

The “Churchwardens’ Book of Accounts Marston St Lawrence 1758”, to the present

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The Office of Churchwarden has had legal recognition since the thirteenth century. Churchwardens have always had important responsibilities. Until 1921, they were the only official representatives of the laity of the parish and were responsible for the care and preservation of the fabric of the church and its contents and its land and crops. Even now the churchwardens are still the bishop’s officers in the parish and are responsible for the provision of seating for parishioners and for the maintenance of due order in the church and churchyard.

The idea for this article was inspired by the discovery of a book entitled “Churchwardens Accounts 1759” in the church safe. The same book is still in use.

Over the last two and a half centuries the detail and content of the Churchwardens’ Accounts have varied enormously. While some of the outgoings have ceased, many expenses, like the bread and wine sacrament, repairs to the church and visitation fees, are still the same.

One of the first entries in the book in 1759 reads:

Paid the funeral expenses of a vagrant’s child 7s. 6d.

It is the only entry of this type that I have found. However, in the middle of the eighteenth century, the churchwardens repeatedly made payments for the extermination of vermin, namely sparrows, hedgehogs and foxes.

In 1764: 43 *Dozen* of Sparrows 7s. 2d.

4 Hedgehogs 1s. 4d.

In 1774: 2 Hedgehogs, 2 Foxes 2s. 8d.

In 1784: 24 *Dozen* of Sparrows 4s. 6d.

In 1794: 25 *Dozen* of Sparrows 4s. 2d.

In 1804: 11 *Dozen* of Sparrows 1s.11d.

In 1834, there were no less than six entries relating to sparrows and payments were made for the extermination of over a hundred dozen. The last reference to sparrows occurs in 1838.

I conjecture that it was important for sparrows to be killed because they ate crops. Foxes killed chickens and hedgehogs stole the cows’ milk.