



The Auction of Midsummer Tithes, 1902 & 1903

A Curious Auction

Unique Sale of Midsummer Tithes

There are many old-fashioned customs in Wiltshire, but the selling of Midsummer Tithes at Wishford by the clerk, by public auction is unique. It takes place on the Monday before Ascension Day, and must be finished before the sun sets. The Rector, Churchwardens, and Clerk, assembled in the churchyard as usual on Monday. First, the Clerk tolled the bell, and the villagers and others assembled outside the gates. The clerk perambulated from the gates to the porch accepting bids as he went along. In this instance, the tithes were bought by Mr Cannings for the "Wilton Fly Fishing Club." The sale being over the Clerk proceeded to toll the bell to announce the fact. The proceeds of this unique sale go towards church expenses.

Salisbury Times, Friday, 9 May 1902

Midsummer Tithes

These tithes, which give the right of cutting the grass in certain meadows near the river were sold on Monday last by the clerk, Mr E. Hunt. This is a very old unique custom. In the presence of the rector and churchwardens, the clerk perambulates to and fro from the church porch to the yard gate. Outside the gate stands a crowd of would-be buyers and spectators. After the manner of an auctioneer, the clerk announces the bids, and eventually knocks it down with the key of the church door to the highest bidder. These tithes must be sold on the Monday before Ascension Day, and before sunset on that day.

Salisbury Times, Fri 22 May 1903

OPC Note:

The Midsummer Tithes consist of the foreshore, or first cut, on two parcels of land in the parish. The first piece of land is Bonham's Mead, which is 2 acres and 2 roods (4 roods equal 1 acre), and lies on both banks of the River Wylye, just below Duck Island, on the southern outskirts of the village towards Wilton. The other parcel of land is Abbey Mead which is 3 acres, 2 roods and 30 perches and lies about 200 yards past Wylye Cottage between the back road to Langford and the river.