

Appendix 5 - Church Briefs

The Brief System

Purley has a long tradition of giving money to help the less fortunate. This generosity was not always spontaneous. In mediaeval times a well organised system of 'Briefs' was functioning whereby the Pope or a Bishop would issue a Brief to support a particular cause and provided the mechanism for collecting money, usually via the archdeacon. All parishes were expected to pay their due share. Briefs were issued to compensate people for 'Acts of God' eg fires and accidents. The theory was that if the loss was occasioned by an 'Act of God' then the people of God should pay compensation. The person suffering the loss could appeal to the Archdeacon, the Bishop or the Archbishop, depending upon the scope of the appeal, and a writ would be issued to be read in all the churches in the county, diocese or country and a target set for each church.

When Pope Nicholas sent out his brief for the support of the Eighth Crusade he demanded a world wide assessment of parishes to form the basis for future payments. Henry VIII stopped the Pope from issuing Briefs in England in 1536 although Bishop's Briefs continued until the 17th century. Henry had been issuing his own Briefs under Letters Patent since 1533 and an elaborate system of collectors was established.

Briefs were used as an early substitute for insurance, thus when someone suffered an unexpected loss eg by fire or shipwreck, he could petition the King for the issue of a Brief, which if authorised was printed and despatched to all the churches in the counties and towns named. The King also appointed an underwriter or undertaker to collect the money. The clergy were supposed to read the Brief to their congregations on Sundays and the churchwardens collected the money which was usually handed over to the archdeacon with the Brief endorsed with the amount collected. The archdeacon passed these to the Clerk of Justices for the County who took his cut and sent the remainder to the undertaker or underwriter.

Underwriters would have guaranteed a fixed payment to the appellant and they were able to pocket any excess. Undertakers however usually agreed to take a fixed percentage and hand over what remained whether greater or lesser than the amount requested. On occasions fees were fixed in amount but these were very unpopular with undertakers who would usually not bother to print and despatch the Brief.

The system was very unpopular and clergy often used either not read the Briefs at all or save them up and read several in one go adding an appeal for funds for the parish church at the same time. When the money did not come in, a second or even a third Brief might be issued listing those parishes which had already contributed. Eventually most parishes adopted an approach whereby the money was simply taken out of parish funds and handed en bloc to the archdeacon at the time of the annual visitation. The system was abolished by an Act of 1836.

Purley's Contributions

Purley's contribution to Briefs were recorded in the Parish Register from 1669. The last recorded payment of Briefs for Purley was made at the visitation of August 23rd 1826 when the churchwardens paid over 13/6 for nine briefs. After the Restoration the Briefs and the amounts collected were listed in the parish register. There were 64 recorded for Purley between 1669

and 1683 when the recording ceased. During this time £13-0-7 ½ was collected for such purposes as the rebuilding of St Paul's (12-0), Redemption of slaves in Turkey (£1-16-6) and for the rebuilding of the centre of Blandford Forum destroyed by fire to which Purley contributed 11d.

The subject is comprehensively covered in the book 'Church Briefs' by W A Bewes. In the list below we reproduce what was recorded in the Parish Register and append extracts from Bewes' book to explain the reason for the appeal. In some cases the Register records individual contributions but mostly it is the amount demanded by the Archdeacon.

The Briefs

1	1669	May 30	2-3	John STUKELEY of Paddington, Middlesex [<i>Fire loss of £500</i>]
2	1669		1-2	Loughborough [<i>Fire loss</i>]
3	1670	Nov 18	1-16-6	Redemption of slaves in Turkey [<i>£30,000 paid - see Historical Manuscript Commission report 1876 page 575</i>]
				Mr Francis HYDE 10-0
				Mr BLAGRAVE 2-6
				Thomas BLAGRAVE 8-0
				George BLAGRAVE 2-6
				Thomas CHILDE 2-6
				Thomas DRAPER 1-9
				Widow JUSTICE 1-9
				Widow HIGGS 1-0
				John GUTTERIDGE 6d
				John TAYLOR 6d
				Richard BAGLEY 3d
				John MARTIN 1-0
				William GILGRAVE 1-0
				Grace DRAPER 1-0
				Elizabeth SIMONS 6d
				Katherine KESSEL 6d
				Griffin KESSEL 6d
				John ELMES 6d
				John KNAPPE 6d

				1-16-6
				Thomas BLAGRAVE rector
				Jno BUSHNELL church warden
4	1671	Mar 5	3-3	John WICKENS and Lidia ARLAND, two of ye inhabitants of ye parish of Ufton in ye county of Berks
5	1671	Mar 8	17-0	Marshall Fowler of Great Chart, Kent [<i>Loss of £400</i>]

6	1671	May 28	1-6	Mere, Wiltshire														
7	1671		4-8	Oxford [<i>Church, either St Aldates or St John's</i>]														
8	1672	May 19	1-8	Nettlestead, Kent [<i>Mary PEARSON, widow</i>]														
9	1672	June 2	3-3	Liggrave, Bedfordshire [<i>Near Luton, fire loss of £2946</i>]														
10	1672	Sept 8	1-10	Heston Middlesex [<i>Fire loss by SCRATTAGE</i>]														
11	1672		1-11	Thomas COX of the hamlet of Ham in the parish of Kingston upon Thames Surrey [<i>Loss by fire of £659</i>]														
12	1672	Oct 27	3-1	For ye refining of sugar in ye city of London [<i>For loss by fire (£70,000) by Matthew SHEPPARD, John LUNN, Gents; Edward PROBEN refiners of sugar and bakers of the sugar house, Upper Thames St, Allhallows, London</i>]														
13	1673	Mar 30	3-6	Fordingbridge in the county of Southampton [<i>Loss by fire of £13,633/9/9</i>]														
14	1673	May 11	17-5	John SMALL, spicer of Guildford Surrey [<i>Loss by fire to John or Job SMALLPEECE of £695/7/3</i>]														
15	1673		2-1	For the fire at St Catherine's in London [<i>Loss by fire of £25,355/5/0</i>] as follows:- <table border="0" style="margin-left: 40px;"> <tr> <td>Mr Francis HYDE</td> <td style="text-align: right;">6d</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Thomas BLAGRAVE</td> <td style="text-align: right;">8d</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Thomas CHILD</td> <td style="text-align: right;">4d</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Elizabeth JUSTICE</td> <td style="text-align: right;">4d</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Mary HIGGS</td> <td style="text-align: right;">2d</td> </tr> <tr> <td>John GUTTERIDGE</td> <td style="text-align: right;">1d</td> </tr> <tr> <td colspan="2" style="text-align: right;">sum of 2-1</td> </tr> </table>	Mr Francis HYDE	6d	Thomas BLAGRAVE	8d	Thomas CHILD	4d	Elizabeth JUSTICE	4d	Mary HIGGS	2d	John GUTTERIDGE	1d	sum of 2-1	
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16	1673	Jul 27	1-5	Fires in the Theatre Royal in St Martins in the Fields [<i>Fire loss of £11,488/2/0 - Theatre Royal and other buildings at Covent Garden</i>]														
17	1673	Aug 3	1-3	Edward SINGER of Littleton, Middlesex [<i>Edward SINGER's loss of £1159/5/0 by fire</i>]														
18	1673		1-0	Lawrence Waltham, Berks [<i>Fire</i>]														
19	1673			Nether Wallop, Co Southampton [<i>Fire loss of £7756/0/0</i>]														
20	1674	June 14	3-6	Benenden, Kent [<i>Church - [fire loss of £3920/14/0]</i>]														
21			2-1	Watton, Norfolk [<i>Fire loss of £7450</i>]														
22	1674		1-11	Basingstoke, Co Southampton [<i>Fire loss</i>]														
23	1675		1-10	Great Bedwyn, Wilts [<i>Fire loss</i>]														
24	1676	Mar 26	11-9	Northampton [<i>Fire loss of £152,008/4/6 - In Sept 1675 fire destroyed 600 homes chiefly built of wood and covered in thatch. It burned for 6 hours and 700 families were made homeless. All Saints Church was subsequently rebuilt to a design by Wren.</i>]														
25	1676	Apl 16	1-8	Church of Oswestry, Salop [<i>Damage to church and steeple during Civil War, loss £1500</i>]														
26	1676	Apl 30	1-10	Newent, Glos [<i>The church fell down, loss £2000</i>]														
27	1677	Apl 15	2-0	Eaton, Bucks [<i>Fire loss</i>]														

History of St Mary The Virgin Church, Purley on Thames

28	1677	July 18	1-9	Harlington, Middlesex [<i>Fire loss £1046</i>]
29	1677	July 22	3-0	Rickmansworth, Herts [<i>Fire loss £822</i>]
30	1677	Aug 26	11d	Blandford Forum [<i>Fire loss £15,348</i>]
31	1677	Nov 25	1-4	Cottenham, Cambs [<i>Fire loss</i>]
32	1677	Dec 19	3-0	Wem, Salop [<i>Fire destroyed the church, market house and a whole range of buildings, loss £23,677</i>]
33	1677	May 20	3-6	Southampton [<i>Fire loss</i>]
34	1678	Apr 28	1-8	St Mary Magdalene, Bermonsey, Surrey [<i>Fire loss £2000</i>]
35	1678	May 18	1-6	Pattingham, Staffs [<i>Fire loss, collected from house to house</i>]
36	1678	Sept 18	12-0	Building of St Pauls Church in London [<i>It had been destroyed in the Great Fire of 1660. Five inhabitants of Wrotham in Kent refused to contribute on the grounds that they alleged it was a hot-bed of popery</i>]
				Thomas BLAGRAVE rector 10-0
				Thomas CHILD 1-0
				John BROOKES 1-0
37	1679	Apr 20	1-6	Dover [<i>Fire loss by Tho. OSBORNE</i>]
38	1679		1-10	Windlesham, Kent [<i>Fire loss, church and steeple</i>]
39	1679	Jul 27	2-6	Ludgershall, Wilts [<i>Fire loss £1292</i>]
40	1680	Mar 3	1-8½	East Derham [<i>Fire loss, collected door to door</i>]
41	1680	June 25	1-6	Weston in the Parish of Bulkington, Warks
42	1680	Aug 29	14-2	Collected in the Parish of Purley towards ye redemption of ye captives in Algiers, safely delivered. [<i>971 persons were in captivity in Algiers having been captured by pirates. Some were en route to the Straits, others to Virginia. A horrible account was given of the cruelties practiced upon them and a petition on their behalf was lodged in the House of Commons in 1678.</i>] as follows:
				Mrs & Mr Francis HYDE 1-0
				Mrs & Mr BROOK 1-0
				Tho CHILD 1-0
				Tho BLAGRAVE rector 10-0
				Samuel COMBER 6d
				Richard PETHER 2d
				John TAYLOR 2d
				John NICHOLS 2d
				John GUTTERIDGE 2d

				14-2
				Tho BLAGRAVE rector
				Richard BAGLEY X warden
43	1680	Oct 31	2-2	Duxford, Cambs [<i>Fire loss of £1865/19/0</i>]

44	1681	Jul 10	8-0	Collected for ye Protestants of Poland Tho BLAGRAVE rector 5-0 Mr Francis HYDE junior 1-0 Mr BROOK 1-0 Farmer CHILDE 1-0
45	1681		2-8	Stafford [<i>Fire loss</i>]
46	1681	Oct 2	1-7	East Budleigh, Devon [<i>Fire loss £2251/19/6</i>]
47	1681	Dec 4	3-0	Broad Chalk, Wilts
48	1681	Dec 18	1-0	St Albans [<i>Church repairs</i>]
49	1681		12-6	French Protestant refugees [<i>Collected from house to house</i>] Thos BLAGRAVE rector 9-0 Eliz his wife 2-6 Tho CHILD 1-0
50	1682	Mar 19	19-2	Ye Maze, Southwark [<i>St Thomas and St Olaves parishes, fire loss</i>]
51	1682	Apr 16	1-6	Bishton, Staffs [<i>Fire loss £2176/16/0</i>]
52	1682	May 11	2-6	Cullompton, Devon [<i>Fire loss £9263</i>]
53	1682	June 11	3-6	New Windsor [<i>Fire loss £5135</i>]
54	1682	July 9	1-6	Thomas NICHOLLS suffering fire in London [<i>In the warehouse of Thos NICHOLLS lying under Dyer's Hall in Thames St. London, Fire loss of £2600</i>]
55	1682	Aug 6	1-11	Caistor, Lincs [<i>Fire loss £6786</i>]
56	1682	Nov 8	1-4	Presteign in Radnorshire [<i>Fire loss £6150</i>]
57	1682	Nov 12	1-4	Eynsham, Oxfords [<i>Fire loss £1330</i>]
58	1682	Nov 19	1-10	St Katherines, London [<i>Fire loss £4799</i>]
59	1682	Nov 26	1-6	Stoke by Clare, Suffolk [<i>Fire loss £1100</i>]
60	1683	Jul 29	1-8	Brentford in Parish of Hanwell [<i>Flood loss £718</i>]
61	1683	Aug 8	1-3	Preston Candover [<i>In Hampshire, Fire loss of £1276 or £11,000</i>]
62	1683	Aug 18	1-3	Bassingborne [<i>Fire loss £963 (in Cambridgeshire?)</i>]
63	1683	Aug 22	1-0	Llanubdufery [<i>Fire loss (Llandover?)</i>]
64	1683	Aug 26	3-11	Wapping [<i>Fire loss £56,346</i>]

NB - the index refers only to people and places in Purley

