

CHURCHWARDENS' ACCOUNTS FOR ORMSKIRK PARISH, 1692-1730

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Among the documents relating to Ormskirk parish church which have only recently been transferred from the church premises to the Lancashire Record Office in Preston is a set of churchwardens' accounts for the years 1692 to 1730. These accounts have been particularly valuable in forming a picture of the church and its life in the first quarter of the eighteenth century, and it is the purpose of this article to examine in some detail what the accounts reveal about the concerns of the churchwardens at the time, many of which were doubtless common to other parish churches up and down the country.

The accounts are not listed by Cox in his *Churchwardens' accounts* of 1913, and it is likely that their existence was known about only very locally. The Ormskirk churchwardens' accounts for 1665 and 1666 were transcribed and commented on by Dixon,¹ but no detailed study seems to have been made of this later set. They have survived in remarkably good condition, being in only a few places torn, smudged or faded, and are carefully written in secretary hand. The accounts provide information on a wide range of topics. We learn about the duties and responsibilities of the wardens themselves and how they carried them out; about various aspects of church life and worship at the time; about the fabric and furnishings

1 J. Dixon, 'Church expenditure two centuries ago', *T.H.S.L.C.*, XXX (1877).

of the church building; and about the people involved in the life of the church, from patron to bellringers, from vicar to dog-whipper, from visiting preachers to legal advisers.

Ormskirk parish at this time consisted of six townships: Ormskirk, Bickerstaffe, Burscough, Lathom, Scarisbrick, and Skelmersdale. Each was represented by a churchwarden elected for one year; usually there was a complete change from one year to the next. When the wardens were sworn in they received from the outgoing wardens the custody of the church goods. At their first meeting they usually reviewed the church fabric 'to veive ye necessary repairs of ye Church'. They attended the Dean's court in Wigan and paid fees to the court. Thereafter they met several times in the year, partly to pay bills and settle accounts. The number of meetings in a year ranged widely from two to thirteen, though they are only recorded when they involved some expense. Apparently such expenses became a problem in most parishes; Cox writes of 'the very numerous excuses made for refreshments and drinking'² found in accounts, and these included treating visiting ecclesiastics. It is therefore interesting to read in the Ormskirk accounts for 1713 of a vestry meeting at which it was agreed that 'hereafter noe further expences shall be allowed to ye Churchwardens but only 12s. a meeting, & four meetings onely in ye year & for ye entertainmt of strange Clergymen when they come to preach here, onely 2s. 6d. a day'. It has to be said, however, that this agreement was not adhered to in subsequent years.

At the end of their year of office the wardens made up their accounts and presented them to a vestry meeting on Easter Tuesday. The annual income is not given for every year, and only in the accounts for 1693 is there any indication of the source of the income; here the six townships are listed with a sum against each, giving the total amount available for the year. The money presumably came from the church rates, which were levied from Elizabeth I's reign until they were abolished in 1868. Annual expenditure ranged from £30 in 1692 to £256 in 1729, but contrary to our twentieth-century expectations, this does not reflect inflation. In fact the

2 J. C. Cox, *Churchwardens' accounts* (London, 1913), pp. 8-10.

standard expenditure rose only slowly over the forty years from £30 to about £40 a year. What caused major variation was particular undertakings. Work on the roof resulted in a total of over £80 in 1703; the recasting of the bells in 1714, paid for over two years, more than doubled expenditure; heavy legal expenses were incurred in 1724 when funds were being raised for a major rebuilding programme; and when the actual work was carried out the wardens made a contribution of £160. Cox claimed that after the Reformation churchwardens' accounts 'show but a minimum of expenditure on anything connected with divine worship',³ but the main areas of expenditure in these Ormskirk accounts are the maintenance, repair or replacement of the church's fabric and furnishings, and the servicing of church worship; there is no evidence here that religious duties were 'swamped by secular responsibilities'.⁴ It is true that there are references to such things as poor relief, but the fabric of the church clearly constitutes the chief concern.

Dixon, commenting on the expenditure by the wardens on the fabric in 1665 and 1666, sees this as confirmation 'that it was much damaged during the civil war turmoil, which raged with such destructive force about Ormskirk and Lathom'.⁵ The fabric was also under constant threat from the effects of time and weather. On a number of occasions snow had to be cleared from roof and gutters, and a great hailstorm in April 1697 broke several windows. There is repeated reference to reslating, glazing, mossaing, pointing, leading, and soldering. However, this patching-up process was not in the long run satisfactory, and eventually, as we shall see, a decision was taken in the 1720s to raise money for the purpose of rebuilding the nave of the church. Figure 15 gives an impression of the church, dated to 1742.

The fact that the churchwardens were constantly paying for work on the fabric enables us in some measure to reconstruct the external and internal appearance of the church in the early eighteenth century. It was surrounded, as it still is today,

3 Cox, *Churchwardens' accounts*, p. 2.

4 Cox, *Churchwardens' accounts*, p. 3.

5 Dixon, 'Church expenditure', p. 175.



Figure 15 *Ormskirk parish church in 1742*

From a postcard franked 1906 in the possession of Mr Don Ambrose, to whom the Society is grateful for permission to reproduce the illustration.

by a churchyard marked by a wall which had to be repaired from time to time. In 1710 the churchyard was extended; the accounts record an income of £5 'recd from ye Buriall places in ye new Enlargem^t'. Gates and a turnstile to the churchyard are also mentioned; a new turnstile was put in in June 1698 at a cost of 6s. 4d. and new gates were made in December 1712 for £2. Reference is made to a sundial, possibly the one that still stands near the church; in February 1719 Henry Sephton was paid £3 3s. for a 'new diall stone'. The church also had a weather vane. In March 1721, after several meetings to 'consider abt putting up a new fane', James Barnes was paid 15s. for a copper vane. Mr Cawdwell of Liverpool (a rare example of someone from outside the immediate area being employed) was paid £1 5s. for gilding it, and Henry Sephton £2 10s. for putting it up, doubtless on top of the spire where the present one is.

Ormskirk church is of course renowned for having both a tower and a steeple. The latter stands rather oddly at the

south-west corner and at first glance looks more recent than the massive west tower. In fact it is over a hundred years older, having been built in about 1430, but looks newer because it was rebuilt at least twice, in 1790 and again in 1826. Not much seems to have been done to it during the period under review. In the accounts for 1693 we find the rather cryptic entry 'pd 4 Rails & 4 Partes for ye Church Stepl . . . 3s. 6d.' In November 1703 the wardens paid 2s. 4d. for two locks for the steeple doors, and in February 1715 they bought hasps and staples for the door, but the fabric is not mentioned. The west tower was built in the late 1540s, apparently to house bells that came to the church from Burscough when the Priory there was dissolved in 1536, though it was not completed until the 1570s. It is a massive structure, probably far more substantial than was needed for the four priory bells, and the fabric seems to have needed little attention, at least for the first two hundred years of its existence. References in the accounts are restricted to work done on the belfry area. The windows and door of the bell-house needed attention in November 1707; it was plastered in November 1713; and a new floor was laid in September 1716. The clock mentioned in the accounts was on the south face of the steeple, rather than on the west tower where the present clock was installed in 1883. It is clear that the church had a clock before August 1693, when Henry Webster was paid £2 for repairing it. It was a striking clock, as there are references to hammer, bell and spring. In July 1708 1s. 6d. was paid for 'repairing Clock hammer after ye bell was hung again', and in October 1708 1s. was spent on a 'new Spring for Clock Hammer'. An annual payment was also made for the maintenance of the clock.

The church had an entrance porch at the west end of the south wall, where the present porch of 1891 stands. In August 1701 the wardens bought 'a Planck for a seat in ye Porch', and in August 1712, after 'agreeing wth ye Masons abt ye Porch & Windowe', the wardens put in train the building of a new porch. The masons were paid £2 16s. in September, and James Gleast was paid 8s. 10d for '71£ & a halfe of new Sheet Lead for ye Porch att 1d. per £' (the £ sign relates here, of course, to pounds weight not sterling). References to doors suggest that the church had north, south and west doors as

well as a chancel door. In August 1702 'ye Chancell door Lock' was repaired, and again in September 1713. The west door into the tower is mentioned in November 1699 and in January 1700, when some of the woodwork and ironwork was replaced; in April 1703 reference is made to the great door, probably also the west door.

The windows, which had leaded lights with plain glass quarries, needed fairly constant attention. Between 1692 and 1716 James Gleast was paid on a regular basis for glazing and soldering, as were Ralph Gleast, and Henry, John and Richard Helsbie. James Gleast was paid 3s. 4d. in October 1692 for '8 foot of new Glass at 5^d a foot'; in March 1693 he was paid 4s. 6d. for 'Sodering ye Leads' and 11s. 8d. for 'Glazening at Church & School'. In January 1695 Richard Helsbie was paid 15s. 7d. 'for amending sevell Glasses abt ye Church & putting in Quarrels'. In January 1706 when a good deal of reglazing was done by Ralph Gleast, there is an item 'for Pinning two Casemts', which suggests that some of the windows were openable. There were also dormer windows. The word used in the accounts is dormant, for which the *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* gives two meanings: a fixed horizontal beam; and an alternative term for dormer window. The context makes it clear that the latter is the sense here. The dormers are mentioned in February 1710 and in December 1713, when William Moorcroft was paid 6s. for 'six days work in Pointing Windowes Tearing (tarring) ye Dormants & abt North door & School'; one shilling a day seems to have been the standard wage for labour at this time. The roof and dormers were pointed in September 1716, and in April 1723 William Slater was paid for 'worke att ye South Dormant windowe'.

Frequent references to the roof suggest that it was another source of trouble. Slating is a regular item in the accounts, work for which William Davie was paid throughout almost the entire period, often twice a year. In October 1705 120 slates cost 8s. Inside the church, the roof timbers also needed attention. In April 1699 the wardens agreed with workmen 'abt Casing ye Church Roof', and Henry Jones and Antony Smith were subsequently paid £12 10s. for doing the work. Only eighteen months later, however, in October 1700, a further £9 10s. was paid for the same work. Perhaps to

prevent this from becoming a regular item, major work was done on the roof in November 1703. This warranted a separate entry at the end of that year's accounts, headed 'An account of all Charges pd Concerning ye Great Roofe' and presumably referring to the nave roof. Five trees were cut down for this work, and the main task seems to have been getting down the great beam and replacing it; the new one cost £3 10s. A second beam and four more trees cost a further £3 11s. The work necessitated carting, plumbing, slating, and other jobs, and £1 was spent in dinners and drink 'when ye workmen gott up ye Great Beam'. But even this did not cure all problems with the roof: in July 1705 the wardens paid for more wood for the great roof and for a 'Plate and nails for ye Pann in ye Gt Roofe', a pan being a northern term for beam. Moreover, in September and October 1706 more work had to be done on the great beam.

As well as having clear glass in the windows, the typical early eighteenth-century church would be whitewashed and adorned with texts, such as can still be seen at Puddletown, Dorset. In March 1705 £9 was paid to 'ye Limners for painting ye Isle according to Agreemt' and in October that year they were paid £16 'for Painting & White Liming ye Church'. In March 1694 Thomas Hilton was paid £3 10s. 'for Drawing ye Sentences Dressing Pulpitt & Quire & Font Cover'. William Moorcroft was paid for whitening the church in September 1716. In May 1707 the wardens paid Henry Gill 6s. for 'Painting abt ye Commandmts & ye beam & some other work', a reminder that from Elizabeth I's reign churches were required to display the Ten Commandments, Creed and Lord's Prayer.

Another feature of Georgian churches was the galleries that were inserted into the fabric of churches to provide additional seating at a time when the population was increasing but few new churches were being built. Most of these galleries were swept away in Victorian times, often (as at Ormskirk) as part of a wholesale restoration programme. Ormskirk church had a west gallery for which a faculty had been obtained in 1682, but two more were subsequently added. At the end of January 1715 the sum of 12s. was spent 'when we mett to consider abt ye Gallery', and workmen were paid 1s. for 'erecting a Scaffold to veiwe abt ye Gallery'. This might relate to the

existing west gallery or to the possible erection of an additional gallery. However, there is no further reference until October 1730, by which time a faculty had been obtained, the work agreed with the workmen, and the gallery built for £20. This was a south gallery; a north gallery was added in 1770. The nave and aisles all underwent some alteration during this period. In October 1712 agreement was reached with masons about new pillars, and the work seems to have involved flagging '113 yards att 5d per yd' in addition. The painting of an aisle in March 1705 has already been mentioned; in November 1713 the north aisle was plastered and whitened. Both aisles were widened to their present dimensions in the rebuilding of 1729–30. The chancel was refurbished in 1706. In October James Ascroft and others were paid 14s. for 'Leading Sand Stones & Mortar for raising ye Communion Chancell'; leading is here used in its northern dialect sense of carry or transport. In December carpenters and plasterers were paid for 'doing ye Roofe over ye Communion table'. Two years later, in October 1708, Thomas Billinge was paid £3 11s. 10d. for a 'new Sett of Rails for Communion Table & some other worke'. The church had a vestry on the site of the present one, which dates from 1886. A casement window is mentioned as being repaired in March 1710, and in May 1721 4s. 8d. was paid 'for a Battlemt stone att ye Vestry Leading itt & for mortar & workmanship'. An annual payment was made for 'Looking to ye Vestry all year'. Importantly, since many meetings were held here, the vestry had a fireplace. The grate was repaired in March 1701 and again in March 1710, when the chimney was also rebuilt.

It is clear that the fabric caused the wardens concern, and relatively major projects were undertaken in 1703 (the roof), 1706 (the nave roof, an exterior wall, and the chancel), and 1712 (porch, nave arcades, and flooring). But overwhelmingly, payments seem to relate to moss, hair, lime, laths, nails, glue, rods, staples, pins, locks, and keys, and one cannot avoid the impression that, as suggested earlier, the wardens failed to appreciate the need for more radical work on the fabric. However, by 1724 its condition had clearly become dangerous, and after some deliberation the wardens decided to apply for financial help towards rebuilding the nave of the church.

In June 1724 a petition to the Chancellor at Chester, in which diocese Ormskirk lay, was drawn up and signed. In the same month the local justices of the peace inspected the church. In July workmen examined the building in order to give estimates of the likely cost of rebuilding. This evidence was then put into a petition sent by the justices to 'the Right Honourable Thomas Earl of Macclesfield Lord High Chancellor of Great Britain'.⁶ The justices testified that inhabitants of the parish had made clear to them that the church was 'so ruinous that it is not Capable of being Repaired but must be Rebuilt'.⁷ The roof on the north side was said to be 'so Rotten and Decayed also the Pillars thereof so much bruised and shaken The North Pillars be already 23 inches out of Square and the South pillars 14 inches . . .'.⁸ Appended to the letter were the workmen's estimates, which amounted to £1,856 15s. and represented a very large sum in those days. At the same time a brief was prepared, signed, taken to the bishop of Chester, registered with the clerk of the peace, and then despatched to Stafford, the headquarters of the principal firm of 'undertakers' of briefs at that time. In an age when there were no regular collections at church services, briefs were one means of financing a major building project such as that now contemplated at Ormskirk. The Ormskirk church rebuilding brief is listed by Bewes for the year 1725-6, and the sum quoted as needed is £1,856, the total quoted above.⁹ The return on a brief seems to have varied from under 20% of the sum sought to about 75%. There were apparently many complaints about the system, and it was sometimes up to six years before the accounts were settled, which may be one reason why the rebuilding work at Ormskirk was not started until 1729, five years after the decision to rebuild had been taken. How much money was raised by the brief is not clear; the wardens' accounts do not include the income or expenditure for the work, which must have been accounted

6 Lancs. R.O., QSP 1266, 30 (quarter sessions papers).

7 Ibid.

8 Ibid.

9 W. A. Bewes, *Church briefs* (London, 1896), p. 312.

separately. However, the wardens did meet the legal costs and other expenses involved, and in March 1730 they contributed £160 towards the actual cost of rebuilding, which largely accounts for the unusually high total expenditure for that year of £256 7s. 1d.

We learn from these churchwardens' accounts not only about the fabric but also about the furnishings of the church. Some have already been referred to, for example the communion table, the bells, and the commandments board. The altar in use for almost the whole of this period was a typical seventeenth-century oak table, which is still in use in the church today. It was bought in April 1694 for £1 4s. and is carved with the initials of the six wardens for that year and the date.

As an example of comparative costs, a cloth was made for this table's predecessor in March 1693, and the materials—broad cloth and a silk fringe—cost £2 18s. 6d., more than twice the cost of the new table. New cloths were made in 1704 and 1710. The table was provided with matting in September 1695, and two kneeling stools for officiating clergy were made in September 1704. In March 1723 Richard Sowerbutts was paid 6s. 6d. for making 'four Quilts & four Quishions for ye Altar', while Mr Parr was in the same month paid £1 2s. 9d. 'for 19 yds¹/₂ of Kitterminster att 14d per yd for Quilts abt Communion table', which underlines the cost of such material in comparison with the cost of labour.

The church plate used for communion services consisted of flagons, plates, chalices, and patens. A new silver salver was purchased by exchange in May 1709 at a cost of £3 18s. 8d. A silver paten of 1717 is inscribed 'The Gift of Heyrick Halsall to Ormskirk Church, 1718'. Just a year earlier, in August 1717, the wardens had met 'to consult abt opposing Henerike Hallsalls Citacion for a seat', but they seem not to have been swayed by Halsall's rather pointed gift, as they pursued their opposition to his suit.

The pulpit referred to in the accounts may have been of the typical Jacobean kind still found in countless parish churches, though at some time in the later eighteenth century it must have been altered or replaced, as the church then had a three-decker pulpit that survived until 1879. The pulpit's position in the early eighteenth century is not clear; the most likely place

is part way along the nave on the north side, as can still be seen, for example, at Wilby, Norfolk, where the church was re-furnished after a fire in 1633.

The pulpit clearly had fashionable trappings; in November 1694 new 'Pulpit Quishern fringe and furniture' were purchased, and a new pulpit cloth in April 1698 cost no less than £7 19s. To enhance the preacher's voice a sounding board was fitted; work was done on it in November 1705 and January 1706. The clergy wore surplices which needed regular repair or replacement. One of the few occasions in these accounts when a woman is mentioned occurs in February 1693, when Hannah Caunce was paid for mending a surplice. In December 1702 she was paid £2 for 'a new pr of Surplice'.

Books that were needed for services at this time naturally included the Bible and the Book of Common Prayer. They were expensive items, and the prayer book needed to be replaced at fairly frequent intervals—at least nine times in the course of the forty years. In January 1708 William Grice was paid £6 for 'a large Folio Bible best Paper & Print, & a Co: prayer book wth Cases'. In October 1726 10s. was paid for 'Binding ye old folio Bible' and in April 1696 a new homily book was purchased. A few other books are listed: in April 1693 'ye book of Jewell & Hardin' was bound, and in January 1719 15s. was paid 'for binding three bookes of Martyrs & Lettering on ye back'. Betty quotes Elizabeth I's Injunctions of 1559 and other orders to clergy and churchwardens which required churches to have copies of Erasmus's *Paraphrases*, Foxe's *Book of Martyrs*, and Bishop Jewel's *Apology*.¹⁰ One other book mentioned is a 'Registers Book' purchased in April 1698. The Royal Injunctions of 1538 required a record to be kept of all baptisms, marriages and burials in the parish, and each church to have a 'sure coffer' with two locks for the safe keeping of the register. The Ormskirk registers date from 1557. Each year in these accounts there is a record of the vicar being paid 6s. 8d. 'for Registring all year', and it is quite likely that the register was kept in the chest still in the church.

In traditional fashion the chest had three locks; an entry for November 1703 records the provision of '3 new Locks for Great Chest'. In April 1706 the chest was lined, and the keys were mended in August 1712. In addition to books, the wardens had to make regular purchases of papers provided by the Apparitor. These included forms of prayer for the royal family and for special occasions such as national victories or the birth of a royal heir; guidelines for the day of fasting and for thanksgiving day; books of articles; proclamations; and Acts of Parliament. The latter included acts about briefs, Quakers, tenths and first fruits, and Queen Anne's Bounty.

Since the terminology is not always clear, it is difficult to discern from the accounts just how much and what sort of seating was provided in the church at this time. Perhaps appropriately, the wardens' own seating seems to figure more frequently than anything else. In December 1699 'ye Churchwardens Seat' was mended; it was provided with a new mat in January 1698 and December 1705, repaired in March 1707, covered and provided with new cushions in August 1712, and furnished with six hooks in November 1724. In March 1730, probably as part of the rebuilding programme, £4 0s. 4d. was paid for 'making the new Pew for Ch:Wardens being 60 days & ¼ work at 1s. 4d.' In January 1722 the vicar was provided with a new seat, which then had to be fixed 'after the Removal 3 days' at the time of the rebuilding. The clerk also had a seat which received attention to its ironwork in April 1693, and a plate in August 1706, together with '6 yards of Square wood'; mention is also made of a door for the clerk's seat. As for congregational seating, there are references in the accounts to great pews, pews, seats, and forms. If the distinctions are genuine this suggests a hierarchy of seating similar to that found at, for example, Kedington, Suffolk, where the seats are graded to correspond to social status; at the east end of the nave are box pews for the wealthy, including the Barnardiston family pew, then benches, and at the back of the church plain forms in rising tiers for children.

A font has always been an essential piece of church furniture, and English parish churches have examples ranging in date from the Anglo-Saxon period to the present century, and in size from the typical Norman tub designed for total immersion to the delicate little basins of the eighteenth

century. The font in Ormskirk church is one which was given in 1661 to mark the restoration of the monarchy. The donor was the redoubtable countess of Derby, Charlotte de la Trémouille, heroine of the siege of Lathom House in 1644. In February 1711 the wardens paid 1*s.* 6*d.* 'for Iron work abt ye Canopy over ye Font & for a Pullice'; this implies some mechanism for raising the cover when the font was used, as is the case with the modern cover now over the 1661 font. In May 1717 a new font cover was purchased for £3, and in June 1718 a 'new pewter Bason for Font' was bought for 4*s.* 6*d.*, no doubt used in the same way as a stainless steel bowl is used today.

The church was responsible for welcoming new arrivals into the world through baptism; it was also called upon to provide for their departure. There are references in the accounts to both hearse and bier as part of the church's equipment. The hearse was regularly provided with a new cloth, as in November 1694 when £1 9*s.* was paid for 'a new black hears Cloath woosted & for fringe & weaving'. The bier also had a cloth, and in October 1707 the wardens paid £2 15*s.* for four yards of Spanish broad cloth. The bier needed mending from time to time; indeed, in January 1717 reference is made to repairing two biers, a second one having been purchased earlier that month, for which John Watkinson was paid 10*s.*

Other necessary items of equipment kept in the church and mentioned in the accounts include a ladder, a spade, a fire shovel, and a whip. From 1725 a dog-whipper was paid £1 a year, and at the back of the church there still stands a desk fitted with a drawer for the dog-whipper's gloves, whip, and perhaps tongs, the standard equipment in the eighteenth century. He seems to have been kept quite busy: a new whip was needed by March 1726 and repairs were necessary four years later. The vestry was equipped not only with a fireplace, as we have seen, but also a cupboard, a looking glass, an umbrella, a standish (inkstand), sandbox and brush, and even a chamber pot; in November 1702 the sum of 2*s.* 3*d.* was paid for 'a Chamber Pott for ye Vestry'.

The accounts make virtually no reference to any music for the services at the church, and the only item of expenditure is in July 1722, when 8*s.* 7*d.* was spent on singers from Croston.

An organ was presented to the church by Jane Brooke of Astley Hall, Chorley, in 1731; before that the clerk would have had the task of leading the congregation in any singing. The bells of the church, however, played an important part, at least from the 1570s onwards. The accounts are full of references to money spent on them; up to 1714 the annual expenditure on the bells ranged from 12*s.* 5*d.* to £5 16*s.* But after discussion in June 1714 'to consider abt Casting ye Bells' and a vestry meeting at which 'ye Parishioners . . . agreed to Cast ye Bells' the work of recasting was entrusted to a nationally respected firm of bellfounders, Rudhall of Gloucester. By the terms of the contract, Abraham Rudhall was paid a total of £91 4*s.* over two years, and of course many smaller expenses were also incurred. This recasting resulted in a peal of six bells; further recasting was done in 1774 by Thomas Rudhall, when two treble bells were added, making a full peal of eight. In the period 1692–1730 the ringers were paid on a regular basis for ringing the bells, but not for church services. The bells were pealed for festivals like Christmas and Thanksgiving Day, and for secular occasions such as the monarch's birthday, day of accession, and coronation day. 'Powder Plott' day was commemorated every 5 November throughout the period and from 1711 to 1730 King Charles II's restoration was also celebrated with ringing, confirming the royalist allegiance of the town. Various royal occasions were marked by ringing, such as Queen Mary's funeral in 1694 and the birth of a son to Prince George in 1721. Between 1692 and 1713 the bells were also rung eighteen times to celebrate international events, most of them victories in the War of the Spanish Succession. The ringers were paid a set amount: 6*s.* from 1692 to 1714, and 10*s.* after the bells had been recast.

The services held in the church at this time were morning and evening prayer, with Holy Communion celebrated on certain Sundays only. The wardens do not actually specify what services are held except when the sacrament is mentioned, but visiting clergy are almost always said to have preached. The first such entry is for June 1692, when 7*s.* was spent on 'Mr Worden when he preached & ourselves for Dinner and drinks'. However, visiting clergy also conducted the whole service when the vicar was absent, as happened several times in Mr Kippax's twenty-seven years in office. On

occasion it is actually said that the visiting minister 'assisted ye Vicar at ye administration of ye Sacrament'. An entry for February 1710 that 'Mr Manwaring . . . preached here & assisted att Sacramt' seems to confirm that Holy Communion, when celebrated, followed morning prayer, a practice that had become firmly established in the Anglican Church in the reign of Elizabeth I. It is possible to estimate how often communion services were held during this period from entries in the accounts recording the purchase of wine and bread. The number of celebrations remains fairly constant throughout the period, ranging from five to ten and averaging about seven times a year. Moorman stated that in Elizabethan times 'the Eucharist was celebrated generally about once a month at the end of Morning Prayer',¹¹ but Cox claimed that 'in post-Reformation days the number of Celebrations were usually surprisingly few, but opportunities for communicating were often multiplied at Eastertide'.¹² The Canons of 1604 required parishioners to receive communion at least three times a year, including once at Easter. Clergy were often encouraged by their bishop to administer communion once a month, but in his study of services in Restoration Wiltshire Spaeth found that 'churchwardens in country parishes usually purchased bread and wine, and therefore communion was administered, only three or four times a year, at the great feasts of the religious calendar'.¹³ The frequency of communion in the early eighteenth century at Ormskirk, a town parish serving six townships, seems then to fall somewhere between the ecclesiastical ideal of a monthly celebration and the practice in rural areas noted by Spaeth. Certainly the most regular occasions for communion were Whitsun, Christmas, Good Friday, and Easter Sunday, with Michaelmas and Allhallows not far behind.

Ormskirk was, and still is, served by a vicar. During the period under consideration there were three vicars at the church: Archippus Kippax, instituted in 1692; Christopher

11 J. R. H. Moorman, *A history of the church in England* (London, 3rd edition, 1973), p. 219.

12 Cox, *Churchwardens' accounts*, pp. 101–102.

13 S. Wright (ed.), *Parish, church and people* (London, 1988), p. 133.

Gibson, who served from 1718; and William Knowles, who was appointed in 1727 when Mr Gibson died. As already noted, although worship at the church was the vicar's responsibility, it was the churchwardens who had to make sure that a substitute was available if the vicar was absent or sick. There are several mentions of the expense of a messenger being sent for someone to preach, to read prayers, or to celebrate communion. A slightly macabre reminder of the needs of the parish for the services of a minister is provided in July 1727, when Mr Gibson is described as being abroad, and Parson Dawson 'preached visited some sick persons & buried some Corpses'. Mr Kippax retired in February 1718 and died three months later. On 29 August the wardens 'pd for Entertainmt of Mr Gibson and his freinds wn he took his Induction'. For some six months, then, there was an interregnum filled by the wardens with a number of visiting ministers, though the chief responsibility for services was taken by Mr Brownell, who was paid a total of £7 for officiating during the interregnum. In June 1718 the wardens paid for 'an order of Sequestration abt ye Profitts of ye Vicaridge'. The same happened when Mr Gibson died in 1727; a letter came from Chester with a sequestration order, and Mr Sherdley was paid for officiating during the interregnum. William Knowles was instituted some time before April 1728, when he signed the wardens' accounts, but he seems not to have been given an 'Entertainmt'.

For some of the time, at least, there was also a curate at the church. The *Victoria County History* records that in the later sixteenth century 'the size of the parish rendered an assistant priest necessary',¹⁴ and the need is unlikely to have diminished by the late seventeenth century. The first definite mention in these accounts of a curate is in April 1709, when Robert Letherbarrowe went 'near to Kendall abt a Curate'. In October the wardens paid 6s. 8d. 'for Entertainmt of ye Curate twice & for his horse'. The curate is recorded as being present with the vicar at meetings in March and October 1711; he was entertained in July 1713, and was assisted by Mr Hull on Whitsunday 1715. But in March 1716 there were two

14 *V.C.H. Lancs.*, III, p. 243.

meetings about the curate, and then there is no mention of a curate until an entry for April 1721: 'Spt on ye curate at his coming', followed by two references in June.

On two separate occasions there is reference in the accounts to a King's Preacher. One of the measures taken in Edward VI's reign to destroy Catholicism was the institution of six itinerant chaplains who would tour the conservative areas of the country, beginning with Lancashire. The project was soon all but abandoned, but it was revived in Elizabeth I's reign; in 1599 four Queen's Preachers were appointed for Lancashire at a cost of £200 a year.¹⁵ In July 1692, soon after the institution of Mr Kippax, the vicar went with the wardens and others to Wigan 'to Attend ye Lord Bishop with a Petticion Concerning a Kings preacher's place'. The petition seems to have been unsuccessful, but Mr Kippax's successor fared better. In July 1720 the wardens spent 5s. 9d. 'on Mr Gibson & some of his freinds on ye good news of his being made a Ks preacher'.

Despite the size of the parish, Ormskirk had always been a poor living. According to Gregson, Ormskirk received Queen Anne's Bounty money in 1719.¹⁶ The accounts record that the wardens met in January 1715 'to consider abt . . . Qs Bounty money', and again in August 1716 'abt signing a Certificate for ye Ks bounty money'. However, there were clearly difficulties in persuading the governors of the bounty money; in September 1717 is the entry 'pd Mr Brownsword for Solliciting abt ye Late Queens bounty money . . . £1 17s. 2d.' It is quite possible, therefore, that payment of the bounty money was not started until 1719, as Gregson suggests. The living at Ormskirk had also been augmented by the Duchy of Lancaster in 1550, but payment of the Duchy money was frequently a cause of concern for the wardens. In April 1704 Mr Tyrar, described as an attorney at law, was paid for 'looking after ye Dutchy money yt was in danger of being lost'. In March 1706 a 'Pot of Fowle' was sent as a present to Mr Bellamy for looking after the Duchy money; and both in October 1717 and March 1720 a substantial

15 C. Haigh, *Reformation and resistance in Tudor Lancashire* (London, 1975), p. 22.

16 M. Gregson, *Portfolio of fragments: history and antiquities of Lancashire* (London, 1869), p. 240.

sum was paid 'for a Pot of Fowle & carriage as a p'sent to ye receiver of Dutchy rents'. These are all indications that legal costs sometimes constituted a major part of the wardens' expenditure.

The wardens seem also to have involved themselves in other lawsuits from time to time. One of the more entertaining cases has already been referred to: Heyrick Halsall wanted to appropriate a part of the church for a private pew, and the wardens opposed this. In January 1719 they paid £2 5s. 3d. to Mr Roberts 'abt ye Disbute wth Heyrick Hallsall &c abt ye seat in ye Church', and a further £1 2s. 7d. to Mr Brownsword 'for his fees in solliciting abt ye sd Matter and for Postage of Letters'. Even Mr Halsall's gift of a silver paten, mentioned earlier, did not weaken their opposition, although in the end a compromise solution was reached. Even higher costs were involved in what is described as a 'tryall wth Mr Hesketh'. In October 1724 the wardens paid £13 2s. to 'two of ye Proctors at Chester who were concern'd for us at the tryall', and £2 15s. 9d. to Mr Topping 'who was also concern'd agt Mr Hesketh'. We are not told the cause against Mr Hesketh, but in 1728 a case arose which may, like Mr Halsall's, have concerned an attempt to procure a private pew in the church. In May the wardens met to 'Consider to prevent a faculty to Wm Kingsley', and in June they paid John Fazakerley 13s. for a journey to Chester, and court fees of 7s. 'abt ye Kingsley Citacion'. Finally they paid the Proctors at Chester costs of £27 18s. 4d. One of the charities in existence at the time also seems to have necessitated legal action on occasions. According to the *Victoria County History*, 'Henry Smith in or before 1641 gave to trustees the manor of Longney in Gloucestershire with the impropriate rectory, the income to be divided among twenty-four parishes in different proportions. Ormskirk receiving $\frac{9}{264}$ of the whole'.¹⁷ Despite the donor's intentions there was clearly difficulty sometimes in ensuring continued payment of Smith's charity, which was distributed by the overseers of the poor in Ormskirk parish. In February 1694 the wardens sent a letter about the money; in October 1698 they met 'to consider

17 *VC.H. Lancs.*, III, p. 246.

abt Mr Smith money being in gt danger of losing'; and in December they met to 'sign a Certificate & orders to Mr Tyrar abt Mr Smith money'. Legal help and advice were also needed when the rebuilding was planned. Discussion started in 1724, and in October Mr Topping was paid 'for attending on ye Justices in examining witnesses in order for brief' at their sessions on 10 July. The result of this was the letter to the earl of Macclesfield quoted earlier, petitioning his support for a brief. In February 1725 the wardens had two meetings with Henry Sephton 'Considering of a Model of Church & Bargaining with him in undertaking ye whole work', and in March 1725 Mr Brownsword was paid £10 16s. 10d. 'for his care & pains & for a journey to Stafford abt ye brief'. There is then no further mention of the rebuilding until November 1728, when the accounts record that there had been 'Several meetings of ye Parishioners abt Rebuilding the Church'.

Finally, the accounts give a good idea of the number and range of people (nearly all men, as intimated earlier) involved with the church in some capacity. Sometimes an unspecified number of workmen are referred to by trade, mostly masons and carpenters but also slaters, painters, and smiths; more usually, however, the workmen or suppliers are identified. Some men were obviously employed on a regular basis. William Davie, for example, was paid on over thirty separate occasions between 1695 and 1726 for slating, flagging, and pointing; James Gleast was paid for glazing and soldering almost every year from 1692 to 1716; and John Watkinson, between 1707 and 1730, repaired bell wheels, made new gates, gable boards, pews and seats, and a new bier, as well as supplying much of the woodwork for the rebuilding. A number of people were employed on an annual basis for specified duties at a fixed rate. These included mending surplices, washing the church linen, cleaning the church plate, cleaning the vestry, sweeping the church, ringing for prayers, and 'looking to ye Clock'. The wardens paid the sextons and the clerk; from 1712 the sextons were paid £1 a year for ringing for curfew at 8 p.m. in addition to their other duties. As noted earlier, the vicar was paid for registering births, marriages, and deaths.

Something of the social hierarchy of eighteenth-century England is reflected in the way people are referred to in the

accounts: workmen are referred to by Christian name (often abbreviated) and surname; professional men like lawyers and clergymen by Mr and surname; while members of the gentry are identified with Esquire. Esqr Thrusbie donated a book to the church in August 1697, and Esqr Case was petitioned about the great pews in November 1706. The earl of Derby, as patron, is mentioned on a number of occasions, as when the bells were rung for his birthday, but other members of the Stanley family were also involved in church affairs. In 1712 Sir Thomas Stanley, Bt., served as a churchwarden, and in November that year there was a meeting with 'ye Honble Cha: Stanley [,] Esqr Scarisbricke & others abt bells'.

As suggested at the beginning of this article, then, a great deal can be learned about the church in Ormskirk at this time from the often trivial minutiae of these churchwardens' accounts. Some of the information is of course specific to the parish, but much of it is of wider interest and relevance.

All other quotations are from the churchwardens' accounts for 1692–1730, now in the Lancashire Record Office under PR3385 acc. 7175, and are reproduced with the kind permission of the vicar of Ormskirk, the Revd P. M. Kirby, and the Lancashire Record Office, whose help is gratefully acknowledged. Dates used in the text are those of the year of account.