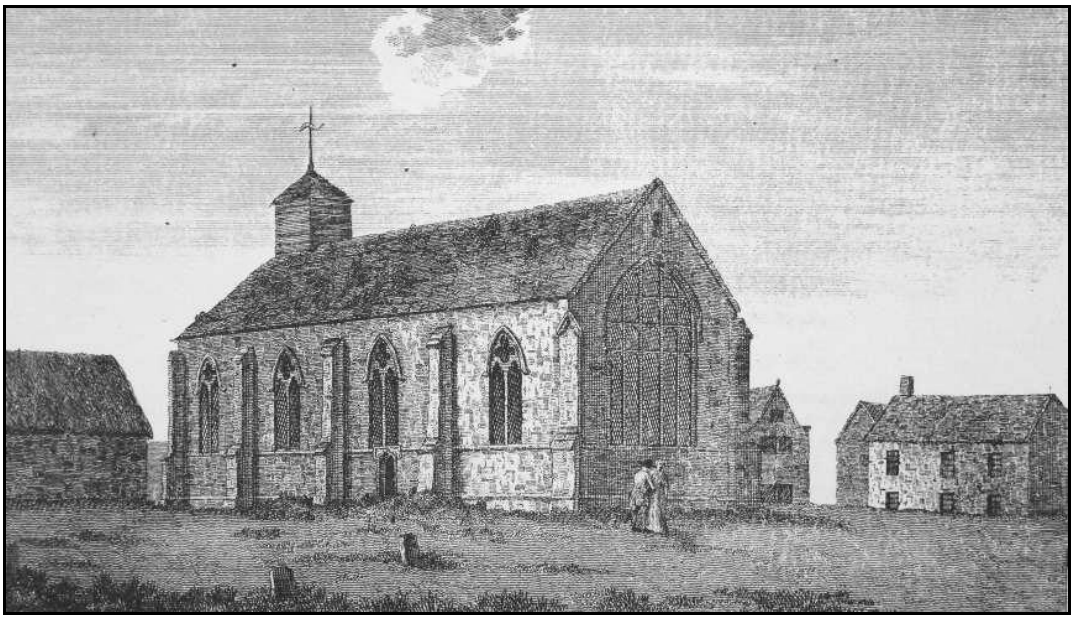
THE OSGATHORPE CHURCHWARDEN'S ACCOUNTS 1674 - 1716

PROVIDE AN INSIGHT INTO LIFE IN OSGATHORPE IN THE LATE 17th / EARLY 18th CENTURIES



A 1795 ENGRAVING OF ST. MARY'S CHURCH

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"*The particulars of his accounts is in a paper but (considered) not fit to be entered (so) that they might not be for a precedent for any churchwarden to follow. The sum of his receipts and disbursements are as followeth*.....".
It was apparent that Robert Morley, who was appointed churchwarden in 1716, had to help Benjamin out. Morley charged the parish £1 17s. 10d. "*for work done in Ben. Waldrums year*".

BY SAMUEL T STEWART - DECEMBER 2023

FRONT PAGE ENGRAVING

This 1795 engraving of St. Mary's Church, Osgathorpe taken from John Nichol's History of Leicestershire is the earliest known illustration of the church. Note the single bell tower encased in wood and capped by the tiled steeple, later to be covered in lead. The Alms Houses, Thomas Harley Free Endowed Grammar School, and the rectory can be seen in the distance. What is thought to by the author to be the first rectory is shown to the left of the church. Note the priest's door at the rear of the church.

CONTENTS

RESEARCH SOURCES

L&RRO Ref DE1668/21 period 1674 to 1716 (chosen because virtually complete)
The Compleat Parish Officer. Facsimile of 1734 handbook
W.E. Tate. The parish Chest. Phillimore 1983
D. V. Glass & D.E.C. Eversley. Population and History. 1965
Barry Coward, Stuart England. Longmans Advanced History p282
L&RRO Ref - MF129-130
Photocopy of the accounts of Thomas Wootton, churchwarden in1685
John Nichol's "History and Antiquities of the County of Leicester" Volume 3. pp921
Exploring Villages. Joscelyne Finsber / Alan Sutton 1987. p.178
Glebe Terrier 1606 - Lincoln Record Office

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Many thanks to Robert Jones for making available to the author the research he carried out whilst a resident of Osgathorpe in the 1990s which has proved invaluable in the writing of this publication.

COMLIMENTARY READING ON THE AUTHOR'S WEBSITE :-

"The 13th Century Church of St. Mary The blessed virgin and Graveyard in The Village of Osgathorpe"

INTRODUCTION

The churchwardens' annual accounts of 1674 -1716 provide a valuable insight into Osgathorpe life at the end of the 17th century. Whereas the churchwardens dealt partly with support for the travelling destitute, the village overseers' organised the parish's maintenance of the poor or sick of Osgathorpe. The diversity and complexity of the duties of the warden become clear during the research and we can see how the parish rate was spent and collected. Local sources of materials and local craftsmen are identified. We also obtain a picture of the construction and appearance of the church as it was 100 years before the earliest engraving (1795), and recognise the itinerant underclass begging in the parish during the period. An analysis of the 42 sets of accounts provides a picture of day to day village happenings during an early time when insight into such illuminating trivia are not otherwise documented. How else would we wonder at the size of the communion wine bill or the market price of a dead hedgehog would be 1d.

Churchwardens' "*supervised the finances of the part of the church affairs which by tradition were the responsibility of the laity", "they are a corporation to take care of the goods of the church and the property whereof is in them.....".* The wardens were also responsible for conduct within the church and churchyard, the provision, repair and disposal of church seats, the repair and hanging of the church bell. They were advised on matters involving expense, to consult with the vestries and take advice from their neighbours. This was sound advice, for churchwardens had to present their accounts in writing at the end of the year (just after Easter) to the parish and to the Visitation made by the Bishop's representative or apparitor (**an officer who summons witnesses and executes the orders of an ecclesiastical and formerly a civil court**. The vestry is variously described as "*inhabitants in vestry assembled, the parish, the town meeting, the principal inhabitants, lawful and sufficient men*". Membership was either open to all ratepayers or selected from within the parish.

This was a period of marginally increasing religious tolerance, still recovering from the puritanical zeal of the Protectorate and the changes associated with Parliamentary powers. The period covered by these accounts follows one of immense change, almost revolution.

The rural economy experienced a lack of pressure on resources; national population dropped in the plague years of the 1600s, and did not recover until after 1710. Grain prices fell gently and England became a net exporter of grain from 1670 for about a century. There was a shift from grain growing to cattle keeping due to the introduction of fodder crops like turnips and storable grass feeds (known as silage today), which enabled cattle to be fed during the winters. However, the harvest failures of 1691 and 1698 and the trade depressions of 1696-7 and 1709 upset the economy. **Gregory King estimated that in 1695 more than half the population was reliant on charity for survival.** (***Gregory King****, (born Dec. 15, 1648, Lichfield, Staffordshire, Eng.—died Aug. 29, 1712, London), English genealogist, engraver, and statistician, best known for his* Natural and Political Observations and Conclusions upon the State and Condition of England, 1696*, first published in 1801, which gives the best available picture of England's population and wealth at the end of the 17th century. A man of remarkable versatility, he edited the* Book of Roads*, for which he supervised the engravings (executing several himself), assisted in the drawing of the map of London, and constructed the map of Westminster).*

Life expectancy was lower at the end of the 17th century than at the beginning. Nationally, the rural economy was changing; the larger landowner had difficulty finding good tenants due to falling food prices even though he could borrow more

easily and his offspring could marry more advantageously. Enclosure "by agreement" had been temporarily halted, then legalised again. By 1690, 50% of the cultivated land of the country was in the hands of the larger landowners who let to the larger prosperous farmers, resulting in an increase in the landless labourer population who were now reliant on wages for survival. Osgathorpe appears to have followed this pattern: the estimated 40% of land that was not enclosed was within the traditional three field system and lay in Grange Field, Brand Field or Gracedieu Field and was farmed in strips. The balance was common or waste at disposal of the village.

During the period of the Osgathorpe Hearth Tax assessment during (1664 -1673), the maximum number of houses eligible to pay tax on their fireplaces was 25. A crude calculation based on Hearth Tax paying families of 25 x 4,5 = 112.5. If it assumed that only 60 to 67% of the population paid Hearth Tax then the crude maximum population between 1664 and 1673 could be estimated at about 170. The ecclesiastical census of 1676 gives the population attending church at Osgathorpe as 90.

From the accounts being examined, it would appear that the Osgathorpe churchwardens also performed some of the duties normally associated with those of the parish constable, namely the giving of alms to vagrants. It is not clear whether the duties were combined or just the accounts. It is also not known with any certainty how churchwardens were appointed in Osgathorpe. There is no evidence to show they were elected by the village, appointed by the Rector or selected internally from a group associated with the church. The number of individuals eligible or able to be appointed as churchwardens during this period was limited, the office being held several times by the same individuals. Twelve held office only once, whereas nineteen were appointed two or more times. Certainly the churchwardens keeping the parish accounts were male and most could write and were numerate. This was demonstrated by the variety of hand writing in the accounts. Most appeared able to travel in order to visit Loughborough, Leicester or Ashby in the course of their duties without charging the expense of hiring a horse to the parish.

The rector of Osgathorpe had not been replaced during the protectorate, even though he was a staunch Royalist, but his life was made very uncomfortable. "Mr. *Ross* (the incumbent from 1640), "*by the interest of some friends was saved from a formal sequestration; but was miserably harassed for many years, and often forced to abscond. He was a man of good life and learning".* Cadwalleder Vaughan was the rector from 1697 until his death at the age of 83 in 1728. Mr. Vaughan appeared popular and well thought of. The annual dinner instead of being titled the parish or the vestry or town dinner was called Mr. Vaughan's dinner and paid 1s. into the accounts.

ANALYSIS OF THE CHURCHWARDEN'S ACCOUNTS 1674 - 1716

The accounts have been analyzed as follows :-

- Internal church administration, repairs and Maintenance
- External church administration including visits from the apparitor (the Bishop's representative, purchases of proclamations, payments of fees and citations and for visits to church courts.
- Payments for vermin.
- Alms and donations.
- Bread and wine for communions.

	ANNUAL AVERAGE	42 YEAR TOTAL
Internal church administration, maintenance etc.	£1 4s. 9d.	£51 19s. 10d.
External administration	£1 2s. 10d.	£47 18s. 9d.
Vermin	1s. 10d.	£3 15s. 10d.
Alms and donations	4s. 0d.	£8 7s. 3d.
Bread and wine	11s. 11d	£24 19s. 7d.
Glazing		£3 5s. 11d.

The greatest expense of the parish was the maintenance of the church. The religious upheavals of the 16th century had led to a fossilisation of the church as well as a transformation of the interior. During this time it took the church wardens all their time to keep pace with the swings of the ecclesiastical pendulum. Payments were noted in the accounts for repairs, and improvements as well as general housekeeping. The ringing of the church bell was responsible for a major recurrent item of expenditure; bell-ringers were obliged to ring on all important public occasions as well as on Sundays. The bell wheel required regular repair, either by a joiner or by the village blacksmith. Bell ropes were replaced most years, a testament to the frequency of bell ringing, the poor quality of the ropes or perhaps the friction caused by a crude bell wheel.

In 1700, possibly to celebrate the new century, a new bell wheel was commissioned. The old bell was taken to Nottingham at a cost of 2s., and probably melted down, the bell founder charged £3 15s. 2d. for casting the new bell, and the return trip including expenses came to 5s. It cost a further 10 shillings for its hanging, 7s. 4d. for new ironwork and 2s. 3d. for a new bell rope. The bell clapper needed mending the following year and either one or two new ropes were purchased every year until 1716.

Whether coincidentally or not, the steeple also needed substantial repair three times during the same period. Only one payment of 1 shilling is recorded as having been made to the bell ringers on Christmas Day 1710 directly from the church funds. Apart from bell ropes the following were regularly repaired or replaced: bell wheels, bell hangers, bell fastenings, iron work for the bell, bell clapper, and ironwork for the bell wheel. The church was substantially re-pointed in 1675 and 1677 and was roofed with local slate (presumably Swithland slate):-

- 1685 - Paid Stephen Clarke for bringing slates 5 shillings, for slates at pitts 12 shillings, and for nails and laithes £2 7s. 9d.

Many loads of stones were brought to build, and later repair, the churchyard wall; the stones were set in lime mortar.

- 1693 - *Paid for mending churchyard wall and lime for it, 1s. 4d.*
- 1696 - *Paid for mending churchyard wall 2s. 6d*.
- 1706 - *Paid for twelve loads of stone for ye churchyard wall, 3 shillings.*

A gate and style in the wall required frequent minor repairs.

- 1674 - *Paid for lock for church gate, 4d.*
- 1682 - *For borde and nailes for ye gate 2 shillings.*
  For work on ye church style 6 shillings.
  For ironwork round it 1s. 4d.
- 1706 - *Paid for churchyard style and the carriage of it, 15 shillings*

The church steeple requires frequent repair.

- 1702 - *For repairing ye steeple for wood boards and work 10s 6d. for nails for ye steeple 6d.*
- 1705 - *For Tomlinson for mending ye steeple 10d.*

- 1706 - *For boards, nailes and workmanship for ye church steeple 6s 2d.*

Eric Bailey, who mended the bell wheel in 1689 and 1693, was a carpenter, as was Tomlinson who mended the steeple in 1705. Thomas Clarke was certainly a blacksmith supplying ironwork, *nailes* and fastenings from 1690 to 1712 for the bell wheels and the church gate. Both lived and worked in Osgathorpe. The only indication of rates of pay were those of a mason who worked on the church wall for 30 days and charged 15s 6d. for his labour. Mr. Vaughan supplied stone and Mr. Boutbee boards of wood.

The most detailed list of bell components appears in 1693 comprising "a bolt, a plate, a cotter, two wedges, and two staples for the bell rope".

Seats were either installed or increased in number inside the church in 1674 at a cost of £2 13s. 0d. plus 2 shillings for nailes and 1 shilling for labour. The wardens own charges for 2s. 8d. for *ye presentiment of seats in the same year* reflects the work done in allocating the seats to householders (or commonly to houses). The inside of the church was coated in 1687 using lime wash, the coat of arms was mended using 6d. worth of nailes and the painter was paid £4 for "*beautifying ye church".* In 1707, two locks were brought for the parish chest, in which money for alms and parish records were kept, and a catch was fitted to the pulpit door.

From 1674 to 1716, regular sums of money, some substantial, were spent in glazing the church windows. A total of £3 5s. 10d. was paid for seventeen separate visits of the glazier and his materials. This could be the belated repair of glass damage during the Commonwealth, as it seems rather high for wear and tear. "*Quarrels"* (quarries) for the church floor were brought for 6/3, "fetching" cost of £1 0s. 1d. and laying 3s. 9d. This was taken to mean quarry tiles but the same term was later used to describe material to repair the church windows (possibly the sills).

An entry in 1713, "*Made surplice and for thread 6d, 12 yard of Holland (lace) at 3s. 4d. a yd (2 pounds)". This* compliments the entries each year for washing the surplice, the vestments of the rector being a parish expense. The first entry for payments to Thomas Shaw the parish clerk, was made in 1696 at the rate of 5 shillings per year. His duties included the mending and washing for the above surplice, maintaining the register and general odd jobs around the church.

The Bishop's representative paid two visits to the parish each year, at Michaelmass and Easter. The fees paid for this visitation to inspect the parish were considerable. The apparitor (known as the pallitor locally) was the official messenger of the church court and charged the parish for various documents it was obliged to receive. A bible, prayer books, alterations to prayer books and other ecclesiastical literature were purchased from the meagre funds of the parish. It was charged by the apparitor for a proclamation regarding "*The Union"* (with Scotland) in 1706 and *"prayers concerning ye wars"* in 1709. Other proclamations of fasts, humiliation and thanksgivings for various National events also had to be purchased to be read out in church. The rector was also obliged by government to keep a register (of births, deaths and marriages) that was brought along with supplies of parchment. At the Michaelmass visitation, the apparitor received a transcript of the register for the bishop's records. Every few years the parish was obliged to produce a terrier or descriptive list of all church lands and properties. This list, and its copy, and the fee for presenting the document were also paid from the parish fund, the copies being taken by the apparitor.

The churchwarden also paid a bounty for the corpses of vermin. The price paid in the churchwarden's accounts varied somewhat dependent on the donor and the individual bearing the vermin, but the averages were, 1 shilling for a fox or a badger, and 1d. for a mole or a hedgehog. Rarely did a year go by without three or four

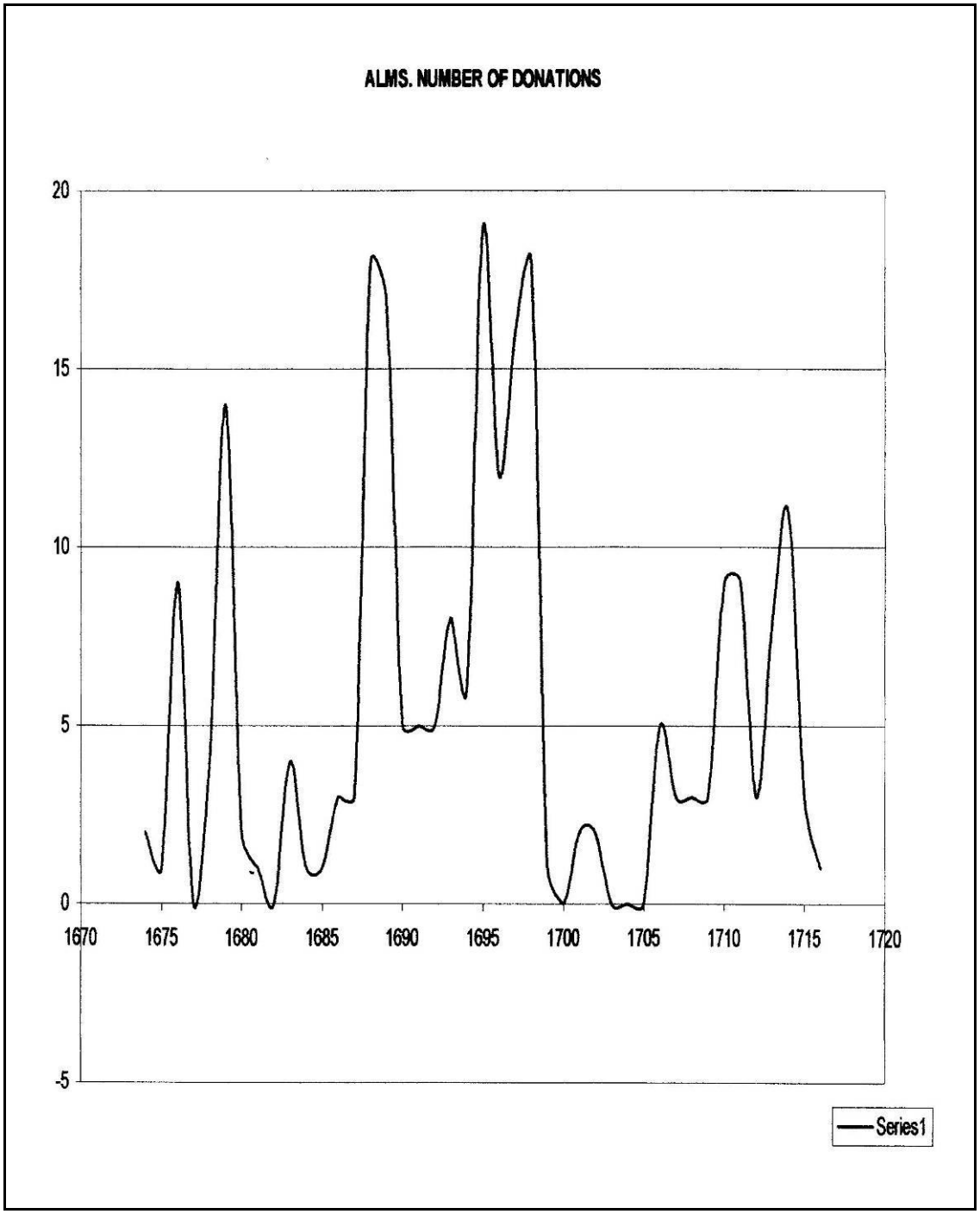
entries of this type in the accounts. Presenters of dead vermin came from as far afield as Sheepshead (sic), Thringstone, Belton and Low woods. These bounties were, from the evidence of the accounts, not purely a means of pest control, but also a charitable donation. (Note - Sheepshead became Shepshed as we know it now).

DONATIONS TO TRAVELLERS

Alms were given to the destitute who were not settled in the parish of Osgathorpe, falling into two groups, those with a 'letter of request', and those without. The 'letter of request' was a permission to beg or receive alms written by a Justice of the Peace. The entries in the accounts were as diverse as the travelling poor of the period. The accounts usually state the gender and age of the beggar, where they are from, and sometimes where they are going. The occupations are often mentioned as well as the reason for the circumstances. Over the 32 years of the study there were approximately twice as many single beggars as there were groups seeking alms. An analysis of the descriptions of the individuals is as follows :-

SINGLE MEN	**113**	
SINGLE WOMEN	**17**	
SINGLE, GENDER UNKNOWN	**9**	**TOTAL SINGLE 139**
GROUPS OF MEN	**16**	
GROUPS OF MEN WITH CHILDREN	**1**	
GROUPS OF WOMEN	**14**	
GROUPS MIXED	**8**	
GROUPS OF WOMEN WITH CHILDREN	**7**	
GROUPS MIXED WITH CHILDREN	**8**	
GROUPS GENDER UNKNON	**17**	**TOTAL GROUPS 71**
SOLDIERS	**5**	
SEAMEN	**10**	

A total of 225 payments of alms occurred during the years 1674 to 1716. Donations peaked in the years 1688 to 1689 and 1695 to 1698 (see the following graph).



The peaks of the graph of alms appear to have some correlation with national times of hardship possibly caused by harvest failure or trade depressions. There is not the same correlation with local mortality rates suggesting that a similar degree of hardship was not experienced in the township of Osgathorpe. The picture of a predominantly single male beggar from neighbouring Leicestershire parishes passing through Osgathorpe in the greatest numbers between 1688/9 and 1695/98 through is painted in the graph above.

Examples of the reasons why the alms were sought when given in the accounts are listed below :-

- Poor, old, lame, distressed.
- For loss by fire, general losses, great losses, loss by water, inundation by water, loss by overflowing of the sea, had cattle drowned.
- Seamen who had ship burnt, suffered shipwreck, merchant for loss upon the sea.
- To travel to their native country, forced to leave estate, to redeem out of slavery.

From the list of recipients whose parish of origin is stated, the majority came from Leicestershire; 39 out of a total of 53 came from places like Woodhouse (Eaves), Thornton, Leicester Forest, Groby, Desford, Ashby, Mountsorrell (sic) and Swithland. The others came from further afield, namely, Cheshire, Glossop, Lincoln, Essex, Salop, Upton, Nuneaton in Warwickshire, and Yorkshire. The picture of the predominantly single male beggar from neighbouring Leicester villages passing through Osgathorpe in the greatest numbers in 1688/9 and 1695/98 is painted from the preceding statistics. A significant underclass of people not offered, or incapable of work was constantly on the move. These were the "deserving" poor: the vagabonds were theoretically whipped from the parish by the constable. **Ironically, it can be seen that the average annual expenditure on alms was only a third of that spent on bread and wine for communion.** At the time of the survey, it was the custom that bread and wine left over from the sacraments were the perquisite of the rector.

FURTHER INFORMATION

During the period studied, the rector and the parishioners "went aparambuling" walking the bounds of the parish at Rogationtide. This was considered necessary to confirm the boundary as well as being the ancient tradition of "beating the bounds". **Rogationtide was a religious festival held between the Monday and Wednesday before Ascension Day, and was a period of fasting and prayer. It was accompanied by processions around the parish boundaries, and our ancestors in this procession would have recited the Litany of the Saints.**

The party was refreshed by payments for ale of between 1shilling and 3s. 6d. on each of the ten excursions. Glebe Terriers were written at intervals. These described church properties and identified and located church lands. These terriers, filling two to three sheets of parchment, were accepted by the apparitor on behalf of the Bishop at a Visitation and cost the parish about 2 shillings.

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More unusual payments were made :-
In 1709 "*for a table of kindred and a board for it 1s. 3d*." This was the Table of Prohibited Degrees which had to be displayed to "*clear up all doubt which marriages were lawful and which forbidden*".

In 1684 an entry "*paid to ye pallitor about ye Kings Touch*". Each minister was required to keep a record of the certificates issued to those requesting a cure for the "King's Evil". Touching the Royal hand was regarded as a cure for a tuberculosis swelling of the lymph glands disease called scrofula, The practice ceased in 1714 with the death of Queene Anne. Whether this entry refers to the actual permission or only an administrative messsage from the apparitor is not known but the fact of the

practice reaching a small township like Osgathorpe is worthy of note. (***King's Evil****, scrofula (*q.v.*), or struma, a tuberculous swelling of the lymph glands, once popularly supposed to be curable by the touch of royalty. The custom of touching was first adopted in England by Edward the Confessor and in France by Philip I. In England the practice was attended with great ceremony; and from the time of Henry VII sufferers were presented with especially touched coins to be worn as amulets or charms. The custom reached its zenith during the Restoration: Charles II is said to have touched more than 90,000 victims between 1660 and 1682. The last royal healer in England was Queen Anne, who touched 200 victims in 1712. In France the ceremony persisted for another century and was even briefly revived by Charles X between 1824 and 1830*).

The final unusual payment in the accounts was 15 shillings for a hearse cloth in 1709. Whether this is a relic of the elaborate funeral ritual of the pre-Reformation period will never be known. A hearse, in this context, is a wooden frame for holding candles. This frame was placed over the body when it was brought into the church. A Pall or hearse-cover was draped over the framework and holders for candles were visible on the ridge and at the edges of the covered structure.

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Osgathorpe church wardens had access to two sources of revenue. Rents were received from what were described variously as church lands, church ground, town ground, common ground, or common, amounted to £1 4s. 9d. each year. To supplement this, various levies were made. It is not known from the accounts what section of the population was being levied; rate books have not survived. In 1707, the rent received was deemed adequate to balance the books and no extra was charged. In other years between one and five levies were collected by the churchwardens at times during their year of office.. The total amount of the levies appears to be proportionate to the cost of spasmodic extra work on the fabric of the church.

The churchwardens drew upon their accounts at the end of their year of office for presentation to the parish at Easter. There are no amendments or notes on the accounts to suggest any query or dispute with payments made during the year. During the 42 years of the study, although the legibility of the accounts varied from year to year, there was only one warden whose work was considered inadequate; Benjamin Waldrum in 1715 produced accounts that were substandard. An anonymous note was entered in the accounts as follows:-
"*The particulars of his accounts is in a paper but (considered) not fit to be entered (so) that they might not be for a precedent for any churchwarden to follow. The sum of his receipts and disbursements are as followeth*.....".
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