

*Queen Mary abhorred
priests who had
married during the
reign of Edward and
they lost their benefices,
but what happened to
John Greenwood?*

Christopher Browne of Peasenhall at Michaelmas. In his will of 1495, the rector of Sudbourne and Orford, William Dakke, asked his executors to distribute to his parishioners one bushel of malt and one of barley to pray for his soul.

So John Greenwood died during the Catholic Mary Tudor's reign, describing himself as a priest and yet having two sons. How did this come about? Before Mary, England had been a Protestant country under King Edward VI (January 1547 to July 1553) during which it was possible for men in holy orders to marry and have children. One of Edward's first changes to religious practice was to abolish chantries, and John Greenwood was the last chantry priest in Orford. He had succeeded George Gore who died in 1545 during the reign of Henry VIII.

The earliest mention of Greenwood I have found is in the will of John Firbye, priest, 'now of Orford' who left him some books when he died in 1540. At this time Greenwood was not the parish priest in Orford since John Warner is named in that position the following year. It is not clear who was Warner's successor but in 1555, John Bukkill, parish priest of Chillesford made his will leaving Robert Pawling of Orford 'all my wages that is owing me for serving the parish aforesaid (Orford)'. He too wanted to be buried in St. Bartholomew's church, Orford. John was part of the prominent Orford family of Bukkill or Buckyll, one of whom is represented by a brass rebus in the floor of the church in the shape of a buckle.

With the abolishment of chantries Greenwood must have had to vacate the Chantry House, which by 1552 was owned by Richard Ingram who bequeathed it to his wife Margaret with instructions to sell it. At the time of its abolition the chantry income was £7 15s 7d annually and the clerk's stipend £5 9s 9d. Greenwood was described as 'well learned and teacheth children'. He was aged thirty-eight and born in 1509.

There are two clues to who Greenwood married, first the will made by Walter Garson in 1550, in which he bequeathed his daughter Jone his tenement Mawlsters with the condition that she allow her mother to live there. Clearly Greenwood acquired the house when he married Jone and was able to leave it to one of his sons. As mentioned, he also named Jone's two unmarried sisters in his will. The parish burial register reveals that Jone 'wife of John Greenwood' was buried in 1555. Who was the Greenwood boys' 'grandam'? Since nothing is known of Greenwood's family, it seems likely she was the mother of the three Garson girls. As regards the birth of the elder of the two boys it must have taken place after Walter Garson made his will in 1550 and before the death of Edward VI in 1553, so they were very young when their father died.

There is some information about the Chantry of Our Blessed Lady within Orford parish church, based on wills. In 1453 Augustine Higham of Gedgrave left twenty pence for a light in the chantry, John Buckyll left 3s 4d for the repair of the chantry in 1534, and Robert Buckyll gave Robert Pawling twenty of his best sheep that were in the Chantry flock in 1540. However, the most interesting will is that of Alice Bache, widow of two husbands, who died in 1531. She bequeathed to George Gore, the Chantry priest and his successors, her tenement named Malsters under the condition that he and his successors pray annually for the soul of herself and Robert Sprowte, her first husband. Then she made a surprisingly perspicacious condition that should 'our Sovereign Lord' (Henry VIII) make a law or statute such that the priest or his successors should not 'enjoy' the property, then it should be sold and the money used for repair of the chantry. It would be another sixteen years and a different monarch before the house had to be sold, but the chantry was abolished at the same time.