

When Half-a-Crown was a Good Day's Pay

Peeps into an Old Craftsman's Ledger

I HAVE HAD THE PLEASURE of inspecting a Berkhamsted tradesman's ledger which had seldom, if ever, been opened for a century and a half. It looked and smelt its age. As I turned over the 170 pages, 16-in. by 6-in., my desk acquired a grimy, gritty surface. The sand which drifted off the pages was not the fine quality that was used by parish clerks to dry the ink of the churchwardens' accounts.

Though the craftsman's own name does not appear in the book, he was almost certainly a member of the Matthews family, either the founder or a son of the founder of the business which was later known as H. and J. Matthews Ltd., builders, contractors and undertakers, of Castle Street. The name Matthews appears in a list of Berkhamsted tradesmen in a directory of 1792, and the ledger, which was started in 1801 and filled by 1811, was obviously not the first of the series.

ODD JOBS

Here are some typical entries in the spelling of a scribe who wrote as he spoke—with a broad accent!

- For work menden Chikin Coop, 5s.
- For meaken Cow Cumber frame, 1s. 6d.
- For the Cobbard (cupboard), £1.
- A pare of Hings to Dog Cennell, 1s.
- For sawing of the Charrey tree, 6d.
- For menden the Rat trap, 6d.
- For menden the Bedpoast, 6d.
- For the Goe Cart, 6d.
- For 1 hook to hang the meet on, 3d.
- For menden Candle Rack, 6d.
- For Nobbin the Cows hous, 6d.
- For Drowing Down the Bilden, 3s. 6d. (Drawing or throwing down a building?)
- For Smothing Cutting Board, 6d. (for

John Tomlin, 'showmaker' = shoemaker).

- For menden coffey mill, 6d.
- For putting up Windo Curtin, 6d.
- For Job teaken down puttion, 6d. (partition).

WAGES AND BEER

Prices were low by present-day standards, and so were wages. In 1801 the price charged for a day's work was 2s. 6d., or 7d. for '3 ours work.' Even then there was an inflationary trend; the day rate rose to 3s. 2d. in 1804 and to 3s. 4d. in 1808. 'For half a day in Back Lane' the charge was 1s. 6d. I found several mentions of overtime.

BY

'BEORCHAM'

Wages were sometimes supplemented by beer, and there is also a reference to gin at 1s. a pint. In October 1802 Mr. Wheedon was charged 6d. 'for beer for carrying up stuf', and no doubt the stuff that was carried up was heavy enough to justify the refreshment. Here is an entry of 1808: 'I paid for A point of Beer you order Ben 3d.' (Ben was one of the employees; another was named Burch). Several jobs were done in 1809 for Mr. Turner, who always paid extra for beer for the workmen.

Among Mr. Matthews' customers was the Rev. George Nugent, of the Red House, who bequeathed £1,000 towards the cost of a new workhouse. The following bill was rendered to Mr. Nugent in 1802:

- For menden privey, 3d.
- For Smothing the privey floor, 6d.

- For menden tea tray, 6d.
- For New Nife Board, 1s.
- For Easing the door, 3d.
- For menden the Close Hors (clothes horse), 6d.

A FARMER'S ORDERS

Obviously Mr. Matthews was a very useful man to have about the house—or the farm. Jonas Harden (Harden, of Haresfoot) received the following bill in 1802:

- For Leatherin the Bocket and for New Bocket Leathern, 4s. 3d.
- A haytrofe 4/A long, 5s.
- A Shiptrofe, 3s. 9d.
- A new Hogtrofe, 5s.

The plural of 'shiptrofe' (sheep trough) was 'shiptroves.

Mr. Clarredge (Claridge), of the Swan, paid 14s. 6d. for 'a new drink stand' in May, 1802; his monthly or quarterly bill was sometimes as high as £22 15s.

John Tomlin, brewer (not to be confused with the 'showmaker' of the same name) was charged 12s. 'for New Gate dellfield'. Gates, always spelt geates, were obviously a Matthews' speciality. Mr. Tomlin also bought 76 ft. of board for the Prince's Arms, price 12s. 8d., and a salt box, 6d. Perhaps a scuffle in the Prince's Arms, with chairs as weapons, was the cause of Mr. Tomlin having to pay 1s. 6d. for 'menden 2 cheers.'

THE TALLY-HO COACH

The coaching days brought business to Mr. Matthews; he sent the proprietors of the 'Union Tallio Coach' a bill for 10s. for two new rails on October 10th, 1805. This date could cause a revision of the following entry in the Shorter Oxford Dictionary: 'Tally-ho. The proper name given to a fast day-coach between London and Birmingham, started in 1823; subsequently the name was appropriated by other fast coaches, and treated somewhat as a common noun.'

The little footbridge over the Bulbourne and water-cress beds at St. John's Well Lane is mentioned in this entry of 22nd April, 1809:

- Senjen Well Bridge.
- for 4 Oak Steaks and 2 pounds of spikes, 2s.
- for 2 men for work, 2s.

Orders were taken from Mr. Tompkins of the Workhouse, Mr. Bombredy of the 'Peasthouse' (Pest House), Mr. Empey (Impey) the miller, and William

Shekspear, a well-known Berkhamsted resident of the period.

THE CHURCH LADDER

William Halsey, churchwarden of St. Peter's, received a bill for 'menden the church ladder, 6d.; for job at Church Geate, 1s.' Another churchwarden, William Norris, was supplied with a 'bothricke' (the spelling is difficult to decipher) in 1803, and four years later Mr. Smart ordered a 'brotherecke' for the great bell at Northchurch, the price being 2s. 6d. Perhaps a campanologist will explain what a 'brotherecke' or 'bothricke' was.

Mr. Joseph Austin had a bill which covered four pages and amounted to £139 8s. 1d. in 1808—mostly for timber, nails and labour, but including 80 bricks at 6s. 6d. and '2 Iron Hoops to the Wellhole, 6d.'

Here is an unusual entry: 'March 14th, 1803. Mr. Thomas Dorrien, for borring 198 feet of elm pipe at 1 shilling per foot, £9 18s.' A very hard—and expensive—boring job.

Coffins appear frequently in the entries. In 1801 a child's coffin cost 3s., 4s., 6s. or 7s. There were even wider variations in the prices of adults' coffins—from 10s. to 'coffin compleat' at £13s.

ONE PIG'S HEAD

Finally, here is a letter written on a small piece of paper, which was found in the book:

'Bletchley. Dear Brother we recivied the tow boxes and the pigs hed I think you very kindly we have sent you a few apeles send the Box back and we will fill it again December.'

It was, of course, the season of goodwill.

Of course every parish has a parish church . . .

. . . but who pays for it ?

Q: Doesn't the State pay for the Church of England?

A: The State pays for Chaplains to the Forces of all denominations, but gives nothing at all for parochial or diocesan church life.

Q: What about the Church Commissioners, aren't they very rich?

A: We ought to be very thankful for the Church Commissioners because, if they did not use their income from ancient endowments wisely and well, a great many parishes would today have no clergy at all! They provide roughly half the stipends for our clergy but, though their total income looks impressive, their resources are limited, and they can provide no funds at all for church upkeep and repairs and the general expenses of church and diocesan living.

In this parish the Commissioners will pay, next year, about half the Incumbent's stipend—you have to find the rest!—And they will give £650 towards our total assistant clergy bill of roughly £2,000.

But, the annual running cost of this parish and its two churches is over £6,000—without counting our gifts to home and overseas causes and the inevitable capital outlay each year upon our churches, halls and curates' houses.

The ordinary person is under the fixed impression that the church is somehow "laid on"—that it is someone else's

responsibility and not his. And yet, he expects the parish church to be there when he needs it, and a clergyman to be around if he should happen to want him!

Q: What can we do about it?

A: Christian Stewardship seeks to change all this; to invite people to regard their giving as a deliberate Act of Worship; to make sure that it is a worthwhile act which really means something to them, and therefore means something to God.

It seeks to proclaim the truth that when people break with the old habits of casual giving, and bring this giving into the heart of their worship, then their lives, as well as the life of the Church, is immeasurably enriched.

Christian Stewardship has been well defined as "The regarding of ourselves—our time, our talents and our money—as a trust from God to be used for his work in the world". It is nothing new; the Bible teaches it from start to finish.

May I ask those who do not subscribe to our Christian Stewardship Fund to consider doing so, and those who already subscribe, to review their subscriptions.

Compiled from the Rector's recent Christian Stewardship letter. The Stewardship Recorder, Mr. A. E. Dye, 4 Cedar Road (Tel. 3856) will be pleased to provide further information, or to note any increases in subscriptions.

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