

Chesterfield Church Customs of the Eighteenth Century.

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WITHIN the parish church of Chesterfield, in the chapel of St. George (usually known as the Calton Chapel), on the south side of the chancel, is a massive old oak chest bound round with iron bands and staples, and fastened with six locks. The parochial archæologist might naturally expect to discover a rich "find" of old papers in such a receptacle, but it contains nothing earlier than papers of last century of trivial moment. One book, however, deserves more careful notice. It is called :—"A Book of Register, for the use of the Church, to enter the Money that is collected at the Sacrament as also the Disbursements and the Names of the Persons to whom it's given, by Bernard Lucas & John Webster Church Wardens. Anno Dom : 1733."

This volume seems to be the only survivor of the large number of important parish books that this chest, or some other receptacle, at one time sheltered. We were told, many years ago, by the late Archdeacon Hill, that more than a score of old parish volumes disappeared during the prolonged restoration of the church fifty years ago, and that he in vain tried to recover them. This folio account book extends from 1733 to 1809, and consists of 168 leaves or folios. The parchment and board cover is nearly off, and the leaves are loose. We venture to ask that a few shillings be expended on a new cover, and that the leaves be all paged as a preventive to abstraction.

As a sample of the book, the first page is here transcribed :—

June 3 th	Collected	...	0 . 10 . 6	The Vicar had at severall			
1733				times	...	...	7 . 6
July 1 st	Collec ^d	...	0 . 16 . 7	The Curat	...	...	2 . 0
Aug ^t 5	Collected	...	0 . 14 . 5½	The 3 officers...	...	...	7 . 6
Sept. 2 th	more	...	0 . 17 . 10				
30 th	more	...	0 . 14 . 3				0 . 17 . 0
			<hr/>				
			3 . 13 . 7½				
			<hr/>				

Remains 2 . 16 . 7½

Given as follows

To Ant : Deate	...	...	...	...	...	0 . 2 . 0
W ^d Atkin 2/ W ^d Fox 2/	...	...	...	...	...	0 . 4 . 0
W ^d Kirkwood 2/ H Slater 2/	...	...	...	...	...	0 . 4 . 0
W ^d Bland 2/ W ^d Howey 2/	...	...	...	...	...	0 . 4 . 0
W ^d Cartledge 2/ W ^d Pease 2/	...	...	...	...	...	0 . 4 . 0
Two Wid ^s Chantry	...	...	...	...	...	0 . 4 . 0
W ^d Whitaker 2/ W ^d Stubing 2/	...	...	...	...	...	0 . 4 . 0
W ^d Turner 2/ W ^d Watkinson 2/	...	...	...	...	...	0 . 4 . 0
W ^d Calow 2/ W ^d Wheatley 2/	...	...	...	...	...	0 . 4 . 0
Tho ^s Hawksworth	...	...	...	...	...	0 . 2 . 0
Francis Tupman	...	...	...	...	...	0 . 1 . 0
Tho ^s Wheatcroft	...	...	...	...	...	0 . 1 . 0
W ^d England 1/ W ^d Wright 2/	...	...	...	...	...	0 . 3 . 0
W ^d Moor 1/ W ^d Houghton 2/	...	...	...	...	...	0 . 3 . 0
W ^d Brailsford	...	...	...	...	...	0 . 1 . 0
Ruth & Elizabeth Kirkwood	...	...	...	...	...	0 . 2 . 0
Grace Beadson	...	...	...	...	...	0 . 2 . 0
W ^m Hudson	...	...	...	...	...	0 . 1 . 1½
T : Bush wife 6 ^d W ^d Bush 6 ^d	...	...	...	...	...	0 . 1 . 0
Tho ^s Gilberthorpe	...	...	...	...	...	0 . 0 . 6
W ^d Mittam 6 ^d W ^d Renshaw 6 ^d	...	...	...	...	...	0 . 1 . 0
W ^d Stringfellow	...	...	...	...	...	0 . 0 . 6
W ^d Needham	...	...	...	...	...	0 . 1 . 0
Dor : Wilmott	...	...	...	...	...	0 . 1 . 0
Ed. Lowe wife	...	...	...	...	...	0 . 0 . 6
Izabell Hall	...	...	...	...	...	0 . 0 . 6
W ^d Rollison	...	...	...	...	...	0 . 0 . 6
						<hr/>
						2 . 16 . 7½
						<hr/>

The vicar at this date was Thomas Hincksman, who entered upon the incumbency in 1715. The other vicars during the period covered by this book were, William Wheeler, 1739; John Wood, 1765; and George Bossley, 1781. The various sums paid to the vicars, and occasionally to a curate, throughout this book, are obviously for special gifts they desired to make to the poor, the churchwardens keeping rigid and personal care over the distribution of almost the whole of the sacramental alms.

With regard to the "three officers," the officers who receive payment throughout the book must have been church, and not parish officials. They are evidently almost invariably two in number, and were, we suppose, the parish clerk and the sexton. Perhaps in this case of three, one whose appointment had lapsed was included. Under some years, when there was a payment of two shillings to the officers many times during the year, it appears as though they had always received an extra gift after a celebration of the Holy Communion. This was an old established custom in some parishes.

In the years 1733-4, there were sixteen Sacrament days; but in the following year, and almost invariably throughout the book, there were eighteen during the year, namely, one on the first Sunday of each month, with these additional times—Christmas Day, Good Friday, Easter Day, Low Sunday, Whitsun Day, and Trinity Sunday. It is rather remarkable to note how change of vicars did not seem to effect the church customs, and how the number of celebrations remained the same throughout four incumbencies. Chesterfield was decidedly superior in this respect to not a few parishes of the end of last century and the beginning of this, where the shocking irreverence and carelessness with regard to Holy Communion had relegated its celebration to quarterly days; but there were at the same time many churches, at all events in London and in towns, where weekly celebrations never fell into abeyance.

The Good Friday celebration is somewhat remarkable. In the early days of the Church there was no Mass on the anniversary of

our Lord's death. The earliest documentary evidence of this custom is in the days of Pope Innocent I., about the year 450, but the habit was certainly of much greater antiquity; and as it prevailed in the days of St. Augustine, probably represents the practice of the Apostolic Church. This tradition is attested as an accepted fact by the sixteenth canon of the Council of Toledo, in the year 693, which ordains that there shall be daily mass for the King of Spain and his family, save on Good Friday, "which is a day upon which it is not permitted to anyone to celebrate the Sacred Mysteries." In the Eastern Church, there is no recognition of the Eucharist at all on this day. Though there is not conclusive evidence that it was ever intended by our Reformers to set this long established custom of the Church at defiance, it would seem that a sheer spirit of perversity caused a certain portion of the Puritan and Genevan element within the Church of England, who disobeyed the whole spirit and letter of the Prayer-book in the number of their celebrations, to select Good Friday for "a Sacrament day." Some, indeed, went so far as to abandon an Easter Day celebration in favour of one on the death-day of our Lord. Chesterfield is one of the only instances that we have found wherein a continuous and largely attended Good Friday celebration can be proved right through the eighteenth century.

The total of the sum collected at these sacramental offertories in 1733-4 was £13 8s. 3½d.; in 1734-5 it amounted to £14 3s. 6d. It remained at this latter average for some years, but by the end of the century had more than doubled in amount, the yearly average exceeding £30.

As a rule the payments are tersely entered without any description, and varied in amount from 4d. to 2s. In 1745, 2s. 6d. was given to "Soldyer Bowes motherless children;" in 1751, 6d. was given to "a soldier's wife in y^e Glumangate." Payment was occasionally made out of the sacramental fund in kind instead of money. Thus, in 1745, 4s. 6d. was given "for a pare of shoose;" and on another occasion, 7s. 8d. "for 2 shirts & stocks." On another occasion, a "campernow" was bestowed upon a widow

at a cost of one shilling ; we should doubt if there are any Derbyshire folk who would now know what such a term meant ; but we find that Grose explains—"Camperknows : ale-pottage, made with sugar and spice, etc. ;" probably the old widow was at the time seriously ill, and was thus comforted at the church's expense.

In 1752, we find the first entry relative to giving coals to the poor. The coals were extraordinarily low in price, and probably the "load" of those days was something very different to what we understand as a load now-a-days. George Sheldon received 11s. 8d. for "20 L^d Coles." In 1755, 167 loads of coal were purchased for £4 17s. 5d. ; and in 1757, there is an entry of "162 loads of coales given to sundrey," at a cost of £4 14s. 6d.

The churchwardens of Chesterfield had the distribution of the bread doles in their hands, and this volume contains various entries with respect to them. They not infrequently added to these doles out of the sacramental fund. The first entry with regard to bread is in 1747, when £1 was spent in loaves for the poor on St. Thomas' Day. On March 24th, 1748, being Good Friday, £1 11s. od. was given by the churchwardens "to sundry persons when we gave Naylor's dole." Naylor's dole was a charity founded by Ralph Naylor and his son, of the same name, consisting of £60, the yearly produce of which was to be given on Good Friday in bread to poor housekeepers of the town of Chesterfield. The accumulation of several years interest subsequently brought up the principal to £95 8s., the interest on which remained for many years at £2 7s. 8d., at the low rate of 2½ per cent., and was scrupulously given in accordance with the bequest, generally with some further addition.

The other bread-dole was originated by Theodosia Winchester, who in 1737 left £20 to be invested, the interest on which was to be expended in the purchase of bread for the poor of Chesterfield, to be distributed on St. Matthias' Day (February 24th) by the churchwardens. Theodosia left instructions that the bread was to be baked by her nephew, Humphry Winchester, and his descendants, so long as any of them should exercise the trade of a baker and were careful in the baking. The name of Winchester

seems to have died out as a Chesterfield baker during that century, for none of that name were dealt with by the churchwardens after 1780. At the beginning of this century, the names of the four Chesterfield bakers who supplied the dole and charitable bread were Wilson, Hawkesley, Cooper, and Hardy. The Winchester dole for a long period only realised 15s. 11d. per annum. In 1791 is this entry:—"Winchester Dole given on S^t Matthias Day and Distributed in threepenny Loaves to the poor by Tho^s Browne & Sam^l Diggin Churchwardens. Naylor's Dole gave away on Good Friday." A little later than this, we find that the interest for both the doles, amounting to £3 3s. 7d., was paid to the churchwardens by Mr. Bernard Lucas, jun., a banker, being invested in the Matlock Turnpike Trust. In 1802 the interest was increased, Naylor's charity producing £3 11s. 6d., and Winchester's £1 3s. 10d.

In 1795, both the doles were given on Good Friday at the church, resulting in the distribution of 144 sixpenny loaves to as many poor people. Different churchwardens adopted different ways of distributing both the doles and other moneys. In 1797, the Good Friday crowd of church bread-seekers was avoided by £5 15s. 9½d. being distributed round the town to poor widows. But shortly afterwards, this irreverent custom was still further intensified; and it is anything but pleasant to think of the churchwardens giving away, in 1789, 420 sixpenny loaves in the church, on the death-day of the Church's Master, to as many struggling applicants. In 1804, 360 loaves were thus distributed, and in 1806 four hundred.

Record is made, under the year 1792, on September 30th, of an "Especial Sacrament for The Mayor and Corporation," but their liberality was not excessive, the alms only amounting to 6s. 6d.

The money at the disposal of the churchwardens for the relief of the poor was occasionally increased in special ways. Thus, in 1795, they "received of Mrs. Smith, for Pigs being in the churchyard, 2s. 3d.;" other entries show that the usual poundage fee upon such beasts was 6d. a pig. But other fines not of their

own levying came into their hands. Under the date of December 1st, 1793, are the following entries:—"Received sundries fines as undernamed which are distributed in the account of Disbursements.

of M ^r T. Mittam for suffering Tipling in his house during divine service	-	-	-	0	10	0
M ^r T. Fox for Do.	-	-	-	0	10	0
M ^{rs} A. Cowley Do.	-	-	-	0	10	0
M ^r Sam. Beard Do.	-	-	-	0	10	0
of M ^r S. Ollerenshaw for Tipling	-	-	-	0	3	4
M ^r Hardy for Do.	-	-	-	0	3	4
M ^r Tho. Hearnshaw Do.	-	-	-	0	3	4
M ^r W. Roiston for suffering Tipling in his house	0	10	0			
W ^m Rogers for being Drunk	-	-	-	0	5	0
M ^r H. Brocksop for Tipling on a Sunday	-	-	-	0	3	4

During the same year, on Nov. 6th, William Parker's fine of 5s. "for being in Liquor" was handed to the Churchwardens, and it is interesting to find that his own conscience condemned him, for he gave another shilling, "his own addition for Alms-houses in the Saltergate." The record of other fines for Sunday tipling occur in other parts of the book.

In 1796, the churchwardens "received from John Bowes, Esq., Mayor, 5 shillings as a fine paid by Jos. Glossop for Leading Cows on the Sabath day." In 1803, they received a shilling fine that had been imposed for swearing.

From 1801 onwards, the number of communicants at the more important celebrations of Holy Communion are given, from which we have compiled the following table.

NUMBER OF COMMUNICANTS AT THE PARISH CHURCH, CHESTERFIELD.

	Christmas Day.	Good Friday.	Easter Day.
1801-2	... 124	... 136	... —
1802-3	... 137	... 103	... 119
1803-4	... 87	... 80	... 76
1804-5	... 100	... 100	... 80
1805-6	... 107	... 116	... 77

In 1804-5, there was an average of 50 communicants at the other monthly communions of the year.

The only expenditure entered in this book, otherwise than the distribution to the poor, is that of wine for the Holy Communion. The amount spent and the bottles of wine consumed during 1755, and for several subsequent years, are entered at the end of the volume. The wine cost 2s. a bottle. Six bottles were required at Easter and at Christmas; this quantity would amply suffice for six times the number of communicants, in well ordered churches, at the present time. Wine was also sometimes purchased for other purposes. In 1757, the Dean of Lincoln, as rector, visited the church, and two bottles of wine were provided for him. In the same year, namely, on August 4th, Bishop Cornwallis was at Chesterfield for a confirmation, when the churchwardens actually spent £1 4s. od. on wine for his lordship, as well as 9s. for wine "for his secretary & gentlemen," and in addition to this, spent a pound on wine for themselves and the church officers on the same occasion! Certainly, times are changed for the better.

Out of these sacramental alms received at the parish church, the hamlets always used to receive a certain proportion. In 1786, when two pounds were assigned them, the following division was made, Newbold, 10s.; Brimington, 10s.; Hasland, 4s. 6d.; Tupton, 2s.; Normanton, 3s. 9d.; Calow, 6s.; Walton, 3s. 9d. Later on in the book, we find that it became usual to assign 10s. each to Newbold and Brimington, and five shillings each to the remaining five.

It only remains to be added that there is a gap in the entries in this book between the years 1771 and 1791, and to again plead for the re-binding and careful preservation of this interesting volume of Chesterfield church customs of the last century. Our thanks are due to Mr. Churchwarden Windle for the kind facilities that he gave for consulting these pages.