

Transactions

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Annals of an English Hamlet.

The following paper was read by Mr Wm. Barclay, Banff:—

A little time ago Major Chinn, of Portsoy, gave me a look of the exhaustive and handsomely got-up Records of his native district of Knowle in Warwickshire. It is a book of over

400 pages quarto, and included in its contents are some items that I thought might interest the members of the Banffshire Field Club, who are credited with being engaged in work on somewhat similar lines pertaining to these North-Eastern parts. Before we turn to the book itself, let a word be said of the county of Warwick, of which Knowle is situated in one of its 256 parishes.

The county has an area of 564,000 acres, so that it is more than one-fifth larger than our own county of Banff. Its principal river has the same name as the one large stream which Banffshire can claim as its very own, although it is to be feared the Warwickshire Avon is more celebrated in British song and literature than our own northern A'an. It has coal-fields, of which Banffshire is innocent, although the latter county may easily compete with it in the fuel resources of the peat moss; it has ironstone, of which we also have small deposits in the upper regions of the A'an and on the shoulder of Ben Aigen; and if it has great manufacturing towns, like Birmingham and Coventry, we may try to uphold our own end of the balance by pointing to the sea coast of our county, which stands supreme in its herring fishing resources. The English county, it is true, has one institution with which Banffshire cannot compete, the public school of Rugby, that school of national reputation of which every British schoolboy has read in the fascinating pages of *Tom Brown's School Days*. If Warwick has its battlefield of Edgehill, we can point to the Bleedy Pits on Gamrie Mhor, to that other long distant engagement that was fought on the moor by the sea-board of Rathven, and to the more recent battle of Glenlivet; and if Warwick has also within its bounds a Kenilworth Castle, it was Scotland's most famous writer that gave it its world-wide fame when Scott described how in 1575 Queen Elizabeth, who had conferred it on her favourite Leicester, was sumptuously entertained there for eighteen days at a daily cost of £1000. And there have been natives of Warwick also with whom Banffshire cannot compete, although we may take heart of grace and say that so far the world itself has failed

to provide such another as at least one of her sons. And not only was Shakespeare a Warwickshire man, but there were born there other personages of national renown, Samuel Butler, Drayton, "George Eliot," and Landor, to mention only four from a galaxy of great names that would be the justifiable pride of any similar area in the universe.

And so we come to the Book of Knowle, which is described as a hamlet or chapelry, situated in the ancient parish of Hampton-in-Arden, nine miles from Birmingham, on the main road to Warwick. The old and historic church is the centre of the village, as it has ever been the centre of the village life. The book opens with an account of the Registers, which begin in 1682. The first entry is an announcement that Edward Mandley and Alice Brown, "both of this Chapelry, were joyned together in Lawfull Matrimony"; the second is the entry of a burial "and affidavit was made of her being buryed in woolen"; the third is the entry of a baptism; so that in the first three entries we have brought before us in outline the whole drama of human existence—birth, marriage, and death. Gentle and simple are both here: on the page that records the birth of a daughter to Fulke Lord Brooke and Lady Dame Sarah his wife, is the entry of the birth of a son to one who is euphoniously described as "a traveller"; and while there is recorded the wedding of Lord Campden, Earl of Gainsborough and Lady Catherine Greville, the latter, when a widow, to become afterwards the wife of John Duke of Buckingham, there are recorded with equal fidelity the marriages of many hundreds of couples of much less exalted folks. Shakespeare is a name that appears from time to time in the registers; there are entries of baptisms of those who are described as "base born children," and altogether 140 pages are occupied with a transcript of the registers between the years 1682 and 1812. Major Chinn belongs to a family that has long been firmly established at Knowle, for from 1690 on to 1911 there are numerous entries in the registers referring to them under the name of Chin, Chinn or Chan. The index alone of names on the registers occupies 60 pages. One

entry in these registers intimates that in August 1686 a collection was made "for the King's Letters Patents" for the "Relief of the French Protestants fled to this Kingdom upon the horrid persecution in France," and it amounted to £29 7s 2d, whereof my Lord Brooke's family contributed £21 3s 6d, and two years later there was a collection for the relief of distress caused by an earthquake at Kettlewell, in Yorkshire.

Part II. of the book gives the names of the churchwardens and details of their accounts. The latter are complete from 1673 onwards. The churchwardens performed secular duties of quite a varied nature. They were not always men, for the churchwarden for the four years 1802-05 was Mrs Marshall, mine hostess of the Mermaid, a hostelry that the present-day visitor to Knowle will find in the Greswolde Arms, still decorated with the old figure of a mermaid; other inns mentioned are the Lyon, the Swan, the Duke of York, and the Rising Sun. The churchwardens incurred expenditure in a variety of ways, all detailed here over a matter of 80 pages. The washing of surplices is a regular entry. To keep the clock in order, to repair the bell now and again, to maintain the fabric of the ecclesiastical buildings, to provide bread and wine for the Communion, the purchase of bell ropes, bricks and lime, and to help on their way people who came with certificates of losses they had incurred by what in a modern insurance policy might be called "the hand of God"—all these things cost money, which the churchwardens entered in their accounts with scrupulous fidelity. A person came one day to Knowle, who is described as "a strange Minnister," and he was given 5s from the church funds, while another man described as "a traveller," possibly a needy tramp, was sent on his way with twopence. "A man brought by a guide," a blind man perhaps, was given sixpence, and when work had to be done "for the buildinge of a Seate for the Minister's family for ever," it cost a pound. When the bell ringers were paid, ale had also to be provided for them, and money had to be disbursed for the destruction of sparrows and for the capture of hedgehogs, described some-

times as hedgehogs, more frequently as urchins. The common figure for a hedgehog was fourpence, so that surely someone was profiteering when one entry occurs of sixpence paid for seven urchins; and when in 1676 John Symon's maid got only twopence for four, and soon after Francis Watton got fourpence for one, it would appear that the tariff was liable to considerable fluctuation. In 1703, 35 hedgehogs were paid for, and in the same year the production of the head of a fox brought 1s. An entry in 1718 shows 7s paid for seven foxes, and for the destruction of three dozen sparrows 6d was paid. In 1800 there is the entry "for sparrows at 4d a dozen £1 8s 9d," and in 1805 sparrows and eggs cost £9 12s 2d. That wine was cheap may be gathered from the fact that five quarts cost 11s 8d, but to that had to be added 1s 2d for fetching it from Birmingham. Deputation work in those days was certainly not costly: for in 1678 the sum of fourpence was "spent at Hampton upon accation of goeing about Towne bussiness." The same year, however, there was spent not 4d but 4s when a journey was made to Coleshill "with the Constable about the Papishes." Oil for the clock and bell cost 11d per annum. In 1680 John Penter got 1s for killing a fox, and whether or not the parson was a vigorous pulpit-thumper, the fact is that in 1681 the sum of 4s 8d was paid "for mendinge the pulpit Cushion." There are regular entries of payments to "the High Constable for King's Bench and Marshall sea Marriners and Maimed souldiers," and in 1683, 5s was "given to a Minister whose ffather is a slave." There was expenditure for gunpowder on such an occasion as a royal coronation, and gunpowder was also regularly bought for the celebration of the 5th of November. When bells had to be cast in 1687 the work cost £20, or almost one-half of the whole year's expenditure. On the occasion of the Declaration of Indulgence in 1688, the sum of 1s was paid "for a Declaration about Liberty of Consscience," and a month later, when the Bishops were acquitted, there appears an entry of 2s 6d "paid the Ringers and pd. for gunpowder when the Bishoppes were sett free." In 1689, 1s 6d was given "to a poor

man and family that was undone by fire and much burnt himselfe," and when the Irish revolt, in support of James, came to an end at the fall of Limerick, the ringers celebrated the event at a cost of one shilling, which sum remunerated them also on the occasion of Christmas. In 1695 half a sovereign was spent in "stocking the Gr Bell," and other 4s was "spent in Ale in taking it up and downe," and when Andrew Neeler tolled the bell for the burial of the Queen, he was given a shilling. Andrew seems to have been something of a handy man, for on different occasions he was paid for mending the clock, mending the bells, sothering the leads, and for iron work. Then another name appears of one paid for repairing the leads, so that Andrew's work on earth had presumably come to an end. Samuel Phillipps' accounts were stiffer, for he got £2 "for painting ye hand," £2 "for washing the Chapple," and £2 5s "for painting ye tenn Commandments the Creed Lords prayer pulpit and furbishing ye Kings Arms." Twice in 1707 the ringers were paid 2s 6d for what is laconically described as an "account of good news," and when in 1714 a messenger was sent to Birmingham to inform against William Chamberlaine for keeping a disorderly alehouse, there was incurred a charge of 2s, just double what was paid at the same time to Tho. Barlow "for Stocking up the Ivey about the Chappell." In 1722 the sum of eightpence was paid "for powder and shott to Shute the Sparrows about ye Chappell," and in 1737, on the marriage of the Prince of Wales and the death of the Queen, a shilling was paid "for the Alteration of the Form of Prayer for the Royal Family." When there were issued Orders of Council "touching the Distemper among Horned Cattle," money was provided for the purchase of copies and when the "surplis" "was rained on," it cost a shilling to wash it. A new clarionet for the use of the choir cost £2; later £3 was paid for a similar instrument, and when music was bought in 1830, the churchwardens had to pay £1 10s for it.

There follows in the book a note of the Overseers and their accounts. The record begins in 1705 and is complete until 1836, when £81 17s 6d was paid to the Poor Law Union, thus bring-

ing the duties of these officials to an end. The poor of the place were under their care, and they looked after its morals as well, both duties being evidently discharged with zeal and fidelity. It is of interest to follow the fortunes of some of these old beneficiaries. Here, for instance, is Goody Norton, to whom, poor soul, was given periodically sums of 6d and 1s, until we come at last to these successive entries—"Gave Goody Norton 1s; pd. for a tender for her 2s; pd. for Ale for those that Laid her out 6s 6d; pd. her funerall Expenses and for a Shrowd 11s 11d; pd. Mr Raper for Burying Goody Norton 1s; pd. Job Eedes for making her Grave 1s; pd. the Queen's duty for her Buriall 4s," and that was the end of Goody Norton, to be followed, however, by Goody Neeler, Goody Taylor, and many, many others, in accordance with the declaration of old time that the poor we have always with us. Shoes were bought for children, poor workmen had frocks provided them, coals were bought for the needy, breeches were bought for boys and linsy aprons for girls, malt was provided for the weak, and money was expended on boys' apprentice indentures. When a doctor cured "Ruth Kimberleys Brest being a year about and many times drest" his fee was £1 15s, and when Goody Watton was buried, 5d was paid for tobacco and pipes and 4s for four dozen of ale—there was then an epidemic of smallpox. In 1726 a medical man was paid 7s 6d "for his Journey and Medicine," and the next entry is of 2s "for going to Henly to Stop ye Doctr from coming a 2d time," so that there was here a distinct saving of 5s 6d. When Mr Holyoak of Henly cut off and cured Isaac Taylor's wife's toe the fee was two guineas, but bleeding was cheaper, for when that operation was carried out on Mary Watton, the fee was only sixpence, while when Mary Hexal cured Sarah Hann's face, she got £1 6s 6d. Another medical man "for doctoring Wm. Kimberleys Leg 5 years" was paid in all £2 12s 6d, and we can only hope that at the end of the five years William's leg was all the better of it. An entry of £7 is connected with this entry—"Expences in taking Mary Dale to swear her child, apprehending the reputed Father, keeping them in

custody and marrying them," a romance, a tragedy, or whatever you will in a dozen words, but making short work of it all. The keeping of the couple in jail until they were safely married has an element of practical humour and economic sagacity that is irresistible. There are a number of entries to show that it was not an unheard-of occurrence for men who were drawn for the militia to abscond, and the Overseers had in some cases to provide a bounty in order to secure a substitute; when two men had to be procured and hired for Knowle for the Navy, the bounty money was £21 for one and 16 guineas for the other, and when one of them was objected to other £2 10s went in expenses in trying to procure a substitute. In 1801 there was a riot of some sort in Birmingham. Of its cause and nature no hint is given, but at all events a sum of £19 3s 8d had to be paid as Knowle's proportion of the loss incurred. When in 1804 Knowle was unable to find the quota of men under the Defence Act, it had to pay a fine of £20 to the county treasurer.

A list of Indentures begins in 1675 when a tradesman of Tipton was given £9 "of good and lawful money" to teach a lad "in the Arts, Trade, or Mistery of a Naylor," and although we are apt to think that the institutions known in modern times as Domestic Schools of Science are provisions of our own day, here is an entry in 1686 of a payment of 20s to one who is described as "gentleman" in consideration of Katherine, his wife, teaching one Mary Eedes "the calling or art of huswifery." Four years later William Eedes was indentured to a Birmingham tailor, one of the conditions of his indenture being that "he shall not doe nor committ matrimony." Quite a number of girls were indentured for sewing, and they were also taught such trades as snuffer-maker; mantua maker and sempstress; spinning, knitting and sewing, while boys were indentured to such trades as leather draper; gun-smith; bridle cutter; button maker; toymaker; candlestick maker; jobbing smith; brass founder; curry comb maker; stay maker; steel trap maker; wire drawer; pistol filer; thong maker; coal miner; and so on.

In another section of the book, an account is given of Walter Cook, who founded the Church of Knowle in 1396 under a faculty from Rome. He died in 1423 and was buried in the chapel that he had been the means of erecting. A record is given also of a meeting

in 1278 of a Manor Court held at Knowle. These Manor Courts were inferior to County or Hundred Courts and were held for the preservation of peace and good government of each particular community. On this occasion of six and a half centuries ago there came before the Court such matters as defaults, concealments, disturbances of the peace, encroachments, trespass by cattle, brewing of ale contrary to regulations, in fact anything that had happened in the least way contrary to the ordinary routine of rural life, and the delinquent was punished by a fine. This is one of the oldest documents belonging to Knowle. Few surnames are given, such designations being used as Roger the Barker, Juliana at the Gate, John son of Thomas, Richard atte Mill, Roger atte Wood, Mathew of the Temple; the amount of the fine was for the most part 2d, 3d, or 4d, although when Walter, son of William, cut thorns in the lord's wood more than he ought to do the fine was 6d; when Isonda, wife of Thomas Scott, struck a boy, she got off for 2d, but when Juliana Gery committed lewdness, the fine was 5d. The first known document relating to Knowle is a deed of date about 1200 constituting a grant of dower for life of three estates, including that of Gnoll (Knowle) to Amice de Traci, by William de Arden of Hampton. Another document quoted is the certificate of the consecration of the Church of Knowle in 1402 by Nicholas, Bishop of Dunkeld, appointed to that office during the great schism in the Roman Catholic Church when both Popes and Anti-Popes sought to administer the affairs of the faithful.

The book, it will be gathered, constitutes quite an exhaustive record of a tiny community in the midlands of England, and from what has been said of its contents we may learn something perhaps of what has been done throughout the centuries by those who, while only names to us, and who have long since lived their day and crossed the bourne, have so left their record in the history of the hamlet that even still it requires small imagination to endow them again with living flesh and blood and to see them immersed in the little joys and troubles of their own time and generation.