

Churching

One tradition which was followed in a limited way in Chinnor was the churching of women. This tradition acknowledged the dangers of childbirth and the constant threat it posed to women's health. Analysis of the entries made for some interesting reading and speculation as to the significance of the ritual and its place in the spiritual lives of the residents. By cross-checking with the baptismal register and the burial register, the role of the church did not appear to be a constant factor in residents' lives. Because of the church records being incomplete, it was difficult to form a firm impression about the role of the church within the community. In chapter three, records highlighted the delay in infant baptism in spite of the high infant mortality rate, and with the churching of women a couple of anomalies have also been identified. From the *Record of Church Services* from 1907 until 1924, 20 women were churched following childbirth.

Ellen Peacham was churched in May 1917 although her baby was not recorded in the baptisms register, nor in the burial register, however, in March 1919 she was churched again and the baby was baptised in April. In 1920, Kathleen Shrimpton was not recorded as having been churched, but brought the baby for baptism in November and, in 1924, she was churched and the baby baptised in November. Similarly, Mrs. Barratt was churched in April 1921, but her baby was not recorded on the baptism record. Of course, the records may be incomplete as demonstrated by Rosa Gray's entries, having been churched in September 1913, and her baby baptised in October when the baby's death was recorded on December 13th. However, the burial records show an interment on October the 20th. One point which might be raised here was the manner of recording the service of churching in the records.

Although the service was an established part of the liturgy, the entries in the register during the period 1914-1927 suggested an interesting approach to the concept of the service. The names of the women were entered in very small, sometimes undecipherable writing, in a corner of the ledger under the remarks column, and omitted the woman's or husband's Christian name. For example, 'churching Mrs. Smith'. Whilst under the Reverend Moxon, churching was recorded as a service under the appropriate section. Whether it could be suggested that this variance in recording reflected the attitude of the officiating clergyman is impossible to say, but the difference was clear in the records. The churching of women has been part of the church's liturgy since 1552 in a variety of forms, and whilst it is a service of thanksgiving for the safe delivery from childbirth, it also marked the mothers return to the church congregation and the community. From 1907 to 1931 a total of 31 women were churched at St. Andrew's. Unfortunately, there were gaps in the register, but churching appeared to have been resumed in 1941 and 1946.