

CHAPTER XIV.

THE CHURCHWARDENS AND PARISH CLERKS.

In pre-reformation times the office of churchwarden appears to have been solely ecclesiastical. The *custodes ecclesiae* were wardens of the goods of the Church.

But in the reign of Henry VIII, civil functions were added to their duties. They were constituted relieving officers to deal with the widespread poverty caused by the suppression of the Monasteries and Chantries.

They had, moreover, to provide arms for the soldiers. By the time of James I, much of the burden of local government rested on their shoulders. They were responsible for the upkeep and repair of the roads, for the appointment of many local officials, and they were expected to keep the parish free from vermin.

They have left a wonderfully interesting record of their duties and doings in the Accounts which they annually rendered to the vestry at Easter-tide.

The early accounts of our parish have been lost, but those that remain are full of interest. Many of the entries, quaint though they may sound to our ears, have much to tell us about parochial life

generally and the duties of churchwardens in particular.

" Paid for sparrows two shillings," " for hedgehog seven pence." " For a fox's head two shillings." " For ale and wyne," " for hoyle oyle," " for two pennyworth of threede for the surplisse," "paid the Minister two shillings and sixpence for his dinner."

The last item reveals the fact that the Rector was formerly, at any rate in this parish, re-embursed the cost of his mid-day meal on the occasion of the annual journey to Rochester for the visitation.

The Churchwardens of olden days seem, many of them, to have been very good business men, but they were often very bad spellers.

Here are a few examples of their eccentric orthography.

" For a pulcat and a heghog," " A pont of bear for the cappenter." " Tolung the bell," " the cort feas," " for six haskoks."

One Mr. Samuel Muggeridge, a former Hartley resident, suffered severely at their hands. On one page he is "*Samell Muggerag.*" On another "*Samawell Muggerreg.*" Again he appears as "*Sam. Mugarige,*" or "*Sam Muggerigs.*"

The Church seasons were perpetual stumbling-blocks, as witness :

"Wetsuntide, Whyttsuntyde, Wytson, Mykellmase, Rogacyon, Ester, Crismas."

There is quite a lot of history in these old accounts.

" Paid for 2 thanksgivings for the glorious victory of Lord Nelson over the French fleet. Thanksgiving for the victory of Marquis Wellington in Spain."

" Two forms of prayer for the preservation of his Majesty being shot at."

The accounts very often tell the tale of the times. In the reign of Edward VI :

" Putting up the 10 commandments and pulling down the rood serene."

And then, in the reign of Queen Mary :

"Defacing the 10 commandments, and putting up the rood serene."

Once more, in the reign of Elizabeth :

" Taking down the rood serene and setting up Moyses's tablets."

In the reign of Henry VIII the royal arms were ordered to be put up in the churches. In the time of the Commonwealth they were, in nearly every church, destroyed or defaced. We find such entries as:

" Washing out the royal arms."

At the Restoration they were reinstated. In the Hartley accounts we have an entry, 1795 :

" Repairing the King's arms."

They no doubt hung on the front of the gallery, in our church, which was removed in 1862.

A frequent item is one for refreshments. Churchwardens seem to have been a hospitable body of men. They, also, on occasion, treated themselves, at the parish's expense.

" Wine and cakes at the audit "

is a perennial **item** in some accounts. And again,

" Dinner and drink,"

and

" Beere when we gave up the accounts."

"Seven dinners on Sacrament day."

These were for people coming from a distance.

" For dinner to the suffrecan that day he hallowed the altar."

Again.

" Wine bestowed upon the bushopp, 3s 1d. Four bottles of common wine when 'the Archdeacon came to view the church !"

Perhaps Mr. Archdeacon had found fault on the last visit, and the wardens bore him a grudge.

" Liquer for the curate and churchwardens. Bread and cheese and beer for those confirmed. For drynk in the rood loft upon Palme Sunday."

In church accounts there are continual references to the bells. They wanted new ropes and other repairs, and the ringers, in some parishes, wanted much beer " Bread and ale for the ringers." " Five pots of beer for the ringers."

There are, of course, many entries anent the pageants which were formerly held in nearly every

church at certain seasons. Quite a lot of stage property, appropriate to the particular Festival, seems to have been required. Some of the items would appear very strange in the church accounts if we did not know to what they referred.

Here are some at Epiphany time :

" Makyn of a star." " Renting and gylding of a star."
" Making of skaffolde to take down the mone." " For
the hire of an angell." " Hire of a beard for a proffyt
on Palm Sunday."

At Whitsuntide the emblem of a dove was in general requisition. In a parish in Suffolk a gift towards the expenses is thus recorded :

" Money to provide for the Holy Ghost goying upp
and down with a cheyne."

On another occasion :

" For the Holy Ghost appearing in the Church roof ';

And again:

" Paid for wyre to set up the Holy Ghost." And,
" Gloves for hym that played God Almighty."

There seems to have been much decorating of the church at certain seasons, but this "garnishing," as it was called, had often to be paid for :

" For holly and ivy against Christmas, 2s. 8d." " For
trimming the church, 2s. 6d." " To chyldryn to gather
ivy, id." .

The choir and music loft ran away with some of the money. In our Hartley accounts we find :

" Paide Mrs. Glover for psalm singing, 13s.;" "John

Knowles on account of the singing, 12s.;" "the psalm singers feast, 4s.;" to a tribyll for singing in the quier, 33. 4d." " Trellysses to kepe out crowes."

Keeping birds out of the church always seems to have been a trouble to the churchwardens. In the old days they took no half-measures as the following entries show :

"Powder and shot to kill pigeons in the church."

" Gunpowder to beate the starlings from ye church."

" For shooting sparrows in the church." " Paid for bird lime to catch owles."

" Making of the butts. Bread and beare when the butts were made."

The butts were for shooting practice. From the middle of the 16th century every parish was required to have its butts, and every man his long bow. The parishioners were ordered to practise at the butts on all Sundays and holy-days.

There is an item which occurs year after year in our old accounts; and I have seen a similar entry in other parish accounts: "*Making the seas.*" Occasionally the word is spelt "*seace*" or "*sess*," sometimes "*seace.*" The amount paid was usually Is. This entry puzzled me very much till I found that it referred to the annual *assessment* of rates for the church expenses.

We know that in 1552 the churchwardens here were John Overey and John Smyth, but a consecu-

tive record of those who have served the office in this parish commences only in the middle of the 18th century.

Here is a list of the names from 1745 :—

John Young.	F. D. Barnes,
Thomas Underhill.	A. E. Dobbs.
Edward Thorp.	Joseph Thornton.
Richard Treadwell.	Alfred W. Cromar.
Joseph Oliver.	H. E. Pass.
Robert Monk.	Thomas Morton.
Wm. Bensted, Senr.	G. W. Nairn.
Wm. Bensted, Junr.	Major A. Hildebrand.
Owen Parson.	Win. Braybrook.
Wm. Allen.	Frederick Flint.
Wm. Treadwell.	T. F. Tate.
J. Gambrell.	Charles Parker.
Thos. Dean.	Jas. Stuart.
W. F. Alien.	Wm. Daniel.
Col. Jos. Hartley.	Alfred L. Farrow.
H. Kendall Barnes.	J. Wells Thatcher.
Adam Tait.	

THE PARISH CLERKS.

The first of our Parish Clerks that we know by name is William French. He was in office in the year 1747.

Following him was Francis Treadwell. He was appointed in 1779 and served the office for forty years. He died in 1819.

Here there is a gap in our record. In 1848 comes

William Elcomb, parish clerk for another forty years.

In 1888 he was succeeded by Elvey Cooper. In 1896, John Crouch was in office, and in 1899 Philip Letchford. He resigned in 1914 and was the last of the Hartley parish clerks.

There were parish clerks as far back as early Saxon times. In the 14th and 15th centuries the clerk was an important ecclesiastical official.

In this country he survived the Reformation, but though there was continuity of office some of his duties were changed. He no longer made the round of the parish on Sunday mornings to sprinkle the people with holy water. And though he continued to chant the responses in the Church services he did so in English instead of Latin. But he remained an important official till the time of the Commonwealth. After the restoration he lingered on, shorn of much of his dignity, till the latter half of the last century, when the office gradually fell into abeyance.