

BRIEFS.

BY THE REV. EDWARD TURNER, M.A., V.P.

THE first impression upon the mind of those reading the title of this article will very naturally be—"Surely this is but a *brief* subject for an Archæological Paper:" and I must confess that it is. But *brief* as it may be, both by name and in its nature, it is not wholly devoid of interest to the Archæologist. For Briefs have now become things of the past; and though they were discontinued during the present century, few of those now existing can remember their being read in our churches, and fewer still of the present generation of clergy are, like myself, sufficiently advanced in years to have been instrumental in reading them. That they may not then be wholly forgotten, I purpose to give a short account of their origin and history, and shall conclude with some extracts from the Register of Briefs, kept as they were read in the parish of Maresfield, with the causes of their being granted, as far as they are stated; and the sum which was collected upon each; and which, though it was in most instances very small, amounted in the aggregate to a considerable help.

The history of my recovery of this Register, after it had been in the possession of a gentleman of Cuckfield for upwards of half a century, I have given in my account of Maresfield Parish, in Vol. xiv., p. 153. But few of these Registers now remain. I never saw one until Mr. John Fearon, of Ockenden, Cuckfield, gave me, in 1851, the Register of this parish, to which I have just alluded, and which he found among his father's books and papers after his death. Since then I have ascertained that there is a similar Register, but commencing

at a much later period than the Maresfield, in the parish chest of Uckfield. This begins with the year 1707, and ends with that of 1739; whereas the Maresfield Register of Collections commences with 1664, and is continued to 1752. There is, however, among the Uckfield Parochial Records, the Book of Receipts for the period the Register embraces, which we have not here.

And here it is necessary for me to state for the information of those who are unacquainted with Briefs, what they were, what were their nature and object, and how they were to be obtained. And this I shall do in the words of Jacob—"Giles Jacob, Gent.," as he designates himself, who in his Law Dictionary defines them to be—"Licenses to make collection for loss by fire." And he refers to the Statute of the 4th and 5th of Anne, cap. 14th, as relating to them. This he says under the head of Briefs, and in stating the duties of churchwardens, he further says, that one of them is "to collect the charity-money upon Briefs, which are directed to be read in churches, and to take care that the sums collected be endorsed on the Briefs in words at length, and signed by the minister and churchwardens. After which they were to be delivered over, with the money collected upon them, to persons undertaking them, within a specified time, under a penalty of £20. And he then states, that, under the provision of the Statute to which he refers, a Register is to be kept of all money collected under the authority of such Briefs; and further, that the undertakers, or persons having the charge of them, as trustees, shall, within two months after the receipts of the sums collected, and notice has been given to the sufferers, render up an account to a Master in Chancery appointed by the Lord Chancellor for this purpose. All this, he says, the same statute of Queen Anne requires to be done. The date of this statute is 1706 and 1707.

We must not then infer from Jacob's reference to this statute, that Briefs were at that time first established. For this was not the case. The Maresfield Register shows that parochial collections were made in this way nearly half a century previous to the passing of this Act, the date of the first collection recorded in it being 1664. Should it then be asked—What was the object of the passing of this Statute?

The heading tells us. It is there called "An Act for the better collecting Charity Money on Briefs by Letters Patents, and the preventing abuses in relation to such Charities;" and it then goes on to recite that, "Whereas many inconveniences do arise, and many frauds are committed in the common method of collecting Charity Money upon Briefs, by Letters Patents to the great trouble and prejudice of the objects of such charity, and to the great discouragement of well-disposed persons, for remedy whereof be it enacted," &c. The principal source of these abuses was the farming or purchasing of such charity monies, and hence by this statute this is declared to be unlawful, and a penalty of £500 is imposed on such as might be found to do so, which penalty, when inflicted, was to be applied to the relief of the sufferers intended to be benefited by these Briefs. At what date these general charity collections throughout the kingdom first commenced I have been unable to discover, for I find no earlier statute relating to them than this of Anne. The nature of the abuses arising out of them are manifest enough from the different enactments of this statute. After the 25th of March, 1706, none were to be deemed genuine that were not printed by the Queen's Printer, and afterwards stamped and registered in the Court of Chancery. They were also directed to be openly read in the church, within two months after their receipt, by the officiating minister of each parish, immediately before the sermon. After this the churchwardens were to collect money upon them in church directly after their reading, or from house to house in the parish, as they may be required by the Brief to do. And the money so collected was to be endorsed on the Brief, and signed by them and the officiating minister, as before stated, under a penalty of £20 for neglecting to do so. The number of Briefs received were to be entered in a book, and a register was to be kept of the money collected on each, which register, as well a book of receipts, which was also required to be kept, was to be open to public inspection, without fee, at all reasonable hours. And then follows a statement of the duties required of the undertakers, or those to whom the management of each Brief was entrusted. This statute was equally binding on the teachers

of the sect called Quakers, and on all teachers and preachers of separate congregations.

Whether or not these charitable collections were first made for the benefit of sufferers by fire, as Jacob says was the case, I am unable to say; but it is manifest enough, from the Maresfield register, that in 1664 it was not confined to the relief of sufferers by such calamities.

Why this mode of aiding the distressed was abandoned, about fifty years ago, I have never been able to discover. Possibly it might have been from the great expense which attended such collections. From a case mentioned by Burne, in his Ecclesiastical Law under the head "Briefs," which we may fairly presume to have been an average one, it would appear that nearly two-thirds of the money so received was expended in such costs and charges. For instance for the repair of a parish church in Westmoreland 10,489 Briefs were issued; of these 503 were returned blank; the remaining 9,986 realized £614 12s. 9d. Upon this the patent charges were £76 3s. 6d.; the salary of the receiver of the money collected upon the profitable Briefs, at 6d. in the pound, was £249 13s.; and what is called "The London Salary" amounted to £5; the whole charges then were £330 6s. 6d., which, deducted from the total amount gathered, leaves £283 16s. 3d. only, or considerably less than half, for the benefit of the church for which the Brief was granted and collection made. From this then we may form a tolerably accurate notion of the way in which these Briefs worked. We learn from the Uckfield Receipt Book that a Mr. Simmonds was, for many years, the collector of this district, and when he ceased to hold the office, the Brief monies—and *brief* monies they were, for in some instances 6d. only was collected in this extensive parish—were paid to save the expense of the collector's poundage, by the churchwardens, to Mr. Edwd. Verral, of Lewes, on the day of the Lewes Visitation.

The Briefs in the Maresfield Register, which are the most historically interesting are, one read in October, 1665, "for the relief of the poor who were sufferers by the plague in London;" another read in the same month of the following year, "for the relief of those whose losses were very great

from the fire in London;" a third, read in December, 1678, towards rebuilding the cathedral of St. Paul's, London; and those which seem to have worked the most strongly on the charitable feeling of the inhabitants of Maresfield were such as were read for the redemption of captives, and for the relief of those who were persecuted for their Protestantism in the sister country and abroad. The highest sum collected upon a Brief in this parish was £4 9s. 1d., which was raised in August, 1699, for the relief of the distressed Protestants in Ireland; a few realized above 20s.; and if the average were taken of the remainder it would amount to about 3s. each Brief.

In the year 1715 an epidemic similar to the one which, within the last few years, has been so destructive of cattle in this country, seems to have raged in and about London. The loss of cows in the milk-producing counties of Middlesex, Surrey, and Essex, for which a Brief was granted, was alone estimated at £24,539 16s.

The only Sussex Briefs mentioned are the following :— 1664, towards rebuilding Withyham Church; 1665, towards a loss by fire at Rotherfield; ditto, towards a loss by fire at Eastdeane; 1685, towards the reparation and enlargement of Aston (Alfriston) Church; 1702—3, towards the reparation of Rye Church; 1712, towards the reparation of St. Clement's Church, Hastings; 1714, towards the reparation and alteration of New Shoreham Church; 1721, towards a loss by fire at Amberley; 1722, towards repairing the damage done to the town of Brighthelmstone by an irruption of the sea; 1751, towards rebuilding Storrington Church.

I shall now give a few extracts from the interesting old register of Briefs as they were read in this parish, with the amount collected upon each.

For the Redemption of Captives in different parts of the world, and particularly those enslaved by the Turks, we have—

	£	s.	d.
1669, July 18, Collected for the Redemption of Captives under Turkish Slavery	-	-	-
	0	4	2
1670, May 22nd, Do. for William Massey, one of the Captives redeemed from Sally	-	-	-
	0	1	7

— December 25th, Do. towards the redemption of the
English Captives now in Turkish Slavery - - 2 3 0

So awakened was the sympathetic feeling of compassion for these miserable captives throughout the Kingdom at this time, on account of the Turkish cruelty exercised towards them, that it was not unusual for the more opulent class in this country to make bequests in their wills, either for their relief in slavery, or for their redemption from it.

For the aid of Protestants in Papistical Countries we have—

	£	s.	d.
1681, January 28th, Collected for the Protestants in Poland - - - - -	0	6	8
1682, April 20th, Do. towards the relief of the French Protestants - - - - -	0	8	1
1686, May 30th, Do. towards the relief of the distressed French Protestants - - - - -	1	2	0

These French Protestants had been driven out of France by the religious persecutions which were the consequence of the Revocation of the Edict of Nantz by Louis I., the year before. More than half a million of these Protestants were obliged to leave that country, of whom about 50,000 came to England for protection during the reign of James II. And it was probably towards their support upon their first coming here as exiles that collections were made for them, under the authority of this last and another brief, granted in 1688, which realized £1 10s. 5d. It will be seen that a collection had been made for them in April 1682, which realized 8s. 1d.

	£	s.	d.
1689, August 1st, Collected for the relief of the poore distressed Protestants in Ireland - - - - -	4	9	1
1691, May 10, Do. upon the second Briefe for the Irish Protestants - - - - -	0	11	0
1694, October 21st, Do. towards the Briefe for the French Protestants - - - - -	2	10	0
1707, February 15th, Do. upon the Briefe for the Protestant Church at Oberbarmen, in the Dutchy of Berg, in Germany - - - - -	0	5	4
1709, December 18th, Do. towards the Protestant Church at Mittaw, in Courland - - - - -	0	5	9

Towards the repairs, &c., of churches we have—

	£	s.	d.
1664, May 17th, Collected towards the rebuilding of With-			
ham Church - - - - -	0	7	8½

This Church had been struck by lightning and entirely destroyed, the year before.—(See Vol. XIV., p. 153).

	£	s.	d.
1671, July 2nd, Collected towards the repairs of Waltham			
Abbey Church in Essex - - - - -	0	5	0
1678, December 23rd, Do. towards rebuilding St. Paul's			
Church, in London - - - - -	1	1	1
1682, May 7th, Do. for the building the Church of St.			
Albans in the County of Hertford - - - - -	0	3	10
1702, Do. upon a Briefe for Rye and other churches, and a			
fire at Ely - - - - -	0	19	0

From memoranda left in the Registers of Rye, and from private information in my own possession, I am able to give the origin and history of this Rye Brief. Upon my great-great grandfather, the Revd. Edward Wilson, taking possession of the Vicarage of Rye in 1700, he being at the time Vicar of Framfield, he found no vicarage house there; and upon enquiry into the cause of this, he was informed that it had been so neglected by his predecessor's predecessor, that his immediate predecessor was obliged to take it down; and, for want of means, he had not rebuilt it. The Church, too, was in a most dilapidated and neglected state. He therefore set about making a provision for rebuilding the one, and for effecting a thorough reparation of the other. And this he was able to accomplish, though not without great difficulty, the sum required for the reparation of the church alone being of itself so large, that the parishioners refused to grant a rate towards it. At the suggestion then, and through the influence of his Framfield patron, the Earl of Thanet (Rye had been given him by a relative of his wife), he applied for, and obtained the Brief here alluded to, in 1702, and by the collections thus made, he realized very nearly £400; and with this, and a considerable sum subsequently borrowed upon the security of the parish rates, which his parishioners most liberally engaged to repay by five

yearly instalments, my ancestor was enabled to effect what he so ardently desired. He also recovered, at a considerable cost to himself, a part of the endowment of the vicarage, which had been alienated by a former vicar. And it was out of consideration of the great trouble and expense he had been put to in carrying out these different matters for the good of the living, that his friend, Dr. Williams, then Bishop of Chichester, obtained for him and his successors in the same benefice, a discharge from the payments of first-fruits and tenths. He also rebuilt the vicarage house at Framfield.

	£	s.	d.
1713, June 17th, Collected upon the Briefe for St. John Baptist Church, Southover, Lewes, damage £1,510	0	5	4

As the steeple of Southover Church fell in 1698, this Briefe was probably granted, and the collection under its authority made, towards the expenses of building the present substantial brick tower.

	£	s.	d.
1714, October 31st, collected upon the Briefe for New Shoreham Church, Sussex, damage £2,203 -	-	0	3 0
1720, July 2nd, Do. for Oxtead Church, in Surrey, which had been struck by lightning, charge £1,904 -	-	0	1 6
1721, June 25th, Do. for Amberley Church, in Sussex, Loss by fire, £1,280 -	-	0	4 9
1732, May 17th, Do. upon Llandaff Cathedral, charge £26,366 -	-	0	3 4½
1751, June 23rd, Do. for Storrington Church, Sussex, charge £1,650 -	-	0	4 6

This church having been considerably damaged by lightning, was rebuilt about this time, and towards the expense thus incurred, this Brief was doubtless granted.

Among the Briefs granted as a compensation for losses by fire are the following—

	£	s.	d.
1665, March 11th, Collected for a fire at East Deane, in Sussex -	-	0	5 1
1666, Octr. 20th, Do. towards the relief of the poore sufferers by the late exceeding great fire in London -	-	0	13 0
1667, June 30th, Do. for a fire neere Shrewsbury, in Salop, by which a loss was sustained of neere £30,000 -	-	0	3 5
1671, August 4th, Do. for a fire in the Sugar-house in Cold-bath Fields, in London -	-	0	4 0

1676, August 13th, Collected for Northampton, as relief to the Inhabitants in their dreadful Fire	-	-	0	11	11
1704, January 2nd, Do. towards Wapping Brief for Fire	-	-	0	12	4
1716, August 26, Do. upon the Briefe for Spalding, in Lincolnshire, loss by fire, £20,560	-	-	0	14	0
— Sept. 9th, Do. for Thames Street, London, loss £7,650	-	-	0	7	0
1721, June 25th, Do. for Amberley, in Sussex, loss by fire, £1,280	-	-	0	4	9
1728, Oct. 17th, Do. upon Gravesend Fire, Loss £21,232	-	-	1	4	1½
1729, March 15th, Do. upon Copenhagen Fire, damage not stated	-	-	1	12	10
1736, Sept. 13th, Do. upon Royston Fire, in Hertfordshire, loss £2,272	-	-	0	6	0
1747, June 21st, Do. on St. Paul's, Shadwell, Loss by Fire, £1,387	-	-	0	3	1

I shall now conclude my paper with a few miscellaneous extracts.

	£	s.	d.
1665, Oct. 8th, Collected towards the Relief of the Poore visited by the Plague in London	-	-	0 9 0
1666, March 24th, Do. for John Osbourne, a Russia Merchant, whose losse was £10,000	-	-	0 2 3
1671, July 9th, Do. towards the relief of the Inhabitants of Meere, in Wiltshire	-	-	0 2 0
1763, April 6th, Do. for the Inhabitants of Russell Street, St. Martin's Lane, Middlesex	-	-	0 1 6
— May 18th, Do. for Job Smallpeice, of Stoke-next-Guildford, in Surrey	-	-	0 1 5
1676, March 18th, Do. towards the relief of the Sufferers in the Borough of Southwark	-	-	0 15 9
1677, May 15th, Do. for the relief of the distressed Ministers in Hungary	-	-	0 9 5
1682, December 23rd, Do. for New Winsor	-	-	0 4 0
— December 25th, Do. for Dyer's Hall, in Thames Street, London	-	-	0 3 10
1683, April 8th, Do. for the relief of Presteigne, in Radnorshire, Wales	-	-	1 5 3
1687, March 21st, Do. for Whitechapel	-	-	0 6 2½
1690, June 22nd, Do. for Southwarke, in the County of Surrey	-	-	0 4 11

These last two collections are directed to be certified to the Chamberlain of London, with the names of the parishes and their respective ministers.

	£	s.	d.
1690, July 22nd, Collected for East Smithfield, in Middlesex	-	-	0 6 2

This is directed to be certified in a similar manner.

	£	s.	d.
1692, May 29th, Collected for the Briefe for poore Sufferers by casualties at Sea - - - -	0	2	0
— September 21st, Do. towards the Redemption of the Christian Captives under the Turks in Argear [Algiers] and other places - - - -	0	10	0
— December 25th, Do. towards the Briefe for Tonbridge Wells - - - -	0	2	6
1695, June 23rd, Collected upon the Briefe granted to the Inhabitants of Warwick - - - -	1	7	6
1699, June 4th, Do. toward the Briefe for the Voudois and French Refugees - - - -	1	8	0
1701, January 19th, Do. towards the Briefe for the Slaves in Morocco - - - -	0	13	0
1704, April 9th, Do. towards the Briefe for the Inhabitants of the Principality of Orange - - - -	0	12	0
— July 12th, Do. for the relief of the seamen's widows and orphans - - - -	0	10	0

A remark is this year made, that "all the preceding Briefs were read in Maresfield Church, and collections made upon each, previous to the passing of the Act of the 4th and 5th of Queen Anne, and that those that follow have been read since, and have the amount of the loss sustained stated in each case."

	£	s.	d.
1709, November 13th, Collected towards the Palatine Briefe, the number of souls being about 8,000 - - - -	1	15	0
1715, September 4th, Do. upon the Brief for the cow-keepers - - - -	0	13	2

The grounds upon which this Brief was granted are more fully stated in the Brief Book of the adjoining parish of Uckfield than in this parish. The Record there is as follows: "September 4th, 1715, collected upon the Cow-keeper's Brief in the counties of Middlesex, Surrey, and Essex, for loss of cows by an infectious and malignant distemper, amounting to £24,539 14s. and upwards." The sum raised here is given above. At Uckfield they raised £1 7s. 3d.

	£	s.	d.
1716, December 16th, Collected upon the Briefe for Reforming the Episcopal Churches in Great Poland and Polish Russia - - - -	0	12	0
1720, May 15th, Do. for the sufferers by thunder, &c., in Staffordshire - - - -	0	7	6

1722, November 11th, Do. for the Inundation in the County Palatine of Lancashire; damage sustained, £10,227	0	7	1
February 10th, Do. for Brighthelmstone, in the County of Sussex; charge £8,000 - - - -	-	-	-
	{ Sums raised not stated.		

The Brief here alluded to was obtained by virtue of letters patent under the great seal in 1722. The author of of a Tour through the island of Great Britain, in speaking of it at p. 61, says:—"The sea is very unkind to this town, and has, by its continual encroachments, so gained upon it, that in a little time more the inhabitants might reasonably expect that it would eat up the whole of it, above one hundred houses having been devoured by the water in a few years past. They were now obliged to get a Brief granted to beg money all over England, to raise banks against the water, the expense of which the Brief expressly says will be eight thousand pounds, which, if one were to look at the town only, would seem to be more than all the houses in it are worth." The collection thus made realized £1,700; and this sum, together with the local contributions, enabled them, by means of groynes, &c., to secure the town against the fearful encroachments which the sea was making at this time.

	£	s.	d.
1724, August 16th, Collected for an Inundation at Halifax, in Yorkshire, damage sustained £3,395 - - - -	0	3	4
1726, August 1st, Do. for the Folkstone Fishery in Kent, damage sustained £3,598 - - - -	0	2	5
1729, April 10th, Do. upon St. Andrew's Harbour, charge £8,734 - - - -	0	12	7
1730, Sept. 13th, Do. upon Wroot Inundation, damage sus- tained £2,686 - - - -	0	4	8½
1733, May 6th, Do. for Aberbrothoc Harbour, Forfarshire, charge £9,311 - - - -	0	3	4
1736, September 19th, Do. towards the loss at Mobberley, Cheshire, by a Storm of Hail, damage £1,905 - - - -	0	4	9
1738, October 15th, Do. upon Dunstone and Dadington Brieve, Oxfordshire, damage by Hail £1,000 - - - -	0	2	8
1739, October 30th, Do. upon Standen, loss by Hailstorm - - - -	1	1	6
1741, May 17th, Do. for the Oyster Dredgers - - - -	0	2	9
1744, June 11th, Do. for the Fishermen of Faversham, loss £9,000 - - - -	0	8	1
1745, December 8th, Do. upon Blacktoft, damage by Flood - - - -	0	3	0½
1751, July 14th, Collected for damage by Hailstorm, estimated at £4,228 - - - -	0	6	2