

# *Account of Purley on Thames*

## The Church - Tithes and Revenues

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### **Tithes and Church Revenues**

From the very earliest days of the church each Christian had imposed upon him a moral obligation to give one tenth of his possessions to the work of God. However it was left more or less to each individual to decide for himself how to allocate it. Theodore, Archbishop of Canterbury, in the seventh century, advised that it must go to pilgrims, the poor and the church and no where else.

For payments to the church three types of payment predominated; Plough Alms, Soul Scot and Church Scot.

Plough Alms was a simple tax of one penny to be paid at Easter time for each Plough team owned.

Soul Scot, which is the forerunner of the modern burial fee was a claim by the priest upon the deceased's possessions. It usually was the second best beast or object, the best having gone to the lord of the manor.

Church Scot was a customary present in kind which could vary from a few eggs to a waggon full of grain.

Church Scot gradually came to be replaced by tithes based upon income and to become compulsory rather than voluntary. It was made payable by law in the reign of King Edmund (939-946) and it soon became obvious that much clearer rules had to be enforced. Parishes had to agree firm boundaries with their neighbours and King Edgar decreed that two thirds should go to the ancient Minster and one third to the local Church, but this was often complicated by considerations as to where burials and baptisms were conducted.

When Lanfranc became Archbishop of Canterbury after the conquest, he set about ensuring that the church got its hands on all the revenues and decided for itself how it should be apportioned. He had to compromise however and only the third or lesser tithes were tied down as the income of the local church for the incumbent to decide how it should be spent.

The value of tithes was considerable. Consider for example what one tenth of the income of all the present residents of Purley would amount to! The Lords of the Manor were very reluctant to see this income go out of their control and wherever possible severed the link with the Minster and substituted a token pension. In Purley's case this amounted to 2s per annum and was paid to the Minster Church of St Mary le Butts in Reading. The rest of the tithe was allocated according to the whims of the patron or owner and he often paid it to his favourite monastery or other ecclesiastical establishment, usually in exchange for favours. The recipient was expected to provide the money for pilgrims and the lord spent money on his local church as he felt fit.

The income of a parish priest was provided for mainly by a portion of land made available to him by the proprietor which he could farm. This land, known as Glebe land gradually came to be owned

rather than rented. It was the rental value of this land which was used to determine the 'value' of the living. This was supplemented by the fees he was allowed to charge and the customary dues from parishioners.

A person who had full control over all the income of a parish church was known as the rector, whether or not the income included all the tithes or only part of them. Rectors were usually priests although in many cases the village lord himself assumed the title and would often take minor orders in the church.

Where the rector was not a priest or did not live in the parish then the patron had to find a vicar who would perform the pastoral and priestly duties and in return receive a part, usually only a small part, of the income. At first this was a very insecure post but the Council of Avranches in 1172 stipulated that while the owner of a church retained the right to present a candidate, once inducted whether as vicar or rector he was guaranteed the benefice for life and could be deprived only by the bishop under exceptional circumstances.





