

Working for a Shilling a Day

The Churchwardens' Accounts

PEOPLE who borrow books, as many of us know from hard experience, often forget to return them. A notorious local example was the removal of the first volume of the Churchwardens' Accounts from Berkhamsted parish chest early in the 19th century. For years it was presumed lost until the book reappeared as 'Lot 49' at a London auction sale in 1851. It was purchased by the British Museum, and that is why, for the past 115 years, historians have had to go to London to consult one of the town's most valuable sources of information.

Presented to the parish by a London wine merchant in 1584, the book contains many thousands of entries. The 366 large pages record 160 years of local history. The second volume, started in 1744, is still stored in the vestry.

VESTRY'S WIDE POWERS

If 'Churchwardens' Accounts' suggests a dull subject, I can assure you that local historians often welcome the opportunity of quoting extracts to add interest and perhaps humour to their articles and talks. Not that the entries are limited to receipts and payments; the decisions taken by 'the minister, churchwardens and the rest of the vestrie' are also recorded. The vestry, as the local authority of the period, had duties and activities which extended far beyond church matters, and it was only in the 19th century that it was shorn of many of its non-ecclesiastical functions.

Here are a few early entries:

1592. For watching and tending James Clarke in the tyme of his sickness *xd.*
Setting out of soldiers for the townes behouffe (behalf) vs.
A payer (pair) of shoes for mother White *17d.*

1597. For Richard Grove's wyfe when he was in prison *8d.*
Altering a cote for Thomas Abower *5d.*
A pair of shoes for Percivale when he went for a sogier (soldier) *20d.*

WHIPPING THE DOGS

Payments of 1s. 5d. and 1s. 8d. for shoes show how the value of money has changed since Elizabeth I was on the throne. Even so, £1 19s. 4d. does not seem a handsome reward for a

BY

'BEORCHAM'

year's devoted service by Goodman Scott, the sexton, in 1603.

Admittedly he was spared some strange duties, such as whipping dogs out of the church and churchyard. Thomas Abower, whose acquaintance we have already made as the man whose coat was altered at a cost of 5d. (was it a special dog chaser's uniform?), received 4s. for 'whipping dogs out of the Church and kepeinge cleen the market howse.' Later on a similar payment was made to Thomas Platyer for 'whippinge ye dogges', apparently without the additional chore of cleaning the market house.

'To make ye stares that go up to ye pulpitt and ye flower of ye seat appointed for ye minister to sitt in,' a carpenter received 7s. 6d. for seven days' work. A master man, however, could earn 2s. a day if he was a quick worker and ran

the risk of working on the church roof. In 1628 the churchwardens agreed to pay Richard Poolye, of Wendover, 2s. 'for every dayes work about the mendinge of the leads and 12d. for his man... all which work shall be speedily performed by him.'

Positively no loafing! And no shoddy workmanship, either. A small payment was made to John England in 1632 for repairing the church key on the understanding that 'if it doth not hold for a yeare he is to mend it agen for nothing.'

BREAD AND WINE

At Easter, 1602, communicants were required to 'paye for ever hereafter towards the charge of the bread and wine at Easter.' Single persons had to pay one penny, and 'the rest of the perishoners according to their ablyties.' (I will not comment on the spelling of the word 'perishoners'!)

In the following year the wine and bread cost 17s. 6d. and 9d. respectively, and the communicants contributed 18s., leaving the trifling deficit of 3d. But by 1628 the gap had widened; contributions were £1 7s. 4d., but wine and bread cost £2 16s. 7d.

We are reminded of simple rustic pleasures by the payment, in 1622, of 1s. for 'cutting and carrying in the maypole.' While the lads and lasses danced, destitute old soldiers passed through the town and blessed the churchwardens for their gifts from parish funds. Two poor men 'who had been taken prisoner by the Turks' were given a shilling apiece; a similar coin was handed to a man who had been 'in the warres of Bohemia.'

OIL FOR THE BELLS

In the same year, 1622, 3s. was paid for 'three quarts of wyne at Whitsontide' and twopence for 'oyle for the bells.' Then, in 1634, when the sexton's wages for the year had risen to £2 8s. 8d., we find that 4s. 8d. was paid 'for bread and wine to make ye children drinks when they went on procession.' In the same year James Baker received 6s. 6d. for making 'ye little longe ladder,' which was probably used by the men who were paid 3d. for carrying 'stones into ye Church which were blown off with ye great wind.'

During the Commonwealth, entries were few. This, incidentally, was the period when the parish registers, the subject of a series of articles a few months

ago, were also neglected. But on the restoration of the monarchy, the churchwardens spared no expense to celebrate the occasion. A barrel of beer (10s.) and powder and match (15s. 2d.) were purchased—the latter for a firework display—and the bellringers received £1. Royal and loyal Berkhamsted celebrated the king's return by having his coat of arms in the church cleaned. Thomas Bonning received 4d. for this work.

PORK FOR THE MINISTER

Here are some entries dated 1660-1:
Item for a journey to Hempstead with hoss, 1s. 6d.
Item pd. for a joint of pork for a Minister that preached on Lords Day, 1s.
Item pd. to Richard Baker for 6 daies and a halves work about the church wall, 9s. 9d.
Item pd. for beer for the workmen, 1s. 10d.
Item pd. in the 2 yeares to poore travellers that were distressed, £1 3s. 1d.

The bellringers always received special payments on days of rejoicing. There were gifts to them in 1616 when Prince Charles went to Berkhamsted Place, and again when he, as Charles I, visited the town in 1633. Other events celebrated with merry peals were the proclamation of 'ye Lord Protector' in 1657; 'ye victory in Ireland' (the Battle of the Boyne) in 1690; 'the News of the Limerick Surrender' and the 'Return of the King from Holland' in 1691. And a pound of candles was bought in 1745 'on ye Rejoicing day when the Rebells were driven into Scotland.'

MRS. J. SHAW, Central Organiser of the Fish Scheme, reports on

A Year of the Fish



The Fish Scheme throughout this year has been working steadily and successfully.

There has been nothing spectacular or dramatic about it—just normal work such as the driving of old people to hospitals and clinics, some for treatment and some to visit relatives. Others have been driven to the Blind Centre at Hemel Hempstead, the dentist, to church and Mother's Union meetings. A child was taken to Great Ormond Street Hospital.

Much shopping has been done for those who are ill or too old to do it themselves, and for some it has been done regularly, twice a week, for a year or so, and this seems likely to continue.

People with 'flu have had meals cooked and been looked after generally and sick children have been minded, so that mother could do the shopping. Children have been met from school and there has been quite a lot of baby-sitting and elderly folk sitting. Many meals have been cooked, and a certain amount of housework done.

HELP WILLINGLY GIVEN

A great deal of the organising of the work has been done by the Area Agents efficiently and conscientiously, and I am most grateful to them for their help and

to all the people who have been called upon for help who have given it so willingly and promptly. I cannot thank all these people enough.

Miss Fintigan has been most helpful where any typewriting has been necessary and I have much for which to thank her.

CHANGES IN AREA AGENTS

Three of our Area Agents wish to retire, Mrs. Keeling, Mrs. Stroud and Mrs. Bunker, and we have found three others to take over from them—Mrs. Griffiths, Mrs. Fox and Mrs. Giles.

After this I myself should like to give to another the privilege and pleasure of running the fish scheme, not because I'm tired of running it but because it does not seem fair to hang on to such a good thing for too long, thus depriving another of all the benefits it brings with it. And so Mr. Chairman, if you have no one within your mind to whom you would like me to hand over, may I have your permission to start looking for someone?

Mrs. Shaw was warmly thanked for her report and work, and the Rector smilingly gave her the permission she sought to look for her own successor.

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