



EXTRACTS FROM THE CHURCH-  
WARDENS' ACCOUNTS AND VESTRY  
MINUTES OF ST. JOHN'S, CHESTER.

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THE history of a parish church, if we follow out the lines which are suggested to us by the entries in parish books and registers, becomes a history of the neighbourhood in which the church is situated, a history of the families which surround it, a history of the city where it stands, of the events which have marked the history of the Church of England, and indeed a history of the country in which we live.

The churchwardens' books of St. John's begin in the year 1633, and continue in an unbroken record to the present day. These books contain the signatures of men who played important parts in the civic history as well as in public life. The name of Ric<sup>d</sup> Throppe, which is impressed upon the cover of this book as churchwarden at the time its entries begin, is the name of one of that group of disheartened Royalists who accompanied King Charles I. as he left the city by the Dee bridge, on the 25th September, 1645, after the outworks were taken, and the city itself threatened with immediate destruction. The signature

of Charles Walley, which appears frequently as chairman of vestry, is the signature of the man who was Mayor of Chester when the Parliamentary troops poured through the breaches made in the outworks, and, rushing down Foregate Street, surged around St. John's Church, and were beaten back only by the city walls. Charles Walley lived in Foregate Street, and had a pew in St. John's; his house was sacked, and the sword and mace, which had perhaps been carried before him often to St. John's Church, captured, and sent as trophies to the House of Commons in London. So I might multiply instances to show how the history of a parish is interwoven with the history of a city, a county, and a state.

The vestry meetings, of which full minutes are given in these books, were very important gatherings. Sometimes as many as thirty or forty signatures, many of them the signatures of persons of importance, are attached to the proceedings. They were the local boards of the day; guardians of highways and of the poor, the layers of rates, and the spenders of the ratepayers' money; they levied rates in time of war for providing a certain number of men to serve in the army, and for ships and men for the navy, and they made provision for the wives and families of soldiers and volunteers.

At the Easter vestry meetings there were appointed churchwardens, sidesmen, or swornmen, auditors, guardians of the poor, and pew commissioners, for placing or displacing the people in church (or, as they might have written it, for pleasing or displeasing the people). These commissioners appear to have taken precedence of the churchwardens, whose thankless office it is to seat the parishioners. They were appointed regularly down to the time of the restoration of the church, about thirty years ago. Two letters remain from bishops of Chester, one in 1708 from Bishop Dawes, and

the other in 1803 from Bishop Majendie, stirring up these commissioners to collect pew rents for the use of the Vicar. These Commissioners had also authority from the Bishop to examine the churchwardens' accounts, and to accept or reject them as they judged best. In 1638, there appear in the books the names of all the people, and the seats which they were appointed to occupy, with the Mayor's seat in front; he was often a parishioner of St. John's. It must have been a difficult matter for these Commissioners; their perplexity is hinted at in the names crossed out, and the substitution of others. There must have been some black looks, when the people came into church, the Sunday after the Commissioners had been at work.

The churchwardens received every year payment for "Ley stalls." This was a payment for a grave or burial place in either the church or churchyard. They also collected payment for seats in the church as far back as 1638, and every year there is a payment for making up the "houslyng books." This was a list of communicants,

"Cut off, even in the blossom of my sins,  
*Unhousel'd*, disappointed, unanel'd."

This list appears to have been made with some view to rating, or to presenting those who did not attend to their religious duties, to the Bishop. There were, when the King's Commissioners visited St. John's in 1548, one thousand two hundred "houselyng people," *i.e.*, adults, persons of age to receive the "Lord's supper." All members of the church were accustomed to be communicants. Among the receipts of the churchwardens these entries occur:—

*Proceeds of the Houslyng Money.*

|      |           |         |
|------|-----------|---------|
| 1638 | - - - - - | £3 8 4  |
| 1642 | - - - - - | £3 13 5 |

From the accounts for Sacramental wine, always kept separate from the other accounts, we find that it was customary to celebrate Holy Communion ten or twelve times in the year, but always on Palm Sunday, Good Friday, and Easter Day; there is not an entry for wine on Christmas Day. In the year 1641, there is an entry to the joiner for mending the communion table and taking away the rails, 2s. Is this evidence of Puritan influence? Archbishop Laud had the Holy Table placed against the east wall of the chancel and railed round. Perhaps this entry is evidence of its having been taken into the body of the chancel, in accordance with Puritan sympathies.

In the case of a church of the importance of St. John's, standing without the walls, it is impossible that the events of 1644-1645 should have passed without leaving their mark in many ways. In September, 1642, Charles I. came from Nottingham, by Shrewsbury, to Chester. The churchwardens paid the ringers, "when the king came to Chester, 1s. 6d." In 1643, the siege began in earnest. The earthworks were carried from the river, by the Dee Lane and Bars, round by Upper Northgate Street, and down to the river again by the Water Tower. These were fiercely defended, and sorties constantly made by the Royalists of Chester against the Parliamentary troops, under Sir W. Brereton, himself a citizen, but offended with his fellow citizens. It appears that this Brereton had a spite against the citizens, because they had assessed some land of his, called the "Nunnery lands," which were supposed to be free from rates, and had assessed them for the payment of the hateful "Ship money." We find in July, 1643, he met with a great repulse, and there was paid by the churchwardens of St. John's "to the ringers, for the king's victory, 2s." Perhaps the ringers watched the conflict from the tower, and rang a triple bob major (if they had such

things then) in triumph; perhaps they were themselves helping to man the earthworks, and, when released by the return of the victorious citizens, ran in hot haste to tell the city the news in a joyous peal.

The wardens were prudent as well as liberal. A few days afterwards appears, "paid for taking down the ladders from the tower and carrying them within the walls, 9s.," and now no one could mount above the bell-ringing chamber to view the city, or make use of the tower for purposes of attack.

In 1644, the ringers were paid "for the king's victory in Lancashire, 2s.," for ringing, "when Liverpool was taken, 2s.," "for victory over the Earl of Essex, 2s.," and again "for the king's victory, 2s." In 1643, they were paid, "ringing for the victory at Middlewich, 2s. 6d."

In 1644, Prince Maurice came to Chester, and issued a precept to the Mayor and other Commissioners to tender a protestation or test to the inhabitants of the city, in which they declared their loyalty to the king. The churchwardens of St. John's "paid for a book to take the names of those who took the test, 6 pence."

It was customary, in accordance with the injunctions of Queen Elizabeth, for the principal parishioners to perambulate the parish boundaries on Holy Thursday or Ascension Day. On these occasions they appear to have had a dinner together: "Pd For the minister's dinner, and our own, when we went the perambulation, 4s.," and again, "Spent, when we went the Perambulations, 4s.," is an entry which occurs in the year 1645. How they could have walked the bounds of the parish, which extended to Bishopsfields and Far Boughton (to White House), when the city was surrounded by the enemy, it is difficult to explain. Either the troops were drawn off for a time on some expedition, or the churchwardens took the walk as done, stayed at home, and eat the dinner.

In September, 1645, the troops from Beeston, after a forced march by night, took the outworks, and the whole of St. John's parish lay at their mercy. We can guess the state of things. The people driven within the walls, the Foregate Street in flames, Boughton destroyed, the church used as a shelter or base of operations against the walls; the principal attack was made against that part of the wall which runs through St. John's parish, from Eastgate to Newgate. The parish accounts are kept, but there can have been no services in the church. The entries for wine for Holy Communion cease in the month of September, 1645, and there are no entries under this head in 1646. The year's expenses were £8. 16s.

On February 3rd, 1645-6, the city surrendered; we find "paid for a part of the Clock unto the soldiers 2s. 6d." The account of the siege is given by Randle Holme, in so graphic and pathetic a manner, that we are made to wish we had more of his wonderful MSS. in print.

The entries in years succeeding the siege, show that it was a long time before the church was restored to anything like order and decency.

1646. "Payd for nails for the Church door, the pulpit, the minister's seat, Mr. Maior's seat, 8s. 6d."

"P<sup>d</sup> Carpenter for making the staves to the pulpit, 10s. 4d."

"P<sup>d</sup> for making two petitions, one to Mr. Maior & the other to the Committee for a collection to repair the Church, 2s."

"P<sup>d</sup> Thomas Lyall towards the gates, & a new board and a cover for the table in the Chancell, £3."

"P<sup>d</sup> David Dobb for repairing the way to the Meeting House."

This was either St. James's parish church, which stood at the south side of the church, and was used as a meeting house for the Tanners' Company, or the Hermitage, used

for the same purpose by the Shoemakers' Company. The seats in church were all destroyed.

“Pd Carriage of forms from the Cathedral to St. John's & drawing a petition, 3s.”

An entry, “Pd for a Quart of Burnt Sack to welcome Mr. Ball to Chester, 2s.,” is supposed to refer to the arrival of a new minister, to take the place of one turned out. In 1645, there is a memorandum by the churchwardens:—

“Paid unto Mr. George Burches, minister, before his quarter-age came to be collected, in regard of his necessity, the sum of £1. 5s.”

This seems to show the miserable condition into which the vicar of St. John's was brought in those troublous times. Poor Mr. Burches disappears from the scene; perhaps heart broken at the devastation of his church, and the poverty and misery he endured. Perhaps he was ejected to make room for this Mr. Ball. In the printed list of vicars of St. John's, Mr. Ball has hitherto found no place, John Pemberton succeeding to George Burches in 1650, so that between 1645 and 1650 we have only Mr. Ball to fall back upon.

Now, the parish had to buy a new piece of church furniture, whether in mercy to themselves or Mr. Ball you must judge.

“Pd for an houre glass, 9d.”

Perhaps an entry like the following, refers to some one of the lawful clergy ejected and persecuted by the Parliament:—

“Pd Given unto a banished minister, by Mr. Ball's appointment, that came out of prison.”

Is the following entry to be taken as evidence that care was taken to show contempt for the ordinances of the church?—

“P<sup>d</sup> for 3 quarts of sack given on the fast days to Mr. Ball, 5s.”

Expenses for year 1647, £6. 17s. 11d. only.

Although Mr. Ball does not appear among the list of vicars, as printed in the local histories, there is evidence that he occupied an important position in the parish. In 1648, the less important parts of church furniture were brought in:—

“P<sup>d</sup> for a frame for the cittie sword, 3s.”

“For drawing Mr. Maior's arms paid to Mr. Holme, 2s.”

This was one of the celebrated Holme family. The mayor was again a parishioner, and came in state to church, the city sword and mace having been returned to Chester by this time. In this year there is—

“Spent on the gentlemen when we went to Mr. Maior about the £50 for the minister, 3s.”

In 1650, the people were seated again in church, but the frequent erasures and alterations, show that the commissioners found their task no easier than before. John Pemberton now appears as vicar; he signs “pastor” after his name. In this year the churchwardens received from the deputy receiver general, the sum of £21. 6s. 8d. for the minister of St. John's, but they seem uncertain who was the person lawfully authorised to receive it; the parishioners give them an indemnity, in case they are called upon, to refund the money. This £21. 6s. 8d. was the money left from the endowments of the college, when Edward VI.'s Commissioners took care of the rest for the good of their country, to pay a vicar and his assistant to



perform the services of the church. The first vicar and his assistant were selected from among the clergy who were ministering in the College and Chantries, at the time of the dissolution. So far from the old endowments being handed over to any new made church, as is so often stated, we find two of the priests actually employed in the services of the college, appointed to perform the service according to the use of the Prayer Book of Edward VI.'s time.

This payment the vicar now receives; it is made to the "preacher of St. John's," and comes from the Consolidated Fund. It puzzled me a good deal, (not unpleasantly) until I learnt its origin. I find a document which shows that it was made a charge upon the revenues of the Earldom of Chester, and was acknowledged by George, Prince of Wales, and Earl of Chester, who, in 1717, ordered his auditor to pay all arrears due.

Before I pass on to further payments by churchwardens, I must take you to the Parish Registers. The Parliament passed an ordinance in 1644 forbidding the use of the *Book of Common Prayer* in any place of worship in England and Wales, and a further ordinance forbade the use of it even in private houses; all copies of the book were to be given up to be burned. Penalties were imposed for disobedience to this tyrannical order: £5 for first offence, £10 for second, imprisonment for a third.

*The Directory for Public Worship*, issued in its place, was to be used under penalty of 40s., and any one who preached or wrote against it was fined from £5 to £50. This *Directory* instructed the minister to get his own mind and the minds of the people into a proper condition to receive divine truth. How this desirable but difficult work was to be effected, we are not informed. Macaulay's words have often been quoted: "Thus it became a crime in a child to read by the bedside of a sick parent, one of those beautiful

collects which had soothed the griefs of forty generations of Christian people." Volumes no doubt might be written about the extravagances of those days—the outrages upon decency, and the cruel insults to all that churchmen held dear and sacred. Our registers bear a silent, but what an eloquent record to the sadness of the times; there is more eloquence sometimes in silence than in words. From August, 1641, to the end of 1652, there are only fifty-eight registers of baptisms. Only four marriages are recorded from June 9th, 1639, to 5th February, 1653. Registers of burials cease altogether from April, 1640, to February, 1654. The *Directory* forbade the use of any service whatever at the burial of the dead. Thus they sorrowed, and compelled men to sorrow as those without hope.

The following entry appears in this register book:—

"This booke was taken into the Church July 16, 1676, and there everye Sabbath to be [for] all Christenings, Marriages, and Burials to be entered by the Minister, Churchwardens, and Clerk; the occasion whereof is through many mistakes and defaults made formerly by Thomas Morries, Clerk."

Yet, even in the sad years when churchmen were forbidden to worship as they wished, there were some sturdy old churchmen in St. John's parish, whose children were not only baptised, but entered in the parish registers. Randle Oulton was one of these; he was often at vestry meetings, and generally took the chair (vicar or no vicar); indeed, the vicar seldom occupied the chair in those days, nor until long afterwards, he was generally overshadowed by one of the influential parishioners, and Randle Oulton seldom signed anywhere but first. Well, he had eight children born in these years, all baptised and registered. He was mayor of Chester more than once. William Wilson was another of these churchmen; John Cotgreave,

Ralph Edge, Roger Maddocks, most of them mayors of Chester in their day, had several children baptised, and entered in the registers; but Randle's quiver was the fullest, and with a stout heart no doubt, he faced his enemies in the gate, as he was called to do, along with all Royalists in that unhappy time.

In 1649, "P<sup>d</sup> the ringers for ringing for the Victory in Dublin."

This was the terrible campaign of Cromwell, when he revenged the massacre of Protestants, by a slaughter of Roman Catholics equally hideous.

Another thing we may notice, as an evidence of the ravages wrought in these days,—the absence of fine monuments in St. John's. In St. Mary's, they were preserved by the terms of surrender, and we know that tombs, similar to those of the Gamulls and Oldfields in St. Mary's, existed at St. John's. Here is the evidence of one of them: this, of which I have a drawing here, was actually erected, and, together with others, destroyed by the Puritans. Under two arched recesses, supported by columns, kneel in two groups four figures, two male and two female, facing each other, with desk and books between them. The tomb is classical in design, and underneath the sketch is the contract for its erection, and at the back three receipts for the three instalments of the money.

"Memorandum. That the first day of December in the 45<sup>th</sup> year of the reign of Elizabeth, 1602, it is agreed between Alexander Cotes of the Cittie of Chester, gentleman, and Maximilian Coult, of London, Alien, that the said Maximilian shall make, frame, erect, and sett up in the place agreed upon in the Church of S<sup>t</sup> John Baptist, in the Cittie of Chester, before the Feast of the Annunciation of the Blessed Virgin next comyng, the tomb of the forme before set down to be wrought of alabaster of the saide Alexander Cotes, with the Incriptions upon . . . and the Arms of Alabaster to be provided by him, the said Maximilian, at

London, and two Armes of Cane Stone to be set over the utter gate of the dwelling house of the said Alexander Cotes in the place appointed, the tomb and the proportion to be according to the scale aforesaid. And for the doing thereof the said Alexander Cotes, is to pay the said Maximilian Coult the somm of ten pounds in form following, viz., iij<sup>l</sup> vj<sup>s</sup> viij<sup>d</sup> in hand, other iij<sup>l</sup> vj<sup>s</sup> viij<sup>d</sup> when the stuffe cometh from London, other iij<sup>l</sup> vj<sup>s</sup> viij<sup>d</sup> when the same work is furnished and set up. And Randal Holme, of Chester, paynter, is surety for the said Maximilian for the performance thereof.

(Signed)

ALEX<sup>R</sup> COTES,  
MAXIMILIAN COULT.

Witness thereof { Randle Holme,  
W. Powell,  
Anne Spark.”

Alexander Cotes was the lay impropiator and patron of St. John's. A house, which stood where St. John's rectory now stands, is marked on an old plan as "Mr Cote's House." Ann Sparks<sup>1</sup> was his daughter and heiress, and by her marriage with Mr. Sparks brought the advowson of the living into that family.

The tide of war, however, rolled away, and the people entered their Church once more. What a cruel spectacle it must have presented; for twenty weeks it had sheltered the besiegers of the city. The books are full of entries for repairs, flagging the church, &c. In 1654, the long sermons had done their work on the pulpit cushion:—

“P<sup>d</sup> for Stuff to bottom the pulpit cushion, 4s.”

“P<sup>d</sup> Daniel Croston for bottoming it, 1s.”

The church flagon was also mended for 6d. There is a curious feature about the church plate, a chalice of Charles I., 1634, having survived all the troubles of those times,—when money was wanted for the king, and plate was coined,

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<sup>1</sup> Maid of honour to Queen Elizabeth.

when Puritans seized on church ornaments, and soldiers pillaged,—some sturdy churchwarden, perhaps Mr. Mayor Walley, who was mayor and warden when the outworks of the city were taken, hid away this cup. In 1674, they made a copy of it, and the initials of Randle Batho, and Thomas Bird, churchwardens, were placed on both cups, and the date 1674; but we can see that the later piece is a clumsy copy of the more graceful chalice. It was a mystery to me how one could be so much better than the other, until Mr. Lowe showed the dates by the Hall mark. In 1656, the parish bounds were marked for the first time since 1645, and 4s. was paid for the "collation." Then there was:—

"Pay<sup>d</sup> Henry —, the joiner, for the minister's seat, & the passage into the pulpit, as will appear by a note under his hand, £2. 15s."

1656. "P<sup>d</sup> Ralph Almond, the smith, for making a case to hold the basson in, & for a lock for the minister's seat, 2s. 8d."

"P<sup>d</sup> Thomas Blessing, for paynting & gildinge the case that holdeth the basson in the Church, 6s."

This "basson" was, I find from church accounts in another parish, for the administration of the Sacrament of Holy Baptism. Where was the font? All fonts had been taken out of the parish churches by the soldiers. The history of our particular font will be given presently. It appears that they had time now for attending to the æsthetics, and, if they must wear chains, would at all events have them gilded.

"Paid Thomas Blessing, for the gilding of the houre glass, 6s."

It seems that, since the ladders had been taken from the tower, it had not been possible to ascend it. It had no doubt suffered in the siege, and needed (as it always seems to have done since the day it was finished) repairs.

“Paid to Alderman Foulon, for 10,000 slates, £5. Paid for the Carriage of them from the boat, 8s. 4d.”

“payd. to the Joyner, for 4 foote of — & 6 foote of Spares for the bell wheeles, 1s.”

“P<sup>d</sup> to Thomas Loyd, in part of payment, for the making of the bell wheeles, £1. 10s.”

Now they had to get into the steeple.

“pay<sup>d</sup> for pack thread to flinge into the Steepill, 2s. 6d.”

“Given Roger Maddock, for his paynes for flinging 3 dayes, 4s.”

“Given unto Charles Robinson, for going up into the Steepill, 6s.”

The carpenters had morning draughts when they made the windles.

“P<sup>d</sup> for 41 lbs. of Spanish Iron, 1s. 6d., at 2<sup>d</sup> a pound, for the windles, 8s. 6d.”

“P<sup>d</sup> W<sup>m</sup> Ragge, the Smith, for working of it, 4s.”

“Paid to Edward Powell, for helping to lay the Bell flower with y<sup>e</sup> boardes, 2s. 6d.”

A sawpit was dug, and everything seems to show that great activity existed around the church. £30 was spent.

1657. Two bells were recast (probably having been cracked in the siege) at a cost of £5. 6s., and more metal, £4. 6s. 8d.

“Paid the Bell founder £11. 17s. 7d.”

In 1659, Mr. Sparke, the lay rector, attended a parish meeting, and made a demand for the tithes and other payments; the parish engaged to defend any suit brought against any parishioner on this charge. The churchwardens venture to spend £1. 5s. on an audit dinner this year.

In 1660, the new ladders were made for the steeple, and put into their places. This was a joyful year for those who loved Church and King. King Charles II. was proclaimed, the bells of St. John's were rehung just in time,

and the churchwardens paid the ringers when the king was proclaimed, 6s.

The bishopric was restored. Bishop Brian Walton entered Chester. At the Bars the Mayor and Corporation, Clergy, trainbands of the city in their formalities, and principal inhabitants, met their bishop, and walked before him to the palace, amidst the acclamations of the people, who expressed the greatest joy at the restoration of Episcopacy. Better times were in store for churchmen; the people were heartily tired of the vagaries which had been played, the long sermons, the extemporaneous prayers, which, in the ears of those accustomed to the solemn piety of the Prayer Book, sounded almost ludicrous and profane. They longed for the sober piety of the prayers they had learned to love; they longed to have their solemn life union in holy matrimony, consecrated once more by prayer and sacrament; they longed to be allowed to dedicate their little children again to God in Holy Baptism; they longed to see their loved ones laid in their last quiet resting place, with words of hope and faith; they longed for the quiet, tender, devotional services of the church, for reverence in holy places, and in the presence of holy things, instead of the disorder, ruin, contempt, and profanity, which they had witnessed. One writer says: "The enthusiasm of the people was too impatient for legal forms, and in thousands of parish churches the liturgy was restored on the Sunday after the king's return, under no other authority than what was conferred by the unanimous feelings of the pastor and his flock. The reaction was sudden and complete. Puritanism retained no hold on the affections of the people, and they scarcely expressed any interest in its fallen fortunes."

The changes of vicar were numerous in these days. No one seemed to settle at St. John's: John Pemberton, eight

years; Peter Leigh, four years; Alexander Featherstone, three years. A contrast to Parson Richardson's fifty-three years, and my predecessor's, thirty-seven years.

In 1662, we find what had become of the font, which had been taken out of the church in 1646.

“Pai<sup>d</sup> for the getting of the font stone out of Mr. Bickerton's garden, 1s.”

“Spent upon those men that fetcht it, & the Servants, who showed them to it, 1s.”

“Paid for drawing of the font stone to the Church from Mr. Bickerton's, 1s.”

“P<sup>d</sup> unto Ralph Downam for the setting up of the font stone, 12s.”

I take it that the bowl of our present font is the stone here referred to in Mr. Bickerton's garden; it had perhaps served the purpose of an ornamental flower bowl, or perhaps of a trough for dogs to drink out of. Next comes:—

“P<sup>d</sup> for the Common Prayer book, 8s.”

“P<sup>d</sup> for 8 Ells of Holland to make the Sarpliss, £1. 17s.”

“P<sup>d</sup> for the making of it, 5s.”

“P<sup>d</sup> for 3 lbs. of Wax candles to read Prayers by, 5s.”

“P<sup>d</sup> for a book, which the Lord Bp. sent to us to give to the Minister, 6d.”

The oath of allegiance was probably taken, for the churchwardens

“P<sup>d</sup> to the Visitors for the book of our oaths, 6d.”

“Paid Henry Johnson for the Cover for the font, 6s.”

Whether a change of minister followed upon these other changes, I don't know, but there is this entry:—

“P<sup>d</sup> to M<sup>r</sup> Chatterton for his preaching upon two first days, by the Commissory's order, £1.”

This was in 1662, and in that year Alexander Featherstone became vicar. Peter Leigh, his predecessor, was a



nonconforming minister, who refused to use the Prayer Book, and retired from his post.

Here is further evidence of the Restoration:—

“P<sup>d</sup> Henry Johnson for the setting up of the King’s arms, 1s. 6d.”

“P<sup>d</sup> for two iron bars & 2 iron clamps for the Staying of the King’s Armes, 3s. 4d.”

“P<sup>d</sup> for the Kings Armes, £4.”

“P<sup>d</sup> for a piece of plate for the Church use, £1. 13s. 6d.”

“For changing the old flagons & bason for 2 new flagons, 10s.”

Now the people were seated again in church. Charles Walley, the mayor, who was deposed by the Commonwealth, had his seat in the middle aisle, so had sturdy Randle Oulton, with all his olive branches. Richard Broster, too, and other old friends. How thankful they must have been to enjoy once more the services they loved.

“Paid for ringing on King’s Coronation Day, 1s. 6d.”

“P<sup>d</sup> for 60 lbs. of leade for the (lining of the) font, 13s. 9d.”

Christmas was kept in good style again.

“P<sup>d</sup> for 2 lbs. of candles, & 3 large links for Xmas Day in the morning, for the Parish use, 5s. 4d.”

“Paid for Hollies & Evergreens to dress the Church, 2s. 6d.”

In 1665, they were still unsettled about their vicar.

“M<sup>r</sup> Broster was paid for preaching two Sabbaths, £2.”

“M<sup>r</sup> Trafford for preaching, 10s.”

Thomas Bridge became vicar in this year. Alexander Featherstone was only here for three years.

Though regicides were out of favour, there were vulpicides in those days, and I am afraid the churchwardens of St. John’s would be out of favour with the Cheshire hunt.

“P<sup>d</sup> for a fox’s head, 1s.”

The entry, "Paid for ringing two several times for news against the Hollanders," refers to a bitter conflict between England and Holland, owing to the quarrels of merchants belonging to the two nations on the Guinea coast. The king had not received the kindest treatment from Holland in his exile, and no love was lost between the nations. The Dutch were very tough, but the Englishman was tougher. "They may be killed," said the Dutch admiral, "but they can't be conquered."

1669. "Pd M<sup>r</sup> Bickerton's man for bringing an order from the Lord Bp. against Conventicles, 8d."

This must have been the Mr. Bickerton who had the font stone. Was he the bishop's secretary? In 1672, there was

"Paid to Mr. Robert Radford, for foure yards of Dyaper to make the Communion Tabell Cloth, & two napkins, 12s."

This I take to be the curious linen cloth worked with the history of St. John Baptist. The feast, the daughter of Herodias, the executioner, and the head brought in a charger, are the subjects repeated again and again on the linen.

"More payd to Widdow Burges for making of the table cloth & the two napkins, and for washing them, 1s. 2d."

"Paid M<sup>r</sup> Humphrey Jones, the Draper, for 3 yards of green Broad Cloth for a Carpitt for the Communion Tabell, £1. 10s."

Again, the Hollanders:—

"Paid. Ringing for news agst. the hollanders, 2s. 6d."

"Thanks giving day, being good news against the hollanders."

They rang on May 29th, "for the day of his majesty's return, 2s."

1672. The distressed minister appears, perhaps in the person of some who had refused to conform, and had given up their livings:—

P<sup>d</sup> "to a distressed minister, that was recommended to us by M<sup>r</sup> Maior & M<sup>r</sup> Bridge, 1s."

and, again, "p<sup>d</sup> a distressed minister, 2s."

1673. "P<sup>d</sup> ringing the Day the Peace was proclaimed between England and Holland, 3s."

In this year there is an entry:—

"Paid Mr. Randle Holme, for work done about the Standards for the Sword and maise, 5s."

These were heraldic paintings by our friend the herald and antiquary.

In 1684, extensive repairs were needed for the steeple and roof of the church. Thirty-eight hundredweight of lead cost £22. Clamps of iron and great barrs for the roofe of the church, £2. Workmen got 1s. 4d. and 8d. a day.

"Paid Samuel Looms for rails and bannisters for the Communion Table, and for other timber, as doth appear by notice, £9. 4s."

This was an extensive order. These rails, I suspect, were the oak rails, which were taken away when the present stone arcading was erected. These rails were sold, and are now in a house at Heswall.

"1680. The Ch. Wardens paid W<sup>m</sup> Crane for writing the Creed, ye Lord's Prayer and the Antiquitie of the Church, 12s."

The last refers to the statement now to be seen in the porch:—

The yeare of grace six hundred fourscore and nyen  
As sheweth myne Auctour a Briton giraldu  
Kynge Ethelred myndyng most the blysse of Heven  
Edyfyed a Collage Churche notable and famous  
In the suburbs of Chester pleasant and beauteous  
In the honor of God and the Baptyst Saynt Johan  
With help of Bysshop Wulfrice and good exortacion.

1684. The wardens received from Captain Spark, the lay rector, "what he has bestowed towards the railing of the communion table, 10s." Paid for the book of Homilies 9s. 6d. There is one in black letter still at St. John's.

1685. "Pd. the Ringers, the day we received news that the Duke of Monmouth was defeated, 1s."

He had been in Chester two years previously, popularity hunting, but the Cestrians had had enough of disturbances, and a little further on they paid no less than 12s.

"to Christopher Ealim for ringing upon the Day of Thanksgiving for the happy victory over the Duke of Monmouth."

The wardens had special seats in church, and paid £1. 4s. for covering them.

1686. The bells were thoroughly over-hauled in this year:—

"Paid the Bell founder for Casting 3<sup>rd</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> bells, and for adding thereto 9 cwt. of metal and upwards at 1d. a pound, £64. Paid the workmen for making the bell frames and for morning draughts, £10. 9s. 1d., as usually allowed."

"Paid for the timber that was used about the bell frames, £8. 15s."

"The Iron work about the bells, £7. os. 10d."

"For new brasses for the bells, £3. 3s. 6d."

"For the making of 5 new bell wheeles and timber, £6."

The churchwardens showed a spirit worthy of the office they held, and they spent £139, and were £73 in debt!

At this time there was painted on plaister, in very beautiful lettering, and enclosed in an elaborate border, with cherubims at the corners, the following instructions to the ringers:—

Ye ringers all observe these orders well.

He forfeits 12 pence that turns off a bell,

And he that rings with either spurr or hatt

His six pence certainly shall pay for that.  
 He that doth spoile or doth disturbe a peal  
 Shall pay his 4 pence for a yard of ale,  
 And he that is heard to curse or swears  
 Shall pay his 12 pence and forbear.  
 These customs elsewhere now be used  
 Lest bells and ringers be abused.  
 Ye gallants all that on purpose come to ring  
 See that you coyne along with you do bring,  
 And further also, if that ye ring here  
 You must ring truly with both hand and eare,  
 Or else your forfeits surely pay  
 And that full speedily without delay.  
 Our lawes is old, that are not new,  
 The Sexton looketh for his due.

Unfortunately, these no longer exist in the church.

There was further inscription:—

The 3<sup>rd</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> bells were new caste in the year 1686,  
 and in the same year bells and frames, being in great dis-  
 repair, were newly hung.

In the churchwardens' books there is this entry, "paid  
 for plastering and writing in the Steeple, 8s. 6d." This  
 work was most beautifully executed, and the colours were  
 admirable.

"1688. P<sup>d</sup> for 4 distressed Protestants that were sent to us  
 by Mr. Bridge, 2s. 6d."

"P<sup>d</sup> W<sup>m</sup> Rogers, that had lost his Ship coming from Vir-  
 ginia, 2s."

"Ringing, 18 July, for the proclamation Day of King William  
 and Queen Mary, 10s."

This was large payment.

On October 8th, 1689, a church rate agitation seems to  
 have stirred the minds of the parishioners. A very large  
 parish meeting was held, and a large majority decided

that all persons, who have not paid church rates for two years, should have citations against them taken out. The minority resented this, for on October 12th appears a notice signed by several of those present at the former meeting, and also by others: "We protest against this meeting, as it relates to the setting up a copy of the exemplification."

In December, however, an overwhelming meeting of parishioners was held, and resolved:—

"Notwithstanding any protestation of any of the Parishioners, that a certain table, containing special articles, which do contain several rights and privileges of this Church, shall be, and is ordered to be put up and hung in the most convenient place in the Church aforesaid for the better satisfaction of whom it may concern."

Thirty-three signatures appear to these minutes. The vicar, Lawrence Wood, signs at neither meeting. He was a pluralist, and was rector of St. Bridget's as well as St. John's. He kept out of disturbances, like a wise man. Perhaps he went to St. Bridget's when there was trouble at St. John's, and to St. John's when there was trouble at St. Bridget's.

This feud continued to rage, for on December 17th a meeting, at which forty-two parishioners signed the book decided "that the churchwardens make diligent search for the person or persons that broke down the table of fees set up by order of a former meeting at the Parish Church, and prosecute him and them, and set up a New Table, and defend any Parishioner who shall be sued for fees not contained in the Table as set up." Perhaps we can understand why Master Lawrence Wood was not there.

1689. "Pd by request of Widow Gardiner, to 4 poor widdows of her daughter's near acquaintance (her daughter being buried in linen), 10s."

In Charles II.'s reign an act was passed requiring, that all people should be buried in woollen, not in any garment made of flax, hemp, silk, hair, gold, or silver, but sheep's wool only: the friends were to bring an affidavit to the Parson to this effect, within 8 days, and he was subject to fine of £5, if he did not give notice to churchwardens and overseers in case they failed to comply with this order.

There is a certain melancholy interest about the following, especially at the present crisis of public affairs:—

June 9, 1690. "Paid the ringers 7s., when King W<sup>m</sup> came to Chester for to go for Ireland," on his way to the Battle of the Boyne. Parkgate was then the port from which vessels sailed for Ireland.

"Paid the ringers for the King's safe landing into Ireland, 5s.," and again "for Joy that the King came to Dublin."

"July 2, 1691. P<sup>d</sup> Ringers, when Athlone was taken, 2s. 6d." Again, for taking of Galway.

"P<sup>d</sup> ringers, when the news came that the Irish was routed. 2s. 6d."

And here we must stop, for the present, at any rate.

