A book about Staughton August 2019

**Ordinary lives in Stoughton Magna during the Civil Wars**

Whilst the Civil War was pitting Englishman against Englishman, and superstition challenged religious belief, ordinary people in the village of Great Staughton went about their business, and we know something of their activities thanks to sources like the Protestation returns, the Churchwardens' Accounts, Charity Collections, and land and property transactions.

A year prior to the Protestation, in the accounts for 31 May 1640, the churchwardens, Edmund Ibbott (as his name appears), and Ralph Paine, record all the furnishings and ornaments held by the church, the land it owns; they list the duties and obligations of the rector and give details of payments to the poor.

The most prominent objects in the church are the bells, of which there are five and 'one little bell, hanging betweene the church and the chauncell,' ie the Sanctus bell. In the belfry there is 'one clocke with all the parts and furniture thereof.' Various holy books are then listed, including 'one great new bible,' a reference presumably to the relatively new King James bible, published three decades earlier.  There is also a register of births, marriages and deaths.

The rector had other parochial duties, one of them proving to be onerous, as two entries in the accounts reveal. The rector was obliged to make 'palmecakes' for the poor of the parish at Easter. For this, four bushels of 'wheate' were required 'to be yearlie paid out of the parsonage of Stoughton Magna by the Rector.' It was the duty of the churchwardens to organise the grinding of the wheat into meal, leaving the rector with the responsibility of finding firewood, and a suitable place to bake the cakes. This particular task was the responsibility of parishioners; however, the rector was obliged to provide 'meate and drinke, dureinge the time of the making of the same palmecakes.' The churchwardens' accounts record laconically that the practice was abandoned by Easter 1640 ' by a consent of the minister, churchwardens and divers other parishioners.' The rector was, however, also obliged to supply the Communion wine for all communicants within the parish at all times.

An interesting entry marks the beginning of the bell rope charity, which existed until various bequests were consolidated into the Parish Charities in the early years of the twentieth century. 'The Rector is likewise to find and allow belle-ropes for all the bells at all times, at his owne costs and charges, for which (it is said) he holdeth a parcell of land, being four selions, commonlie called the belroapes.' A selion, a measurement of land, was one furlong (660 ft) long by one chain (66 ft) wide.

**© A Withers 2019**