. Where this was the case the driver often took the couple for a drive around between the wedding and the reception. Cars varied in type, but were all luxury models and included a limousine, a Bentley and a Lanchester: varieties of car that the couples would be in no position to own. Some of the grooms provided a considerable amount of detail about these vehicles, though others gave less precise descriptions: 'a convertible,'[36] a '*Chitty-Chitty- Bang- Bang* Car.'[37] Couples expressed considerable pleasure about the chance to travel in a prestigious, high quality vehicle.

Hiring wedding cars became customary at a time when private car ownership was rare. It persists with hired cars being prestige models in immaculate condition and appears to serve two purposes. On the one hand, it is another opportunity to enjoy, for the day of the wedding, luxurious commodities impossible in ordinary life. On the other hand, the incongruity of groom or bride driving themselves to their wedding or getting there by bus merits attention. Journeys are most significant in rites of passage, especially weddings, where journeys associated with the occasion become special events: physical journeys mirroring the social movement of the couple.[38] Even now, both bride and groom are accompanied as they move through their wedding day and much is made of this physical movement, whether being driven to the church, from the church to the reception or walking into, out of or around the church.

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[36] A1.
[37] A5.
[38] See Van Gennep, p.116.

The Ceremony

Chapter 6 considered the ceremony from the perspective of the priest. This section considers the wedding ceremony from the couples' perspectives. An interesting observation made by several of the couples, and by others I have spoken to informally, concerns this question of perspective. A wedding is imagined in advance from an observer's point of view. Sight lines of both bride and groom are very different and often something of a surprise to both of them. This highlights the extent to which a wedding exists as an actual event and in the imagination. The desire by some couples to create the 'wedding of their dreams' is, to some degree at least, frustrated by their own central, physical as well as ritual, position in it. This is partly rectified by the wedding video, which will be addressed later.

One of the first things couples planning weddings must decide is the type of ceremony and its venue. So say all the wedding manuals and so say the couples in this study. Ceremony and reception were, for all the couples, booked at almost the same time. Some booked the church first and then arranged the reception. Some got a number of possible times from the parish priest before approaching reception venues. Some booked their reception before arranging a wedding service. The fact that even the busiest wedding churches in the deanery seldom had more than two weddings on any Saturday meant that this last strategy was often a practical one. None of the couples made any comment on the cost of a church wedding. This includes a fee set nationally for the wedding, the publication of banns and the banns certificate. At present these costs are, respectively, £247, £22 and £12, in total £281.00.[39] Marriages by common licence are more expensive than marriages by banns, and marriages by Archbishop's special licence more expensive again.[40] All options are more expensive than a register office wedding, which costs £43.50 for the ceremony from Monday to Friday and £93.50 on a Saturday, and £30 for each partner to

[39] 'Table of Parochial Fees From 1st January 2008', http://www.cofe.anglican.org/lifeevents/weddings (11/06/08).

[40] The fee for the wedding ceremony remain the same, but a common licence costs a total of £75 and a special licence £140. 'Marriage', http://www.peterboroughdiocesanregistry.co.uk/marriage.html (11/06/08).

give notice, a total of £73.50 or £123.50,[41] and where there are seldom any opportunities for additional services. Weddings in approved premises vary in cost. One popular civil wedding venue in the area currently charges £300 for the ceremony.[42] Another connects the charge for a ceremony with the number of weddings guests, charging £225 for the ceremony alone, £200 where a reception for less than fifty guests is held at the same place and £175 where there are more than fifty guests.[43] While the cost of the church ceremony seems unlikely to put engaged couples off church weddings, it must be noted that a cheap wedding in the contemporary imagination is generally a register office wedding. Advice on ways to save money will frequently commend a register office ceremony. First marrying couples with an articulate Christian commitment and an active involvement in a church will get married in church anyway, irrespective of their budget, but such couples represent a minority of those marrying in the Church of England.

In addition to the basic costs of the ceremony, which are statutory, most churches offer additional services, charged at locally agreed rates,[44] including organist, choir and bells, where available. Where bells were an option, in about half of the deanery churches, couples like to have them. There are a number of community choirs in the area, which, on payment of a donation, will sing at weddings, swelling congregational singing and also singing during the signing of the register. One of the study couples booked such a choir and one of the weddings I observed did so too, in preference to the church's choir. Except during Lent, all the Anglican churches in this study are decorated with flowers at all times. At Easter and Christmas such displays are quite extensive. For the rest of the year flowers are limited to one or two arrangements on pedestals at the front of the church or near the font. Most churches are happy to do their ordinary flowers in colours to suit a wedding, and most of the couples felt this was sufficient. Some weddings have far more flowers, with displays on all available surfaces as well

[41] 'Marriage' http://www.kirklees.gov.uk/answers/register-office/faq-marriage (11/06/08).
[42] 'Weddings' http://www.healdshall.co.uk (11/06/08).
[43] 'Weddings' http://www.alderhousehotel.co.uk (11/06/08).
[44] Plans to agree a shared framework of additional charges for weddings for the deanery have yet to be implemented.

as on pew ends and round doorways. The church flower arrangers usually arrange such flowers, their costs being met by the wedding couple, though professional florists are sometimes employed, especially where the requirements are extensive. One couple, marrying between Christmas and New Year said that the church's Christmas decorations with candles and greenery fitted in well with the general style of their wedding. Nevertheless, the decoration of the church was not, by most of the couples, felt to be a priority. So saying, the internal and external architecture of the church was held to be of great significance, as will be discussed later.

The 'givenness' of the church building in the minds of marrying couples was echoed in many of their attitudes to the structure and content of the service.

> **Mike** We wanted a traditional white wedding…
> **Liz** That's it really
> **Mike** Very traditional.[45]

> **Rebecca** It was just basically pretty traditional really.[46]

While most of the couples used the term 'traditional' to express what they wanted their wedding to be like, this did not indicate a preference for what *CW* calls the 'traditional language' vows: all of the weddings used contemporary language. The desire for tradition meant, in this context, that most of the couples wanted, not particular music or words, but the wedding service as it came, as a whole set piece. One consequence of this was that while they were happy to make the choices that were open to them, this was not, on the whole a major preoccupation.

Typically the vicar had given them on paper or by email a series of choices of readings and prayers. Few couples were very familiar with the Bible passages and most were uncertain about the conventions of citing them. So saying, while the clergy said that the overwhelming majority of couples chose 1 Corinthians

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[45] A4,p.4.
[46] A3,p.5.

13, and while this was the preferred choice of the study couples, it only accounted for about half of them. Couples quite often added an additional, non-biblical reading, read by a friend or relative. Others had someone read the Bible passage, but about half had the priest read. Couples also had to choose music, both hymns and incidental music. Most of the couples felt more confident choosing hymns than Bible readings, and chose a wider selection than clergy indicated was usually the case. Most couples had two hymns, though some had three and Ian and Rachel had several 'worship songs', some of which were sung together. Wagner and Mendelssohn were popular processional and recessional, respectively, but several couples chose recorded music instead and a large minority other organ music. Couples chose prayers from the choices given in the *CW* material. When I spoke to them, unsurprisingly, none of them could remember exactly which ones, though several told me about the process of choosing prayers and readings.

> **Tina** He gave us a sampler, didn't he?
> **Patrick** Mm.
> **Tina** And we were sat in bed a few times with pamphlet type of thing, trying to read what were the best. We did end up asking him still 'what would you think'd be appropriate?' And he told us.[47]
>
> **Mike** He then sent us a link, via email, of the order of service, the hymns and everything else that you can choose. And then we scrolled through that and actually, we emailed him back what we wanted…
> **SF** So he gave you a choice about which hymns?
> **Liz** Hymns and prayers.
> **Mike** And different services.
> **Liz** There was a set format, but there was a lot of choice, [48]

This somewhat tentative approach to the choices offered them for the service, happy to let the priest lead, was typical, though two couples had much stronger preferences for the content of their wedding ceremony, which were frustrated by

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[47] A10,p.3.
[48] A4,p.3-4.

the requirements of the Anglican service. In both cases they felt themselves sufficiently informed to be able to plan a ceremony with minimal help.

> **Lisa** We pretty much knew what we wanted to do…
> **Robert** So we had it all listed with questions for everybody and stuff, so when we got there, he sort of said ‘oh here’s a list of… popular readings and things.’ We said ‘oh we’ve chosen a few.’ I mean we got a few religious ones and a few non-religious ones... so we ended up with one of each.[49]

> **SF** Did you have an idea of what you wanted from a wedding service yourself?
> **Ian** Very much so.
> **Rachel** Yeah, I think, kind of, we did. But because we’d never arranged one before we didn’t know the procedure... Even though you know the way services normally go... even though its slightly different, depending which church that you go to, but you’ve got to remember all the stages, so having a book was helpful and what we did was gathered other orders of services to see the style that we wanted to go for…
> **Ian** Really did it ourselves... We chose the readings. We chose the prayers. Rachel’s Baptist minister from home came and actually did the talk… Another friend from my church read a blessing prayer. Katie, one of Rachel’s friends, kind of the person who got us together in a way… She did a reading. We chose all the worship songs.[50]

Neither of these couples imagined their weddings as set piece rites offered by the Church. While both couples were very concerned about the details of the service, their frustrations were provoked by very different aspects of the legal and liturgical status quo. Lisa and Robert were happy with the overall shape of the service, but wanted to write their own vows.

> **Robert** We originally considered doing our own vows, didn’t we?
> **Lisa** Yeah.
> **Robert** I mean it was quite restrictive, you know, the Church of England’s set up...

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[49] A13,p.5.
[50] A8,p.5.

> **Lisa** We felt we were just saying what everybody else said… but we didn't really say everything we wanted to say. So we asked if we could put some extra things in and he said, 'you know the words are stuck.' So we were a bit disappointed in that… we wrote us own vows anyway… as a memento… obviously I know they're sort of traditional, but they're not sort of up to modern day life... So we wrote us own together… We wrote for us-self and exchanged them one day at home, didn't we?[51]

An increasing desire of couples to write their own vows is attributed by clergy to the influence of films and popular television programmes like *Friends*. Vows are widely represented on films as occasions for making public declarations of personal feelings and intentions towards one's spouse, which some couples find attractive, being surprised to discover this 'invented tradition' is not acceptable practice in the Church of England.[52]

Rachel and Ian had different concerns. Though committed Christians they were ambivalent about the benefits of a wedding in a church building:

> **Rachel** And the fact is, no, I didn't always want a *church* wedding. I wanted a *Christian* wedding…When I initially started thinking about a wedding it wasn't in a church, it was … a local farm near us, which was beautiful... I still would have had all the Christian input into it.
>
> **Ian** It would have still been in the sight of God...
>
> **Rachel** I wanted it to be, like, God-focused… what we believed in and
>
> **Ian** Like a witness.
>
> **Rachel** Our relationship with God, really, more than anything else... There wouldn't have been any doubt that we would have had a civil service or anything… it was to do with our faith, and sort of, to declare, just saying 'in God's sight we wanted to live our life together now… 'According to your will and your way.'
>
> **SF** If it had been possible to have a Christian wedding, say on a farm, would you have liked to do that?
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> **Rachel** I would have.

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[51] C3,p.8.

[52] See Eric Hobsbawm, *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: CUP, 1992).

> **Ian** … At the end of the courtyard there's a, kind of an altar, not built as an altar, but it's there, and that would have been a beautiful place to have flowers kind of lining the area, maybe creating your own little aisle. Yeah it would have been really beautiful place, just a really beautiful place to do it…
> **Rachel** It's just the first place I thought and as soon as I saw it I thought 'that's what I wanted.'[53]

There is a great deal of interest in these observations, which will be addressed shortly in the section 'Why Church?' Couples vary very much in the extent to which they feel that they own wedding ritual or can direct it according to personal preferences or convictions. For some, maybe most, the content of a wedding is not really negotiable. They go along with choosing aspects of it, because this is a part of the package. The two themes of choice and the observance of protocols, noted above are evident again here. With respect to the wedding service the significant choice, from the point of view of most couples, was made when they chose to marry in church, thereafter, observance of the protocols was the issue. The others, frustrated by the limitations of an Anglican service felt that choice should extend further. This can be substantially attributed to a greater ritual confidence on the part of these couples: one with considerable experience of informal Christian worship and the other of organising Brownie events, including services. Both these couples are, in other respects more representative of Bauman's 'liquid modernity'[54] than are the others, one meeting in an internet chatroom, the other active participants in the kind of trans-national charismatic Christianity, which Coleman identifies as a response to globalisation and postmodernity.[55]

Emotions

Both brides and grooms said that they felt very nervous on the morning of their wedding, though several felt that they got their nerves out of the way at the rehearsal, allowing them to be calm for their actual wedding. However, bride and groom experience the beginning of the wedding very differently. The groom

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[53] A8,p.13-14.
[54]Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity, 2000)
[55] Simon Coleman, *The Globalisation of Charismatic Christianity* (Cambridge: CUP, 2000).

arrives at the church early with the best man, greets and chats to guests as they arrive. The bride's arrival with her father marks the start of the wedding service. In anticipation of the arrival of the bride, the guests are seated in their pews, as directed by the ushers and the groom is sitting at the front on the south side (or right hand side if facing the altar) with his best man. The incidental music stops as the bride's arrival is noted by the priest and indicated to the organist, and the processional music begins; at which point the congregation stand and the bridal procession enters the church. At this point most of the grooms described turning to look at the bride coming down the aisle.

> **Ian** When Rachel came down the aisle… It's nice when you look back, because everyone is looking. They know that she's coming in, but they still can't see her; they must be looking forward… looking at you and you look back and oh, wow![56]

> **Paul** The one thing that stands out was I noticed (when the music starts, you know the bride-to-be is coming in) and I saw her tiara. Right at the back, it was the first thing I saw. The sun was glinting off it and when she walked in like that and… that's what I remember…my heart was just beating out of my chest, just through pure adrenaline and excitement. [57]

While Ian and Paul express their experience with particular force, many of the grooms identified this moment as one that stood out for them in the wedding service. Both Ian and Paul articulate clearly the effect that point of view has on one's perception of the wedding. The groom stands at the front, looking back to see the bride enter. Guests watch him watching for this and then, guided by his response, themselves turn to look at the bride coming in. Brides also experience the moment of their entry into the church as one of heightened emotion.

> **Liz** I cried… walking up the aisle, I really remember, because I was absolutely full of it. The music starts and then I walk down the aisle.[58]

[56] A8,p.8.
[57] A1, p.5.
[58] A4, p.5.

> **Tina** When you get married its, like the church, isn't it, it's walking down the aisle..? I mean look what state I were in when I got to them doors with my Dad. They had to come with tissues and I were sweating. It were really nerve wracking.[59]

It is noteworthy that this memorable point, for both partners, in the marriage service is not attended by any speech at all, just physical movement on the part of the bride and waiting and watching on the part of the groom. Even the responses to this are described in a noticeably embodied way: sweat, tears, a beating heart.

A few people particularly remembered the vows:

> **Linda** The whole day was wonderful, but to me, it was actually taking us vows, wasn't it?… declaring our love and commitment to one another in front of everybody.[60]

> **Annie** Making the vows. It is within a meaningful context. And we wanted that. We wanted to have a blessing.[61]

As significant as exchanging vows was the context of so doing; in what Annie describes as the 'meaningful context' of a church service and, in Linda's words, 'in front of everybody.' The actual, embodied presence of the right people at the wedding service was something most of the couples mentioned as having great significance. Even here, in this verbal, contractual part of the ceremony it is action and context: physical as well as social that impresses the couples as being important. So saying, none of the couples, even those with definite ideas about their weddings, found it easy to describe the physical movement in the service. Instead they articulated their perceptions as a series of snap shots: coming down the aisle, signing the register, exchanging vows. The movements necessary to accomplish these actions were nearly impossible to recall and it was widely assumed that things like who was involved in the bridal and wedding processions and in which order were so familiar they needed no articulation.

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[59] A10,p.9.
[60] A1,p.4-5.
[61] A9,p.8.

Photography

All the couples kept extensive photographic records of their weddings; and all but one hired professional photographers. Clare and Matt, who did not, hired a videographer to make a video record of the day, as did most of the others. Clare and Matt felt that their professionally made DVD would constitute a sufficient record of the day, allowing that friends and relatives would also take photographs. Hiring a professional photographer was universally assumed to be normal practice; the decision not to was something that Clare and Matt felt needed justifying. Couples chose local photographers, often on the basis of personal recommendations, and took as much interest in the manner in which photographers conducted themselves as they did in the quality of the final photographs.[62]

While the marrying couples in this study had met and dealt with numerous different professionals, most of this was completed by the wedding day. Of those present on the day, most: drivers, cooks and musicians went about their tasks in an unobtrusive fashion. The priest and the photographer were different, and even the priest's role was completed by the end of the service and contained, on the actual wedding day, within the service. Negotiating with the photographer was not always easy.

Tina I wish we'd have had some more people in the photos as well, you know like...

Patrick Grandmas…

Patrick Aunties and Uncles...

Tina... It would have been nice to have, like Patrick's grandparents on one side and mine, you know, a big photo.

Patrick I don't know why we didn't. We never got asked, did we?[63]

Tina and Patrick, along with other couples, found that their dealings with the photographer were of a different order than with other professionals. Not only are photographers performing a role, as well as accomplishing a task, so their

[62] A11,p.9.
[63] A10,p.11-12.

manner as well as competence is an issue, they also make a crucial contribution to the way the wedding is remembered. This becomes clearer when considering the final wedding photographs.

All of the couples had a special wedding album; where they had them completed they showed them to me. Otherwise they showed me loose photographs, of which all couples had at least a hundred, often many more. Albums are typically large and heavy, with white or cream leather-look covers. Most couples had the album supplied by their photographer, the cost included in the overall fee, and others bought an album and arranged the photographers' pictures themselves. The photographs are large prints, usually 8" x 10" or 8" squares, in colour. Black and white shots were included sometimes, occasionally with certain sections picked out in colour. Most of the photographs were posed shots of individuals or groups, though there were some informal 'reportage' shots. With or without these the wedding albums told the story of the wedding day in pictorial form. The pattern is sufficiently consistent to enable a general account. Early pictures feature bride and groom alone, or with their families of origin, or the bride with bridesmaids and the groom with best man and ushers. Additional pictures of bridesmaids, groomsmen and families are taken, but family of origin or association with bride or groom is clearly distinguished in these early shots. Few pictures are taken during the service, photography being limited to the arrival of the bride, and to the signing of the register. Some photographers take pictures of the ceremony from the back of the church, especially of the vows and the blessing, and all photograph the newly married couple coming up the aisle and leaving the building. Following this there is a series of posed groups: the bride and groom, with, in turn bridesmaids, best man and ushers, respective parents and other close family members: each family separately and then all together. Larger groups of extended family and specific groups of friends follow. These pictures are taken either outside the church or outside the reception venue, except where the weather makes this completely impossible, when pictures are posed inside either place instead. Pictures of the reception dinner are quite rare, but speeches and the first dance of bride and groom are often photographed, as is, almost without exception, the cutting of the cake.

Where a professional video or DVD is taken the same sequence is followed (amateur videos, unlike amateur photographs, were widely disregarded as a helpful record of a wedding). One videographer goes to the bride's house; the other to the groom's and the day is recorded and then edited in sequence. What wedding videos include, ordinary photographers being restricted in the number of photographs they are permitted to take in church, is a complete record of the wedding service. This is particularly appreciated by those who had one made, and is the main regret of those who did not.

> **Patrick** It was… a lot of money at the time, you know… but then you think, a hundred and fifty quid to see it again.
> **Tina** Yeah, it would have been nice, because I were in a bit of a state, me, and I didn't really take notice when I were coming in.[64]

Photographs and videos allow people to revisit and remember their wedding. Keeping a photographic record of events in one's life is a normal cultural practice in contemporary England, though typically a partial record. Holidays, parties and other special occasions are often photographed, mundane activities rarely. Rarer still are photographs of funerals, or of people suffering an illness. So while photography is an assumed aspect of social life, clear, if rarely articulated social rules apply to it. These are culturally specific. The impropriety of photography at a funeral, for example, is certainly not universal. But a wedding is, without doubt, in an English context the event at which photography is not only acceptable, but also required.[65]

This might derive from the historical development of photography. Before cameras and film were cheap and simple enough for non-specialist use people were photographed rarely, a wedding the most likely event to occasion a photograph. Others: early infancy, especially the baptism of a child, or engagement are not unrelated events, and ones that persist as occasions when people might have a professional studio portrait, rather than take a photograph with their own camera. The advent of photography as an ordinary and universally

[64] A10,p.3.
[65] See Lansdell.

accessible activity has not seen a commensurate decline in the demand for professional photographers at certain times. This can be connected to a popular taxonomy of photography that distinguishes the ‘snap (shot)’ or ‘photo’ that can be taken by anyone, from various more elevated forms of photography practiced by professionals, or by talented and experienced amateurs. The couples who had a friend or acquaintance take their wedding pictures pointed out that this person was in fact a professional, or qualified in some other comparable way. Part of this is a matter of having a job done well. People have professional photographers at weddings (and rarely at other occasions) because they want good photographs taken then (which are not so important at other times). But this is an inadequate explanation, that still fails to address what it is about *weddings* that makes them the occasion before any other on which really good photography counts.

A consideration of the way in which occasions or events are classified in contemporary England is illuminating here. Any event can be located on both of two sliding scales: that of its importance, both to its participants and to society more generally, and that of its privacy; the extent to which people other than its participants have any legitimate interest in it. People, in England, as elsewhere, tend to organise their lives so special events are marked by a higher standard of everything: food, drink, clothing in particular. This is more than a binary division, into ‘ordinary’ and ‘special,’ but a hierarchy of degree of specialness and importance. In the weekly and annual cycles of events within families and groups of friends, including (this list is not exhaustive) Sunday lunches, birthdays and Christmas, a hierarchy of importance is evident for participants, in which food, drink and clothing are increasingly distinct from ordinary things and in which, significantly, photography becomes increasingly appropriate. Workplaces sometimes also have similar patterns of social events, and employees must negotiate between their personal and working commitments. The extraordinary and non-cyclical events of major life crises cut across this, with all happy events involving photography and weddings, professional photography. The more important an event, the more it needs to be photographed.

Something of the same scheme of values is evident in the fact that the more famous a person is, the more often they are photographed, and being photographed consolidates fame. This connects to the virtual prohibition on photography at funerals. While famous people are frequently photographed with their consent, they are also the involuntary subjects of photographs. While such photographs, published in magazines like *Heat* or *OK* as well as many newspapers have a wide audience, there is considerable public censure of the tactics of the 'paparazzi' that take them. This turns on the idea that having one's photograph taken can be an invasion of privacy, and that privacy is something to which people are entitled. The contrary view does not reject the notion of privacy, but holds that certain persons, by virtue of deliberate courting of the press, have forfeited the privacy that is an 'ordinary' person's right. Whether or not some have forfeited such a right, the idea that photography can be invasive holds. Photography at funerals is improper because it is an invasion into the grief of the bereaved. The same holds for photographing the sick and, in line with contemporary perceptions, children. All these people are in a state of life that photographers must take care not to abuse. People are in a heightened state of emotion at weddings too, but *anyone* is allowed to take photographs at weddings. The normal freedom of private individuals not to be photographed is waived. In addition to degrees of importance, there are also degrees of privacy. A wedding is very important, and not private at all.

The social nature of a wedding is evident in the consistent, narrative way in which photographs are arranged, described above. The groupings themselves are not just material snapshots of people, but social snapshots in which images of persons are arranged and displayed according to the roles they fulfill in an immediate and extended family and, to a somewhat lesser extent, groups of friends. Social proximity to the couple is encoded in the photographs, as is the reconstruction of families with the new member who has joined them. Thus the album moves from individual poses of bride or groom to poses of them as a couple, and from groups in which the bride is with her family or her bridesmaids and the groom with his family or best man to ones where bride and groom as a couple are with the bride's, then the groom's families of origin. If marrying couples are individuals adrift in the world, one would not know it from wedding

albums. The couple is, clearly, the focus, but many specific photographs, and even more the wedding album as a whole, locate the couple firmly in a social, familial, context. This was not some kind of by-product of wedding photography from the point of view of the couples, but the purpose of it: to fix a map of family and friends at a particular moment in time. The social and especially familial location of couples was a theme that emerged persistently as they describe their wedding preparations and celebrations. It continues with the reception.

The Reception

The wedding reception follows the wedding, and consists of a special meal, followed by speeches by various persons and toasts. The general practice is to leave a considerable interlude between the wedding and the reception, to allow for photographs at the church, travel to the reception and possibly more photographs there before the reception starts. Weddings can legally take place in England between 8am and 6pm,[66] though weddings in Anglican churches usually take place between 11am and 3pm. The couples in the study married at some point between 11.30am and 2pm.

Numerous hotels and clubhouses in the area cater for occasions like weddings, as well as pubs and community halls. Several of these have their own wedding license, though this was of little interest to the couples in this study. One couple had their reception at home, three at sports clubhouses and one in a pub. The remaining eight had receptions at hotels, one particular hotel seeing two weddings and another, three. Both hotels were very popular in the area for weddings and the couples who had their receptions there were pleased that they were able to do so. The rooms which housed the receptions were designated 'function rooms', some venues having several. These were decorated in the wedding colours, either by the hotel, or by the couple themselves, with flowers and sometimes candles or balloons. All of the couples in the study had their main reception in the middle of the afternoon. Numbers attending varied greatly, the smallest wedding having less than twenty guests, the largest a hundred and

[66] 'Weddings' http://www.cofe.anglican.org/lifeevents/weddings (11/06/08).

twenty and most between sixty and a hundred. Extra people were usually invited to attend later, for the evening reception.

Most couples had a hot ‘sit down’ meal of three courses, followed by coffee, served at tables by waiting staff, the menu of which had been decided beforehand, most frequently a roast dinner with meat, potatoes and vegetables. Couples (and reception venues) were reasonably accommodating towards their guests and offered an alternative meal for vegetarians. Three couples had a buffet at this point instead, arguing that they wanted something ‘less formal.’ Sitting a large number of people is a significant logistical operation. One long narrow table at one end of the reception room was designated a ‘top table,’ the rest of the room being filled with usually round tables, each accommodating between eight and ten people. Guests, except at the smallest wedding, were allocated places, marked by a small name card, and indicated on a plan near the door of the room. Working out seating plans involved some effort on the part of the couple, sometimes in consultation with the bride and groom’s mothers, especially the bride’s. Many couples said they had to decide whether to sit people with others they already knew, or to ‘mix people up.’ Most compromised, sitting everyone with some people they knew and others they did not, but were likely to get on with. Beyond facilitating comfortable social interaction, the seating of wedding guests exhibited a kind of hierarchy of relationship to bride and groom. The top table accommodated the couple, their parents, best man or men and chief bridesmaid. Sitting on tables closest to the top table were close relatives and friends, including those other attendants.

Following the meal there were, in all cases, speeches and toasts, all by men. Even where individuals felt very nervous and personally unsuited to speech making, they gave them. In order, brides’ fathers, grooms and best men gave speeches and offered toasts, respectively to bride and groom, bridesmaids and then bride and groom again. Wedding speeches conform to predetermined patterns; there are numerous books on the subject, giving instructions about what should be included in a speech by the different speakers, how to structure a speech and even suggesting suitable forms of words or jokes. Many of the couples bought such a book, usually for their best man. The conventions, followed by these

couples were as follows. The bride's father speaks about the bride, recounting incidents from her childhood and past life, before proposing a toast to the bride and groom. Where the bride's father is not present, this role is fulfilled by whoever gave the bride away in the ceremony. The groom speaks next, thanking the bride's father for his good wishes, giving some account of the course of his relationship with the bride and concluding with a toast to the bridesmaids. The last speech is given by the best man, who replies to the groom's toast on behalf of the bridesmaids, says something (ideally funny) about the groom, reads out cards from people who have not attended and concludes with another toast to the bride and groom. For the toasts, guests have been given champagne, or other sparkling white wine. The speaker introduces the toast, everyone stands up, the speaker says 'to the bride and groom', the guests repeat 'the bride and groom' and everyone takes a sip of their drink.

It is noteworthy that speech making was, at these weddings, an even more exclusively male activity than either Leonard observed in 1960s Swansea[67] and Charsley in 1980s Glasgow,[68] especially when one takes into account the cultural shifts in the last forty years, at least in terms of patterns of female employment and the sexual double standard.[69] The ritual behaviour, with respect to speeches, as for the 'giving away' mentioned earlier, did not reflect the daily life of these couples, where all women worked full time and where many domestic tasks were shared. Interpreting this is not easy. The perception of making speeches as an ordeal, which Charsley felt contributed to female acquiescence in this respect[70], certainly persists. So too does the simple assumption that this is something men do, noted by both Charsley and Leonard.[71] But neither of these addresses the fact that speeches at weddings appear symbolic ritual acts. This complex question will be addressed later in this chapter.

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[67] Leonard, pp.187-191.
[68] Charsley, *Rites of Marrying*, pp.159-166.
[69] Leonard, pp.259-268.
[70] Charsley, *Rites of Marrying*, p.166
[71] Ibid, p. 166 and Leonard, p.188.

It is at this point that another event, apparently rich in symbolism usually took place: the cutting of the wedding cake, although several couples said that they forgot to do this. Conspicuously displayed in the room throughout, the couple, standing so everyone can see, cut the cake together, often with a special knife kept by the hotel for the occasion. This consists of making just one big cut; a considerable challenge when a cake is covered in hard 'royal' icing. Someone else takes the cake away and cuts it into small pieces, which are distributed and eaten. Wedding cakes are a universal and interesting aspect of contemporary weddings.[72] Very few people marry without them. The couples went to considerable trouble over wedding cakes, though several said that they never actually got to eat any of the cake themselves, or that they did not, personally, like the fruitcake from which their wedding cake was constructed. Wedding cake, like other cakes at formal British events is conventionally a rich fruitcake. This has the advantage of being best made several weeks in advance of the event at which it will be eaten, allowing its maker a reasonable amount of time for the difficult task of its decoration. Conventionally, this has consisted of a layer of almond paste and then 'royal icing,' stiffened with beaten egg white, which allows delicate decorations to be made and retain their shape. For weddings several such cakes, in graduated order of size are made and built with boards and columns into a tiered cake.

Several couples had relatives or family friends make their cakes as wedding presents. Others bought them from confectioners. Still others bought ready iced cakes from supermarkets and constructed their own wedding cake that way. The wedding cake has diversified considerably[73], and most couples felt free of traditional expectations. Though several had fruitcake, despite disliking it because they felt it 'traditional', many included tiers or sections of different kinds of cakes. Some had asymmetric cake stands rather than columns and boards. Others had cakes made to more personal requirements; one had models of the couple on top, another was made to look like 'two pink suitcases and a

[72] See Charsley, *Rites of Marrying* and *Wedding Cakes.*
[73] See Charsley, *Wedding Cakes.*

handbag' and another was not cake at all, but consisted of three graduated pork pies arranged with boards and columns into the shape of a wedding cake.

Charsley suggests a 'symbolic equivalence' between bride and cake, the cutting of the cake, by extension representing the sexual consummation of the marriage, underlined by the custom of retaining the top cake tier for a christening.[74] He further notes that he encountered only one couple in the course of his empirical research that understood wedding cakes in this way. They decided against having a cake for this very reason. None of the couples in this study expressed any view as to the symbolic significance of a cake. Indeed, if a cake is just something necessary for a wedding with no need that it resembles the bride (or any thing else), it might just as well be a pork pie or a pink suitcase. What wedding cakes certainly suggest is connections with other occasions where celebratory cakes are used: christenings, as already mentioned and also birthdays and Christmas.

All but one couple continued the reception into the night with an 'evening do' to which more guests were invited (to a maximum of two hundred) and at which additional food was served, in the form of a buffet, or for two couples, a barbeque. Most of the tables were cleared for the evening reception, to allow for the obligatory dancing, usually a disco with a DJ, but for one couple a ceilidh too. After the couples' 'first dance,' with no on else on the dance floor, others join in. Sometimes, bride and grooms make a point of dancing with the parent of the opposite sex.

At some point the bride and groom leave the party. No mention was made of the once widespread custom of decorating their car with tin cans and boots. Most couples stayed overnight in the reception hotel, as did many guests. Where receptions were held in venues without overnight accommodation couples went back to their own house. Either way, the bride and groom's departure was much less decisive and marked than in the recent past. It is only here, at the end of the wedding day, that the weakening of the idea of marriage as a radical change is really apparent. On the whole couples did not leave for a honeymoon right away,

[74] Charsley, Ibid, pp.126-7.

but after a day or two, sometimes putting off the big trip for several months, though still associating it with their wedding. Couples with young children went away for two or three nights, but said they intended to have a special holiday together at some later date. Honeymoon destinations were diverse, including Australia, Cuba, and America as well as European and British destinations.

The study couples' wedding receptions conformed to widespread contemporary practice in most respects. Hotel receptions, as opposed to ones held in church or community halls or pubs, are common. The preference for a hot roast dinner, usually lamb or beef, for the wedding reception is more local, especially the custom of serving Yorkshire pudding as a first course. Desserts included perennial English favourites: fruit pie or trifle and others enjoying current popularity in restaurants: sticky toffee pudding, banoffee pie, and profiteroles. Choice of menu, like choice of all aspects of a wedding should be, the couples claimed, a matter of personal preference, though champagne toasts and fruit cake, where couples personally prefer beer or chocolate cake must qualify such assertions. The same is true for those grooms who gave speeches against their own personal inclinations.

The whole structure of the wedding reception is as fixed and conventional as is the wedding service, and not one couples challenged. It is both a continuation of that ritual and a performance with its own integrity, sharing a structure with other social events: a formal dinner, followed by speeches and toasts, followed by dancing and informal sociability. Ceremonial followed by feasting is common in wedding rites;[75] in addition, the structure of the reception in many ways repeats that of the ceremony and consolidated the ritual and social shift it brought about. Bride and groom arrive separately at the church and go through a rite in which their status as a married couple is established. Following a formal liturgical and legal section and the signing of the registers, a more informal, relaxed atmosphere prevails as the couple leave the church as a couple, followed by their close relatives and friends, ritually integrated in the wedding procession out of church. The reception both continues this more relaxed mood, and also replays

[75] Stephens, p11.

the service, inverting certain things. Couples arrive first at the reception venue and with their parents greet guests as they arrive. A formal meal is followed by speeches that consolidate the ritual achievement of the wedding service; the ritual action of the wedding is, in the speeches incorporated into the collective narratives of family and friendship groups. After the cake is cut, a relaxed and informal atmosphere prevails until the departure of the couple.

At different points all of the couples expressed the conviction that the wedding was 'their day', generally meaning that their preferences, not those of others should determine the character of the wedding day. Nevertheless, personal preference is socially constructed. I asked couples where they got their ideas from for their wedding. While several brides said that they had 'always known' what they wanted, they were still happy to acknowledge that bridal magazines and books, wedding fairs and the weddings that they had attended as guests gave them ideas of things they would like to emulate (and other things they hoped to avoid.) Several clergy expressed the view that films and television programmes had a considerable influence on peoples' behaviour, including the way they got married. The couples did not generally see things this way, though one groom described his wife's meticulous wedding plans as being like 'Monica, on *Friends*'[76]. Though rarely expressed directly, couples' choices were as frequently informed by their situation, not just in contemporary culture as a whole, but in particular families and friendship groups, the subject of the next section.

Family and Friends

In addition to information about the material and ritual details of their weddings, and motivation for their choices, the couples communicated an enormous amount about their families and friends. Couples talked about who they invited to their wedding, who they asked to perform particular roles, and why. All had best men and bridesmaids; no one even considered the possibility of marrying without them. Some roles, such as 'the father' or 'the mother of the bride' indicate both a distinct familial relationship and a particular function within the wedding. Others roles need to be allocated, usually according to clearly defined criteria. The

[76] A12.

subtle operation of these reveals a working taxonomy of relationships: 'little brother', 'best friend', for example, and of types of family: 'large', 'close' and so on. Weddings are not just the occasion for the performance of roles in a familial drama; they are also occasions in which those roles are negotiated, not infrequently through conflict and jockeying for power. Usually such conflicts are resolved, but on occasion this is not the case and a more intractable situation persists. The couples' accounts of weddings do not only supply information, they are also examples of the way people talk and think about family.

Involving Other People

The presence and involvement of other people in their wedding was of central importance to couples. In addition to the various professionals involved, people at a wedding fall into one of three categories: interested onlookers, guests and members of the wedding party. The interested onlookers are people who, though not invited guests, know the couple and want to 'watch' their wedding. They include neighbours, acquaintances and friends insufficiently close to invite formally. While such people are defined as much by their exclusion from the wedding, as their involvement in it, their presence, interpreted as a form of well wishing and support, was noted and appreciated by the couples, who often mentioned them. A minority of couples, those who deliberately had very small weddings, felt differently, setting a high value on the intimacy of the ceremony. In contrast a bride who was a Brownie leader invited all her Brownies to attend the ceremony in uniform, form a guard of honour as the couple left the church, and to stay for a 'drinks reception' at the church immediately following the service. A few weeks later they held a wedding party at the Brownie meeting. This important aspect of her life was accepted and appreciated by the groom, and both wanted it to be incorporated into the wedding.

Beyond this peripheral group are people closer to the bride and groom: friends and family. 'Closeness' is the quality that admits a person to the guest list, a higher degree of closeness a necessary qualification for anyone fulfilling a key role in the wedding. Degrees of closeness with respect to family are easily identified: children, parents, siblings, nieces and nephews and grandparents and then aunts, uncles and cousins. Cousins, however, are no more likely to be

invited than are friends. Some of these are 'family friends': friends of the couples' parents and their children, including godparents. Such people fulfill a role in couples' lives similar to aunts or uncles, are treated as such and are quite frequently, as fictive kin, referred to as 'Aunty' or 'Uncle'. Others are friends of either bride or groom. Some are 'close friends,' others less so, length of friendship, intensity of affection, frequency and openness of communication and commonality of interests all contributing to the closeness of a friendship. An especially close friend is a 'best friend.'

Many of the couples said that deciding who to invite was quite difficult. Certain categories of person were invited without question: children, parents, and, for younger couples, siblings (with partners and children), grandparents and usually also uncles and aunts. Thereafter, choices were more complicated. Where people had few cousins they were all invited. Some of the brides or grooms, however, said they had 'lots of family' and others, 'lots of friends.' Where either was the case it was necessary to decide who to invite from a large number of possible guests, a process of negotiation between bride and groom.

> **Rachel** We just added the number and we tried to stick to it as much as possible.
> **SF** Which had a priority… friends or family?
> **Ian** Well, both I suppose.
> **Rachel** Yeah.
> **Ian** …You actually see your friends more and you probably want them to be there… Rachel's got quite a large family compared to myself so it was… a bit of a struggle.
> **SF**… Brothers and sisters or cousins?
> **Rachel** Cousins and aunties and uncles and things. And I think that is the difficulty because, although… you've got people that you know now… you've got ones who've been in your life longer… who've almost like molded the way that you are and you kind of want them to be a part of it too, but again its not always that easy. [77]

[77] A8,p.9.

This also involved negotiation with parents, especially mothers, several of whom were described as 'having their own wedding list,'[78] relatives and family friends they wanted to ask to the wedding.

> **Lisa** My Mum and my Dad… had a list of who they thought, and your Mum and Dad… There were some, sort of, differences…Robert were quite adamant that we stuck to the rule that if you hadn't seen people in the last couple of years we weren't inviting them, because we didn't want the situation that there were loads of people that said 'oh we remember you when you were a baby', but yet had had nothing to do with us.[79]

Ian indicated a common dilemma when drawing up a guest list: that of very different sizes of family. There was a clear concern on the part of many for a kind of visible balance between the groom's and the bride's 'sides' at the wedding, strongly suggesting that a symbolic value was attached to guests by couples. This must include a concern for the performative symmetry of the whole wedding. It also emphasises something implicit in the very idea of 'sides' that each partner should have their individual interests protected. Numerical inequalities were resolved for some couples by simply asserting that though some might suppose that it mattered it really didn't.[80] Others balanced a large family against many friends.[81] The remainder used the tactic of recruiting more distant relatives into the 'close' category for the smaller family. A rather different question of fairness was described by Robert:

> We had… eighty, eighty-five. Could have gone up to something like a hundred, but … people that I work with... you couldn't just have an extra five; you'd either have to have fifteen or nothing.[82]

'Having to have' was an issue that emerged frequently. A wedding may be an occasion that one organizes to suit oneself, but there are protocols and courtesies that must be respected. While certain friends were very close and couples would

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[78] A3, A4 and A13.
[79] A13,p.12.
[80] A4.
[81] A12.
[82] A13,p.10.

never consider excluding them, their presence meant that other people, who were held in less regard had also to be included. As in *The Sleeping Beauty,* the consequences of excluding one individual from a group are liable to be disruptive to equable future relationships. It is this principle that operates in partnership with the notion of closeness to determine who should be invited as a wedding guest. It applied also to the selection of key participants in the wedding.

Some roles in a wedding derive from kinship, specifically the parents of couples, especially those of the bride. Where these people are alive and where people have not badly fallen out, they fulfill these roles. Individuals must, in contrast, be chosen to fulfill other roles. While grooms usually have one best man, problems of choosing between evenly matched candidates were resolved for three of the grooms by having two. There is no expected number of bridesmaids and the couples experienced few dilemmas here, simply including all possible candidates. It is nevertheless interesting to see whom they did choose.[83]

Where marrying couples had children they were included in the wedding party, as bridesmaids or pages, as a best man in the case of one of the older grooms and as the person who gave the bride away in the case of one of the older brides. Brides who had sisters usually had them as attendants, and grooms' sisters were included on similar terms. While many 'bridesmaids' were in their thirties and often married themselves and mothers, no attendant was over the age of forty. Most grooms with brothers had them as best men, with other brothers and older sons usually ushers. Nieces and nephews, whether related to bride or groom, were almost always bridesmaids, pages or ushers. Most brides and grooms also included friends, usually 'my best friend' or my 'closest friend,' in these key roles, and as readers in the service. The children of close friends were also often included, especially godchildren.

There was considerable evidence of a form of ritual kinship. Many of the brides and grooms were bridesmaids, ushers or best men for their bridesmaids, ushers and best men. The inclusion of godchildren connects weddings with baptisms.

[83] See Appendix 2.

Not only are godchildren often bridesmaids or pages, but couples are often godparents to the future children of bridesmaids or best men. People choose friends they particularly like for these roles. Being a key player in a friend's wedding establishes and consolidates a connection beyond affection. The same goes for god-parental relationships. Involving people in this way in a wedding extends kinship beyond the family. It also suggests that couples perceive connections between different rites of passage and moreover that they deploy these connections to strengthen numerous social bonds.

While choice of bridesmaids and best men was generally unproblematic, for a few things were harder, when there were too many nieces and nephews for all to have a role. Occasionally, parents intervened to ensure the inclusion of another sibling (in one case as best man and in another as a bridesmaid). In both cases grooms' mothers were convinced their other child wanted to be involved, but felt unable to ask, in deference to the notion of the wedding day as the couple's (and not infrequently the bride's) day. The couples went along with this, in one case happily and in the other feeling rather manipulated. Couples' rights to have their weddings as they wanted were challenged by mothers when the happiness of other members of the family was threatened.

More intractable was the situation for the bride who had her stepsister as a bridesmaid, the daughter of her father's present wife. Her mother took such exception to this that she refused to attend the wedding. This sad circumstance highlights, in a way that happier ones obscure, the importance attached to being asked to play these roles. When an individual asks someone to be a best man or a bridesmaid, they are making a public statement of affection and approval and strengthening an existing bond.

The embodied character of all human relationships is important, which participation in ritual makes clear. Being a bridesmaid, for example, is not just a matter of wishing a friend well in their marriage. It involves turning up, wearing the clothes chosen by the bride and performing the required role in the ritual of the wedding. The same is true of best men and wedding guests in general. Failing to attend a wedding when it would be possible to do so, the deliberate refusal to

bodily travel to a certain place and engage in particular acts, has consequences for a relationship.

The same is true of wedding presents.[84] All of the couples received these, several registering present lists with shops and others requesting vouchers, *Argos* being the preferred shop. In addition to this form of present giving, friends and relatives contributed to the wedding, several couples having cakes made for them and one the bouquets, all given and received as wedding presents. Several couples spoke about various members of their extended family contributing to the wedding costs. Where such gifts came in the form of a cheque, couples specified what they spent it on:

> **SF** Nice cake. And is this a friend who's doing this?
> **Tess** A friends of mine, her mother. And my Aunty Susan is going to pay for it as a wedding gift. Everybody's buying something. So my brother and his wife are going to buy our rings and stuff like that. [85]

The work that the couples' parents, most commonly the bride's mother, contributed was not seen as 'a present.' Gift giving[86] is normal practice at many celebratory events. It is an act of well-wishing and generosity, but not necessarily an entirely spontaneous one, its ubiquity making it almost compulsory. So saying, while most wedding guests do give gifts, and expect to do so, many of the couples felt ambivalent about asking for them, partly because they had already set up their houses, but mostly because they felt uncomfortable asking for things. Gift giving both says things and does things. It is a way of participating in the wedding. Guests give presents, and others also, especially friends of the couples' parents. Giving a wedding present expresses approval of the relationship and consolidates a bond between donor and recipient.[87]

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[84] See Purbrick.
[85] A6,p.5-6.
[86] See Marcel Mauss, *The Gift: The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies* (London: Routledge, new ed. 1990) and David Cheal, *The Gift Economy* (London: Routledge, 1988) p.121-141.
[87] See Purbrick, p.114.

Types of relationship

Weddings, for these couples occasioned a great deal of contact with and also reflection on their families. The couples in the study planned their weddings themselves, in about half of the cases the bride making most of the decisions. The four oldest couples paid for everything themselves, younger couples sharing costs with their parents, to varying degrees. Many contrasted this with weddings in the past, where the bride's mother organised everything and the bride's father paid for it. Nevertheless, without exception, parents were most important for the wedding plans for these couples, always, it needs to be added, referred to as 'Mum' and 'Dad', and never as 'Mother' and 'Father,' even in the possessive: 'my mother' or 'my father' form. Though occasionally using the term 'parents,' all much preferred 'Mum and Dad' or 'Mums and Dads.'

All brides' fathers still alive performed their expected ritual role in the ceremony and reception. Brides' mothers were also important, retaining a considerable involvement in planning the wedding. Grooms' parents had a less well-defined role, though many were involved, and all had an important seat in church and at the reception. But more than any ritual role, in all cases parents were the first people couples told of their intention to marry, and their presence the most necessary to the event. While the majority of the spouses in the study grew up with both their parents, a significant minority had parents who divorced during their childhood. Most retained a relationship with both parents, and with any stepparents, though one mother refused to attend because of the presence of her ex-husband's new family. The existence of stepparents and stepsiblings during the lifetime of other parents is a characteristic feature of contemporary family life. Couples' accounts of relations with parents implied a sliding scale of closeness of relationship.

Closeness, here as elsewhere, has to do with the quality of a relationship, not just its kind. Geographical mobility was not thought as undermining closeness; couples living at a distance from their parents were no more or less likely to see their relationship with them as close. Several spoke of the affection they had for their 'in-laws,' or their in-laws had for them. Such good relationships and mutual regard were understood as a positive contribution to their own marriage. Couples

were not only interested in their relationship with their in-laws, but also that between both sets of parents. All the couples arranged for their parents to meet up, feeling that everything was easier if they got on well. One couple described the parents' meeting, wryly, as 'an interesting evening,'[88] but mostly relations were cordial. In a few cases parents made friends and started to socialise together without their children. Many couples expressed a conscious desire to align themselves and their marriage with the previous marriages of their parents and in-laws, especially where these marriages were felt to be happy and long lasting. Such a wish was often cited in explanation of the decision to marry in church, in preference to a civil ceremony. It was also used to account for numerous choices in the wedding, from the specific church chosen to the wearing of particular items of clothing.

Siblings also occupied key places in wedding plans, as described above. Usually asked to play a specific role, exceptions follow clear rules. Having more than two brothers or sisters affected the ease with which they could be included in the wedding. One of the older couples did not include their siblings in the wedding at all, on the grounds that the small wedding that they wanted would have been quite impossible had their 'whole gang'[89] of siblings, and inevitably also their spouses or partners attended. With bigger weddings this meant that, while the sisters of brides and the brothers of grooms always had a particular role, the reverse was not necessarily the case. Otherwise all siblings attended, though the closeness and ease of relationship varied. Talk about the wedding provided clear pictures of family size and structure. Most of the brides and grooms had only one sibling, two had none, one had two brothers and the remaining four had three or more siblings. Two people said they had stepsiblings, though it is important to note that while people rarely refer to a stepparent as 'my Mum' or 'my Dad' this does not hold with stepsiblings, who are rarely distinguished from full siblings, in conversation. What can be more important than familial relationship is, again, closeness, stepsiblings sometimes enjoying a relationship of greater affection and commonality than full siblings: the only people who described their relationship

[88] A1.
[89] A9. Both had more than four siblings.

with siblings as 'not close' were speaking of full siblings. Such declared absence of closeness between siblings was rare. Involving siblings in the wedding should not, however, be taken a simple indication of harmonious and affectionate relationships between adult children. This might well be so, but it was also, quite often initiated by the parental generation who felt the need to remind their marrying son or daughter to include their siblings, on the grounds that the sibling thus included would *feel* included and therefore important. So motivations for including siblings, as well as affection and convention, include pleasing parents, itself a strategy to encourage harmonious relationships.

Nieces and nephews, being the children of siblings, were almost invariably included in the wedding, unless there are too many of them to do so. No parental coercion seemed necessary to encourage this. Most couples had nephews and nieces, though those (presumably adults) of older couples were not mentioned as individuals. The younger couples, whose nephews and nieces were under eleven, were unequivocally affectionate in their accounts of them. The presence of nephews and nieces indicates also the presence of more 'in-laws,' in this case the spouses or partners of siblings. Brothers and sisters-in-law were seldom referred to directly. There was no direct account of conflict or bad feeling, though one sister-in-law did not attend the wedding and neither did her children, her husband attending alone. While it was not clear whether they were not asked or declined an invitation, the whole incident was presented as an example of a lack of closeness between the siblings. Others established good friendships with in-laws, sometimes rather to their surprise.

Many couples still had grandparents alive. Where able to attend, they were very valued wedding guests, couples liking to be photographed with them. Aunts (generally referred to as 'aunties'), uncles and cousins have more various places in the lives and affections of marrying couples. Aunts and uncles are always invited to weddings; with cousins the situation varies, size of family being significant. Some of the spouses had very few cousins, named them in our conversations and gave them specific roles in the wedding. Others had so many

that they were referred to collectively: 'aunties and uncles and cousins'[90] or 'half of southern Ireland.'[91] A cousin was someone one might be very close to and, in this situation involve very closely in one's wedding, but equally a cousin might be a distant acquaintance, who one saw rarely and knew only slightly.

Most of the brides had friends as well as relatives as bridesmaids and the same is true of grooms and ushers and best men, usually 'close' or 'best' friends. Such terms were not felt to require any explanation, apparently used as short hand ways of indicating intimacy and affection, and a means of avoiding making any direct statements about either quality. Very few of these couples mentioned love or even liking, even in respect of their spouse; though, as described earlier in this chapter, they often alluded to such emotions and commitments. While no one explicitly said how much they liked their friends, many described the history of their friendship in terms that suggest considerable warmth. Even so, it is length of friendship, overall reliability and loyalty that count for more than happening to like someone right now. Friends since childhood were often closely involved in weddings.

> **Clare** Since Ali and me have been tiny we've always said 'you'll be my bridesmaid'
> **Matt** You were her bridesmaid.
> **Clare** 'and I'll be yours.'[92]

The social reciprocity seen here was also seen elsewhere, with several grooms being best man for friends or brothers who then reciprocated. Many individuals liked the people involved with their wedding to evenly represent their life history.[93] This even handedness was a value all the couples took considerable trouble to honour in their wedding plans and one which extended from the guest list as a whole to the individuals chosen to perform specific roles.

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[90] A8.
[91] A1.
[92] A5,p.8.
[93] A12.

For many a wedding occasioned some conflict over certain issues, control over the event being key. While it was the couples, and principally the brides who made most of the decisions about the wedding, parents, especially mothers and even more especially mothers of the bride were actively involved. Many of the brides observed that their mothers felt somewhat marginalised in the planning of the wedding.

> **Lisa** You see, my Mum, obviously their Mums planned the whole wedding, so my Gran planned my Mum's wedding and they had very little involvement…
> **Robert** If she suggested something to you, you wouldn't just say 'yes' you'd say 'I need to go and check it with Robert.'
> **Lisa** Because my Mum couldn't understand why I couldn't just say 'yes.' What she did, she didn't ask my Dad, he didn't want any involvement. He did the cars and stag do and that was it.[94]

This represents a significant shift, of which the brides were acutely aware. Purbrick notes, in the giving of wedding presents, a 'substitution of family participation for market expertise'[95] and there is evidence of this in comments of the couples. Though wedding planning has shifted away from being the primary concern of brides' mothers, they retain a considerable involvement. Most of the brides choose wedding clothes together with their mothers. Many negotiated reception venues, menus and other details with them as well. And a great many parents contribute to the overall cost.

Several couples also commented that parents had a strong desire for extended family members and old family friends to attend their wedding, even where such people had little current relationship with the couple. It would be easy to see this as the couple rejecting their parents' understanding of a wedding as a family occasion. But closer to their actual perception is that membership of the family is understood rather differently by successive generations, not only a shift in attitudes from one generation to the next, but also a shift over time in which the key roles: 'Mum,' 'Granddad', *etcetera*, are filled by different individuals. It is

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[94] A13,p.19-20.
[95] Purbrick, p.146.

such social movement that is recorded in the wedding album. But this question of participation is crucial, for all couples, even those who had very small weddings. From the couples' perspective the wedding as a whole ritual 'worked' better if certain special people were present. But those people became more special as a consequence of their participation in the wedding. It is not only the relationship of bride and groom that is transformed by a wedding.

Family Cultures

Brides and grooms, once married, need some working model of family that includes relatives of both. The wedding is most important here, uniting not only bride and groom, but the two 'sides' of, say, a groom's family: 'Mum's side' and 'Dad's side.' Seating and group photographs emphasise this generational shift, one that can be uncomfortable for older adults, as the centre of gravity in a family moves down a generation.

Talking about weddings revealed much information about the personnel of couples' families and how well they got on, and also a great deal about how couples performed family life, and social life generally. Apart from big set piece events, like birthday and anniversary parties, more prevalent in some families than others, couples mentioned numerous occasions when family members socialised, mostly having people round or going out for a meal or a drink. Distinct preferences for certain sorts of social activities and for the people they would prefer to do those things with emerged in their accounts of hen and stag nights. These (along with engagement parties and the wedding itself) had clear continuities with more general tastes in socializing. Some people described numerous parties and social events, which they had attended. Lucy and Peter got engaged at Lucy's parents' silver wedding party. They also talked about Lucy's aunt's wedding as well as their own engagement party and hen and stag nights and made frequent references to the pub and to work and sports club 'dos.' Others, Tina and Patrick most of all, emphasised they were not the sort of people who often went out. They had no engagement party and 'just a quiet drink' for their joint hen and stag night. They also said they didn't have a 'big close family' and this, combined with their preference for a quiet domestic life, had a significant bearing on what their wedding was like. Tina and Patrick employed a

typology of family much the same as other couples: there are close families, and families that are not so close; there are large families, with numerous relatives and small families with few; and there are sociable families that make much of their own stories of themselves, with big parties for birthdays and anniversaries and families whose celebration of themselves is more muted, whose stories are less sure.

In the course of the interviews, couples told many stories. It is tempting when methodologically committed to the importance of narrative to make much of this, but it could hardly be otherwise. More interesting than stories being told is what they are told about. Certain aspects of weddings frequently prompted stories and others never did. All the couples told the story of their relationship up to the time of their marriage. Frequently funny, often touching, these extended narratives had the polished character of stories repeatedly told. Within these narratives were contained other, smaller stories: about first meeting, first date and engagement. The engagement made their relationship the property not just of themselves, but of their family and friends also. This did not end the stories, but it did alter them. The period of engagement and wedding planning was narrated in an episodic way with numerous stories about encounters with wedding professionals, friends, relatives and especially parents. Short though these stories often were, they were constructed carefully, with setting, characterization, and plot and employing conventional strategies to begin and end. The following is typical:

> **Tess** Because I got the dress… I thought that would be the hardest part, because I'm not a dress person, a bit of a tomboy. So when we went and got that we did put a few noses out of joint like your Mum and your sister, who wanted… to be involved.
>
> **Mark** My sister…
>
> **Tess** …I didn't even know I was going. 'We'll go and have a look at this bridal shop, it's closing down, we'll go and have a look.' And I was, like, 'oh God, I've got to try on dresses.' Tried on all these dresses and we found this dress and I was, like, whingeing and we bought it and it should have cost £800 and I got it for £200. So we had to get it.[96]

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[96] A6,p.8.

In operation are two distinct narratives genres. The stories of first meeting and proposal, described earlier in this chapter are romance, with its themes of love and attraction, intrigue and co-incidence, separation and re-union, suspense and resolution. This genre is individualistic; it separates the participants from the people around them and privileges the values Giddens would associate with a 'pure relationship.' Second, the family saga, episodic, communitarian, a cycle of misunderstandings and frustrations, which while resolved, will repeat themselves endlessly. Here the couple is rooted in a social world in which their feelings and preferences exist alongside those of others and wider concerns like propriety. Marriage, from the point of view of these couples, involves romance being subsumed into family saga. One can go out with someone or even live with them and it be an entirely personal affair, but get engaged and parents are automatically involved. Couples' narratives of their meeting and what proceeded from that are very much shared narratives, told, and constructed in dialogue. What Linde says of the life story of an individual is applicable to these shared stories of relationships and weddings.

> In order to exist in the social world with a comfortable sense of being a good, socially proper, and stable person, an individual needs to have a coherent, acceptable and constantly revised life story.[97]

As compelling as the stories that are told, are those that are not, or not in this context: the marriages and relationships in the past that did not work out, the siblings no longer seen, and the parents who were absent. These are stories that are not told, but could be. More interesting again are the things that couples found it all but impossible to tell a story about: the events of the wedding day itself.

The Untold Story

While couples needed little prompting to tell the story of their relationship, information about the wedding day was much harder to extract. This was not because they were reluctant to divulge things, but because they seemed to have constructed no coherent story of their wedding day. Couples described their choices as regards music or readings in the service, they talked about clothes and

[97] Linde, *Life Stories* p.3.

flowers and cars. They told me what food they ate at their reception, and how many people attended. But all this information was delivered as discrete statements, necessitating constant prompts. This could be interpreted as follows. The wedding day is a set piece ritual in contemporary England, as elsewhere. The bride and groom begin in different houses. The groom travels to the church with his best man, they wait at the front for the church. The bride arrives at the church last, with her father, who escorts her down the aisle, usually to Wagner's *Bridal March* and so on. The structure of the day is such that actually articulating it is redundant. All that needs saying is what is special about this particular example. This may lie behind the frequent response of 'oh, you know, traditional' to many questions about what a couples' wedding was like. What couples wanted their weddings to be like, and what they were actually like, was like a wedding, no more explanation being needed. But this is not sufficient. While one wedding day might be much like another, so too is the purchase of one wedding dress in a bridal salon like another, or one engagement ring in a jeweller's shop. Such similarities do not prevent individuals constructing their own accounts, albeit drawing on familiar and well-used tropes.

While there seems no agreed way of narrating the wedding day that couples can adopt and adapt to their own circumstances, this appears to run counter to the fact that weddings are constantly narrated; on television, in films, in celebrity magazines and in the 'real weddings' sections of bridal magazines. Actually, wedding days are not narrated at all in these genres (significantly in print media they very rarely feature). Instead, weddings are represented, and artifacts enumerated. So, in magazines, for example, an account of a 'real wedding' includes from eight to twenty photographs: some pictures of bride and groom that could have been taken from a wedding album, and others: close-ups of objects used in the wedding: bouquets, table settings perhaps. Interspersed among the photographs are small blocks of text: a sentence on where the bride and groom met and another connecting the style of their wedding with their wider tastes, the rest devoted to a list of things bought or services hired.[98] The same is true of the weddings reported in lavish detail in magazines like *Hello* or

[98] *Brides*, November - December 2007, pp.210-220.

OK, or, to a smaller circulation, *Yorkshire Life*. Product placement is less central to films and television programmes, at least in a brand-specific sense, but the visual nature of the medium is even less equivocal. For television dramas, whether long running soap operas or short series, weddings provide a welcome opportunity to gather numerous characters in a confined space in
a state of heightened emotion, with little to do except talk. The dramatic usefulness of a wedding also applies to films, weddings frequently being a way of rounding things off nicely. Then there are the films that do not just employ the motif of a wedding, but structure the entire film around one, or, not infrequently, several.[99] A wedding in a film is not told in words, but in images. This familiarity with what a wedding looks like results, for some couples, in an odd sense of disorientation in their actual weddings. People do not see their own weddings as they see either someone else's or one in a film: they see the back of a lot of heads and, for most of the time one another and the priest. The desire to relive their wedding is a reason given by those who have wedding videos (including one of the clergy). It does not stretch plausibility far to suggest that part of this is a desire not just to relive their wedding as bride and groom, but also to revisit it from the more familiar perspective of a wedding in a film. Photography is a tool of the memory, sold as such. Couples remember their relationship by telling a story about it. They remember their wedding by keeping photographs; video, but also stills. The narrative of the wedding is not told in words, instead, both literally and metaphorically it is composed of images, snapshots, moments captured.

This 'narrative gap' of the wedding itself: both the ceremony and reception is of great significance to an understanding of the wedding as ritual. A ritual as a whole is a hiatus in ordinary life, where the normal rules and structures do not apply, characterised by Victor Turner's unstructured *Communitas*.[100] In addition a ritual is, internally, a highly structured event in which roles are allocated and action choreographed. Social transformation does not only, it would seem, require a liminal, transformational gap, but also an alternative order within that

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[99] Amongst many others: *Four Weddings & a Funeral* (1994), *Confetti* (2007), *Twenty Seven Dresses* (2008). See Ingraham for a comprehensive list.
[100] Turner, *The Ritual Process*, p128.

gap so that any transformation is not just the work of the participants' own deployment of narrative, but a consequence of the participants' temporary relinquishing of their own personally constructed identity in favour of a social identity, conveyed in ritual.

Family Time and Family Places

The personal narratives of the couples were rooted in very clear perceptions of place and time. Many of the couples wanted to be married where, and on the date, they were, because of family connections. About half of the couples, while they married in church, did not marry in their own parish church. This was not because they were regular attenders at the church they did actually marry in, or because they thought their preferred choice particularly attractive. Rather, they had particular connections with particular churches. Some mentioned appreciating the support of the parish priest in the past, but more common was some family link with the building, especially that their parents were married there or their grandparents had their funeral there. One couple placed the bride's bouquet on her grandmother's grave shortly after the wedding. Such reasons were offered as complete in themselves, needing no further explanation. Dates chosen were in some cases governed by work or hobbies: school holidays, or the cricket season among them. For the majority, however, dates with personal connections were preferred, if not always possible. These included dates that connected with the couples' relationship: first meeting, first date, engagement and so on. They also included birthdays of themselves and of parents and grandparents, especially if such people had died.

> **Tina** We did want the 29th of March because it were Richard's Grandma's birthday and it were mine, my Grandma's... we did actually want that day, but it had fallen into Easter… so we went for the closest Saturday which were the nineteenth of March.[101]

As well as the ordinary calendar, and the church's calendar is a family calendar. Not just place, but also time can be special, for oneself and for one's family. The

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[101] A10,p.2.

desire to perpetuate family tradition was a contributing factor to the decisions of many to get married in church. Few said that their family's *opinion* was decisive here. Indeed more had close relatives who were unhappy with a church wedding, or an Anglican wedding at any rate, than had relatives keen to promote such a wedding. Many, however, wanted a church wedding because this was what their parents had. The wedding choices of parents exercised a considerable influence, especially where parents' marriages were happy and long lasting. Family customs were not, then, accepted uncritically. Couples deliberately aligned themselves with threads in the tradition associated with the sections of the family they most aspired to emulate. Doing things 'properly', a concept that will be addressed in the following section: 'Why Church?' included this critical perpetuation of a family tradition, or story.

Why Church?

I asked all the couples whether they had always wanted a church wedding, whether they considered any other options, and later, towards the end of the interview, what they thought the advantages of a church wedding were over a civil wedding. Couples, and also individual brides and grooms varied considerably in their answers. Steven and Phil both, separately, said they 'weren't bothered'[102] about a church wedding, and just went along with the wishes of their wives. Tess and Mark considered marrying in a civil ceremony either abroad or in Gretna Green, but decided on a church wedding mainly to please Mark's grandmother. Rachel and Ian would have preferred a 'Christian wedding' in an outdoor location they particularly liked. All others expressed a strong preference for a church wedding.

Explicit Christian faith had a bearing on couples' preferences for their wedding in different ways. Annie and George spoke about 'blessing' and the need for God's help:

> **Annie** Making the vows. It is within a meaningful context. And we wanted that. We wanted to have a blessing.
>
> **George** That's right... That was very important.

[102] A2 and A3.

Annie and I think really, to ourselves, and to whoever was there, to let them see that really we know that left to ourselves we wouldn't make much of it, would we? That we need help.[103]

Rachel and Ian also thought that God helped them to live their married life, but spoke about their wedding as not so much an occasion to seek the blessing of God, but as a public statement about their Christian faith:

Rachel It wasn't a *church* wedding, it was the fact that I wanted; I wanted it to be, like, God-focused. I wanted it to be like what we believed in and...

Ian Like a witness

Rachel ... But the most important thing was not being in the parish church, it was... declaring… that's what we believed and just, God's everywhere so it doesn't matter where you have your wedding as long as he was, you know, you join him in and involve him.[104]

Rachel and Ian made a sharp distinction between a 'Christian wedding' and a 'church wedding,'[105] the propriety of a church wedding in popular culture rather devaluing it as an authentic expression of Christian commitment in their view. Both spoke freely about their faith, but were explicitly ambivalent about their denominational commitments.

Rachel I thought that it was time to find a church locally and we had a brief look, didn't we?

Ian Not a very good look really…

Rachel And we went to the parish church, which seemed quite friendly, and it wasn't quite what I was used to, but at the time I had to make a decision about where I wanted to go, because I want to get married up here… I wouldn't say that I would class myself as any denomination really… Although my background is Baptist and obviously now we are at

Ian Well, C of E. [106]

Rachel and Ian combine a strong sense of Christian identity with a weak denominational identity. A different kind of denominational ambivalence was

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[103] A9,p.8.
[104] A8,p.13-14.
[105] See Rachel and Ian's comments under 'the ceremony' above.
[106] A8,p.6.

apparent in the four couples where one partner was a Roman Catholic: Linda and Paul, Susie and Alan, Annie and George and Tess and Mark. Tess and Mark felt that a wedding in an Anglican church represented a compromise between different denominational backgrounds.

> **Mark** It's exactly the same. The only difference is a bit more singing. The only difference really [both laugh] …
> **Tess** Because I'm not a Catholic as well. And it's like your Dad said. Your Dad is a Catholic and when his Mum and Dad come to the service, he said 'it's a bit of both really.' So it was nice.
> **Mark** Catholic and C of E.[107]

Tess and Mark experience the worship in an Anglican church, albeit one with a catholic tradition, as 'the same' as that in a Roman Catholic church. Wider questions about denominational commitment and identity do not really register at all.

Linda and Paul expressed a much more acute awareness of denominational difference:

> **Linda** Well we wanted something as well, because Lee's a Roman Catholic and I was brought up a Methodist, so
> **Paul** Neutral venue [laughs].

Mark and Paul both speak about their Catholic backgrounds as just that: backgrounds, something associated with their family and maintained in loyalty to that family. There was a key difference, however. Mark and Tess, by marrying in any kind of church were pleasing the older generation and maintaining the family tradition. Linda and Paul, in contrast, were undermining a similar tradition, by the very same course of action. Added to this, for this couple and for Annie and George and Susie and Alan is the fact that the non-Catholic partner in the marriage was also divorced. The experience of these couples reflected the theological position and pastoral practice of the Roman Catholic Church, namely that marriage at all, and by extension a wedding in a Catholic church is not

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[107] A6,p.2-3.

possible for persons with a previous spouse still living. The only option for such couples determined to have a wedding in a Catholic church is for the divorced partner to have their previous marriage annulled by the Catholic Church, an involved and lengthy procedure, as these couples found out. Two of the couples considered this possibility, and would certainly have been married in a Catholic church had it been possible.

> **Alan** It was actually a Catholic priest we saw, and discussed the situation with him... Would have taken ages. Would have taken years.
> **Susie** The Catholic Church had said that my previous marriage would have to be classed as being annulled... and I didn't want that.[108]

> **George** We started looking at the system…
> **Annie** In the Catholic Church.
> **George** In the Catholic Church, it was going to be so, so difficult. And it meant that I would have to put my former wife through an awful lot of
> **Annie** Questioning
> **George** Questioning and soul searching. She's been through an extremely bad time with her second husband and it was wrong, you know, to subject her to something that was just to please myself, as it were. So we looked into what the other alternatives were. It was very important, especially for Anne, wasn't it, that we got married in church and of course I, I felt that I'd done no wrong.[109]

Both couples decided against it, feeling that it would cause great distress to previous partners and also not happy to see their previous marriage, however it turned out, as not really a marriage at all. While the Catholic partners in these two marriages asserted their Catholic identity on their own account, not simply to please or placate older relatives, they did not, in the last analysis accept the Church's authority to adjudicate on the existence or otherwise of a marriage. Conversely they were perfectly satisfied with a wedding in an Anglican church and very grateful to the priests who conducted the weddings. In line with

[108] A7,p.3.
[109] A9,p.3.

Catholic thinking, Annie identified the important aspect of a church wedding in the nuptial blessing:

> **Annie** The one thing that we thought… from the moment I said 'yes' was that we wanted to have it in church. We wanted a church blessing.
> **George** That was important.[110]

While there are many differences in these individuals' attitudes to and experience of the Catholic Church, they share an assumption that 'the Church' is not only the Catholic Church; that what a person wants or needs from the Church, acts of worship, or blessing, or God, can be found in other churches too. Such an attitude, while in many respects not too distant from post-conciliar Catholic ecclesiology is nevertheless a quite recent innovation in the thinking of the ordinary membership of the Catholic Church. Where these ordinary members have arguably moved beyond the hierarchy is in the idea, explicit in the comments of these couples, that a Christian identity, and a specifically Catholic identity, in marriage, as in the rest of life, can be maintained without strict obedience, or even particular regard to the *magisterium*.

Of course legal and administrative protocols, or for that matter awkward theological convictions are not the exclusive preserve of the Roman Catholic Church. Such aspects of the Anglican Church have a considerable bearing on marrying couples. While most of the incumbents in this study are prepared to conduct weddings for divorcees, there is in principle a process of fairly searching interviews before such a marriage may proceed. While this is less onerous than a Catholic nullity procedure, it is potentially quite off-putting to couples. Several of the clergy sat quite lightly to the formal process, but none abandoned it completely and all who were prepared to conduct such weddings reported that on occasions couples had withdrawn from the process and decided to marry elsewhere. There will also be those who were unwilling even to embark on such conversations and more still, aware of the Church's reluctance, who never enquired about a church wedding.

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[110] A9,p.2.

Such people are inaccessible to this study. Other aspects of Anglican protocol were, however, experienced by the couples in the study, mainly concerning parish boundaries. Five of the thirteen couples lived outside of the parish in which they were married. Four of these had family connections with the church they married in and all lived in adjacent parishes. In all these cases the couples went on the church's electoral roll so they would be eligible under current rules to marry there. This involved regular attendance at church services for a six-month period, something undertaken without rancour, if with varying degrees of enthusiasm. Nevertheless, several of the couples expressed exasperation at the system that meant they had no automatic entitlement to marry at a church with which their family had a present or historical association. It would be hard to overstate the importance of such associations for many of the marrying couples in this study, especially for the majority who regard themselves as 'local' to the study area. These people had strong connections with particular places in the locality, often over several generations, including particular churches.

This sense that certain churches have a special significance was expressed in a number of different ways. The ritual history of families mentioned in the previous section was one way. Here a particular church has been the location for baptisms, weddings and funerals for a particular family for generations. Six individuals; three men and three women, all from different couples mentioned this sort of thing. Of interest is the idea that having been baptised in a particular church or one's parents having been married there is widely regarded as a sufficient reason to be married there oneself, needing no further explanation. A more general affection for particular churches, not just as the location for family ritual was also significant.

> **Peter** I think it's a beautiful building; I've always been fascinated with that building… every time I go past its really nice and then when we went inside we just instantly fell in love with it.[111]

[111] A12,p.2.

> **Tina** Patrick and I, we knew we were stopping together, we had t'little lad and every time I drove down there, because they've got the arch, haven't they, the archway. Have you seen it?
> **SF** Yeah
> **Tina** I just pictured getting married and coming out of there. [112]

Tina and Peter both describe the presence of the church building in their ordinary lives, part of the background certainly, but an important aspect of the landscape; both the physical landscape and their mental landscape also. It does not stretch the evidence too far to suggest that getting married in these familiar and valued places, enabled people possessed of this sort of sensibility to participate in a landscape that they cherished. This shares some ground with the view, expressed by Lisa and Robert, that one important aspect of a church was its location within, and relationship to a community.

> **Robert** And you're in your local community as well, you know, and obviously... the brownie packs are linked to the church… so there's that link as well. And we had…you don't go hundreds of times, but obviously you go for your banns read and stuff and you get to know the vicar...
> **Lisa** I don't know, it just felt more right doing it than the civil way where you're just using a venue.
> **Robert** Like you're doing it properly.[113]

This concern to do things properly was widely expressed in the reasons given for preferring a church wedding:

> **Jane** I've always wanted to get married in a church… it feels a proper wedding.[114]

> **John** We've both never been married. Going to do it right. Only going to do it once. So that's a church wedding.[115]

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[112] A10,p.8.
[113] A13,p.23.
[114] A2,p.11.
[115] A11,p.2-3.

Lucy I just think that you should get married in church. No real reason for it, I just think that's what you should do. [116]

Patrick My Mum and Dad got married in a church, so you know, I thought I wanted to get married in a church, don't know why, it might sound silly.[117]

Matt We've both been church attenders in the past.
Clare We've both been brought up. And I've always thought it was something that was the right way to do it… in church.
Matt Yes. The majority of my family have always got married at church, my sister… the way to do it. And it looks nice on the pictures.[118]

Rebecca I'm very kind of like: marriage is for life and that's it. And both my parents and Phil's parents have both been married thirty six years and they're still very happily married and I'm of the view that if you're going to do it you're going to do it right.[119]

These couples chose church weddings, feeling that a church wedding was the 'right' or 'proper' way to get married, not simply a personal preference. Family custom connects with this. Where parents of couples had married in church, this demonstrates the wisdom of the wider social rule especially when such parents have long lasting and happy marriages.

Church weddings were contrasted favourably with civil weddings, in either register offices or hotels, though all the couples explained carefully that many of their friends and relatives had very nice civil weddings, which they had enjoyed. Nevertheless, civil weddings were widely described as too short and too utilitarian. While the provision to include music was acknowledged, this was felt to be severely hampered by the rule that all such music must be entirely secular. As Lisa observed 'but then what can you sing? Pop songs?'[120] Register office buildings were regarded with particular disfavour, as being bleak and functional. Sally and John articulated these views particularly clearly:

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[116] A12,p.11.
[117] A10,p.8-9.
[118] A5,p.14-15.
[119] A3,p.5.
[120] A13,p.22.

> **John** I've been to several registry office weddings and they just don't feel the same. It's the feeling you get when you're in a building like that… A registry office, it's just like a red brick building, got no history with it…
>
> **Sally** You're only in about fifteen minutes. Whereas the church, well I like the hymns and the choir. About, I don't know, forty minutes...
>
> **John** And it's the feeling you get being in a church. I'm not particularly religious, but… I defy anyone to get some kind of religious feeling when you walk in a church of a higher being.[121]

Quite apart from the aesthetic objections to civil ceremonies, they were felt to omit something felt by these couples to be important. For some this was the sense of the presence of 'a higher being.' Others were more exercised by the lack of a sense of occasion. A longer ceremony with more music, more movement, more ceremonial, located within sacred space (from either an ecclesiastical, family or community point of view) was more appropriate. This was not easy to articulate:

> **Mike** I mean one of the things that we could have done, we could have gone abroad to some exotic place...
>
> **Liz** I don't think I would have felt married.
>
> **Mike** I wouldn't. We wouldn't have had the people there. We wouldn't have had the traditional church wedding…. The wedding itself was split into two: getting married in the church and then going up to the reception…
>
> **Liz** I think it, to me, was more real, it's the church, its
>
> **Mike** It binds you.
>
> **Liz** Yeah, yeah it did. Far more than signing, you know, a register. It's the whole action. Standing in… front of the altar and the priest and all that. Far more
>
> **Mike** Enlightened. Isn't it?
>
> **Liz** Yeah.[122]

Though Liz and Mike struggle in places to express their meaning, their remarks here express a view shared by many of the couples about what makes a church wedding preferable: the location of the ceremony within sacred space and taking

[121] A11,p.2-3.
[122] A4,p.3.

a traditional form and, not insignificantly, the spreading out of the events of the wedding over several locations and the whole day, particularly missed in weddings at hotels. All this matters because it makes the couple, at the end of the day, feel more married. The enormity of marriage is mirrored in the ritual performance. And ritual is something that these couples think that the Church does well.

Ritual and Narrative

As this account has demonstrated, couples understand weddings very differently to clergy. The following consideration of ritual and narrative will clarify this further. The couples did not refer to weddings, their own, or weddings in general as ‘ritual’, which is not to say that they did not regard what happened in a wedding as a special kind of action. Indeed it was clear that couples regarded their weddings as very special events indeed, ones to which they attached great significance and into which they put significant resources in terms of time, effort and money. Such effort was in part the same kind of action as ordinary life, though more intense and focused. So where in daily life people buy clothes and eat meals and socialise, in a wedding all these actions are performed with meticulous care and on a lavish scale. But weddings also occasion very different kinds of behaviour for couples, behaviour that connects them, categorically with other, similar events.

Clergy, it has been demonstrated think of weddings as a *kind* of occasional office of the Church, occasional offices themselves being *kinds* of church services. Couples share this perspective at one level, associating weddings with other events that tend to occur in church: christenings and funerals. However, couples associate these events not with regular church services, but with various kinds of family celebration: the occasional wedding anniversaries and engagement parties, the annual cycle of Christmas and birthdays and with a more regular familial sociability of Sunday lunches and other meals either ‘in’ or ‘out’. So where for clergy, weddings are church services that include a lot of extra people not normally seen in church, for couples they are family celebrations which like other similar ones take place in church.

It would appear there are two systems of ritual classification in operation in a wedding: one rooted in the liturgical life of the Church and another in extended family sociability. The term 'rite of passage' would apply equally to either system, a social purpose being served by either within the frames of reference of the group concerned. This is suggestive of Davies' category: dual or multi-purpose rites, which different participants understand and make use of in different ways.[123]

Differences emerge over not only the classification of rites just mentioned, but over the purpose of those rites beyond the immediate, agreed 'pragmatic goal'[124] of the wedding: marrying a couple. This is most clearly put in narrative terms. Where clergy see the wedding as bringing the story of a couple's relationship into the meta-narrative of Christian marriage, couples tend to understand a church wedding as part of an ongoing narrative of extended family and community. These perspectives are evident in the events that surround the wedding itself. Clergy use the marriage preparation and rehearsal, and not infrequent invitations to other church services as a way of rooting the couple's understanding of marriage in both Christian ideas and the liturgical practices of the Church. Over the same time period couples are incorporated into the collective life of their respective families and groups of friends, being included in family parties and rituals. While such a process happens incrementally for long term cohabiting partners,[125] it occurs in a particularly intense and defined way in a wedding. Indeed in its material culture and its sociability a wedding, for couples is an intense and defined performance of ordinary life.

Distinct understandings of the purposes of a wedding are also apparent in the way clergy and couples engage with the verbal content of the wedding, especially the service. Leonard argues that the reception speeches at weddings 'have many of the characteristics of formal speech, outlined by Bloch (1975): fixed intonation of delivery, fixed sequence and type of speech acts and use of illustrations from relatively limited sources (jokes, proverbs, speeches).' Such

[123] Davies, pp.120-121.
[124] Ibid, p.120.
[125] Purbrick, p.179.

speech exists ' "not to report facts, but to influence people."'[126] This is equally the case for the wedding service, where speech either involves reading from texts (the wedding liturgy, the Bible and poems or similar readings) or a sermon that corresponds closely with Bloch's definition. Clergy and couples' responses to this are strikingly different.

Clergy, as has been seen, see the wedding service as not only transformative and performative, but also communicative: the text of the wedding service articulating a particular understanding of marriage. Indeed most of the clergy read through the text of the service with couples and explained it, partly as an icebreaker into conversations about a Christian understanding of marriage, and partly because of their conviction that it was helpful for couples to understand the service if they were to participate in it.

Couples, insofar as they recalled these conversations, tended to see them as preparation for the performance of the wedding. This does not mean that couples were indifferent to the 'meaning of marriage', even to a specifically Christian understanding of marriage. Many brides and grooms expressed the view that marriage was a permanent and exclusive relationship. While such an understanding prompted couples to marry in church, this was not because of the verbal content of the service. Indeed the couple with an articulate Christian commitment felt the Anglican service, largely on account of its repeated use by persons with little interest in the theological import of its words, failed to adequately articulate a Christian view of marriage.

It is not that speech in a wedding, which for couples extends well beyond the service to include the proposal and the reception speeches, is not communicative, but it is not communicative is a straightforward semantic way. The proposal, for example, is a very special event, which couples, especially grooms remember in narrative form. It is a meaningful event for both participants and for their relatives who take a keen interest in it. Amongst other possible things, the proposal communicates love and commitment to the bride and her acceptance

[126] Leonard, p.191.

communicates the same things to the groom. But it is the event as a whole that carries this meaning, much more than any specific words used. Words in a wedding, as Leonard suggests, have a purpose beyond communicating facts or ideas: 'formalisation of speech "removes the authority and the event from the speaker himself so that he speaks…less and less for himself and more and more for his role."'[127] This special use of words helps to distinguish the wedding, like other similar rituals, from the ordinary life that surrounds it.

Van Gennep identified the rite of passage as a hiatus in ordinary social life for the participants. The special, celebratory nature of a wedding from the couples' perspective is one aspect of this. So too is the pattern of events that couples consistently engaged in from the proposal to the end of the reception. The proposal and acceptance immediately alters the status of the couple in their social context. As such, in Van Gennep's terms, it is a rite of separation for the couple from their previous life as, in a formal sense, single persons. The wedding service and reception are classic rites of reintegration, not only effecting a legal change of status, consolidated with stamps of approval from church and family, but displaying this reintegration. This is achieved by the internal structure of these rites, parties and their associates separated physically at the start of the wedding day and brought together in the service. The unity of the couple is emphasised by the strategic mixing of their family and friends, in the wedding procession and the reception.

Between the proposal and the actual marriage the couple are in a liminal state, not yet married, but not really single. While the nature of this state has changed considerably in recent years, with the normalisation of cohabitation, it remains a reality, if one focused on increasing familiarity with one's partner's family than the partner themselves. It is a period of transition from a private relationship to a public one, in a legal sense, but more importantly for these couples in the context of their own families, friends and local communities. This is achieved by the official sociability of this period: meetings of the two families, engagement parties, hen and stag parties, these last events often characterised by a raucous

[127] Leonard, p.191, citing Bloch, 1975, p.16.

informality Turner would see as a common feature of liminality. According to Turner this liminal space at the heart of a rite of passage (and for Turner many other occasions as well) is what renders it an effective means of ritual transformation. It allows for an intensification of 'essential and generic'[128] human bonds on which more structured bonds depend. As has been seen, there is not just one liminal period in the course of the wedding; the whole structure of the ritual from proposal to reception, via engagement is replicated in each individual rite: parties being distinguished and separated before being united after a liminal period.

Each of these events is a ritual, and as such also, in Schechner's (and Turner's) sense a performance. As has been evident throughout this chapter performance is central to couples' perceptions of their weddings. Weddings are framed social dramas, participants taking on roles and performing them, utilizing not only formal speech, but also deliberate movement and specific, symbolic objects. Movement, as has been seen, is generally formal and prescribed. Roles associated with the wedding are likewise not of the couples' invention, but couples do have a choice here. Indeed they see this as a most important decision. The careful selection of best men or bridesmaids is a way that couples deliberately deploy ritual means for their own particular ends. While the couples rarely mentioned love when speaking of their own relationship and never when speaking of relationships with others, they alluded frequently to such feelings. Indeed, a particular value of a wedding was the opportunity it provided to demonstrate their affection for friends and relatives by having them play key roles. The performance of these roles within the ritual frame of the wedding transforms the relationship of bride and groom, and displays and intensifies other relationships.

Family and friendship are defined and displayed, indeed embodied throughout the performance of the wedding, in the separations and unions of the ceremony and in the posing for photographs that surrounds it. This is not just a demonstration of affectionate personal relationships, or of family in a general

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[128] Turner, *The Ritual Process*, p.97.

sense. It is important to the couples that both 'sides' are equally weighted; that this is embodied in the ritual and displayed in the photographs. This lends a pleasing symmetry to the performance of the wedding, but also suggests a concern that both partners need their own family and friends to support their interests in the new marriage. The significance of family and friends for the future of the marriage is also embodied in the presence of different generations. Grandparents root the wedding in a long tradition. Most important of all, children, present as attendants and guests, children of relatives and friends, godchildren and the couple's own children embody the expectations of more children in the future and, logically also of the family or families continuing existence. Where little might be made of the procreative purpose of marriage in the liturgy or other verbal aspects of the wedding, the importance of children is articulated very clearly by their actual, bodily presence.

Embodiment is a special kind of symbolism, but by no means the only kind evident in a wedding, as has been seen in the previous chapter and earlier in this one. Couples consistently include in their weddings certain objects to which they attach considerable significance: rings (both engagement and wedding), flowers, a wedding dress, a wedding cake, as well as less specifically significant objects. Apart from the rings, clergy attach little significance to any of these, except, very occasionally as symptomatic of misplaced values. Couples, in contrast take enormous trouble over the selection of these things, including many other people in the process and negotiating the tricky space between the expectations of others and a strong sense of entitlement to have what they prefer. The selection of flowers is straightforward enough: an uncontested exercise in personal taste, though some flowers have a particular significance for some brides. Cakes are quite often made or provided by relatives as a contribution to the wedding, rarely a complicated business. The selection of a dress is for most brides a major event. While couples narrated the effort they took over these choices and purchases in considerable detail, their symbolic significance was not an explicit concern, as has been seen. What was, for these couples much more consciously chosen, and to which they attached much more explicit significance was having a wedding in church. The reasons given for this have been described above: ritual pacing, a desire to do things 'properly', family tradition and personal religious

commitment. Apart from the first these perspectives use a church setting as a symbol of propriety, of the rootedness of a family in a particular place and of Christian faith, respectively, moreover a symbol quite deliberately chosen and deployed. The church wedding is not only a multi-purpose symbol, representing different things for different people, it is also, for some a problematic one. One couple were far from certain that a wedding in church represented their Christian commitment adequately, the restrictions of Anglican practice and moreover the use of wedding liturgy by persons with little other interest in Christianity diluting the potency of its theological symbolism.

If symbols do not always work, then neither does ritual as a whole. Weddings are not invariably flawless performances, and more importantly, marriages do not always last. Ritual failure is a common concern in the study of ritual, at least on the part of those scholars who see ritual as achieving something.[129] For many of the couples in this study too, ritual failure in the shape of unsuccessful marriages, their own and those of their parents, informed their decisions about marriage and about weddings. Boden notes that the couples in her study often chose to replicate the material and ritual details of successful marriages of parents and to make alternative choices to those made for their own unsuccessful ones.[130] The same was true of these couples, church weddings (amongst other things) chosen in emulation of happily married parents. But a couple's current wedding also serves as a kind of stand against such past disappointment, a form of Bloch's 'rebounding conquest'[131], transcending not only the exigencies of everyday life but also former ineffective ritual.

It is narrative, as an interpretive device that makes best sense of this capacity couples have to use wedding ritual to assert the continuity of their family after disaster or loss. Ritual is deployed judiciously to facilitate the maintenance of the 'coherent and acceptable' life story that Linde argues is essential for feeling a 'good, socially proper and stable person.'[132] Where clergy use weddings as a

[129] See Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, p.146 and Grimes, *Deeply Into the Bone*, p.69.
[130] Boden, pp.83-4.
[131]Maurice Bloch, *Prey into Hunter* (Cambridge: CUP), p.3.
[132] Linde, p.3.

narrative resource in support of their ministerial lives, couples' shared narratives of their weddings continue the consolidating work of the wedding ritual. This extends beyond the couple to their families. Wedding ritual brings family members together to display and also consolidate their collective identity. Wedding ritual also gives family members a great deal of material that informs the collective narrative enterprise of that family's story of itself. These family narratives of marriage meet a Christian meta-narrative of marriage in an Anglican wedding. What this might mean for couples varies significantly from one couple to another, as suggested by the preceding discussion of symbolism. What this might mean for the Church will be considered in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 8
CONCLUSION

The Anglican wedding is the product of a complex social, legal and theological history and remains an equally complex contemporary reality. The previous two chapters have shown 'ritual' and 'narrative' to be useful tools with which to interpret this complex reality. Categorising the actions and speech associated with a wedding as 'ritual' suggests its possible purposes and identifies continuities with other similar occasions. Moreover ritual acts are not just things participants engage in inadvertently. Even when conforming closely to expected norms of ritual behaviour, participants in weddings deploy ritual deliberately and strategically. The same is true of narrative, which not only stands as a metaphor for a coherent account of something, but another tool of deliberate human social interaction. In addition, ritual and narrative complement each other as interpretive categories, wedding stories incorporating ritual into personal identity, and gaps and elisions in stories highlighting the need for ritual at points where the capacity of narrative to order experience coherently breaks down.

This study, I asserted in the introduction, is an attempt to answer the question: What is an Anglican wedding and how it might properly be understood? Three reasons were proposed as to why this is a worthwhile undertaking. Firstly, weddings are an important, but little documented area of contemporary life. Secondly, weddings reveal wider truths about society, Anglican weddings additionally revealing truths about the role of the Church in society. Thirdly, a thorough empirical study of weddings, including their interpretation as ritual and narrative might be a significant contribution to a Christian practical theology of marriage. This chapter will address each of these in turn to draw this study to its conclusion.

Weddings in England have seen considerable numerical decline since 1970. So have church weddings, in particular the weddings in Anglican churches with which this study is concerned, which have experienced a disproportionate numerical decline. Nevertheless weddings remain popular social rituals in both practice and in the popular imagination. Chapters 6 and 7 of this study have presented a detailed account of the ritual behaviour, material consumption and

story telling occasioned by weddings in the Church of England. This adds to related material in other empirical studies of weddings in Britain and elsewhere.[1] This detailed account reveals something of the complexity of contemporary weddings, of the numerous interested parties to them and of the importance attached by participants to getting both ritual and material details exactly right. For the couples in this study this included having a church ceremony, the unexamined 'proper' thing to do for most, a deliberate thought-out decision for others and for some in each category a means of pleasing parents or partner. The observations of clergy reveal weddings as carefully performed aspects of working life in which professional rather than personal identity is ritually consolidated and rehearsed.

Studies of weddings being so few in number, documenting such prevalent practices is worthwhile in itself. In addition, as is widely asserted in the literature, weddings reveal wider truths about society, and in the case of this study about the relationship of church and society. Charsley argued in 1991 that close attention to wedding practices corrected a misapprehension that contemporary marriage was of mainly 'individual relevance'.[2] In the eighteen years since Charsley's study was published the idea that contemporary relationships are chiefly concerned with the pursuit of individual satisfaction has gained ground. This study, like those of Purbrick and, especially Boden, has demonstrated, that contemporary marrying couples' do feel entitled to have their personal desires satisfied in their weddings. However, this study corroborates Charsley's earlier observation, revealing weddings as occasions in which couples consolidate not only their relationship with each other, but with established social networks of family and friends, often embedded in very particular geographical locations.

The support of family, and, to a lesser degree, friends, of couples' marriages was of crucial importance to all couples in the study and keenly missed where it was absent. This support was felt to be embodied in the wedding ceremony and

[1] See Chapter 1.
[2] Charsley, *Rites of Marriage*, p.5.

reception by the physical presence of key people, mainly relatives. The wedding ritual consists of a performance of personal transformation within a wider performance of the transformation of existing social networks, incorporating both spouses into the family of the other. This performance is a public display of sociability and is recorded in photographs and video.

Couples are geographically as well as socially embedded; indeed the two are often closely connected. Many articulated a strong attachment to their particular locality as the theatre for their extended family lives and a key aspect of their own personal identity. Particular churches are often important for this reason, as focal points of personal and familial geographies, as well as the location for family rites of passage.

Local affinity is as significant for consumption as it is for ritual for the couples in this study. Boden[3] and Purbrick[4] observe that contemporary wedding consumption is deliberately promoted at the expense of family involvement. Despite this, wedding consumption and material culture more generally is frequently the occasion for sociability. This was evidently the case for the couples in this study as well. Nevertheless, all were conscious of a recent shift that gave couples, and especially brides a 'right' to decide details of their wedding that previous generations had parents decide for them.

Successive empirical studies of weddings reveal a remarkable consistency of ritual behaviour, but considerable changes in social mores. Leonard recorded a world in 1970s Swansea in which young people lived at home until marriage and where pre-marital cohabitation was very rare. Considerable differentials of power and occupation between men and women were expected and generally unchallenged. Leonard met clergy who would insist that brides promised to obey, and some who would refuse a wedding ring to a groom. This study, thirty years later sees young people leaving the parental home well before marriage. Most cohabit before marriage. Considerable gender differences in terms of

[3] Boden, p.70.
[4] Purbrick, p.146.

employment persist, though all women work, some in senior positions and men perform domestic tasks previously the preserve of women. All of the clergy I spoke to preferred parallel marriage vows, many were unhappy with the implications of ownership in the 'giving away'. The persistence of ritual in the face of such social change is an issue that merits more attention that it can receive here. What needs noting at this point is that while it is possible to attribute the persistence of wedding ritual to the fact that social attitudes have not really changed in any significant way, it may also be the case that weddings do not reveal hidden truths about the society in which they take place. This is not to say that they are not, or cannot sometimes be meaningful. Rather, the very familiarity and resilience of the ritual allows very different meanings to be attributed to it and different uses to be made of it.

As was demonstrated in Chapters 6 and 7, couples and clergy while sharing an understanding of weddings as transformative rituals, framed performances outside ordinary time, space and action, in other respects understand weddings very differently. While couples feel entitled to a wedding that suits their own personal preferences, they expressed no desire to influence wedding practices in the wider culture. Clergy also see weddings as a persistent aspect of social life, but one in which Christianity and themselves as Christian ministers can have a transformative involvement, not least by having weddings in church. Clergy see church weddings as aspects of the Church's pastoral and liturgical practice and occasions for the consolidation of their own professional skills and identity. Their focus is on the wedding service and the preparation for this and for marriage. They are also inclined to see the wedding service as embodying a Christian theological understanding that is also expressed in the symbolic action of the wedding. The text and performance of the service is distinguished clearly from extra-liturgical ritual and material culture. While rarely the subject of scathing critique these are seen as potentially problematic. Not only can undue attention to the material aspects of a wedding lead to excessive expenditure and displays of, occasionally, questionable aesthetic taste, but such concerns can distort the central symbolism of the wedding ritual.

Couples, in contrast see weddings as aspects of their own personal life and of their families and friendships, indeed weddings are a key means by which couples' personal lives become embedded in such networks. For couples wedding ritual begins with the proposal and continues until the end of the reception. Couples, particularly women, but most men as well, had a keen interest in the material culture of the wedding taking considerable care over the selection of goods and services. While many objected to the cost of things and few of these weddings were lavish by national standards, all spent money on a very similar range of items. Such choices were understood to be informed by several things. Firstly, weddings were felt to be occasions where the comparatively unrestrained exercise of personal taste was acceptable. Secondly, couples liked their wedding purchases to reflect certain values, particularly the support of local businesses and high standards of craftsmanship. Thirdly, personal symbolic association was of great importance. Specific choices were suggestive of earlier life events of bride or groom or, of even greater significance, echoed previous family rituals and celebrations. Included in this last is the choice of a church wedding, and of a wedding in a particular church. Like clergy, couples are very interested in the proper performance of the wedding, though with a focus on the whole cycle of wedding ritual and consumption, rather than just the service. While this certainly includes the wedding service, the liturgical details are of interest to most couples in a general rather than specific sense, wishing the wedding to have a certain atmosphere and having some preference for music, but not greatly exercised by liturgical choices.

This is most suggestive of Davies' 'dual-purpose ritual'[5], two distinct groups making use of the same ritual for their own different purposes. While there are marked differences between clergy and couples' perspectives, two factors qualify such an unambiguous distinction between the two categories. First, clergy are not only involved in weddings as officiating ministers. Most of the clergy in the study were married and all participated in the weddings of relatives and friends as ordinary guests. These weddings clergy perceived in very much the same way as did couples: as occasions for the consolidation and display of relationships.

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[5] See Chapter 4.

Clergy see different purposes in wedding ritual depending upon the role they themselves perform in a wedding. Secondly, it is not only clergy who think the theological content of a wedding is important. Familiarity with and commitment to Christianity, quite apart from ordained status has a bearing on perceptions of weddings in church. Regular church going couples have a different relationship with church than do people who attend only for rites of passage. For all of them, ordained or lay, church is less special and more a part of everyday life. Such people marry in church because they perceive continuities not only with other rites of passage but also with a regular pattern of participation in Christian worship. In a rather different way is it not only clergy who are inclined to reflect on ritual behaviour in abstract analytical terms. While there are couples who justify marrying in church simply in terms of tradition or propriety there are others who reflect in general terms about what makes ritual more effective: especially sacred space. This issue will be taken up in the concluding section of this chapter. Here it is important to note that these factors both blur the apparently sharp distinctions between clergy and couples' perceptions of weddings and highlight the way in which ritual displays and consolidates social roles. Furthermore, ritual can be deployed by different groups to different ends, the distinctions between those groups becoming, in the process, more acute.

Weddings are of interest to numerous different parties: the wedding industry, couples and their families and friends and officiating clergy. This final section will suggest three ways in which a close study of the perceptions of those involved in weddings is significant for practical theology: as an aspect of the theology of culture, as an area of 'experience', and as a location in which the judicious application of concepts derived from the social sciences, in this case ritual and narrative, has much to offer.

The theological and legal involvement of the Church with marriage consists of a particular example of what Niebuhr describes as 'the enduring problem' of 'the proper relationship of Christ and culture, between the Church and human

aspirations.'[6] It is certainly possible to read episodes in this history as examples of a 'Christ against culture' position or a 'Christ of culture' one. This reveals, as Witte[7] demonstrates, marriage as a place where social and theological interests coincide and where the relationship between Church and society is forged. Weddings, it has been argued here and elsewhere, offer a window on the world. Not only does a study of weddings provide a picture of the pastoral and liturgical practice of the church in respect of weddings, it also offers insight into the theology of culture that motivates that practice, and in part derives from it. Couples tended to assume the embodied presence of the Church in their communities, and its provision of ritual in times of personal crisis. The broad cultural tolerance evident in clergy's reflections on weddings merits a little attention here. While clergy accepted cohabitation and remarriage after divorce, applying a relativist understanding of culture to areas where their own convictions differed from those of parishioners, in apparently less significant areas, clergy were more sceptical about contemporary culture. The material culture surrounding weddings was the focus of this, conspicuous consumption widely interpreted as symptomatic of values antithetical to Christianity. This suggests a working distinction noted by Gordon Lynch between 'popular' and 'folk' culture; the former materialistic, commercially driven and the latter communitarian, spontaneous and 'authentic.'[8] The wedding as a product of popular culture merits further theological attention than this study can give it.

It is axiomatic in recent theological accounts of marriage that the 'lived reality'[9] or 'man's [sic] experience of his own existence'[10] is vital for a proper understanding of the subject. Such a concern is motivated by a desire to avoid an unhelpful and inaccurate idealism that sees only the 'God given purposes'[11] of marriage but overlooks both the political purposes which the institution of marriage has served and the experience of married individuals, both men and

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[6] Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture*, p.26.
[7] See Chapter 2.
[8] Gordon Lynch, *Understanding Theology and Popular Culture* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), pp.8-11.
[9] Thatcher, p.5.
[10] Schillebeeckx, Vol.I, p.xv.
[11] Thatcher, p.10.

women. Thatcher is arguing that an accurate and truthful account of marriage includes day-to-day practical problems as well as significant cruelties and injustices. In this particular area, he is articulating a wider conviction that 'experience', what life and human relationships actually feel like, is a necessary theological source. Such experience is not, however, easy to access, though this study reveals some possibilities. The first derives from Leonard's point that asking people 'to talk about particular semi-public events, such as engagement and weddings, would be more acceptable (i.e. they would be more willing to cooperate) than simply asking them to talk about everyday family matters, which are seen as private and/or uninteresting.'[12] A second derives from parish clergy's encounters with marrying couples described in Chapter 6. It is attention to the experience of marrying couples, in their stories that informs the subsequent pastoral practice of these clergy and their theological understanding as well, of marriage and of ministry. The stories of parish clergy offer an insight into their experiences, and into the way in which experience can inform a pastoral and theological task.

The importance of ritual is increasingly acknowledged in both pastoral and liturgical theology, as outlined in Chapter 4. Two particular themes emerge frequently. First, ritual is understood as having social and psychological utility. Second, Christian liturgy can be understood as ritual. These positions are not contradictory, and, as this study has demonstrated there is much to support either of them, but it is important not to conflate them. While the Church is an active participant in the creation and performance of wedding ritual, it is by no means the only one as Chapter 7 has shown. The ritual associated with marriage over which the Church has no control can be too easily designated, in a contemporary English context, as peripheral to what is important in a wedding. Not simply a value judgement about aesthetics or consumption, this also misconstrues activities that are ritually efficacious. If the positive effects of a wedding are the consequence of rites including, rather than limited to, Christian liturgy, then it does not necessarily matter that 'all the church has to offer is a liturgy for the

[12] Leonard, p.3.

third and final stage [of Van Gennep's scheme].'[13] In addition, 'treating 'invented patterns… as if they were discovered'[14] to use Grimes' phrase, runs the risk of ignoring the contingent nature of theories like Van Gennep's and the debates surrounding them.

Grimes' comment also sounds a cautionary warning about the natural desire on the part of pastoral theologians that ritual should be effective, in this case that a wedding should produce stable, happy and lifelong marriages. Church weddings, like other weddings quite often do succeed in doing just that, and inevitably they quite often do not so succeed. There is no way of correlating the success of marriages with the ritual that brought them about, except, perhaps in very crude terms, by 'type' of ceremony for example,[15] which excludes so many qualifying factors as to be meaningless. There is a popular notion that very expensive weddings are less likely to succeed, which several of the clergy and couples expressed, but I could find no empirical evidence to support this assertion. The factors that do have a bearing on the success of a marriage (or at least its longevity), including the age of the spouses, their previous marital history and that of their parents,[16] have no apparent relation to type of wedding ritual or the way in which it is performed. There is no effective magic in having a particular ritual performed in a particular way. Why then, given this, have weddings in church at all? One answer to this lies in an understanding of weddings as not only rites of passage, but also rites of intensification, already suggested in Chapter 6 in relation to clergy. The emphasis is not so much on transformation of social status as on the intensification and consolidation of existing roles and relationships. This connects the practicalities of planning a wedding, involving as they do negotiation with family and friends, with the ritual that consists of an intense display of all those relationships. Planning a wedding involves testing the numerous threads of sociability that will support a marriage, the more numerous the better. Actually celebrating a wedding involves (amongst other things)

[13] Stevenson, *To Join Together*, p.5.
[14] Grimes, *Deeply into the Bone*, p.107.
[15] 'Religious' or 'civil'.
[16] 'Divorce: Tables 4.1-4.10', *FM.2, No.34 Marriage, Divorce and Adoption Statistics 2006*, http://www.statistics.gov.uk (20/09/09)

displaying all this support. Having a wedding in church, in addition to the quality of the ritual performance, displays at least two additional sources of support, symbolic connection to the locality in the church building and the desire for the blessing of God. This issue of display is theologically significant, relating as it does to the idea that what is important about formal, public liturgical acts is not what they effect, but what they reveal. A church wedding makes God's blessing explicit, it does not manipulate it into existence.

Anglican weddings, while they cannot, in Keillor's phrase 'make a true love story' or a lasting or happy marriage for that matter 'out of a passing fancy,'[17] are rituals with considerable narrative potential. Beyond the numerous stories that couples and clergy tell, to reveal, and doubtless also to cast in a good light their own experiences and actions, something else is going on that can best be expressed in narrative terms. In the course of a wedding people's personal stories become aligned. Couples, as we have seen construct a shared narrative of their relationship as a part of making that relationship work. In a wedding, this shared narrative becomes a part of numerous others: those of family and friendship groups and local community. In an Anglican wedding their story also aligns, however briefly, with a Christian account of marriage. Just as some aspect of this is likely to inform the couple's story: permanence, commitment, mutual self-giving, so do couples' personal stories become a part of the Christian narrative of marriage.

[17] Keillor, p.302.

APPENDIX 1: THE CLERGY

All names of people and place have been changed and information given is very limited to preserve anonymity

C1	Interview with David	(Incumbent)
C2	Interview with Luke	(Incumbent)
C3	Interview with Thomas	(Incumbent)
C4	Interview with Kathryn	(Incumbent)
C5	Interview with Morris	(Incumbent)
C6	Interview with Chris	(Incumbent)
C7	Interview with Simon	(Incumbent)
C8	Interview with Timothy	(Incumbent)
C9	Interview with Colin	(Incumbent)
C10	Interview with Harry	(Incumbent)
C11	Interview with James	(Incumbent)
C12	Interview with Ruth	(Parish Administrator)

APPENDIX 2: THE COUPLES

All names of people and places have been changed.
To ensure anonymity I have listed occupations and marital status separately.

'Local' indicates lifelong residence within five miles of their present home (excluding higher education)
'Regional' indicates people who grew up within twenty miles of their present home.
'Incomer' indicates people who have moved into the area from further afield.

Interview A1: Linda, 39 (local) and Paul, 37 (regional)
Bride given away by 'my godfather' (father had died).
Adult Bridesmaids: two friends (one 'known for a while, the other 'a very, very good friend'), groom's sister (3).
Child Bridesmaids: goddaughter and her sister (2).
Best Man: 'my closest friend'.
Ushers: groom's 'three best friends' (3).
Married 2006, interview after the wedding.

Interview A2: Jane, 30 (local) and Steven, 29 (local).
Bride given away by 'my Dad'.
Adult bridesmaids: bride's sister, 'my best friend' (2).
Pageboys: groom's son, couple's son (2).
Best men: 'best friends' (2).
Ushers: groom's brothers (2).
Married 2006, interview after the wedding.

Interview A3: Rebecca, 29 (local) and Phil, 31 (local).
Bride given away by 'my Dad'.
Adult bridesmaids: friend and bride's cousin (2).
Child bridesmaids: bride's niece and groom's niece (2).
Pageboys: bride's nephew and groom's nephew (2).
Best man: groom's brother.
Ushers: bride's brother, 'cricket friends' (4).
Married 2006, interview after the wedding.

Interview A4: Liz, 27 (regional) and Mike, 30 (local).
Bride given away by 'my Dad'.
Adult bridesmaids: 'my friend', groom's brother's girlfriend (2).
Child bridesmaids: friend's children (2).
Best men: groom's 'little brother', groom's 'very good friend'.
Ushers: unspecified.
Married 2006, interview after the wedding.

Interview A5: Clare, 25 (local) and Matt, 31 (local).
Bride given away by 'my Dad'.
Adult bridesmaids: bride's cousin, 'my best friend' (2).
Child bridesmaids: groom's nieces, friend's daughter (3)
Pageboy: groom's nephew.
Best men: groom's friends (2).
Ushers: groom's friend and bride's brother (2).
Married 2007, interview before the wedding.

Interview A6: Tess, 31 (incomer) and Mark, 32 (incomer).
Bride given away by 'my Dad'
Child bridesmaids: bride's nieces, bride's friend's daughter (3)
Pageboy: bride's nephew
Best man: bride's brother (and groom's friend)
Ushers: unspecified
Married 2007, interview before the wedding

Interview A7: Susie, 52 (incomer) and Alan, 54 (local).
Bride given away by her son.
Adult bridesmaids: bride's daughter.
Best man: groom's friend.
Ushers: bride's daughter's partner, groom's nephews (3)
Married 2005, interview after the wedding.

Interview A8: Rachel, 33 (regional) and Ian, 23 (local).
Bride given away by 'my Dad'.
Adult bridesmaids: bride's sister (1).
Child bridesmaids: bride's sister's daughters (2).
Best man: groom's brother.
Ushers: 'two friends from university'. Groom was later an usher for one of them (2).
Married 2006, interview after the wedding.

Interview A9: Annie, 52 (incomer) and George, 56 (incomer).
Bride given away by friend (husband of witness) (father had died).
Witness: 'closest friend'.
Child bridesmaid: groom's granddaughter.
Best man: groom's eldest son.
Married 2004, interview after the wedding.

Interview A10: Tina, 26 (local) and Patrick, 29 (local).
Bride given away by 'my Dad'.
Bridesmaids (older teenagers): bride's step sister, groom's sister, cousins of groom (4)
Pageboy: couple's son.
Best man: 'one of the close friends'.
Ushers: bride's cousin.
Married 2005, interview after the wedding.

Interview A11: Sally, 39 (local) and Paul, 42 (local).
Bride given away by ‘my Dad’.
Child bridesmaid: groom’s niece.
Pageboy: groom’s nephew.
Best man: ‘my best friend’.
Married 2005, interview after the wedding.

Interview A12: Lucy, 23 (local) and Peter, 25 (local).
Bride given away by ‘my Dad’.
Adult bridesmaid: bride’s ‘aunty’ (1).
Child bridesmaids: bride’s cousins (2).
Ringbearer (boy): bride’s cousin (1).
Best man: ‘a lad a play rugby with’.
Ushers: ‘from different aspects of my life’, bride’s brother, ‘one from my past’, ‘one from a past job’(3).
Married 2006, interview before the wedding.

Interview A13: Lisa, 25 (local) and Robert , 29 (incomer)
Bride given away by ‘my Dad’.
Adult bridesmaids: friends (2)
Child bridesmaids: bride’s goddaughters, groom’s cousin’s daughter (3)
Best man: ‘a friend I’d known since I was ten’
Ushers: bride’s brother, groom’s brother.
Married 2004, interview after the wedding.

Occupations

Brides**:** care worker (2), nurse (2), pay-roll officer, teacher, personal banker, accountant, drugs worker, cash administrator, support worker, airline cabin crew, sales executive.

Grooms: engineering (3), accountant (2), technical officer, firefighter, youth worker, fibreglass operative, operations manager, teacher, social worker, financial advisor.

Marital Status

Brides: 11 single, 2 divorced.
Grooms: 11 single, 1 widowed, 1 divorced.

Stated Religious Affiliation

Brides: Church of England (3), Catholic (1), Methodist (1), Baptist (1), ‘not very religious’ (3) not stated (5).
Grooms: Church of England (4), Catholic (3), ‘not very religious’ (3), ‘not bothered’ (2), not stated (1).

APPENDIX 3: CLERGY INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Would you say that weddings are as important part of your ministry as they were ten years ago?

What sorts of people want to get married in your church?

Can you talk me through the way a service is planned?

How did you learn the ropes?

Do you have any observations to make about the *Common Worship* marriage service?

Do you offer any marriage preparation?

Have you noticed any changes in weddings over the course of your ministry?

Are there other occasions in the life of your congregation, or in your own ministry, that concern marriage or other relationships?

Are you prepared to conduct the weddings of divorcees?

Do you think that weddings are a valuable part of the churches ministry?

How would you respond to the idea that marriage is a sacrament?

APPENDIX 4: COUPLES' INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Questions in round brackets are prompts which were used where needed

How did you meet? And when?
When did you decide to get married? (How long had you known each other?)
[To bride] Did you have a ring? (Did you choose it together?)
How did you announce your engagement? (Who did you tell? In what order?)
Did you have an engagement party (Could you tell me about that?)
When did you set a date for the wedding? (How did you decide on a date?)
Which did you decide first, the ceremony or reception?
Did you have Stag and Hen nights? (Could you tell me about them?)

Did you always want a church wedding?
Did you consider any other options?
How did you go about booking the service?
When did you meet the vicar? (How often? Was there any marriage preparation?)
How did you plan the service? (Did you have an idea of what you wanted the wedding service to be like? Was there anything you particularly wanted?)
Can you tell me what you chose? (Music, poems or readings, which service, 'extras': bells, choir. Why?)
Looking back, what do you remember about the service?
Were you happy with the wedding? Is there anything you would have done differently?

What sort of reception did you choose? (Venue, food, cake, 'evening do')
Did you have speeches?
Did you go away?

Did your families know one another before your wedding? (If not had they met? When did you introduce them?)
[To bride] Did someone give you away? (Who?)
Tell me who was involved in the day? (Best man, bridesmaids, ushers, other jobs?)
How did you decide who should have these roles?

How many guests did you invite?

Did people travel a long way to attend your wedding?

[To bride and groom in turn] Can you tell me about your outfits?[1] (Wedding dress, Groom's suit. 'Something borrowed, something blue'?)

Flowers: Who did them? What were they like?

Cars: ditto

Photography: ditto (Did you have a video?)

Were you happy with what you got?

Did you have a wedding present list?

Did other people have their own ideas about what your wedding should be like?

Where did you get your ideas from for your wedding?

What do you think is good about getting married in church?

[1] Before the interview I had asked couples if I could look at their wedding photographs. Everyone I spoke to after their wedding were happy to let me. It proved more straightforward to talk about clothes, cars, flowers and photography when looking through the wedding album. In addition, looking at photographs prompted a great deal of talk about family and friends.

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