



James Mayne [cce-id 70753], curate of Bethnal Green

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Abstract

The story of James Mayne, curate of Bethnal Green between 1823 and 1842, has been highlighted by Patsy Kensit in the BBC1 programme *Who Do You Think You Are?* It provides a fascinating insight into the problems posed for the Church of England in the East End of London by rapidly expanding population and the consequent social problems in the first half of the nineteenth century. Mayne was also a literate, one of the non-University educated clergy, and he provides an example of the careers of a group of clergy often neglected in the history of the Church.

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Article

- [1] Genealogy sometimes throws a spotlight on obscure individuals who do not feature in the history books but whose lives exemplify important aspects of society which might otherwise go unrecorded. So it is with James Mayne (d. 1851) whose remarkable story was investigated by his descendant Patsy Kensit with the help of the team responsible for *Who Do You Think You Are?*, in the programme first broadcast on BBC1 on 13 August 2008.
- [2] James Mayne was one of the humbler ministers of the Church of England. He never rose to high office, nor did he leave any printed work. He lived at a time when most Anglican clergy were educated at Oxford or Cambridge and were part of a well-defined social élite. Yet Mayne himself did not attend university and, until Archbishop William Howley stepped in, he held no degree. Accordingly, for most of his career, he formed part of a non-graduate minority within the clergy, an underclass known somewhat

derisively as 'literate', who could rarely aspire to the more lucrative livings – if they aspired to a living at all – and who frequently carried the most unenviable workloads. For nineteen years, from 1823 to 1842, Mayne was the stipendiary curate of St Matthew, Bethnal Green, one of the largest and most socially deprived parishes in England. There, as the resident minister in place of the absentee [rector](#) of the parish, he experienced the horrors of urban conditions on the eve of the Victorian Age – mass poverty following the collapse of the silk industry, overcrowding, the arrival of cholera, political agitation and unrest, crime (including body-snatching from his own churchyard), and what came to be known as 'spiritual destitution' resulting from the failure of the Church of England to provide for the teeming population in its care. Yet he lived long enough to experience radical changes, many of them led by his superior, Charles James Blomfield, the reformist [Bishop](#) of London, as the Church sought to come to terms with industrial urban society. At Bethnal Green a vigorous programme of church building was set in hand, with the result that the pastoral care of the parish, which was provided by James Mayne almost single-handed until 1831, was being delivered in 1853 by no less than twenty-two clergymen based at twelve separate churches, each named after one of the twelve apostles.

[3] Mayne's clerical career began in December 1814 when he was ordained a deacon by George Henry Law, [bishop](#) of Chester. At the same time he was licensed to serve as a curate in the tiny parish of Stoke, a few miles from Chester. In September 1815 he was ordained a priest.¹ These facts, and the course of Mayne's subsequent career, have come to light thanks to the Clergy of the Church of England Database. However, Mayne was a late entrant to the Church's ministry; he was around the age of thirty-nine at the time of his ordination. Nothing is known as yet of his earlier life, from his birth around 1775 to the birth of his daughter, Isabella Georgina Mayne, at Chelsea around 1813.² Even the record of his marriage, to Isabella Webster, has so far eluded discovery.³

[4] Mayne's late entry to a clerical career may reflect the difficulties in the way of those who lacked a degree or the means to afford the high cost of a university education. Some bishops, including Blomfield, sought to make the clergy a graduate profession, and only ordained non-graduates in exceptional circumstances.⁴ At this time non-graduates were often seen as a problem within the Church; only later in the century would they begin to be perceived as a solution – hard-working pastors who could reach the urban working class more effectively than gentlemen educated in the universities. The percentage of non-graduates amongst the clergy has been variously assessed, and the progress of the Clergy of the Church of England Database will doubtless promote access to firmer statistics. However, in most of England non-graduates probably represented around a quarter of the clergy towards the time of Mayne's ordination. The exception was the north-west of England, and parts of Wales, where they comprised as much as a half or two-thirds of the clergy.⁵ In the huge [diocese](#) of Chester, which encompassed Cheshire, Lancashire and large parts of Yorkshire, Cumberland and Westmorland, around 60 per cent of the clergy ordained by Beilby Porteus ([bishop](#) of Chester 1776–87) were non-graduates.⁶

[5] The need to staff the many poor livings in the [diocese](#), not least in the growing industrial areas of Lancashire, encouraged a more inclusive acceptance of non-graduate clergy and focussed the minds of successive bishops of Chester on their training. Ordination candidates were expected to be competent in Latin and Greek and to have a good theological knowledge whether derived from grammar school or university education or otherwise through private study; interviews and examinations might be part of the selection process.⁷ At Chester towards the end of the eighteenth century Bishops Porteus and William Cleaver both issued long reading lists for non-graduate candidates. [Bishop](#) Law, in the year after he ordained James Mayne as a priest, founded St Bees Theological College, the Church's first college for the training of clergy outside the universities of Oxford and Cambridge. Chester was therefore an ideal [diocese](#) to give Mayne an entrée to a clerical career. His appreciation was expressed in the name he chose for his daughter, whom he baptised at Stoke in January 1816. She was christened with the Latin name of the [diocese](#), Cestria.⁸

[6] With its tiny population of 120 and modest curate's stipend of £50 per annum, the parish of Stoke was no more than a stepping stone in Mayne's career. His last entry in the parish registers is dated October 1816. He surfaces next as the curate of two associated parishes consolidated in a union for the duration of the current incumbency (a process unique to the [diocese](#) of Norwich), Great and Little Witchingham, to the north-west of Norwich, in July 1818.⁹ In 1821 he was duly licensed by Henry Bathurst, [bishop](#) of Norwich to serve in this capacity, with a stipend of £100 per annum and the use of the [vicarage](#) house at Great Witchingham, with its stables and garden. This was at the [nomination](#) of Dr Thomas Jeans, the incumbent, backed by letters testimonial to Mayne's piety, sobriety, honesty, diligence and doctrinal orthodoxy, signed by three neighbouring clergymen, including Dr Augustine Bulwer of Heydon Hall, [rector](#) of Heydon, who was to prove a significant friend and [patron](#).¹⁰

[7] After two quiet country parishes, the transition of Mayne, with his wife and at least three young daughters, to the gruelling work and urban squalor of Bethnal Green is very remarkable. He clearly sought the post of curate on his own initiative, being previously unknown to the [rector](#) of St Matthew's, Joshua King. King received Mayne's application, backed by a reference from Augustine Bulwer, in December 1822, and wrote in some perplexity to Brasenose College, Oxford, [patron](#) of the living, to ask if anything could be ascertained about Mayne, his character and religious beliefs.¹¹ Mayne took up the post in July 1823, although more than five years were to pass before he received [Bishop](#) Blomfield's licence, confirming his stipend of £150 per annum plus residential use of the parsonage house.¹²

[8] Bethnal Green in 1823 comprised the single teeming parish of St Matthew. During Mayne's [curacy](#), rapid population growth and industrial collapse made it an urban slum, a focus of interest for sanitary reformers such as Southwood Smith and Edwin Chadwick as well as for social and political commentators, and a pressing concern to the parish in its operation of the poor law. The population of Bethnal Green in 1821 stood at 45,676, rising to 62,018 in 1831 and to 74,088 in 1841.¹³ Its economy was heavily dependent on silk-weaving, largely carried out on looms in overcrowded domestic houses. Evidence was given to the Select Committee on the Silk Trade in 1832 that 12,000 of the 16,000 Spitalfields looms were located in Bethnal Green; with some three persons to a loom, towards 36,000 of the Bethnal Green population were engaged in silk-weaving.¹⁴ This was, however, an industry in rapid decline. The repeal in 1824 of the Spitalfields Acts and the removal in 1826 of import restrictions opened the market to foreign competition, leading to a steady drop in wages and to high levels of unemployment. Poor housing was another feature of Bethnal Green. It was reported in 1838 that nowhere in London were there so many low-rented houses, with the vast majority of the population living in small, badly-built homes, densely packed together.¹⁵ Unmade and muddy roads and alleys, an almost total lack of drainage and sewerage and a variety of squalid and noxious trades produced a dire effect on health. In a detailed street-by-street report published in 1848, Hector Gavin recorded the 'filthy cesspools and privies which everywhere pollute the surface of this dirty parish', the intermittent water supply (twice weekly for two hours at a time) commonly with one standpipe serving three or four homes and sometimes as many as thirty, overcrowded homes with rooms sleeping six or nine and sometimes as many as fourteen, and everywhere dust and garbage heaps, filth and foul smells. The Town District, which included the church of St Matthew and the parsonage house where Mayne lived, was no better than the rest, being densely crowded with no open spaces whatever. The District boasted only two water closets, one of which was in the parsonage house, but even this drained into a cesspool. Elsewhere in the District, there was one privy to two houses or more.¹⁶ Gavin went on to show that the average age at death for the labouring people of Bethnal Green was only sixteen, with more than a quarter of the population succumbing to epidemic disease. There was also a prevailing effect on health in general: '... it is notorious, that an enormous proportion of the people are unhealthy, without vigour or physical strength, pallid and cachetic, stunted in their growth...'¹⁷ James Mayne would have been acutely aware of these conditions, not least through the innumerable burials which he performed, day after day, in St Matthew's crowded graveyard and perhaps, too, through the death of his daughter Cestria, buried in 1827 at the age of twelve.¹⁸

[9] The spiritual care of the people of Bethnal Green was the responsibility of the [rector](#), while the civil management of the parish (including highways and poor relief) fell to the vestry, representing the ratepayers.¹⁹ Public vestry meetings could be rowdy affairs, with up to 1,000 members of the public in attendance on one occasion in 1818. Joshua King, the autocratic [rector](#) of Bethnal Green from 1809 to 1861, fought a constant battle with a faction of his vestry, which controlled the maintenance of the church and graveyard, the appointment of the [clerk](#), the organist and the sexton and was responsible for paying his own salary. His bitterest foe was Joseph Merceron, whose corrupt management of parish funds became notorious. King managed to have him convicted in 1818 for misappropriation of parish funds and licensing public houses used for debauchery, but Merceron recovered to chair vestry meetings again from 1826 and to become one of the chief landlords in the parish.²⁰ In 1823, while Mayne's application for the post of curate lay on King's desk, the feud led to an act of parliament to establish a select vestry with only 100 vestrymen. However, the first election meeting proved tumultuous: King, who was in the chair, reported colourfully to both the [bishop](#) of London and the principal of Brasenose:

I was assailed on every side with the vilest calumny and abuse, with hissing, hollwing, shouting and most violent exclamations ... for about three hours ... several of the creatures approached in menacing attitude and said 'they were better fellows than me, they would not be bullied and dictated to by me', [and] added 'Mr [Rector](#) I am going to piss – Mr [Rector](#) I am going to s—t'!²¹

[10] At the next meeting the following day the Riot Act was read. King drew the conclusion that unless some remedy were found, he would be driven from Bethnal Green, as was his predecessor, William Loxham ([rector](#) 1766–1809), who was driven out after less than six months, never to set foot in his parish again.²²

- [11] James Mayne began work as the curate of Bethnal Green only five weeks later.²³ For the next five years Joshua King shared the work of the parish with him for part of the year. However, King had inherited the family living of Woodchurch, Cheshire, on the death of his father in 1820, and increasingly resided there, returning only periodically to London.²⁴ After 1828 King left his bed of nails at Bethnal Green entirely to his curate, evidently concluding that Mayne provided a safe pair of hands.²⁵
- [12] Services at St Matthew occupied much of Mayne's energies at Bethnal Green. Services were performed every Sunday, morning and evening, each with a sermon. On the first Sunday of every month there was Holy Communion, as well as on Christmas Day, Good Friday, Easter Sunday and Whitsunday. During the week prayers were said on Wednesdays and Fridays, and there was a daily quota of marriages, baptisms, funerals and churchings following childbirth.²⁶ The church was said in 1823 to accommodate only 1,500 out of a population expanding towards 50,000.²⁷ Mayne could therefore expect to preach to capacity audiences and there was pressure for more seating and indeed for new churches. Other duties involved in pastoral care would probably have included parochial visiting, care of the sick and dying, the administration of charity and an involvement in education, in association with the National School opened at St Matthew in 1819.²⁸
- [13] More than any other source, the parish registers of St Matthew reveal the incredible burden of work which James Mayne sustained. From 1828 to 1831 he was the sole clergyman at St Matthew, performing each year some 800 christenings, 180 marriages and 670 funerals. The work was unremitting, day after day without a break, with funerals even on Christmas Day. It was also intense. There were days at which he officiated at as many as thirty or even forty christenings, or as many as ten funerals, though only a tiny minority of these involved services in the church as well as in the churchyard.²⁹ Mayne's bold signature advances resolutely through the registers, tallying the burials which filled the graveyard to near its capacity of 50,000 by 1848, including many thousands of burials at which Mayne officiated.³⁰
- [14] To this exceptional workload Mayne added additional work, which also served to boost his income. His salary, paid by the [Rector](#) and confirmed at his licensing in 1828, was £150 per annum, a significant level for a curate at this time. To this he added occasional income. In 1823, for example, he was awarded seven guineas for preparing the annual [bishop's](#) transcript of the voluminous parish register.³¹ He also netted £21 per annum from a parish charity, Margareta Browne's gift, which provided for the distribution of prayer books, Bibles and tracts to children at the feast of Epiphany. Mayne was required to read prayers and lessons and catechise the children one day in the month. At the Epiphany he preached a sermon on the calling of the Gentiles and examined the children, giving Bibles and prayer books to the most deserving.³² In 1829 the afternoon lectureship became vacant, with responsibility for officiating and preaching at the Sunday afternoon service. The appointment lay with the vestry. Candidates were required to preach probationary sermons prior to the election. With no degree to his name, Mayne outdid the rival candidate, Rev. John Ayre, [MA](#), classical tutor to the Church Missionary College at Islington, and was appointed to succeed the Rev. Dr. William John Lowfield Fancourt in the lectureship. Mayne had clearly won the support of the fractious vestry and was duly congratulated on the 'flattering manner' of his appointment. Joshua King also wrote from Woodchurch to congratulate him on achieving unity of doctrine in the parish by occupying the pulpit both morning and afternoon. He added that the appointment would contribute materially to Mayne's comfort from a pecuniary point of view. [Bishop](#) Blomfield's licence for the lectureship duly followed, backed by a testimonial to Mayne's 'good life and conversation' and sound doctrine signed by the rectors of Stepney and Whitechapel and by Henry Handley Norris, a well-known high churchman associated with the Hackney Phalanx, whose approval of Mayne possibly gives a hint of Mayne's own churchmanship.³³
- [15] By 1831 Mayne's excessive workload, or rather its effect on the spiritual welfare of his parishioners, was becoming a matter for concern to the [bishop](#) of London. Following a meeting with Mayne at London House, Blomfield wrote to Joshua King in December 1831, urging the appointment of an assistant curate. 'This state of things', he argued, 'of course excites great dissatisfaction as it is quite impossible for any one clergyman, however active and zealous, to look after the spiritual needs of such a population.' He dismissed the occasional help given by another clergyman, Thomas Davies, whose bodily infirmity prevented him from taking any active part in work such as parish visiting. Mayne, he added, would not object to a deduction from his income of £40 or £50 to contribute to the new post and he trusted that King would add as much again.³⁴ King pointed out in a blustering reply that Mayne was perfectly equal to all the duties of the parish and had even complained of a want of employment. To fill up his 'vacant hours' Mayne had even accepted the chaplaincy of a lunatic asylum and had established a private school:

No man can be more popular or give more universal satisfaction than he does – no man can have provided better for the occasional duties which he could not personally discharge than he has done – why then, as there is no ground for complaint, should the harmony of the parish be endangered by the introduction of a person who might create jealousies and conflicting interests?

[16] He added that Mayne decidedly objected to having an assistant.³⁵

[17] In a terse response, Blomfield threatened to declare King's Bethnal Green living void unless he fell into line, evoking in turn an explosion from King against 'our Lordly Despot, an exact counterpart of the notorious Bonner'.³⁶ In addition the [Bishop](#) carpeted Mayne at London House concerning the Lunatic Asylum, arguing that it was impossible that 'other avocations' were compatible with the proper care of the parish and demanding the appointment of an assistant who would receive part of Mayne's salary.³⁷ Mayne next proposed the appointment of Thomas Davies as assistant curate, drawing down further censure from the [bishop](#) and the suspension of Davies from officiating without an episcopal licence. Mayne was summoned again to London House in May, when he must have calmed the wrath of his abrupt and determined superior. Whether infirm or not, Davies was licensed as assistant stipendiary curate with a salary of £75 per annum in July 1832.³⁸ From this time onwards Mayne had regular assistance in the parish and he achieved it without diminution of his salary. The report of the Commission on Ecclesiastical Revenues in 1835 shows that King, the absentee [rector](#), received a gross income from the parish of £614. From this he provided £225 in salaries to the curates; Mayne continued to receive £150 per annum as senior curate, while Davies received £75 per annum as his assistant.³⁹

[18] Throughout his time at Bethnal Green the most pressing issues for James Mayne were poverty and the lack of facilities for the spiritual care of the burgeoning population. In May 1824 he expressed to the vestry his support for the construction of an iron gallery at St Matthew to increase accommodation. The scheme had already been sanctioned in 1819 with the award of a grant of £350 by the Incorporated Church Building Society but nothing had been done. The project was finally implemented in 1824, providing 600 extra free seats and raising the capacity of the church to 2,000.⁴⁰ Mayne also proposed the purchase of additional ground to extend the overcrowded churchyard, though the vestry declined to levy a rate to meet the cost.⁴¹ The need for additional churches was also pressing. When Mayne came to Bethnal Green in 1823, St Matthew was the only Anglican church in the parish, apart from the Episcopal Chapel for the Conversion of the Jews. However the Church Building Commissioners had contemplated building two new churches in the parish as early as 1819, with support from the [bishop](#) of London, then William Howley.⁴² One church was eventually built, St John. Designed by Sir John Soane and consecrated in 1828, this provided seating for another 2,000 of the parishioners.⁴³ St John was not assigned its own district until 1837 and until this time remained in close association with St Matthew and its vestry. Mayne was therefore directly involved in this new church. In July 1828, for instance, we find him in correspondence with Sir John Soane about seating in the new church. 'Mr. Soane presents his compliments to the Rev. Mr. Mayne and in answer to his note begs to inform him that plans for the pews in the new chapel at Bethnal Green are being prepared and shall be forwarded to him as soon as possible.' It fell to Mayne to rate the pews at St John (apart from 790 free seats) and to submit his account of the pews and pew income to Brasenose College as [patron](#) of the parish.⁴⁴

[19] The main impulse for church extension came however from [Bishop](#) Blomfield. In 1839 he launched the Bethnal Green Fund, with an appeal under the title 'Spiritual destitution of the parish of Bethnal Green'. It pointed to the growing population, estimated at 70,000, still only served by three churches (including the Episcopal Jews' Chapel) with five clergymen. 'It is scarcely possible to imagine an equal amount of population, in a christian country, more destitute of the means of religious and moral instruction.' Blomfield's scheme envisaged the building of ten additional churches equipped with clergymen and schools.⁴⁵ Mayne was included in the Committee to promote subscriptions. He collected money at St Matthew and around the parish and himself contributed five guineas.⁴⁶

[20] The first stone of the first of the new churches, St Peter, was laid in August 1840 by the Lord Mayor, prayers having first been offered by James Mayne. However, Bethnal Green lived up to its unruly reputation and the ceremony was marred by a jeering crowd which let loose an ox to disrupt the proceedings.⁴⁷ During Mayne's last years at Bethnal Green the building work advanced rapidly. By 1843, the year after he left the parish, four churches had been consecrated; by 1853 Bethnal Green had twelve churches with ten schools and 22 clergymen.⁴⁸

- [21] In promoting church extension Blomfield had drawn a link between spiritual destitution, poverty and vice. His appeal referred to Bethnal Green as a parish which had become 'the resort of persons who, from abject poverty or vicious habits, desire to live secluded from observation'. The vestry at St Matthew took a similar view. A committee reported approvingly in 1831 on the provision of free seating at St John, arguing that 'whatever tends to allure the poor to a place of public worship on the Sabbath Day tends also to their moral improvement and thus by the inculcation of religious precepts effectively reduces the parochial expenditure, it being universally proved that a neglect of public worship on the Lord's Day leads to indolence, extravagance and all those vices by which pauperism is produced and misery engendered'.⁵² Mayne would have been acutely conscious of crime at Bethnal Green, being obliged to move the parish safe from his parsonage house to the workhouse for greater security, and to face up to the evil of grave-robbing from the churchyard for anatomy teaching.⁵³ In 1826 he had to present evidence against the sexton, a watchman, a gravedigger and others after bodies were disinterred, including the grave of a young woman whose head had been cut off and her child carried away.⁵⁴ Mayne was aware, however, that poverty and vice did not necessarily spring from spiritual destitution but could have political and economic causes. This was abundantly clear to him in the destitution of the Spitalfield weavers.
- [22] The removal of import restrictions on foreign silk in 1826 brought the Spitalfields silk industry into decline, lowering wages and throwing weavers into unemployment as looms lay idle. Mayne took an active part in providing relief. In February 1827 the vestry sent him, with the vestry [clerk](#), to implore the help of [Bishop](#) Blomfield, who was not yet translated to London from Chester but already active in a Committee for the Relief of the Distressed Manufacturing Parishes.⁵⁵ In the following years the parish was in constant difficulties as expenses for outdoor relief soared, while the number of inmates in the parish workhouse rose from 807 in the year 1826–7 to 1,100 in September 1829.⁵⁶ Large loans had to be taken out by the parish and special measures were introduced to put the poor to work breaking up stone and granite for the use of Mr McAdam for road building.⁵⁷ In January 1829 Mayne chaired a meeting to set up a Committee to relieve the sufferings of the distressed poor in the silk districts of Spitalfields and Bethnal Green.⁵⁸
- [23] By 1832, when the Select Committee on the Silk Trade collected its evidence, the situation was much worse. The poor in relief of parish outdoor relief had risen from 1,319 in 1828 to 6,218 in 1832 and there were over 1,160 in the workhouse. John Ballance, a silk manufacturer who had known Spitalfields for forty years, gave harrowing testimony to the situation in the winter of 1831–2 when five to six thousand looms stood idle, throwing 18,000 persons into unemployment. He reported children crying for bread, families without bed or furniture and scarcely any clothes to cover them and nothing but a heap of straw in the corner of a room to lie upon. He also testified to a change in public morals, a new recklessness of character in which virtue and good principles had been lost. For many of those still in work Sunday was no longer a day of rest but a necessary day of labour, given the fall in wages. He noted too a political revolution as government measures were blamed for the distress: 'I do not in the least exaggerate when I say there is a deadly hatred working in many thousands of them to the Government of their country, which presents a contrast as striking as it is painful to their former known loyalty and attachment'.⁵⁹
- [24] Adding to the crisis, cholera reached England for the first time late in 1831 and reached the East End of London in February 1832. The Vestry of Bethnal Green established a Local Board of Health, but it was unable to prevent the sickness breaking out in the parish workhouse, said to be housing 1,200–1,300 people although its comfort capacity was not more than six to seven hundred. A workshop in the house was set up as an infirmary and, by order of the secretary of state, all the able-bodied were turned out on outdoor relief.⁶⁰ With more than 6,000 paupers on the books the parish could no longer cope. In February 1832 two women were arrested for breaking the windows of an overseer's house after being refused aid, and in March a mob of 500 threatened to demolish the workhouse.⁶¹ The unrest fused with agitation for the passage of the electoral Reform Bill. Here, too, James Mayne was active. At a meeting of his parishioners in 1831, his had been the first name put forward for a committee to lobby the King in favour of the Reform Bill, 'a measure fraught with benefit to the whole community as the means of restoring to the House of Commons the entire confidence of the British nation and of averting those appalling results to be justly apprehended if the present expectations of nearly all of His Majesty's subjects be unfortunately disappointed'. Mayne had also been thanked for 'his liberal sentiments in furthering the objects of the present meeting'.⁶²
- [25] It was during the political and economic crisis of 1832 that James Mayne was awarded the degree of Master of Arts by the archbishop of Canterbury, William Howley. The degree was awarded by the Archbishop through his Faculty Office on 3 July 1832.⁶³ Lambeth degrees were given sparingly. In the decade from July 1827 to June 1837 only 37 degrees were awarded, 21 of them being the degree of Master of Arts. Of these 21, ten were given to candidates who already held a [BA](#) degree from Oxford or

Cambridge or who had received a university education. Another ten, that is to say only one on average each year, went to candidates with no apparent university background. Mayne falls into this exceptional category.⁶¹ Regrettably, the letters testimonial proposing Mayne for a degree do not survive, so the reason for the award, beyond his 'proficiency in the study of divinity, uprightness of life, sound doctrine and purity of morals' cannot be known with certainty. However, Howley had already taken an interest in Bethnal Green, visiting and preaching a sermon there in 1820 in aid of the National School and promoting church extension.⁶² With mobs on the streets and marches of workers from Bethnal Green into the City, it would be surprising if Howley, along with [Bishop](#) Blomfield, did not have an eye on Bethnal Green during the crisis of 1832 and on James Mayne as the representative on the spot of the Established Church. The award of the [MA](#) lifted Mayne out of the ranks of the 'literate', raised his social status as one of the educated élite and demonstrated the Church's approval of his work and of Mayne himself as a leader in society. It was a status which Mayne used subsequently in further campaigns for the Spitalfields weavers, always appearing in printed and newspaper appeals as 'Rev. James Mayne, M.A.'

[26] In January 1841 Mayne again chaired a meeting of his parishioners to consider further measures to relieve the distress. He stated, according to a report in *The Times*, that the situation was so urgent that the most prompt measures were necessary. No man could be more ready than he to afford all the assistance in his power and he should be happy to forward the object of the meeting. When a weaver protested that relief was a degradation when what was wanted was work, and that attention should be focused on the economic cause of the distress, Mayne sought to direct the mind of the meeting to the fact that distress existed and needed remedy. However, when pressed about his views on the free import of foreign silks, he acknowledged that he shared the weaver's view that Englishmen had a claim to preference over foreigners and deserved a right to protection. The meeting went on to establish an Association for the Relief of the Destitute Poor of Bethnal Green, with Mayne as its president. A collection was also taken at which £50 was subscribed, including a gift from Mayne himself.⁶³ Subscriptions were subsequently received from Prince Albert, the philanthropist Angela Burdett-Coutts and many others, raising the fund to £840 by the following month.⁶⁴ Mayne was also [treasurer](#) of the Royal Adelaide Provident Institution, a friendly society established in 1837 for relieving distress in the silk industry.⁶⁵

[27] In working for the relief of the Spitalfields weavers Mayne shared a platform with dissenting ministers. He was equally able to accommodate the notorious Joseph Merceron, working with him, for instance, to champion a parish beadle dismissed from office in 1824, and only charring vestry meetings from 1841, after Merceron's demise. Unlike his headstrong [rector](#), Mayne was also able to communicate with his parishioners, sharing their views and winning the support of the fractious vestry and enjoying its commendation of his preaching. No less remarkably he won the confidence of his [rector](#) and equally strong-minded [bishop](#). On his retirement from Bethnal Green in 1842 (which necessitated his [resignation](#) of the office of afternoon lecturer) Mayne received an exceptional tribute from the vestry. The motion was passed

that the [resignation](#) of the Revd. James Mayne be accepted. And this Vestry desires in accepting it to record their deep and lasting sense of the various important duties of this sacred office so long and ably filled by him in this parish and do most cordially congratulate him on his retirement from among us that he should have received an appointment of a much more important nature but likely to contribute most materially to the happiness and comfort of his latter days and we do most heartily wish him health and happiness.⁶⁶

[28] In personal terms Mayne's nineteen years at Bethnal Green had been extraordinarily arduous and not without sorrow. His daughter Cestria died in 1827. A son, George Augustus Frederic Mayne, was christened in 1826 (by Mayne's friend and [patron](#) Augustine Bulwer), but he does not appear to have survived until the census of 1841. Mayne's wife Isabella had also died by 1833, the date of Mayne's re-marriage at Bethnal Green to a widow, Sarah Brazell.⁶⁷ More positively, Mayne's daughters Isabella Georgina and Melissa Belle had both married, and both had children. Isabella had married James Homewood, the organist of St John, Bethnal Green, in 1831, while Melissa had married Thomas Kensit, an umbrella stick maker, in 1840. These two daughters were Mayne's heirs, named in the will which he made on leaving Bethnal Green in July 1842.

[29] Mayne had begun his career as a non-graduate 'literate', an outsider in the ecclesiastical establishment. Decades after his death a contemporary recalled that curates serving non-resident incumbents were, as a rule, 'neither of such social status or education as to command respect', and went on to tell three anecdotes about Mayne as just such an 'extraordinary character'. On one occasion Mayne informed a colleague that his daughter had made a very satisfactory marriage. On being asked the profession of

the bridegroom he replied, 'No, no: none of your professions for me, in which a man must often starve his belly that he may smartly clothe his back', and he proceeded to explain that his son-in-law was in an excellent business as a journeyman maker of umbrella sticks.⁶⁸ This unusual, but pragmatic, view gives another glimpse of Mayne as a new type of clergyman, bluff and practical and more in tune with the working urban parishioners whom he served.

[30] In January 1842 the Ecclesiastical Gazette announced Mayne's appointment to be the [vicar](#) of Hanslope with Castlethorpe, Buckinghamshire. He had achieved the prize of a living of his own, offering freehold and the security of employment which no curate enjoyed. It was again a small country living, Hanslope's population in 1841 being only 1,553. The income of the [Vicar](#) was small, no more than £90 in 1835, but for Mayne the living meant a huge reduction in the stress and labour of clerical life.⁶⁹ He died there, aged 76, on 7 February 1851, and was buried in the chancel of the parish church of St James the Great. An obituary notice in The Times recorded that he was much and deservedly esteemed by numerous friends.⁷⁰

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1. Cheshire Record Office, EDA 1/10: 18 Dec. 1814; 24 Sept. 1815. ↩
2. Isabella Georgina Mayne married James Homewood, the organist of St John, Bethnal Green, in 1831, and died in 1880. Her birth around 1813 is attested in census records. James Mayne might conceivably have spent his early life in the armed services during the Napoleonic wars or possibly in teaching. ↩
3. Isabella Webster is given as the former name of Mayne's wife in the record of the baptism of their daughter Melissa Belle at Great Witchingham, Norfolk, on 3 September 1820. ↩
4. Malcolm Johnson, *Bustling intermeddler? The life and work of Charles James Blomfield* (Leominster, 2001), pp. 24–5. ↩
5. W. M. Jacob, *The clerical profession in the long eighteenth century 1680–1840* (Oxford, 2007), p. 56; Alan Haig, *The Victorian clergy* (London, 1984), ch. 3; William John Conybeare, *Essays ecclesiastical and social* (London, 1855), pp. 1–56 ↩
6. B. E. Harris and Alan T. Thacker, *A history of the county of Chester. Vol. III* (The Victoria History of the Counties of England, Oxford, 1980), p. 55. ↩
7. Jacob, *Clerical profession*, pp. 56–9. ↩
8. Cestria Mayne was christened at Stoke on 30 January 1816. She was buried at St Matthew, Bethnal Green, aged 12, on 20 September 1827. ↩
9. Entries with Mayne's distinctive bold signature in the Witchingham registers (Norfolk Record Office) begin in July 1818 and end in June 1823. ↩

10. Norfolk RO, DN/CUR/6: 7 June 1821. On Augustine Bulwer (d. 1831), see *Burke's Landed Gentry*. ↩
11. Brasenose College, Oxford, Bethnal Green records (hereafter BNC, BG), file 3 (22 letters from King): 2 Dec. 1822. ↩
12. Guildhall Library, MS 10300/4, f. 39: 5 Dec. 1828. Letters nominating Mayne for the licence, dated 18 Nov. 1828, and signed by Joshua King, Thomas Barneby, [rector](#) of St Dunstan, Stepney, and Henry Plimley, [vicar](#) of St Leonard, Shoreditch, on the basis of three years' acquaintance with Mayne's piety, sobriety, honesty and orthodox doctrine, are in MS 10116/25. ↩
13. *An abstract of the answers and returns ... Enumeration abstract, 1821* (London, 1822), p. 192; *Abstract of the answers and returns ... Enumeration abstract, 1831. Vol. 1* (London, 1833), p. 368; *Abstract of the answers and returns ... Enumeration abstract, 1841* (London, 1843), p. 179. ↩
14. *Report from a Select Committee on the Silk Trade ... ordered by the House of Commons to be printed 2 August 1832*, especially pp. 475–80. ↩
15. T. F. T. Baker (ed.), *Victoria history of the [county](#) of Middlesex. Vol. XI, Early Stepney with Bethnal Green* (The Victoria History of the Counties of England, Oxford, 1998), pp. 124–5, 178–9. ↩
16. Hector Gavin, *Sanitary ramblings, being sketches and illustrations of Bethnal Green* (London, 1848), especially pp. 4, 34, 88. ↩
17. Gavin, *Sanitary ramblings*, pp. 105–13. ↩
18. London [Metropolitan](#) Archives (hereafter LMA), St Matthew, Bethnal Green parish records. ↩
19. Tower Hamlets Local History and Archives Library, Bethnal Green Vestry records (hereafter THL, BG), 276–82: Vestry minutes 1820–44. ↩
20. *VCH, Middlesex*, XI, pp. 191–3. On Merceron, cf. *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. ↩
21. Lambeth Palace Library (hereafter LPL), Fulham Papers, Howley, vol. 25, f. 294 (26 May 1823); BNC, BG file 3 (27 May 1823). ↩
22. LPL, Fulham Papers, Howley, vol. 25, f. 294; BNC, BG file 3 (12 Mar. 1823). ↩
23. LMA, St Matthew Bethnal Green parish records. The first burial performed by Mayne was on 8 July 1823 ↩
24. LPL, Fulham Papers, Howley, vol. 25, f. 290r (20 Sept. 1820). ↩
25. King's absence from Bethnal Green after 1828 is apparent from the parish registers. ↩
26. BNC, BG file 3 (7 May 1827). ↩
27. BNC, BG file 3 (27 May 1823). ↩

28. On pastoral duties, see Jacob, *Clerical profession*, part two. On the National Society school, cf. *VCH, Middlesex*, XI, pp. 242–3. ↩
29. Calculations from LMA, St Matthew Bethnal Green parish records. The burial register from 13 Feb. 1828 to 21 Aug. 1831 records 2,400 burials; Mayne officiated at 2,340 and King at the remainder in October and November 1828. Mayne performed 6 burials on 5 May 1831 and 10 on 6 May 1831; 40 christenings on 20 July 1823 and 30 on 3 August 1823. Statistics on burials between 1833 and 1835 (with varying prices for funerals in the upper, middle and lower grounds) are given in THL, BG 280 (9 Mar. 1836). Of 1,597 funerals in these years only 196 were accompanied by services in the church at the extra charge of two shillings each. ↩
30. Burials at St Matthew were discontinued in 1853: see the online data at www.londonburials.co.uk and in *VCH, Middlesex*, XI, p. 208. ↩
31. THL, BG 277, p. 30. The average stipend of the 355 curates in the [diocese](#) of London in 1834 was £98 per annum, Johnson, *Bustling intermeddler?*, p. 106. ↩
32. Charity Commissioners, *32nd Report*, part 2, 1838, pp. 537–8. ↩
33. On Mayne's election, THL, BG 278, pp. 82–105. On his licensing, Guildhall Library, MS 10116/25, May–June 1829. King's congratulations to Mayne on securing the unity of doctrine in the parish – by defeating his evangelical opponent, the Rev. John Ayre – may offer further evidence of Mayne's churchmanship. ↩
34. LPL, Fulham Papers, Blomfield, vol. 2, ff. 44–5 (9 Dec. 1831). ↩
35. BNC, BG file 11: King to the principal of Brasenose, 17 Feb. 1832. On the private asylum at Bethnal Green run by the Warburton family, see *VCH, Middlesex*, XI, pp.165, 206. The asylum also accommodated paupers on behalf of the parish. In 1829–30 it housed 933 patients, of whom 654 were paupers. ↩
36. LPL, Fulham Papers, Blomfield, vol. 2, f. 74 (13 Feb. 1832); BNC, BG file 11 (17 Feb. 1832). ↩
37. LPL, Fulham Papers, Blomfield, vol. 2, f. 51r: Blomfield to Mayne, 17 Dec. 1831; vol.3, ff. 17–18: same to same, 20 Apr. 1832 ↩
38. Guildhall Library, MS 10300/5, 27 July 1832. Davies served until November 1835, when Blomfield revoked his licence for appropriating to his own use subscriptions to the Bethnal Green National School. LPL, Fulham Papers, Blomfield, vol.11, f. 41 (23 Nov. 1835). ↩
39. *Report of the Commissioners appointed ... to enquire into the ecclesiastical revenues of England and Wales* (London, 1835). It is notable that the report does not take into account occasional income, especially Mayne's afternoon lectureship which was paid separately by the vestry. ↩
40. THL, BG 277, pp. 104–19; LPL, Incorporated Church Building Society, minute books, vol.1, ff. 160, 161, 166; vol. 2, ff. 11, 230. The report of the Ecclesiastical Revenues Commission stated that in 1835 the church accommodated 2,000. The gallery was on three sides of the church and a reference in 1839 to the 'children's galleries' probably indicates how it came to be used. *VCH, Middlesex*, XI, p. 215; THL, BG 281, p. 347. ↩
41. THL, BG 280 (29 July 1836). ↩
42. *VCH, Middlesex*, XI, p. 215. In 1822 Howley wrote to Joshua King taking his advice on sites for the two churches. LPL, Fulham Papers, Howley, vol. 25, f. 292r. ↩

43. *VCH, Middlesex*, XI, pp. 215, 221–2. ↩
44. BNC, BG file 11: Mayne to the principal, 19 July 1828. ↩
45. Johnson, *Bustling intermeddler?*, pp.104–20. ↩
46. Archbishop Howley's printed copy of the appeal with a preliminary list of subscribers is held in Lambeth Palace Library (H5133/609, item 15). Mayne is listed as collecting £17.17s at St Matthew and over £13 from two districts in the parish. Other copies and versions of the appeal and list are in BNC, BG, D148. ↩
47. *The Times*, 4 Aug. 1840; *VCH, Middlesex*, XI, p. 216. ↩
48. *VCH, Middlesex*, XI, p. 216. ↩
49. THL, BG 279, p.70. ↩
50. On the parish safe, THL, BG 277, p. 153 (4 Nov. 1824). ↩
51. THL, BG 279 (11 June 1824, 28 Apr., 26 Oct., 10 Nov. 1826). ↩
52. THL, BG 277 (21 Feb. 1827). ↩
53. THL, BG 277–9 passim; on the statistics for the workhouse, 277 (27 June 1827); 278, p.174 (30 Sept. 1829). ↩
54. THL, BG 278, pp. 44–5 (4 Dec. 1828); p. 156 (11 Sept. 1829). ↩
55. *The Times*, 28 Jan. 1829. ↩
56. *Report from a Select Committee on the Silk Trade*, pp. 475–80. ↩
57. *Report from a Select Committee on the Silk Trade*, p.720. Cf. Robert Mc R. Higgins, 'The 1832 cholera epidemic in East London', *East London Record*, 2 (1979). ↩
58. Higgins, '1832 cholera epidemic'. ↩
59. *The Times*, 12 Mar. 1831. ↩
60. Archbishop Howley's signed instruction (fiat) to the Faculty Office, dated 29 June 1832, to issue letters testimonial of the award of Mayne's degree, are in LPL, Faculty Office, FII/173, together with the text of the award of the degree and the oaths signed by Mayne, dated 3 July 1832. The text is also entered in the Faculty Office register (LPL, Faculty Office, FI/Z, f. 105). ↩

61. Lambeth degrees awarded to 1848 are listed in W. Stubbs, 'Lambeth degrees', *Gentleman's Magazine*, 216 (1864), pp. 633–8, 770–2. A full annotated list is in LPL, MS 1715. Cf. Noel Cox, 'Dispensations, privileges and the conferment of graduate status, with special reference to Lambeth degrees', *Journal of Law and Religion*, 18, 1 (2002–3), 249–74. ↔
62. LPL, Fulham Papers, Howley, vol. 7, ff. 197–8. Howley's views on the Reform Bill in 1832 were the opposite of Mayne's but did not impede the award of the M.A. That Bethnal Green was a special object of archiepiscopal attention is suggested by the award of a Lambeth D.D. in 1861 to Timothy Gibson, successor to Mayne as curate and successor also to Joshua King as rector of Bethnal Green LPL, MS 1715, f. 93r. ↔
63. *The Times*, 1 Jan. 1841. ↔
64. *The Times*, 15, 24 Feb. 1841. ↔
65. *The Times*, 10 Feb. 1841 (The Institution's third report). Its scale was small since it relied on voluntary contributions from the workers while in employment. Only 342 families were relieved in the first three years. ↔
66. THL, BG 282, pp. 238–40. ↔
67. LMA, Bethnal Green parish registers, baptisms 30 May 1826; marriages 21 Mar. 1833. The marriage was by licence of the archbishop of Canterbury. James and Sarah Mayne are recorded in the census of 1841. The National Archives, PRO, HO 107/694, book 2, folio 5, p. 5. ↔
68. William Crouch, *Bryan King and the riots at St George's-in-the East* (London, 1904), pp. 22–3. ↔
69. *Report of the Commissioners ... into the ecclesiastical revenues of England and Wales* (1835). ↔
70. *The Times*, 12 Feb. 1851. ↔

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