Introduction

Anglican Christianity is distinctive among most other Reformation churches in retaining the threefold order of ministry: deacons, priests and bishops. Most historical accounts of the Church of England, perhaps understandably, pay attention to only two orders of ministry: bishops and priests. The Church of England inherited the diaconate from pre-Reformation Catholicism; historians have led us to believe that it also inherited the late mediaeval church's attitude to the diaconate as a mere formality on the way to priesthood. The Ordinal of 1550 refers to the diaconate as 'thys inferior offyce',[1] reinforcing the idea that all deacons were destined to be priests. A newly ordained member of the clergy might expect to spend little more than a few days as a deacon before admission to the priesthood, and before the late twentieth century, the Church of England was supposedly without a theology of the diaconate or an appreciation of the distinctiveness of diaconal ministry. In an official church report of 1988 that came to be extremely influential, Mary Tanner concluded that for most of Anglican history, 'It was usual practice for the two orders of deacon and priest to be conferred at the same time or within a few days of each other. Only those who were under age for the priesthood or who were felt to need the stimulus of a further examination were required to serve the full year'.[2] As a recent report on the diaconate put it, 'After the Reformation the tradition of having long-term or permanent deacons virtually died out'.[3]

This book questions received assumptions about deacons in the history of the Church of England, presenting evidence that 'lifelong', 'distinctive', 'permanent' and 'long-term' deacons have existed

1. 'The forme and maner of makyng and consecratyng of Archebishoppes Bishoppes, Priestes and Deacons' in *The First Prayer-Book of King Edward VI 1549* (London: Griffith Farran Browne, 1891), p. 281.
2. [Tanner, M. and Platten, S.], *Deacons in the Ministry of the Church: A Report to the House of Bishops of the General Synod of the Church of England* (Church House Publishing: London, 1988), p. 16.
3. *MMWC*, p. 59.

throughout the church's history. The 'third order' of ministry was hidden rather than invisible, and evidence of deacons has been overlooked on account of inherited preconceptions about Anglican history. It is certainly true that lifelong or distinctive deacons were non-existent in the Church of England for the first six decades of the twentieth century, but this era was atypical of the period since 1550. When the revival of the diaconate began in the 1960s, most were unable or unwilling to look back beyond living memory to the Victorian church's bold experiments in diaconal ministry, or the older tradition of ministers in deacon's orders who flourished in the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The restoration of the diaconate in the Church of England has been portrayed as a borrowing from the Roman Catholic Church, a borrowing from German Evangelical Lutheranism[1] or simply a direct return to the early church.

Missing hitherto from studies of the diaconate in Anglicanism has been any proper investigation or acknowledgement of the significance of deacons in Anglican history. It is the argument of this book that deacons, and thought on deacons, have always existed within the Anglican tradition. However, the meaning and significance of deacons has undergone transformation many times over the course of nearly 500 years, making it well-nigh impossible to give a simple definition of what an Anglican deacon is. The same could be said of the definitions of priest and bishop in the Anglican tradition, but the roles taken by deacons have proved particularly fluid. This difficulty of definition raises important questions about contemporary attempts to revive the diaconate as a permanent order of ministry, which will be addressed in the final part of this book.

Deacons

The origin of deacons as an order of ministry is a controversial issue, but there can be no doubt that deacons and the diaconate are one of the Christian church's oldest institutions. The Greek word *diakonia*

1. Bruce Lescher, in his article on the spirituality of the diaconate, saw nineteenth-century Anglican interest in the diaconate as a direct consequence of the Lutheran experiments of Johannes Wichern and Theodore Fliedner in the 1830s (Lescher, B., '*Diakonia* and Diaconate' in Sheldrake, P. (ed.), *The New SCM Dictionary of Christian Spirituality* (SCM Press: London, 2005), p. 242). Whilst it is true that the deaconess movement had Lutheran origins, I have found no evidence of a Lutheran inspiration in any nineteenth-century Anglican publication on the revival of a lifelong diaconate for men.

can be translated simply as 'ministry', making it doubtful whether all of the individuals called 'deacons' in the New Testament can be considered members of a specific 'order' of ministry. Traditionally, deacons were traced back to Acts 6, when the Apostles chose seven men to help them in serving the poor and waiting at tables. Stephen, the first martyr, has always been traditionally depicted in the West vested as a deacon. In the East, the Council of Trullo in 692 asserted that there was no identity between the men chosen in Acts 6 and the deacons of the church, who were seen primarily as liturgical ministers. In Rome, the deacons acquired enormous influence as the bishop's 'eyes and ears' and took charge of seven administrative divisions within the city. Indeed, deacons started to acquire or pretend to a status above presbyters, and Jerome protested against this. In 314, the Council of Arles forbade deacons from making the offering (the eucharist), suggesting that the roles of presbyter and deacon were not always differentiated in relation to eucharistic presidency before that date.[1]

In a book that has become immensely influential in theological discussions of the diaconate since its publication in 1990, *Diakonia: Reinterpreting the Ancient Sources*, the Australian theologian John N. Collins questioned the assumption that the early church saw *diakonia* in terms of humble service, and argued that the primary meaning of *diakonia* referred to a 'go-between' or agent of one in authority, ready to perform a duty on behalf of someone in authority or act as an administrator. This interpretation is supported by the prominent role played by deacons in the early church as the influential assistants of bishops. For Collins, the association of the deacon with a ministry of love and humble service was introduced by German Evangelical theologians in the early nineteenth century,[2] while the Second Vatican Council's revival of permanent deacons in the Roman Catholic Church from the 1960s onwards was based on similar faulty assumptions.[3]

According to Collins's interpretation, deacons were the bishop's assistants and administrators, his 'staff', as opposed to the presbyters, who represented the bishop in individual churches in his diocese with delegated authority. Deacons worked for the bishop, whereas presbyters represented him. In the first three

1. Lescher (2005), pp. 241-3.
2. Collins, J.N., *Diakonia: Reinterpreting the Ancient Sources* (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 1990), pp. 8-11. The ordination of a deacon as a bishop was later known as ordination *per saltem*, 'by a leap'.
3. Ibid. pp. 14-20.

centuries of the church, deacons often rose to become bishops themselves (without being ordained as presbyters along the way).[1] Two relics of this era have survived in the western church: the practice whereby the bishop alone lays hands on a deacon in the ordination service, and the title of 'archdeacon' bestowed on the bishop's principal clerical administrators within the diocese (albeit present-day archdeacons in the Church of England can only be priests).[2] The practice of ordaining both men and women as deacons was authorised by the Council of Chalcedon (451) and until the twelfth century, male and female deacons were ordained in the Byzantine church with virtually identical ceremonies.[3] Women deacons seem to have fallen into disuse at this time because their ministry was limited to the baptism of adult female catechumens, which was thought unseemly for male clergy because catechumens were baptised naked. As adult baptism declined in the West, so the ordination of women to the diaconate died out. However, parts of the western church seem to have opposed the ordination of women deacons from early on, and the Synod of Nimes banned the practice in 394.

Whatever the original meaning of the word 'deacon', by the fifth century (at least) the diaconate had been transformed into 'the first step in a successful clerical career through the order of presbyters, up to the rank of bishop, just like the various career grades in the Roman civil service'.[4] In fact, deacon was not the lowest grade of orders, since from late antiquity until the Reformation there were five 'minor orders' below it. In the Roman Catholic Church, seminarians continued to be admitted to the orders of doorkeeper, reader, exorcist, acolyte and subdeacon until 1972. These 'minor clergy' were not ordained; rather, a man was tonsured by the bishop, thereby making him a cleric, and appointed to the minor orders by receiving an object pertaining to each office. Deacons, who were ordained, were considered to be in the lowest of the 'major orders'. All of these orders, major and minor, are mentioned in a mid-third-

1. MacCulloch, D., *A History of Christianity*, 2nd edn (Penguin: London, 2010), p. 134.
2. The situation is different in the Episcopal Church in the United States, where deacons can be appointed as archdeacons in some dioceses (Plater, O., *Many Servants: An Introduction to Deacons* (Cowley Publications: Boston, MA, 1991), p. 142).
3. Pinnock, J., 'The History of the Diaconate' in Hall, C. (ed.), *The Deacon's Ministry* (Gracewing: Leominster, 1991), pp. 9-24, at p. 20.
4. MacCulloch (2010), p. 134.

century letter of Pope Cornelius, quoted by Eusebius in his *Church History* (324). Cornelius reported that the Roman church contained fifty-two exorcists, readers and doorkeepers in addition to its priests, deacons, subdeacons and acolytes.[1]

However, the idea that these orders corresponded to 'ranks' of the clergy, and that ordination into them was sequential, was a later interpretation. Other sources, such as the third- or fourth-century *Traditio Apostolica* (once attributed to Hippolytus of Rome), suggest that while some ministries in the Roman church were conferred by the laying on of hands, others were 'charismatic', taken on by those who believed they had been given a special gift for them. The transformation of the orders of the clergy into a series of ranks was symptomatic of an increasing preoccupation with hierarchy in the late Roman church, which was to continue unabated in the Middle Ages. By the early Middle Ages, deacons tended to be defined by what they were not (priests), rather than by what they were.

From a liturgical point of view, early deacons were ministers of the sacrament of baptism and assisted the bishop or presbyters at the eucharist. Deacons were ministers of the church in the full sense, and the only functions they could not do were those specifically delegated by the bishop to the presbyters, such as presiding over the eucharist. However, deacons were 'concelebrants' of the eucharist in an important sense, their liturgical role being the critical one of mediating between bishop/presbyter and people. The presence of deacons at the celebration of the eucharist was originally a required element of the rite,[2] and a relic of this survives in the requirement for a deacon and subdeacon at high mass in the Tridentine rite used in the Roman Catholic Church before 1965.

Whilst the meaning of the diaconate was inevitably diluted by its transformation into a 'rank' in the church, there were individuals in the centuries that followed who consciously chose to remain in deacon's orders without proceeding to the priesthood. Famous examples include Alcuin, the ninth-century Northumbrian monk who became the architect of the Carolingian Renaissance; Francis of Assisi, the founder of the Franciscan Order; and Gerard Groote, the Dutch mystic and founder of the Béguinage movement. Three popes (Gregory the Great, Leo the Great and Hildebrand) were all elected whilst in deacon's orders. William Wareham, later Archbishop of Canterbury, was a deacon when he was appointed Bishop of London in 1502, and Reginald Pole was a deacon when he

1. Eusebius, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 6.43 (*Patrologia Graeca*, vol. 20, 244).
2. Dix, G., *The Shape of the Liturgy* (Dacre: London, 1945), p. 152.

was appointed Archbishop of Canterbury in 1556. The diaconate as ministry survived as an undercurrent within Christian history, and the sixteenth-century reformers took the opportunity to resurrect it. This phenomenon will be examined in Chapter 1 below. Because the minor orders were abolished in England at the Reformation, the diaconate became the most junior rank of the clergy.

On 29 September 1562, the Twenty-Third Session of the Council of Trent discussed the issue of a revived diaconate and decreed 'that the functions of holy orders from the deacon to the porter, which have been laudably received in the Church from the times of the Apostles . . . may again be restored to use in accordance with the canons'.[1] Thomas Goldwell of St Asaph was the only bishop from the Provinces of Canterbury and York in attendance, although his participation was academic, given that Elizabeth I had determined to break with the Roman church. In the end, because no instructions were ever issued on how a revival was to be practically accomplished, a renewal of the diaconate did not take place in the Roman Catholic Church until the 1960s. However, the fact that the Fathers of the Council of Trent, as well as the Protestant reformers, were discussing the diaconate was a mark of a renewed attention to the New Testament, in which deacons are very prominent.

In spite of the fact that it embraced the Reformation, the Church of England did little to revive the diaconate. The service for the making of deacons in the Ordinal of 1550 described the office of a deacon as an assistant to the priest, with a particular concern for the poor and weak:

> It perteyneth to the office of a Deacon to assiste the Prieste in devine service, and speciallye when he ministreth the holye Communion, and helpe him in distribucion thereof, and to reade holye scriptures and Homelies in the congregacion, and instructe the youth in the Cathechisme, to Baptise and preache yf he be commaunded by the Bisshop. And further more, it is his office to searche for the sicke, poore, and impotente people of the parishe, and to intimate theyr estates, names, and places where thei dwel to the Curate, that by his exhortacion they maye bee relieved by the parishe or other convenient almose.[2]

However, the Ordinal also made clear that the diaconate was a temporary ministry for clergy who expected to be ordained priest, since at a deacon's ordination the bishop prayed that deacons 'may

1. *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, ed. N.P. Tanner (Sheed and Ward: London, 1990), vol. 2, p. 742.
2. 'The forme and maner of makyng . . . Deacons' (1891), p. 280.

so wel use themselves in thys inferior offyce, that they may be found worthi to be called unto the higher ministeries in thy Church'. Nevertheless, the Ordinal deviated from mediaeval practice by insisting that a man had to remain a deacon for at least a year before his ordination to the priesthood, 'excepte for reasonable causes, it bee otherwyse seen to his ordenarie'. This left a considerable degree of latitude to diocesan bishops.

The Ordinal remained in use for less than three years before the repeal of the Edwardian and Henrician ecclesiastical legislation by Queen Mary's (reigned 1553-1558) Parliament, and when the English liturgy returned under Elizabeth I in 1559, ordination practice differed little from the pre-Reformation era. Although the bishops made attempts to improve standards in the reign of James I, it was not until Laudian efforts to reform the church in the 1620s and '30s that the year-long diaconate was widely (but by no means universally) enforced. However, a minority of clergy remained in deacon's orders for their entire careers. After the Interregnum (1649-60), when episcopacy and the threefold order of ministry were suppressed altogether, diaconal ordinations resumed. The prescriptions of the Ordinal regarding the interval between ordination to deacon's and priest's orders were still widely flouted, largely because the 1662 Act of Uniformity made it impossible, for the first time, for deacons to hold benefices. This made it imperative for men who wanted to advance their clerical careers to be in priest's orders. However, standards of conformity to the canons progressively improved until, by the early eighteenth century, the average interval between diaconal and priestly ordination was well over a year.

The eighteenth century was the era of the long-term deacon, when many men spent three years or more in deacon's orders as they waited for the patronage and preferment that would allow them to obtain a 'title' to priest's orders. Again, a minority remained in deacon's orders for their entire lives, pursuing ministries as diverse as teaching in schools and colleges, preaching, caring for chapels and undertaking foreign missionary work. Ironically, the Anglican clergyman who arguably made a greater positive impact on the world than any other in the eighteenth century, the anti-slavery campaigner Thomas Clarkson (1760-1846), felt that he had to abandon his calling in the church in order to pursue the abolitionist campaign. Ordained deacon in 1785, Clarkson underwent a conversion to abolitionism whilst a deacon that meant that he did not proceed to priest's orders, campaigning instead on behalf of William Wilberforce. However, Clarkson did not renounce his deacon's orders until ten years later,

in 1795, when he was attracted to Quakerism.[1] If deacons should be prophetic witnesses to social justice, as a recent church report on deacons has suggested,[2] no better example could be imagined than Thomas Clarkson.

By the beginning of the nineteenth century, changes in the church meant that long-term and lifelong deacons were increasingly uncommon, and the 1838 Pluralities Act forbade the clergy from pursuing secular professions. Since some eighteenth-century deacons had been less educated men who were already in employment, the law now made it difficult for deacons to exist in the traditional form. It was at this moment, however, that Thomas Arnold and many others began to call for a restoration of the diaconate to relieve the workload of the professional clergy. Advocates of the diaconate wanted to see a band of lower-middle-class men added to the clergy, to preach and assist in the running of parishes in the rapidly expanding cities, and to train as schoolmasters. A few experiments were tried in individual dioceses, and a college was set up that eventually trained over one hundred schoolmasters who were ordained deacon. However, apart from this success in education, by the end of the nineteenth century, the many proposals put forward for deacons in other ministries had come to nothing, and the number of lifelong deacons remained very small. Discussions continued into the twentieth century, but by this time the terms of the argument had changed. Talk of non-professional clergy was now focussed on expanding the priesthood, while talk of deacons moved to the question of whether women could or should be ordained to the diaconate. There was also much debate on whether deaconesses, who had existed in the Church of England since 1861, were deacons in the true, sacramental sense.

The issue was finally resolved in 1985 when General Synod voted to admit women to the diaconate, although the first women deacons were not ordained until 1987. A sudden flurry of documents and teaching on the diaconate followed, but the discussion soon turned to ordaining women to the priesthood. This occurred in 1994, leaving behind a small 'rump' of male and female deacons. General Synod took note of a report that called for the development of more 'distinctive deacons', *For Such a Time as This*, in 2001, but no positive decision was made to adopt the report's recommendations and encourage a larger body of deacons in the church. A subsequent report, *The Mission and the Ministry of the Whole Church* (2007) acknowledged that the church should encourage vocations to the

1. Brogan, H., 'Clarkson, Thomas' in *ODNB*, vol. 11, pp. 937-41.
2. *FSTT*, p. 54.

distinctive diaconate but presented this as just a small part of the Church of England's strategy for ministry. At the time of writing, the number of distinctive deacons within the Church of England remains tiny (around one hundred), with deacons mostly confined to the dioceses of Chichester, Portsmouth and London. However, all ordained ministers in the Church of England are ordained to the diaconate before they are admitted to the priesthood.

The Church of England is in communion with a number of similar churches where the diaconate has developed quite differently. In the Episcopal Church in the USA (ECUSA) and the Church of Sweden, both of which maintain the threefold order of ministry and ordain both men and women to the priesthood, the number of lifelong deacons runs into thousands. One purpose of this book is to shed light on why a distinctive diaconate has failed to prosper in the Church of England as it has in other parts of the Anglican Communion. However, it would be pre-judging the issue to assume that the diaconate is undervalued in the Church of England just because there are very few distinctive deacons. There is no *prima facie* reason why the traditional 'transitional' diaconate of one year may not be a valuable ministry in its own right. In reality, however, the vast majority of transitional deacons still serve as curates, essentially acting as priests who are unable to preside at Holy Communion.

Speaking of deacons

The use of terms such as 'distinctive deacon' and 'transitional deacon' is just one example of the linguistic difficulties into which any historical study of deacons is bound to run. These are terms of very recent coinage, while the diaconate itself is very ancient indeed. It is an irony that those who make the loudest claims in favour of the restoration of an ancient order sometimes make the heaviest use of newly coined language to refer to deacons. In the Roman Catholic Church, which revived the ministry of lifelong deacons in 1967, such deacons are referred to as 'permanent deacons'. The vast majority of permanent deacons are married men, so the permanence of their diaconal orders is necessitated by Roman Catholic Canon Law, which does not permit married men to be ordained to the priesthood in the Latin rite. The Church of England has rejected the use of the term 'permanent deacon', since there is no canonical or theological reason why an individual ordained to the diaconate could not choose, at some later time, to be ordained priest. Furthermore, every ordained minister in the Church of England is a 'permanent deacon',

since deacon's orders are permanent. In order to avoid confusion, I use the term 'lifelong deacon' in this book to refer to individuals who remained in deacon's orders, without receiving priest's orders, for the rest of their lives. The term 'distinctive deacon', currently favoured in the Church of England, seems anachronistic when applied to deacons before the twentieth century.

The term 'distinctive deacon', generally preferred to 'vocational deacon' or Karl Rahner's 'absolute deacon', emerged from the Portsmouth Report of 1981, which recommended the ordination of women to the diaconate, and it has been used ever since in the Church of England as the preferred means of distinguishing those who will remain deacons only from those who are transitional deacons. The difficulty created by the use of these terms is that they give the impression of two distinct orders of ministry, when in fact deacons are a single order. 'Transitional' could imply that men and women who are ordained deacons cease to be deacons when they are subsequently ordained priest, but the Church of England's doctrine of sequential and cumulative ordination would indicate otherwise. In this book I have spoken of individuals choosing 'to remain in deacon's orders' rather than choosing 'to remain deacons', since this would imply that priests and bishops are not deacons. Likewise, I write of the 'interval' between diaconal and priestly ordination rather than 'the duration of the diaconate', since the latter implies that a minister's diaconate comes to an end when he or she is ordained priest.

The prevalent assumption that transitional deacons are mere priests-on-probation, whose diaconal ministry is more symbolic than real, is a recent one. In telling the story of the diaconate in the Church of England, it is important to avoid the glib assumption that the transitional diaconate was 'merely' a probationary period for priests, thereby denigrating it. Just as it would be wrong to assume that pregnancy is an insignificant event in a woman's life because it is temporary, so it is wrong to disparage the experience of so-called 'transitional deacons' just because their time in deacon's orders ends in priestly ordination and the apparent sublimation of diaconal into priestly ministry. A historical approach that concentrates solely on the distinctive diaconate is in danger of underestimating the impact on priests of their diaconal ordination. Advocates of a distinctive diaconate must not be tempted to create the impression that transitional deacons and priests are not 'real' deacons, since this attitude subverts the threefold order of ministry itself.

Histories of the diaconate

The most influential account of deacons in the early church remains the Australian theologian John N. Collins's *Diakonia* (1990), which has informed almost all subsequent scholarship in the area as well as the thinking of several churches regarding a revived diaconate. Collins's work was preceded by the less academically rigorous but still influential *The Diaconate: A Full and Equal Order* by J.M. Barnett (1979), which has had a strong impact in the United States. Indeed, the extensive development of the diaconate in both the Roman Catholic Church and the Episcopal Church in the USA means that there is more English-language literature published on the diaconate in America than anywhere else. Ormonde Plater's *Many Servants: An Introduction to Deacons* (1991) includes a historical study of deacons in the ECUSA, and in the second edition (2004); Plater also provides a good overview of the recent history of the diaconate in the Anglican Communion as a whole, although his primary focus remains America.[1]

The history of deacons in the Church of England has been very little studied, and knowledge of the subject is very poor. One recent Anglican author declared that 'There is no need to say much about deacons after the fourth century', and used the wording of the ordination service for deacons in the 1662 *Book of Common Prayer* as evidence that deacons were never anything more than 'apprentice priests'.[2] Brief accounts of the history of the diaconate appeared in Mary Tanner's contribution to the report *Deacons in the Ministry of the Church* (1988), presented to General Synod,[3] as well as in the collection of essays edited by Christine Hall, *The Deacon's Ministry* (1991), in the form of an article by Jill Pinnock.[4] Subsequent official and semi-official documents, such as *For Such a Time as This* (2001) and the Diocese of Salisbury's *Distinctive Deacons* (2003), have been derivative of Mary Tanner's work and contain no new research.[5] Rosalind Brown's *Being a Deacon Today* (2004) is the only book currently in

1. Plater, O., *Many Servants: An Introduction to Deacons*, 2nd edn (Cowley Publications: Plymouth, 2004).
2. Turner, H.J.M., *Holy Orders and Completeness of the Church* (Melrose Books: Ely, 2005), p. 77.
3. *DMC*, pp. 14-18; *FSTT*, pp. 4-9.
4. Pinnock (1991), pp. 9-24.
5. *FSTT*, pp. 4-9; [Brown, R.], *The Distinctive Diaconate: A Report to the Board of Ministry, the Diocese of Salisbury* (Sarum College Press: Salisbury, 2003), pp. 43-5.

print dedicated to the diaconate in the Church of England that is not an official report, but its focus is pastoral and theological rather than historical.[1] A notable example of fine scholarship on deacons in the Church of England is David Nicholas's ground-breaking work on the training of nineteenth-century deacon-schoolmasters.[2]

Reliance on the work of Tanner and Pinnock by other authors has meant that historical knowledge of the diaconate in the Church of England has not advanced since the early 1990s. Tanner made a number of observations that are challenged in this book, since they are not supported by the evidence I have encountered. Tanner is hardly to be blamed for this, since *Deacons in the Ministry of the Church* was not intended primarily as a work of historical scholarship. However, it is regrettable that it has subsequently been treated as such, without any further effort at investigation. Tanner argued that it was the norm for deacons to be ordained priest after a few days or weeks in the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, which is not supported by the evidence. However, she conceded that a 'greatly attenuated version of a permanent diaconate existed in the Church of England, in the ancient English universities whose fellows had by statute to be in holy orders, which in many cases meant the diaconate'.[3] She offered the example of Charles Dodgson (who wrote under the name Lewis Carroll), the author of *Alice in Wonderland* (1865), as someone who remained in deacon's orders. Whilst it is true that deacons existed in the universities, this was by no means the only ministry in which deacons were engaged in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Tanner recognised that there were some categories of clergy in the Church of England in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, such as academics and government servants, who either remained in deacon's orders for a significant period of time or never proceeded to the priesthood. However, the authors of *Deacons in the Ministry of the Church* seem to have been unaware of the extensive Anglican theological literature on the diaconate produced in the nineteenth century, apart from Barry Rogerson's solitary reference to the 1878

1. Brown, R., *Being a Deacon Today: exploring a distinctive ministry in the Church and in the world* (Canterbury Press: Norwich, 2004).
2. Nicholas, D., '112 years of professional disability: an under-examined aspect of the 1846 Education Minutes', *History of Education* 39 (2010), pp. 319-41. This article was based on Nicholas's PhD Thesis, 'Derwent Coleridge (1800-83 and the Deacon Schoolmaster', Institute of Education, University of London, 2007.
3. *DMC*, p. 16.

Lambeth Conference in the Preface to the report.[1] In fact, research into the nineteenth-century call for a revival of deacons did exist at the time, in the form of Patrick H. Vaughan's unpublished 1987 doctoral thesis on the origins of non-stipendiary ministry.[2] Although Vaughan's focus was not specifically on deacons, but rather on the wider question of how the church came to authorise non-professional clergy, his and Nicholas's research was until now the only serious research into the Victorian movement for lifelong deacons.

Although no published studies of nineteenth-century deacons exist, research has been conducted into the Victorian deaconess movement, most recently by Henrietta Blackmore.[3] Research into deaconesses was stimulated by the growing recognition of the value of women's ministry in the late twentieth century, and scholars such as Blackmore have seen a process of evolution at work within the church, arguing that the deaconess movement foreshadowed the ordination of women to the priesthood in the 1990s. However, women's path to ordination was less than direct, and the status of deaconesses remained ambiguous right up to the ordination of women deacons in 1987, an act that was in itself a clear statement that deaconesses were *not* deacons. A narrow focus on the development of deacons as a byway of the study of women's ministry has the danger of obscuring the fact that two separate historical streams converged in the admission of women to the diaconate: the growth of women's ministry and the ongoing call for deacons, both men and women, in the Church of England. The former is now well understood, but the latter much less so.

The most complete account of the diaconate in the Church of England published to date has been the collection of essays *The Deacon's Ministry* (1991), edited by Christine Hall. Although these essays were inevitably coloured by the fact that making sense of the role of women deacons was a priority at the time, they are undoubtedly of lasting value. They include discussions of the theology of the diaconate from an Anglican perspective by Robert Hannaford and

1. Ibid. p. 2.
2. Vaughan, P.H., 'Non-stipendiary Ministry in the Church of England: A History of the Development of an Idea', PhD Thesis, University of Nottingham, 1987.
3. Blackmore, H., 'Autonomous Ministry and Ecclesiastical Authority: The Revival of the Female Diaconate in the Church of England, 1850-1900', DPhil Thesis, University of Oxford, 2004; Blackmore, H., *The Beginning of Women's Ministry: The Revival of the Deaconess in the 19th-century Church of England*, Church of England Record Society 14 (Church of England Record Society: London, 2007).

Antonia Lynn,[1] as well as discussions of the diaconate from the points of view of pastoral care, liturgy, education and Canon Law.[2] The volume also contained contributions from Orthodox and Roman Catholic authors. Jill Pinnock's article on the history of the diaconate offered an excellent account of the diaconate in the early church and touched upon the revival of the diaconate since the 1960s, but she spent little more than a paragraph on deacons between the end of the Middle Ages and the late twentieth century.

If the history of deacons in the Church of England between 1550 and 1987 has been woefully neglected, that is not because there are no available sources for such a history. The most useful secondary sources for a history of the diaconate are studies of ordination practices, such as Kenneth Fincham's study of the Jacobean bishops and William Marshall's study of the dioceses of Hereford and Oxford between 1660 and 1760.[3] These regional studies draw on diocesan ordination registers, but registers are of limited usefulness for discerning patterns of ordination on a national scale. Ordinations of deacons and priests were recorded separately, and since lifelong deacons were not distinguished from those who expected to go on to the priesthood, calculating the number of lifelong deacons from ordination registers would require an extremely time-consuming cross-referencing process. Even then, a priest might not be ordained in the same diocese in which he received deacon's orders.

Fortunately, the contemporary historian can draw upon the diligent work of an earlier scholar. John Venn (1834-1923) was the Master of Gonville and Caius College, Cambridge and is now most famous as the inventor of the Venn diagram. In his lifetime, however, Venn was a notable historian, editing the definitive list of alumni of Cambridge University between the foundation of the university and 1900, *Alumni Cantabrigienses* (1922-54). Although Venn began this

1. Hannaford, R., 'Towards a Theology of the Diaconate' in Hall (1991), pp. 25-44; Antonia Lynn, 'Finding Images' in Hall (1991), pp. 103-22.
2. Bardwell, E., 'The Pastoral Role of the Deacon' in Hall (1991), pp. 45-66; Burnham, A., 'The Liturgical Ministry of a Deacon' in Hall (1991), pp. 67-87; Cullen, J., 'The Educational Ministry of Deacons' in Hall (1991), pp. 89-101; Leeder, L., 'The Diaconate in the Church of England: A Legal Perspective' in Hall (1991), pp. 123-45.
3. Fincham, K., *Prelate as Pastor: The Episcopate of James I* (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 1990); Marshall, W., *Church Life in Hereford and Oxford, 1660-1760: A Study of Two Sees* (Carnegie: Lancaster, 2009), esp. pp. 158-87. See also Hayes, G.M., 'Ordination Ritual and Practice in the Welsh-English Frontier, circa 1540-1640', *Journal of British Studies* 44 (2005), pp. 713-27.

work just a year before his death, it was completed by his son, John Archibald Venn, who included as much information about alumni as possible and scoured ordination registers for the dates of their diaconal and priestly ordinations. Venn and his son thus gathered into a single place a vast amount of data on ordinations that would otherwise have been scattered in individual registers. An online version of Venn's *Alumni* now exists, the ACAD database, to which still more data has been added by contemporary editors.[1]

The ACAD database and Venn's original volumes are by no means a perfect resource, but since the vast majority of clergy between 1550 and 1900 matriculated at or graduated from Oxford and Cambridge, a significant proportion of all clergy ordained in England and Wales during this period appear in Venn's pages. Venn may have relied on imperfect records, and it must be borne in mind that Cambridge graduates were not necessarily representative of the clergy as a whole, but Venn's *Alumni* remains one of the best general sources for ordination statistics available. During the course of this book, I have endeavoured to balance my reliance on Venn with the surviving evidence for less educated clergy, who were more likely to remain in deacon's orders than the university graduates who made up the bulk of professional ministers.

In addition to the data on ordinations provided by Venn, I have drawn upon controversial literature and accounts of individual deacons, such as Cuthbert Symson and Nicholas Ferrar. However, material on deacons is meagre until the nineteenth century, when there was an explosion of literature on the subject. I have identified no less than twenty books and pamphlets published on the subject of a revived diaconate between 1841 and 1919, and this excludes the far more numerous articles in magazines and newspapers. For the purposes of this study, I have relied on *The Times* for a record of nineteenth-century convocations and public reaction to them, as well as the extensive pamphlet collections of the British Library and Cambridge University Library.

As this history approaches the present, I have relied upon official reports, online sources and, in the case of Richard Noble, the originator of the report *For Such a Time as This*, a personal interview. There is a small but important secondary literature on deacons in the period 1987-94, when the distinctive diaconate in the Church of England was almost entirely confined to women, some written

1. 'A Cambridge Alumni Database' (ACAD), *Cambridge University Library*, accessed on 27 September 2013: http://venn.lib.cam.ac.uk/Documents/acad/intro.html.

at the time and some afterwards.[1] This literature consists primarily of studies based on surveys of women deacons conducted by sociologists of religion intrigued by the unusual position of women clergy in the church, although not all of these scholars understood or appreciated the history of the diaconate. Indeed, the impression that emerges from this literature is that many of the women ordained to the diaconate during this period had little or no understanding of the theology and significance of the diaconate, since their primary calling was to the priesthood. This is hardly surprising, given that the elephant in the room in official documents such as *Deacons in the Ministry of the Church* (1988) was the unresolved question of whether women should be ordained to the priesthood.

There are a number of pitfalls for the church historian which I have endeavoured to avoid in this study. This book is neither a confessional history nor a manifesto for deacons in the Church of England; much less is it a report, official or unofficial, into the state of the diaconate in the contemporary church, because I have not undertaken any quantitative research of my own into contemporary deacons. Instead, *Inferior Office?* is an attempt to tell, objectively, the history of a marginalised institution, and a marginalised group of clergy, within the Church of England. Nevertheless, since some readers (lay and clerical) will have more than a merely academic interest in the future of the church's ministry, in the book's Conclusion I have offered two arguments based on the evidence presented in this book: the first against the idea of reviving a distinctive diaconate in the Church of England, and the second for it. This balanced approach seems preferable to transforming a historical investigation into a work of theology by advocating a single personal view. At the same time, it would be dishonest to pretend that the practice of church history does not have theological consequences, even if church historians are not theologians.

Professor Eamon Duffy, who has revolutionised the historical study of Roman Catholicism in England, has argued convincingly that a better understanding of history is good for the church: 'The

1. Aldridge, A., 'In the Absence of the Minister: Structures of Subordination in the Role of Deaconess in the Church of England', *Sociology* 21 (1987), pp. 377-92; Aldridge, A., 'Discourse on Women in the Clerical Profession: The Diaconate and Language-Games in the Church of England', *Sociology* 26 (1992), pp. 45-57; Francis, L.J. and Robbins, M., *The Long Diaconate 1987-1994: Women Deacons and the delayed Journey to Priesthood* (Gracewing: Leominster, 1999); Treasure, C., *Walking on Glass: Women Deacons Speak Out* (SPCK: London, 1991).

richness of the Church's past is a liberation, not a straitjacket'.[1] In other words, contemporary Christians should neither fear nor be constrained by history. Since the 1960s, some church leaders, both Roman Catholic and Anglican, have felt that delving into history is an irrelevance to a church that must look forward. In Duffy's view, however, an honest appraisal of the church's history will reveal multiple strands of opinion, often at odds with one another. Whilst some of these have rightly been consigned to obscurity in the contemporary church, others may have a great deal to teach the church in the present. We cannot naïvely assume that recent ideas are new, for they may have been suggested many times before; nor should we assume that novel solutions are better than those that were proposed in the past.

At the same time, there is sometimes a tendency in the Church of England for theological writers to depend almost entirely on the last report prepared by the House of Bishops of General Synod, instead of delving into the deeper historical and theological background to an idea. The parallel tendency in the Roman Catholic Church, which Duffy criticises, is the belief that the statements of the current pope should be relied upon to the exclusion of the magisterium as a whole.[2] The great treasure that the Church of England (and the Anglican Communion generally) shares with the Roman Catholic Church is a centuries-old tradition that can be drawn upon as an almost inexhaustible source for challenging current practice and assumptions inherited from the recent past. The past can often provide the most powerful witness to challenge the wrongheaded assumptions of the present. One example is the mediaeval practice of using church naves for secular purposes, an historical argument now used in many dioceses to challenge the Victorian view that the entirety of a church is, and must always be treated as, sacred space.

The significance of history to the present is an issue particularly acute in relation to the revival of the diaconate. If Anglicans assume that the diaconate should be revived at all, should that revival be an attempt to reinstate the diaconate as it existed, say, in the early church of the fourth century? An antiquarian revival of something so ancient may not be possible in contemporary society, or even desirable. Or should the Church of England simply establish a diaconate that fulfils the vision set out in the Ordinal of 1550 as a lifelong ministry? Or should it revive the diaconate in the form that it existed in the eighteenth century as an option for a minority of

1. Duffy, E., *Faith of Our Fathers* (Continuum: London, 2004), p. x.
2. Ibid. pp. 78-87.

clergy doing something other than parish ministry? The resuscitation of the diaconate has been a work in progress for so long (it began in 1839) that theological ideas have changed dramatically during the course of the process – yet what earlier advocates of revival said and believed must be taken seriously by contemporary exponents of the same idea.

Recently, Martyn Percy has rightly criticised accounts of the development of ministry in the church that try to establish 'one single meta-narrative of how orders came to be' by eliminating competing interpretations. Thus J.M. Barnett's assurance in *The Diaconate: A Full and Equal Order* (1995) that 'The charisma of the Holy Spirit was fully at work in the Church, guiding its development' would suggest that 'all "histories" of the diaconate can only be read theologically'.[1] A church historian who asserts that the development of the church is guided by the Holy Spirit not only cuts off church history from mainstream historical scholarship but also forestalls critical analysis: that which was guided by the Holy Spirit is presumably not open to criticism. Percy observes that Barnett's 'providentialist' reading of church history is used to support the restoration of the diaconate in the contemporary church, as if the re-emergence of any aspect of the early church in the present is automatically validated by the assumption that the Holy Spirit is working to perfect the church.

In reality, Percy argues, the re-emergence of the diaconate 'may also be part of a complex and problematic ecclesial economy'.[2] Clearly, he has in mind here the Church of England's revival of the diaconate in the 1980s, which had as much (or more) to do with accommodating the aspirations of women who felt a call to the priesthood as it did with valuing the diaconate for its own sake. Likewise, the existence of lifelong deacons in the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was a consequence of bishops' concerns about the inadequate education of certain ordinands, or their need to legitimise the ministry of lay readers in remote parishes, and did not reflect a coherent theology of the diaconate. Yet the use of the diaconate as a tool to enable new and creative models of ministry in the church is itself a part of its history, and the fact that the purpose of the diaconate was rarely articulated in this period does not mean that it was not serving a purpose. The fact that

1. Barnett, J.M., *The Diaconate: A Full and Equal Order*, 3rd edn (Trinity Press: Harrisburg, PA, 1995), p. 44.
2. Percy, M., *Clergy: The Origin of Species* (Continuum: London, 2006), pp. 19-20.

many men chose to remain deacons for a period of several years, and even permanently, demonstrates that the diaconate was thought of as a fruitful identity enabling a number of possible ministries. Deacons existed, and therefore the actions of deacons constituted their ministry.

Such an approach is open to the accusation that the historian is reifying a diaconate that did not exist in anything like the same sense in which the diaconate exists in the Church of England today. However, it is in the nature of church history (and indeed religious history in general) that ideas and practices pass in and out of active life, their continuity enabled by the process we call 'tradition', which allows ideas and practices to be passed on even when a particular era or generation has lost touch with their original meaning. So, for instance, the parish communion that takes place in most Anglican churches on a Sunday in the twenty-first century did not exist in the eighteenth century in a form that most contemporary worshippers would recognise. But its elements, and the more ancient traditions upon which it draws, have existed in every age since the Apostles. The contemporary theology of the diaconate is a revival – but any revival must have genuine historical sources.

The assumption that no 'real' diaconate existed in the Church of England before the late twentieth century may be one reason why nothing more than a superficial attempt has been made to tell the story of deacons in England and Wales. Another reason may be the intense focus on the ministry of bishops that has been part of recent debates about the consecration of women to the episcopate. Whatever the cause, it is my hope that this book will mark the beginning of more serious investigation into the history of the diaconate, and indeed into a related field: the marginalised clergy. Clergy have traditionally been seen as a privileged group in history, but as the example of under-educated deacons demonstrates, there were marginalised individuals among the clergy as well, undertaking less remunerative ministries or unable to attain preferment. It is a contention of this book that this portion of the clergy is under-studied and worthy of further investigation.

The most recent fashion amongst writers on the diaconate in the Church of England has been to eschew historical analysis in favour of a return to the New Testament sources. I shall outline current theological developments in detail in Chapter 5 below. This change of emphasis from the 1980s is perhaps understandable, given the absence of any good quality historical research on the diaconate in the established church. However, it is questionable whether such

an approach is truly Anglican, given the Anglican emphasis on the importance of tradition. If the diaconate in the Church of England has a history of its own – and this book makes that argument – then it is incumbent on Anglican theologians to take that history and spirituality into account when considering the future direction of the diaconate. If the diaconate is to be reinvented for the twenty-first century, then previous incarnations of the diaconate cannot simply be dismissed without argument.

Structure and scope of the book

The book's approach is chronological, beginning in 1550 and dividing the history of the diaconate into five eras: the Reformation period, from the Edwardian reform beginning in 1549 to the outbreak of the English Civil War in 1642; the 'long eighteenth century', from the Restoration of the Monarchy in 1660 to the Great Reform Act of 1832; the Victorian era (1837-1901); the twentieth century to 1994; and finally, the era of the contemporary distinctive diaconate from 1994 to the present day. The book's primary focus is the Church of England (including Wales before 1920), and it is not my intention to provide a history of deacons in the Anglican Communion as a whole. However, I refer from time to time to the impact of changes in other churches on the Church of England, especially in relation to the Lambeth Conferences of the nineteenth century. Furthermore, it is helpful at times to compare developments in the Church of England with those in its geographically proximate sister churches, the Church in Wales and the Scottish Episcopal Church.

Chapter 1 examines the theological sources for the 'Making of Deacons' in the Ordinal of 1550 and presents an analysis of ordination practice in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, based on the Venn data and other sources. The chapter considers the significance of deacons to Gospeller congregations in the reign of Queen Mary, drawing on the evidence in John Foxe's *Actes and Monuments* (1583). It presents evidence that the new theology embodied by the Ordinal did create genuine vocational deacons, even if the words of the Ordinal implied that the diaconate was only a temporary ministry. However, although Elizabethan apologists for conformity such as Richard Hooker upheld the need for diaconal orders as a key part of their defence of the threefold order of ministry, the Elizabethan and Jacobean church generally treated the diaconate no more seriously than the mediaeval church had done. The liturgical theology of Lancelot Andrewes and George

Herbert, combined with the Laudian bishops' reform of ordination practices, made space for a better appreciation of the diaconate in the 1620s and '30s, a process that culminated in the ordination of Nicholas Ferrar (perhaps the Church of England's most famous lifelong deacon), but was cut short by the English Civil War.

Chapter 2 presents evidence that lifelong deacons formed a sizeable minority of clergy (around 10 per cent) between the 1662 Act of Uniformity and the middle of the eighteenth century. The most common form of ministry in which these deacons were engaged was teaching in schools and universities. Furthermore, long-term deacons who waited three years or more before being ordained priest were common in this period. The chapter examines the ministries in which these lifelong and long-term deacons were engaged, and argues that the diaconate was a means for eighteenth-century bishops to deploy less educated men in parish ministry, even if no coherent theology of the diaconate can be said to have existed during this period. Ordination to the diaconate 'made honest men' of lay readers whose ministry was only partially authorised by canon. The eighteenth century was also a time when intriguing experiments with diaconal theology and ministry were attempted at the fringes of the Anglican tradition by the Non-Jurors and Methodists.

Chapter 3 examines the repeated calls for a revival of the order of deacons that began with Thomas Arnold in 1839 and continued throughout the nineteenth century. Victorian legislation made it harder for a diaconate of the kind that existed in the eighteenth century to survive, but a movement for a renewed diaconate commanded widespread support from both clergy and laity. A college for the training of deacon-schoolmasters, St Mark's, Chelsea, was established in 1841. The issue of deacons was raised at the Convocation of Canterbury in 1861 and a resolution was achieved in 1884. By 1888, however, divisions on the issue meant that discussions ended in stalemate, and the matter was shelved until the early twentieth century. The chapter examines the various arguments on both sides and tries to explain how, with so much support behind it from both clergy and laity of all shades of churchmanship, the Victorian campaign came to nothing and is now virtually forgotten.

Chapter 4 examines the call for the renewal of the diaconate at the Lambeth Conferences in the twentieth century and the reasons why that renewal was less successful in the Church of England than in other provinces of the Anglican Communion, in spite of a handful of bold experiments. It will trace the process by which General Synod approved the admission of women to deacon's orders in 1987,

and the subsequent attempts to recover a coherent theology of the diaconate to enable the ministry of women to be as wide as possible in the church. The chapter will examine the key documents involved in this process and assess the extent to which late-twentieth-century Anglican thinking on the diaconate valued the diaconate for its own sake, or made use of it as a vehicle to deliver the aspirations of women seeking ordination.

Chapter 5 deals with the development of Anglican thinking on the diaconate since the admission of women to priest's orders in 1994, concentrating on the report presented to General Synod in 2001, *For Such a Time as This*, and the subsequent report, *The Mission and Ministry of the Whole Church* (2007). The chapter will examine the reasons behind General Synod's reluctance to endorse *For Such a Time as This* and the debate that was ignited by both reports. Finally, the Conclusion draws upon the evidence of history to present the twin cases for and against an active revival of the distinctive diaconate in the Church of England.