

CHURCHWARDEN'S BOOK, 1767-1917, Weston on the Green

by

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Introduction

1. This book² containing details of the expenditure by the churchwardens of the Parish of Weston on the Green provides an insight into some aspects of village life for 150 years. This account is a joint work by Paula Hessian, the village historian, who was responsible for the extremely laborious work of transcribing onto computer files in 1998 and Brian Wilson, who similarly transcribed other documents onto his computer such as the Parish Registers of baptisms, marriages and burials, Population Census data, and the Tithe List.

¹ Final version 29 March 2015,

² The book was bought in 1767 for 1s:6d .

Parish administration

2. The parish was the unit of local government³. The incumbent (rector, vicar or perpetual curate) had responsibility for the moral supervision of the village community assisted by the elected and the nominated officers of the vestry (the churchwardens, overseers of the poor, surveyors of the highways and village constables). Sydney and Beatrice Webb found the first mention of a “vestry” meeting of villagers in 1507. The incumbents of a parish were required by Thomas Cromwell in 1538 to register baptisms, marriages and burials ; they elected one of the two churchwardens and by common law chaired vestry meetings.
3. The vestry, representing the inhabitants generally, undertook almost the whole of local government from the decay of the seigniorial jurisdiction of the lord of the manor until the virtual “strangulation” of the parish after the Poor Law of 1834. They had the power to administer common property, to make by-laws, and to control the assessment, levy and expenditure of the church rate and the poor rate . All villagers were required without salary to serve, or provide a substitute, for one year in a parish office; a duty totally unwelcomed by poorer, often illiterate, villagers. The senior “ancient and honourable” office of churchwarden originated primarily for the maintenance and repair of the church fabric and is known to have existed in the 14th century.

Weston on the Green churchwardens

4. Prior to the 1841 census of population, we know very little about the early churchwardens, though some names are in the church registers. Francis Box (1767), William Strainge (1767), John Wood (1770/1) and William Wolford may have come from other villages; they were not baptised but were married here. Although by the 1780s, some wardens were holding office for several years like Robert Howse (nine

³ Tate W.E., The Late, *The Parish Chest*, Phillimore, 3rd Ed. 1968.

years : 1782- 91) and Samuel Howse (18 years: 1812 – 1830), others served only one or two years.

5. The majority of the churchwardens in the 19th century were farmers including Richard Wheeler who was born in 1755, married Sarah and was a churchwarden in 1808. The Spittles were another family of farmers: Thomas Spittle (dob 1742) was a churchwarden in 1791 and listed in the 1848 Tithe as farming 42 acres; John Spittle(dob 1756, obit 1846) was appointed churchwarden at Easter 1808; William Spittle (dob 1784, obit 1851) farming 308 acres (Tithe 1848) was appointed the parish's churchwarden for 1831. Howse was another recurring name of the 19th century churchwardens. Samuel Howse was recorded as a farmer in the 1841 census, and William House was the Minister's churchwarden in the 1830s and 1840s, being recorded as a retired farmer at the 1851 census (he died and was buried in the village in 1853). Thomas Rowles (dob1806) (also spelt "Rolls") became churchwarden in 1838 and had served for 45 when he died in 1883; he had a large farm of 400 acres (in Rowle Lane , now corrupted into the present "Knowle" Lane) and employed 18 men and six boys at the 1851 population census. His son, John Harris Knowles (dob 1837; obit 1900) served for many years in the 1860s & 1870s with him. Benjamin Wheeler (dob 1798; obit 1918) was another farmer (203 acres at the 1851 census) who served in the later part of the century until 1907.
6. Among the non-farming churchwardens were at least two tradesmen. Thomas Maynard (dob 1776; obit 1851) was the village miller and baker, who was listed as having 4 acres of " Mill Close and garden" in the 1848 Tithe; he served in 1848, shortly before his death in 1851. Another tradesman, Henry Boddington, carpenter and wheelwright living at house numbered 73 in the 1891 census on the "Oxford Road"⁴, served as churchwarden (1902-06) during which time, he was joined by Rose Bertie, the only woman warden and lady of the manor.

Accounting by the wardens

⁴ The house, now called "*Cruck Cottage*", is a medieval building design for barns or houses where one or more pairs of naturally curved rigid timbers are set into the ground, rise on each side and lean onwards to join and form the ridge of the roof. A tree has now grown through the centre of the iron template the the village cartwrights used to make iron rims for farm cartwheels. The address on the electoral roll is now Northampton Road .

7. The accounts are a most irregular series of figures. They begin quite well in 1767 , showing a total expenditure of £4:14s.:2d for the year 1767 and that the money was raised by a tax of 6d. and “*recd. from ye church fuzs£4 15s; and from church land17/6*”. But for most subsequent years until 1849 there is no annual total expenditure although individual items are shown and reimbursement was “allowed” by the wardens. In 1849 the “*Balance due to the wardens*” was £4:14s:10d. and the money was raised by a rate of 2d in £1. The rate rose in the 1850s to 3d in the £, but fell back to 2d and then to “*three halfpennies*” in 1864 when it raised £14:6s.: 10d. In 1871 when the rate was 2d. in the £1, there co-existed a “*voluntary rate at Three halfpennies in the pound allowed*”. The last comprehensible figures for Church expenditure were in 1895 and 1896 (receipts £27:8s:1d.; with expenditure of “£27:18s:1d and receipts of £28 the next year). The bureaucrats in Brussels could not have bettered this lack of proper accountability, although this book may well have been just a “working” document from which a balance was drawn up in a final statement that has since been lost.
8. Churchwardens were not given salaries but were reimbursed their expenses. In 1869 however, the entries begin to record “*chw expenses.... 5s.*” and this amount (apart from 2s in 1876) is repeated annually until 1878. As the possibility of true expenses being exactly 5s every year is unlikely, the conclusion must be that those churchwardens, like the MPs of the House of Commons in the 20th century, were treating expenses as salary in lieu.

The Registers

9. The Cromwellian edict ordered “every parson, vicar or curate” to enter in a book every wedding, christening and burial in his parish, with the names of the parties. The entries were to be made after service every Sunday in the presence of one of the wardens and the registers were to be kept in a “*sure coffer*” with two locks, one for the parson, the other for one of the wardens.
10. Entries were generally made on paper, but by a ruling of 1604, they were to be made on parchment and were to be witnessed by both wardens and the coffer was to have a third key, for the other warden. Within one month of Lady Day the wardens had to hand over to the diocese a transcript of the registry entries for the previous year.

11. In 1767 parchment⁵ was purchased for 8d and in June 1773 this was specified as “*parchment for the reghester.....6d*” and the same price was paid for the clerical work involved -“*Right in the list of the reghester.... 6d*”. The following year the accounts read “*Spent parchmet Berins.... 4/6*” indicating the purchase of several sheets for the burial register. The clerk was mentioned by name in 1775 – “*Fallenkner⁶ of Priting ye regerster bill.....6d; Parchment to rite ye regester bill..... 6d*”. Recording of these parchment purchases was made on two later occasions: “*Parchment form to return copies of registers to the Bishop ... 11s*” (1849) and “*Smith for parchmet: 8s*” (1862), but that was the last. For the rest of the 18th century, the records show only payments to the clerk for writing the registers. In the 19th century, payments were made to cover all of the clerks duties e.g. “*Benj Wheeler clerk.....£7: 2s: 1d*”(1861).

These parish registers are an invaluable document of local history from the end of the 16th century and provide the names of persons who were born and baptised in the village (from Robert Digweed in 1591), those who were married (from Thomas Matthew and Gilliam Mead in 1591) and those who were buried here (from Thomas Twitching in 1598)⁷.

The clerk

12. A paid parish clerk was first mentioned in 1773 in the church accounts (“The clark’s bill”, 1s:4d). The amount had risen to £2:2s:3 in 1850 when he was mentioned by name “Francis Davis – clerk bill”. In fact there have been two clerks with the same name and both were baptised in the village (one in 1742 , the other in 1776). In the register of burials both were “parish clerk”, although only the later one is so described in the Churchwardens accounts of 1850; in the population census of 1851 his occupation was described as “*agricultural labourer*” ; this was shortly before his death in 1853.

⁵ Parchment made from animal skins seem to have been the normal medium for records at parish level; probably the dearer vellum, from calfskin, would have been used for diocesan records. Acts of Parliament, dating back to 1497 and recorded on goatskin vellum, are currently held in the House of Lords Public Record Office.

⁶ With various spellings (Forkenor, Faukner, Forknor), this was William Faulkener (dob 1716; obit 1802), who was a widower when he married Frances Prince in 1763 having four daughters and a son by her in the 1760s and 1770s and was mentioned as “*parish clerk for c50 years*” in the burial register.

⁷ Hard copies of diocesan typewritten registers were kindly made available for transcription by Julia White, church warden, with the permission of the Oxford Diocese.

13. Joseph Hinks (d.o.b. 1770) was paid £7:13s:9d (probably mainly for some carpentry work) in 1854 and £1:15s:8d in the following year. Benjamin Wheeler (d.o.b. 1833) was the next named clerk in 1861 (£7:2s:1d); he was recorded as a miller's labourer (1871) and then as an "*agricultural labourer and parish clerk*" in 1891 when, by then a widower, he lived in North Lane with his sister Elizabeth. His niece Lydia Wheeler (d.o.b. 1855), a dressmaker, took over one of his duties from 1911 to 1916 when she was paid £1 p.a. for "*cleaning the ch*".
14. The work of the clerk was not spelled out but was enough to justify annual payments of six or seven pounds. In 1863 the entry reads "*Benj Wheeler fees and bills £7 :1s: 6d*" which suggests that some of his duties carried fixed rate fees (possibly to record entries in the registers, etc.) whilst he did other work for which he was able to present a bill for his costs and labour. These extra duties included *cleaning the church and washing surplice* (17s in 1884), *sweeping and cleaning church paths* etc (£1: 2s: 6d in 1899), *clearing and cutting laurels* (8s.1901) and *cleaning out of millstream* (7s:6d in 1908).
15. In 1854 it was "*Ordered – that a salary of £5 per annum be paid to the parish clerk by the church wardens and that a rate of 1d in the £1 be collected for the expenses of the ensuing year – signed Matthews – chairman*"⁸. On two occasions, the word "sexton"⁹ appears as the clerk's title - in 1865-66 when it was "*resolved that in future the sextons fees to be £4 per annum*" and in 1887 when the entry in the accounts read "*1887 Benj Wheeler clerks bill sexton £4*". This word suggests that his fees covered the duty of grave-digging. The fees were increased in 1911 for Wm Cox to £8 p.a.

Visitations.

16. Visits to villages from the diocese by the Ordinary (the bishop or archdeacon) were an important part of the disciplinary organisation of the Church of England. Then the church wardens were sworn in (without the diocese having any say in their election) and the registers of marriages, baptisms and burials would be examined. Visits took place twice a year, usually in May /June and October/November. In 1767 the June visitation incurred two expenses, each of 3s.6d, and in October the churchwardens

⁸ He was followed by Rev Dry, (1821- 1877), the so-called " Devil of Weston" who on appointment in 1854 stopped the public footpath leading from the Bletchington road through the churchyard and the vicarage garden to the Mill Lane. Fond of dining at Kirtlington Hall, he was conscientious in sending to the Bicester Union Workhouse agricultural villagers impoverished by the new harvesting machines.

⁹ The words "sexton" and "sacristan" both derive from the Medieval Latin word sacristanus meaning "custodian of sacred objects". "Sexton" represents the popular development of the word via the Old French "Segrestein"

were sworn in at Bicester (expenses of 3s.6d. and "*diner at Bicester: 2s*"). When the Bishop himself visited the village, the expenses were higher (7s) and there was 12s "*with them that was confirmed*" and a further 10s. for the four churchwardens (presumably the two for the previous year together with the two appointed for the following year). Twenty years later, in 1787 there was another confirmation service at the visitation (8s.). In June 1808 the expenses at the visitation were 13s and in March 1813 prayers were said for the Prince Regent, the eldest son of "mad" George III who was declared incapable. In the 1820s a payment was made of 3s6d as fees for "Apparitor/Appartor"¹⁰; this fee rose to 18s in 1832. By 1842 the fees at the visitation of the Bishop had risen to £2:15s:2d. The last visitation recorded was in 1889.

Prayers

17. The wardens had to provide a Bible, a *Book of Common Prayer* and a *Book of Homilies*¹¹. The prayer books cost 16s in 1774, £1 in 1789 and after the Napoleonic War, the costs rose to £4:10s. for two prayer books (1823) and £2:12s.:6d (1838). By 1860 after good harvests and the Corn Law repeal Act of 1850, the newer mass-produced "bible and prayer book" cost only £1 together.
18. The accounts show regular payments for prayers, beginning in 1767 with "*prayer for thanksgiving 1s.*". In 1775 there were entries for "*paid for a prayer (received) 1s.*", "*a prayer for the faste 1s.*" and "*prayer on ye mimeries? Clursimas 1s.*"¹² At the October visitation in 1780, a prayer was said "*for ye safe delivery of ye Queen: 1s*", though Queen Charlotte of Mecklenburg Strelitz whom George III had married in 1761 was well on the way to the safe delivery of another of his 16 children. Prayers were also said for a "*bountiful harvest*", a "*general thanksgiving*" and "*for victories*" in October 1813. There were several prayers for the mad King George III, and then for the "*king's recovery ... 2s.*" and again in 1830 "*for the King's recovery*" (George IV's health also was apparently in question).
19. Sometimes prayers were joined with proclamations, also at 1s., so that as in 1798 the combined bill was 2s. Some of these proclamations were "*against vice and immorality,*

¹⁰ Apparitors were officials formerly sent to carry out the orders of a civil or ecclesiastical court.

¹¹ Cranmer's Bible or the Great Bible, the 1559 Prayer Book of Elizabeth and the 1563 Second Book of Homilies

¹² Many words were almost illegible often combined with unusual spelling; here the words are probably "memories" and "Christmas".

which 18th century ministers had the effrontery to send down into the villages in order to warn the rustics from that primrose path which was strictly reserved for their betters”¹³.

20. All other payments clearly specify what was purchased or to whom the payment was made. There is no such indication in respect of payments for prayers (the last being made in 1830) or for proclamations (last was recorded in 1819). One might speculate that they were made to a non-resident curate and they therefore tailed off and then ceased altogether when the vicars became resident. In 1823 Rev. Matthews made a very substantial enlargement of the vicarage for his family which included four sons and four daughters at the 1841 census; at the 1851 census he employed one male and three female servants; he was resident in a big way.

Briefs

21. In 1821 a payment of 2s6d was made for five “briefs” of 6d each. Briefs, originally papal decrees, became royal mandates at the Reformation and were addressed to the minister and church wardens for collecting funds for good causes and were read out in full from the pulpit. The money was collected at the church door then handed to an authorised collector or to the chancellor of the diocese at the bishop’s visitation. Briefs were issued for church repair, redemption of Christian captives of Barbary pirates, relief of Protestants persecuted abroad, families affected by fire or floods etc..
22. By the end of the 19th century briefs have disappeared and “*offertories and subscriptions*” appear as book entries and among these the growing Radcliffe Infirmary, recently given its royal charter, was the largest beneficiary being given £20:17s:11d. in 1893 and £4:0:6d. the following year when the list included Diocesan church building (£2:9s:8d), the Home Mission (£1:1s), the Sick and Poor (£5:10s) and the S.P.G.(Society for the Propagation of the Gospel) (£5:7s).

Repairs to church yard wall

23. Stone pits, the village quarry on the local stonebrash land, does not produce large flat through-stones; its dry stone walls require frequent maintenance. The accounts show entries every few years of “*stones, mortar and carriage*” for “*repairing the chyd walls*”. The carriage would be provided by farmers like Robert and Richard Howse and the labour by Thomas Williams (3s. in 1786) and other agricultural labourers. Later, payment was made to Thos Williams Jnr (1809 : 3s) and then to Geo Williams (1836: *repair chyd wall 2 days @ 2s.6.*

¹³ Tate, W.E., *ibid.*, page 153; also Webb S.&B. *History of the Liquor Licensing in England*, 1903, p.137-151 for an account of the “reformation of manners”

per day -5s.). The skills of dry-stone walling were kept for several generations in that family¹⁴.

24. There was a major wall building in 1770 and this involved works from August through to the end of October. The materials included one load of stones (1s.6d), 2 loads of sand (3s.), four loads of gravel (6s.), four quarters of lime (18s 8d), and 12 bushels of lime (7s) excluding carriage (6s and 2s 3d). Two “*buckatts*” were bought at 8s and one dozen “*pooles*”¹⁵ were purchased from Oxford at 12s plus 1s for carriage. What made this work special was the purchase of 16 bushells of hair at 1 s per bushel. These materials would have been used to create a very strong cement to incorporate in the traditional Oxford stone and mortar band half-way up what is otherwise a dry stone wall.

Graveyard enlargement.

25. Another new wall was later required in 1890 when the churchyard was enlarged by incorporating the adjoining farmyard to the east. This farmyard had been virtually unused since a fire in 1850 destroyed a barn, a stable, some hovels and a cottage “*occupied by a poor man in the name of Cox*”¹⁶. The newspaper reported that four horses and the barn of corn could not be saved but there was no mention of the man’s fate. In fact Henry Cox (d.o.B 1792), the agricultural labourer, who was that pauper escaped and died in 1864. William Tompkins, the farmer (289 acres listed in the 1848 Tithe), had insured his property, including two wagons and a threshing machine, with the Union Fire Office. “*There was reason to fear that it [the fire] was the work of an incendiary*”. On 28th June 1855 the vestry resolved unanimously that “*it is expedient to stop up the pathway leading from the Bletchingdon Road through the churchyard to the Mill lane*”; the vestry then comprised three church wardens (Thomas Rowles, William Rowles and Charles Harrier) with two inhabitants of the village (Henry House and Henry Hawkins)¹⁷.
26. “*For some years past the necessity of further provision being made for the churchyard of this parish has been very apparent and through the liberality of Miss Bertie of Weston who gave a piece of land to the East of the churchyard and of the Rev Rogers, vicar, who paid the necessary expenses of draining, fencing and laying out, this has now been accomplished*”. After the Lord Bishop of Oxford had consecrated the ground, “*a procession of the Bishop and*

¹⁴ 1881 Thomas Williams bill for repair of churchyard wall and for pointing the church windows : £2 11s 0d

¹⁵ This item and “*fougloves*” (purchased for 2s.8d) are like a number of other words difficult to identify.

¹⁶ JOJ, 11 May, 1850.

¹⁷ O.D.P, Ms W-o-G par. b7.

*Clergy, headed by Messrs J.H. Rowles and H Boddington, the churchwardens and followed by the choir, proceeded round the ground reciting psalms*¹⁸.

The Church bells

27. Bellringing on saints days, Saturdays and the greater festivals like Christmas was common throughout the land when coronations (*" the king's crown day"*), royal births, battles and the defeat of the Armada, were all occasions celebrated by bell ringing with the ringers encouraged by a plentiful supply of ale¹⁹. November 5 was, without fail, a bell-ringing occasion in this village. The Ward family who kept the Ben Jonson public house supplied ale in 1767 (3s:11d.), 1774 (3s:1d.) and 1808 (2s:6d), this being also the usual "fee" in kind for the bell ringers.
28. Bell ropes had to be replaced from time to time, a set of three in 1767 being purchased at 4s each from Mr Meaker/ Neaker/Walker of Bister for 12s. and another set for 10s 3d in 1775. Although on some 24 occasions, single bell ropes were purchased, for the most part, ropes were bought in sets as in 1802 (18s), 1811 (£1:5s:4d), 1842 (£1:2s:6d), 1844 (£1), 1849 (£1), 1850 (£1:4s), and 1861 (£1:2s:6d).
29. Oil for the bells was twice bought in the 18th century for 1s:6d. Some repairs to the bells were done in the village: Richard Howse mended a bell in 1786 for 1s.; and David Howse sent in a bill for repairing the bell wheels (2s.) as did George Kirtland, the village blacksmith, in 1863 having done more substantial repairs (£1:13:3d). When the "little bell" needed to be recast in 1834, the wardens paid for the cartage to and from Oxford, whilst the vicar, Rev. *A.H. Matthews paid for the recasting work.*

Church Repairs

30. The Church, dedicated to St Mary, after nearly falling down, was rebuilt in 1743, without its 11 metre nave, by Norreys Bertie, whose initials and coat of arms together with the date are on the rainwater gutter heads. Only minor "*work at the ch*" was needed in 1767 (Wm Forkner bill: 6s6d; Mr Payne: 7s; Mr Williams £1:8:6d and Michael Wood/Ward for ale 3s 11d, and in 1773 when similar bills came to £1:15:1. The "guts" (gutters) were cleaned in 1775 when Thos Williams was paid 2s:6.and in 1785, Wm Pain/Payne was paid 1s:6d for "*Cholofasts for the ch spouts*"²⁰.

¹⁸ 2 May 1890, BA

¹⁹ Tate, *ibid*, p. 104

²⁰ The meaning of "cholofasts" can only be guessed - as a kind of iron staple inserted into the wall to hold the gutter spouts in place.

31. Extensive works however were required in 1809 when the crumbling, heavily ornamented plaster ceiling had to be taken down. Mr Hudson was paid £2:2s for "*surveying the church before it was taken down*". Thos Williams had two men for four and a half days erecting the scaffold in the church for which he submitted a bill for £9:17:2d. Thos Williams submitted a second bill (£8:14:6d) with beer at 5s:7d for the men and glaziers. Timber for the beams of the church cost £34:18s. Stone for the coping from the Headington Quarries cost £6:14: 4d, and was brought by Richard Wheeler using two teams of horses and being reimbursed 11s:10d for "*turnpikes and expenses*". Hair was mixed with mortar by Mr Day at the church (£1:4s). Other materials included lime (Baker 14s and Gulliver 10s:8d) and road dirt (Ashby 2s:6d). John Armstrong in 1809 was paid "*for letting the plumbers use his fire for heating their irons 6d*".
32. These works took several weeks. Carpentry work by Mr Howse came to £73:14s. Thos Williams, mason, submitted a bill for £17:6s:6d and Thos Clark spent 5 weeks assisting the masons at the church and other work at 18s p.week (total £4:10); he continued for another 10 days during which he was joined by Thomas Wise at 2s:6 p.d. Samuel Kirtland's bill for "*iron and ironworks*" was £13:19s:3d. Workmen were expected to take their own food but were given ale on the job; they were well supplied with beer by Mrs Ward of the Ben Jonson (£7:6s:8d) and a "Tuffrey"²¹(16s:5d). Mr Syrett, who had been paid £2:11s:8d for repairing the church windows in 1808, did work on the repaired church in 1810 at a cost of £31:14s "*after deducting £44:15s for the old bell*". The church wardens paid Thos William's final bill (£9:17s:2d) and smaller amounts to Mr Howse (9s:6d), S Kirtland (13s:10d) together with payment for lime (5s:11d) brushes, brooms, mops and flannel (4s:6d) for cleaning the church after these major works (John Toms 7s; Ann Reads, Sarah Gregory 4s) and a later amount of £1:7s. The church wardens would have been relieved to pay in April 1813 the anxiously awaited final bills from Mr Howse (£2:0s:6d), Mr Syrett (£4:7s:8d) and ?T Thaon? (£1:2s:7d).
33. Subsequent bills were smaller, with the exception of Mr George Wakelin (1816, £1:3s:1d; 1818, £7:16s:3d; 1822, £2: 14s: 4d; 1824,£5:2s:6d; 1826, £1:1s:2d; 1827 £9:13s:2d; and 1828 £3:2s:8d). In that year there was a journey to Bicester for lead (2s:6d) and coals for the glazier (9d). Mr Wakelin was needed almost every year and in 1849 the book records payment of £1:19s:1d to "*Geo Wakelin glazier bill*" for the round-headed windows of the 1743 rebuild.

²¹ Possibly a housewife brewing for her own family but selling the surplus to the churchwardens.

34. The tower was repaired in 1832 with Jno Dennant doing most work (£10:10s) with bills for hair (4s:3d) lime and turnpikes (14s:3d), and from D Howse (£2:5s) and Sam Kirtland (19s:6d), not forgetting Mr Wakelin (14s) and (£7:19:8d). In 1833, bills are paid for *plumers* who, like glaziers work with lead and copper²². When the Tower again required repairs in 1868, the wardens sought and accepted a tender from William Whiting, a mason, born in Islip but living and later buried in the village in 1881; they paid his bills for the tower and wall (£25:3:s:6d; £6:9s:5d and later £7:8s:5d *for spouting*).
35. Meanwhile the church had needed new church doors in 1849 (Richard Hinks, carpenter £6:16s:6d); Kirtland supplied piping for the stove in 1853 (£2:14s:10d), 1860 (12s:3d) and 1868 (£1:18s:6d) and Henry Boddington repaired the floor in the tower in 1879 (£3:8s:6d), a shelf in the vestry and churchyard gates 1884 (£1:1s:3d). In 1889, £8:19s@3d was collected towards repair of the tower from nine donors, with £2 each given by Mrs Bertie, Rev Rogers and J.H Rowles.

The organ

36. An organ was purchased in 1885 and a special donation was received towards cleaning and tuning the organ and work connected with it (£16:5s) which covered the bill of Messrs Martin & Coates, organ builders (£14: 17s). The church was "*cleaned after organ repair*" (11s) and Mr H. Boddington was paid £4:1s for his "*work in connection with organ*". The organ blowers were paid 12s:6d, and 1s for a "*weeks nights in lent*". Organ blowers salaries were set at 12s:6d in 1901 and were paid in 1905 for B.Porter, 1yr.7m. at 12s = 19s:9d and M Read, 5 m. at 15s = 6s:3d. The following year the salary was confirmed at the higher rate of 15s.

The sacrament

37. Vestries would buy bread and wine for communion services normally twice a year. In comparison with some other parishes the Weston churchwardens were far from extravagant in their purchases of wine²³ which cost around 3s:6d from 1767 to 1792; there is just one reference in 1775 to "*1 bottle wine and bread 4s.*" This is one of only five years in which the purchase of bread is mentioned. In 1773 bread was purchased separately costing 9d and there was an entry "*order for making of the bread 3d.*"; in 1788 "*bread and water*"

²² Could the terms have been interchangeable? The leaded roof would justify plumbers but it seems hard to believe that the church windows needed such regular attention as is recorded by the payments. In fact in 1861 Smith was paid £5:9s:1d for "*copper wiring windows in the church*"

²³ Various spelled as "wind", "winde", "vinde"

was bought for 3s:6d. Rev James Hakewill, vicar for over fifty years (c. 1746–98), was a pluralist living in one of his other two Oxfordshire parishes whilst having a curate at Weston. He obviously did not intend that his curate should benefit excessively from the Church ruling that *“if any of the bread and wine remain unconsecrated the Curate shall have it for his own use .* In the 19th century the cost of wine (probably port wine , rather than red wine from Bordeaux because of the Napoleonic Wars) rose to 5s (1802, to 6s (1821), and 15s (1835) , and in 1910 W.E Skiffington was paid £1:1s. The Weston churchwardens normally specified whether communion services were held at Whitsun²⁴ or Easter and Christmas but in 1838 services were held at all three. Most entries referred merely to the sacrament or the “sac”.

38. Non-conformism was strong in the Bicester area. The first house in this village was licensed for worship In 1818; from 1829 the meetings were held in a village shop that was owned by George White (dob 1759; obit 1847) who was recorded at the 1841 census as being of independent means and living alone in the middle of North Lane (Mary Goodson, a female servant lived next door). White later sold a garden for £20 to the Methodists who in 1838 built themselves a chapel at the beginning of North Lane . By the middle of the century congregations were large—over 100 in 1851; in 1878 there were said to be 60 professed dissenters, although many people attended both church and chapel. The return of worshippers to the church was one result of the Bertie family taking up residence in the rebuilt Manor House. Mrs Bertie, who evicted from her village cottages any agricultural labourers who joined the Agricultural Workers Union, was a strong supporter of St Mary’s Church and became a churchwarden..

Church requisites.

39. In 1786 the wardens spent £4:3s:6d on purchasing and making a new pall cloth. *“Surplus washing and mending”* cost 4s.:6d in 1776. That same year, after *“twice mending”* the surplice (1s:6d), it was decided to buy *“1 yard Irish for mend of the sur”* (2s.:6d.). Ten years later Wm Forkener was paid 4s.:6d. for *“3 times washing the surplice”* and another 1s. for mending it.
- In 1788, the wardens paid £2:18s.:6d. for *“a new surplus, making and washing”*. In 1815 a new surplice was made and washed (£2:18s:6d.) and this was mended in 1837. But ten years later, the much mended and washed garment attracted undue attention at the visitation, so the wardens acquired a *“New Surplice,by order of the Rural Dean £2:2s”*. Washing of the

24 Variouslly spelled as “Wisontide”, “Witsuntide”, “Crismas” and even “Crimas”.

surplice and the altar linen was later included in the duties of Benj Wheeler, parish clerk, who by this time (1889) was paid a £5 salary.

The silver chalice and paten of 1751 given by Mary Norreys²⁵ for the wine were joined in 1900 by a “*new glass crewet for oil and water and a purificator*” (4s.). “*New mats for the communicants*” cost £1:18s:6d in 1809 and the mats round the communion table were renewed for 6s. in 1833 and another 12s for 12 yards of matting was spent in 1849. A cork door mat was purchased in 1856 for £1. Coconut matting for the aisle costing £2 was purchased in 1886 (£2 from Ellison and Cavell, the Oxford departmental store) and again in 1904 (5s:7d) with a carpet before the altar rails (17s:6d in 1900). A “*Pair of tassels for the pulpit cushion.....3/6*” was purchased in 1823. The hassocks were lined in 1867 for 8s. and the choir hassocks for £1:2s:5d in 1903. A new binding for the church Bible cost 2s in 1809; Gill and Co. having supplied reading lamps in 1878 (£1:17s:2d.). Locks for the two churchyard gates were bought for 1s. each on several occasions (1781, 1786, 1831, 1832 and 1839). Cleaning of the church was done with mops, brushes, hair brooms and birch besoms and these were regularly purchased (1786, 1788, 1793, 1801, 1809, 1818, 1855, 1856, 1860, 1861, 1864, 1867, 1870, ,1877, 1878, 1884 (“*Frank Dew for a broomhead 3s:6d*”) and B Wheeler “for a broom 3s:5d” in 1906.

Coal

40. The first purchase of coal was not for heating. Six pence was expended on “*coal used by the plumbers*” in 1822 and 1823; in the following years it was “*coal for the glaziers*” (6d,1824; 1s:6, 1826; 9d, 1827; and 1828. In 1833 two cwt. of coals for “*glaziers at church*” were purchased for 2s:8d.
41. The larger sums spent on coal from 1854 onwards might well indicate a form of heating in the church (£1:13s in 1854; 17s:6d 1858; and £1:2s:6d, 1861). From 1854 onwards coal was purchased from Benjamin Spittle (d.o.b. 1816) who was described in the 1851 and 1871 censuses as an agricultural labourer , whilst the churchwardens report in 1877 “*Spittle (coal merchant) £1:6s:6d*”. A widower at the 1891 Census, he lived with his son Robert but when he died in 1899 he was buried from the Bicester Union Workhouse. In 1882 H.Heath supplied coals and coke (£1:7s) but two years later Job Turner took his place charging £ 1:9s

²⁵ It was held by the local Barclays bank for some years until a change of bank policy meant a move to bank vaults in Birmingham, involving charges for withdrawal and deposit after the Easter Service. It was therefore decided c. 2000 to send it with a large silver alms plate for safekeeping in the diocesan collection of church silver in ChristChurch cathedral (note from Bill Tootell, a former churchwarden).

- a price that increased to £2:9s with a drop to £2:2s in 1893. Neither Heath nor Turner lived in the village. Coals were not bought in 1897; they were donated by Mr J.H.Rowles ,farmer, and in later years by his wife, Mrs Emily Rowles until in 1914 when Rev Grant donated "*coles, candles and oil*".

42. A stove is first mentioned in 1861 when "*piping for stove*" is bought for 2s:9d; presumably to replace the original piping of the stove purchased sometime earlier. The next year George Kirtland was paid £1:19s:6d for "*stove piping*" and in 1868 another £1:18s:6d. Repairs were needed; in 1878 Kirtland was paid 12s for "*repairs to stove and lock*" and in 1884 he was paid 11s:6d for "*repairing lock and mending stove*". George came from a family of blacksmiths. His father Samuel was a blacksmith at the 1841 census; George, (d.o.b.1814; obit 1890) was described as a blacksmith at the 1851 census and a "*Master smith*" at the 1871 census when he was living "*in village, cottage and shop*".

The highway

43. The Highways Act passed in 1555 in the reign of Philip (King of Spain) and Mary stated that each parish was to appoint a 'Surveyor of the Highways' from among its number to oversee the repair of the roads. The material for repairs was, where possible, to be dug up from adjacent gravel pits. Every parishioner who occupied ploughed or pasture land in the village or who kept a draught of horses had to provide for four days per annum "*one wain or cart furnished after the custom of the country and also two able men with the same*". Every other able-bodied villager was required to put in 4 working days a year, or provide a substitute . It was not easy to find a parishioner willing to take the distinctly unpopular and unpaid post of Surveyor. This responsibility of the vestry for highways continued largely unchanged by later Highways Acts until the time of William IV when it was passed to local authorities by the General Highway Act of 1835.
44. It is therefore remarkable that there are only two book entries in the Weston on the Green churchwardens' book in May 1770 that refer to highways:-

*Survaien of the highway 1/-
Spent at ye same time 2/6.*

45. There was a reason. The responsibility for the repair and maintenance of the major village road, the through-road from Oxford to Northampton, was taken over by the Towcester to Weston on the Green Turnpike Trust 1757²⁶. The Weston on the Green to Kidlington Trust of

²⁶ The Bicester to Aynho Turnpike Trust (Act 1791) took over the Towcester to Weston on the Green Turnpike in 1793.

1781 specified in its Preamble "... a certain Gate upon the turnpike Road at or near the South End of the Town of Weston on the Green". The Turnpike Trust had to ensure that potential fee-paying traffic did not escape payment by using nearby fields or side roads and they therefore erected a second turnpike at the junction of Dolly's Lane (a former drovers' road), and the Bletchington Road-Weston road; this point is still marked "Tollbrook Corner" by the Ordnance Survey²⁷.

The vestry therefore decided that it was not necessary for them to appoint a separate highways surveyor. The village constables were considered able to perform those duties in addition to their own. What little work was done in a period of more than 20 years involved only £9:16s:6d expenditure by the vestry on Church road, the local road to Wendlebury as well as the footpaths to Kirtlington and Bicester.

Travellers

46. The church wardens on six occasions gave money to men and women travelling through the village and returning to their own village of settlement, being furnished with a pass requesting assistance from the intervening parishes. In 1784 they "gave a man and woman with a pass...1s:6"; in 1789 and 1791 they gave 6d to one and 1s to the other. The description changed to a "travelor" (1793), a "travelling man" (6d) in 1797 and a "travelling woman" (1s) in 1798. These men, with their wives or partners, were mainly discharged soldiers and sailors from Portsmouth who would normally have been contacted and paid by the village constable²⁸.

Destruction of vermin.

47. Entries in the first year 1767 of the churchwarden's book recorded the payment of 4d. each for "hoghog" to Robert Johnson, Tos Quainton, Wm Kerwood. Thomas Venemore and Hannah Lawrence; and seven dead "hodghogs" were paid for in 1777.

27 The Ordnance Survey "Oxford Witney & Woodstock" Explorer Map 180; 1:25000 scale.

28 "Constables Book for the Parish of Weston 1796" containing details of expenditure 1797- 1842 This book is currently held by Ruth Pangu whose grandfather Ted Miller was given this official document when he renovated a former village grocer's shop that was formerly kept by Robert Porter. Porter was recorded in 1871 as a shopkeeper and boot/shoe maker, then aged 28 with a wife and three sons and was recorded in 1891 as shopkeeper and sub-postmaster). William Goodson, (dob 1816), the last of a family that was first recorded in 1621, as an old man had lived in the house but moved to the Bicester Workhouse and was buried in the village in 1892. He had been looked after by Mrs Fox, then a young woman who found the book and handed it to the Millers, newcomers to the village, who ran a shop, dairy and milk round from these premises now known as Hazel Cottage.

By an Act of Henry VIII in 1532/3, every parish was to protect itself from vermin such as foxes, hedgehogs, rooks, crows, owls, and other birds. The last of such entries, was in 1783 when John Spittle was paid four pence for a hedgehog either because they had all been exterminated or, let us hope, because these animals became valued for controlling garden pests.

48. The real vermin for this parish were sparrows. The warden's accounts for 1767 show payment of 6s:6d for 78 dozen dead sparrows to 23 named villagers at the going rate of two pence per dozen. These payments continued annually with numbers increasing to 194 dozen in 1775. Payment was increased to four pence per dozen in 1815 at the end of the Napoleonic war. The capture and killing of sparrows, usually in June and July, did not end until 1835 when £2:0:10 was paid for 122 dozen sparrows' heads.
49. The practice is hard to explain without reference to the agricultural practices of the day. The traditional harvesting of cereal crops of barley, wheat and oats (for the large horse population of the time) would have taken several weeks when rows of men swinging sickles and later the more efficient scythes, would cut the standing grain for it to be tied by the women and boys of the village into sheaves that were bundled into stooks of six or eight to dry before being carted for storage into ricks. The whole village would be employed and the sparrow payments gave a welcome supplement to the agricultural wages of six or seven shillings per week.
50. Haymaking and harvesting, which had seemed never-ending were to be revolutionised by the manufacture of the reaping machine, first invented in 1827 by Dr Patrick Bell and then perfected by Crosshill of Beverly in Yorkshire. The sparrows had a much shorter window for their depredations. One man and two horses replaced 16 scythe men.
51. Banbury developed as a centre for agricultural machine-making²⁹ and there the Britannia Works of Sir Bernhard Samuelson expanded rapidly in the manufacture of, at first mowers, then reapers, and later reaper binders, each one capable of paying for itself in two years.

²⁹ V. C.H.Oxon, ii, 268-270

52. Large numbers of agricultural labourers became redundant³⁰. Following the “new” Poor Law Act of 1834 the Bicester Workhouse, was started in 1835 and opened in 1837 and by 1841 had admitted six Weston labourers, their wives and 22 children as well as two young bachelors³¹.

Charitable works.

53. Three entries refer to a charity of £30 that had been left to the poor of the parish³². In January 1771, Samuel Badger recorded that he had “*Recd of the Hon Capt Bertie by ye hand of Mr Howlet the sum of £4 10s in full for 3 years interest of £30 due at xms 1769 to ye poore of Weston aforesd. Note that ye above sum was given to ye poore in bread agreeable to ye wills of ye doaners witness Saml Badger chw*”. His successor, Thomas Clerk, recorded similarly in January 1772 that he had “*Recd of ye Hon Capt Bertie by ye hand of Mr Howlet ye sum of £3 in full for 2 years interest due at Christms 1771 for £30. Note ye above some was given to ye poore in bread agreeable to ye wills of ye doaners*”. In April 1773 Clarke wrote “*be it remembered that ye sum of £1 and 10 shillings was given to ye poor in bread at Christmas last being one years interest for £30 in ye hands of ye Hon Capt Bertie. Agreeable to ye will of ye doner by Thos Clarke chw*”.
54. The VCH states that the £30 principal was held by Norreys Bertie, who died bankrupt in Ghent in 1766 and that Peregrine Bertie, his successor as lord of the manor, nevertheless paid £1 10s. a year, which was distributed in “*meat and bread*”, until 1772, adding that only two other payments, in 1781 and 1788, were made before his death in 1790. The wardens accounts are somewhat at variance since only bread was distributed and as late as 1773. Also there is no record of any of the three later payments stated by the VCH to have been made in 1781 and 1788 and the “*yearly payment of £1 laid out on bread ... recorded in 1805*”..(fn. 175) although Bertie left £5 for a sermon on 30 January and for prayers on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday, (fn. 176) . The VCH concludes very charitably that *Peregrine Bertie appears to have allowed the charity for the poor to lapse*; it appears to have been purloined by

³⁰ At the 1831 January Quarter Sessions for Oxfordshire to be held in the Oxford Town Hall, 21 men were charged singly, or in groups, with breaking a threshing machine (one valued at 50s.) in eight different villages (including Little Milton, Burcott, Clifton, Blenheim Park, Broadwell, Bensington and Heythrop); ten of them were sentenced to 7 years transportation.

³¹ Bicester Poor Law Union and Workhouse Records , 1834- 1851, Carol Richmond, 2006.

³² William and Frances Drake, William Webb, Thomas Croxton and Hannah Maude

the Berties whilst leaving £5 for prayers to be said on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday. Ironically, the accounts have no record of such prayers being said in this church.

55. Whilst the village Constable was ensuring that travellers, vagrants and others with a pass or certificate of settlement in other parishes were helped on their way, the treatment might seem generous of Thomas Bowden, (d.o.b. 1738) who was recorded as a pauper when he died in 1808. In 1794 Thos Quainton was paid 1s. for “*shaving Bousen*” in January and 1s:2d. for “*shaving Bouden*” in April. The payment in 1792 of 2s:7d. for “*waving shirt*” and 6d for “*making shirt*” was probably for him³³. In 1794 Mrs Ladyman was paid 1s.:10d., for “*making shirts for Jno Sturch and children*” and payment of 10s:6d was made for Thos. Bouden’s shoes; 14s. was spent on “*a pair of breechs*” for him in 1798 and a coat (1800) and one “*waistio*” cost 2s.:6d. in 1801 and another 2s.:6d., in 1803 when 2s.:2d. was also spent on “*glovs*” for him.
56. In 1910 charity payments were made of £1:10s:2d. (*bonus clothing club*) and £1:13s (*bonus coat club*) appeared under Parochial alms. But in 1912 the collection church went to “*outsiders (inc. Friendly Soccs. 12s:8d.)*” and had risen to £9:9s.:11d.

ANNEX I: SAMPLE PAGE (PAGE 1 OF 48)

Churchwarden’s book 1/6

<i>Pd Jacksons bill</i>		6/9
Fauknors bill		6/9
Righting the account		1/-
Wine at Easter	3/3	
Disburst		£6 10s 3 ½ d
Recd from ye church fuzs		£4 15s
“ “ “ “ land		17/6
“ with ye book		8/4
“ in all		£6 0s 10d
Due to ye old chw		9/5 ½

Geo Goodson and Willm Strainge was appointed chw for the ensuing yr

1767 Wm Strainge chw

To old chw		9/5 ½
Wine at Wisontide		3/-
Parcshment		8d
Ringin		2/6
THREE ACTADAVIES		3d
At the bushep vizataton		7/-
Expenses with them that was confirmed		12/-

³³ His name was spelled Boodon when baptised but Bowden in the register of burials; the wardens had their own different versions.

“ “ the four chw	10/-
48 do sp and 9	8/1 ½
Visitation	9/-
Wine at Christmas	3/-
2 sacks <i>locks</i>	2/-
Wm Payne	1/3
Mrs Walker	9/-
Ringin	2/6
Richard Williams	3/-
Wm Forkentor	7/-
Writing up a count	1/-
“ “ tax	6d
Wine at Easter	3/-
<i>Wm Strainge disbused</i>	<i>£4 14s 2d</i>

Recorded in overseers book entered here in italics

1767 Francis Box chw	
Expenses at visitation	9/-
Robt Johnson – 1 hoghog	4d
<i>Tos Quainton – 1 hoghog</i>	<i>4d</i>
Thos (John) Venemore – 1 ½ doz sparrows	3d
Dick Wheeler “	3d
Jack Cockin “	“
George Wood 1 doz	2d
Dick Wheeler 2 doz	4d
May 29 1767	
For ringin	2/6
Jack Cockin 2 doz sparrows	4d
Tom Quainton 6 “	1/-
Jack Cockin, Dick Wheeler 2 doz “	