

REVIEWS

BUCKS SESSIONS RECORDS. VOLUME II. 1694—1705.
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Volume II of the Calendar to the Sessions Records is as much an ornament to one's shelves as volume one; and the contents as interesting and welcome to the local historian. Mr. William Le Hardy who edited vol. I is associated with Mr. Geoffrey Reckitt in the production of the volume now noticed.

The miscellaneous contents of the record are ' homogenated into coherence ' by the excellent preface which presents an accurate picture of late 17th century manners and customs in the county.

Fifty years ago or more the treasurer's rolls were evicted from the record room in Aylesbury Town Hall as being useless for business purposes. These rolls are for the whole of the 18th century, and as there are four quarters in a year there should be 400 rolls, but so many are missing that there are only 206 bundles. Of the period treated of in Vol. II, *Sessions Records*, there are eleven treasurer's rolls, the contents for the most part appearing in the volume, but some items do not, *e.g.* sacrament certificates, etc., probably included carelessly or erroneously in the bundles.

In 1702 the Sessions Records enters £20 on account for repairs to Thornborough Bridge, the treasurer's roll records a bill due to John Shouler for £15 17s. in 1702, and a total of £21 14s. 6d., " five arches being out of repair." In April, 1704, the S.R. records that Richard Miles jun., petty constable of Little Brickhill, and his colleague Henry Woodward received £23 10s. for the quarter's expences; and the rolls records £23 11s. 3d.

In the two volumes now issued are the details of 107 sessions, 44 sessions were held at Aylesbury mostly in

the dark months, 20 at High Wycombe, 15 at Buckingham, and the rest at Wendover, Amersham, Chesham, and twice at Newport Pagnell. On the accession of Queen Anne, the takers of the oaths of allegiance and abjuration being resident all over the county caused the Session to be adjourned on successive days to Wycombe, Chesham, Newport Pagnell and Buckingham, for the convenience of those whose age or health made it a hardship to travel.

Political conditions caused much oath-taking and statutory oaths were numerous, at every session there were three or four "took the oaths provided in I. William and Mary c. I. and signed the declaration against transubstantiation and that contained in 30 Charles II, stat. 2. c. I." In addition to the last, deputy sheriffs and bailiffs of the various hundreds took the oaths provided in the acts of 27 Elizabeth, c. 12.

In 1695 a serious conspiracy was in being against the life of King William which came to a head in Feb. 1695-6; on its frustration and arrest of the organisers the King appeared in Parliament, and the Lords and Commons replied with a loyal address. The Oath of Association was passed as an act for the better security of His Majesty's Royal Person etc. The Oath Roll was signed by all holders of any office, and all loyal men. In Vol. XI of the *Bucks Records* pp. 109-20 is a paper giving an account of the Association with special reference to the roll for Bucks. At the Easter session 1696 "it was thought fitt to tender an Association to the Gentlemen and Inhabitants of this County." The bailiffs of the hundreds were paid £2 each for their trouble in the matter. The terms were: "Wee whose names hereunto subscribed do heartily sincerely, and solemnly profess, testify and declare that King William is rightful and lawful KING of these Realms. Wee to stand by and assist each other in support and defence against the late King James etc." At subsequent sessions during the following years there appeared some persons

to produce sacrament certificates, take the statutory oaths, and sign the "Association."

The Bucks Roll in the Public Record Office contains about 17,000 names, and is a practical census of the householders and responsible people, the suggested Record Society for the County might well consider the printing of the roll as desirable. . . .

On the Accession of Queen Anne there was an outburst of oath taking accompanied with sacramental certification not only by laymen, but by the parochial clergy who certified each other. This shows the fear, if not the strength, of jacobitism and papist recusancy, an attitude justified by the event of 1915.

Perhaps all the official swearing may have stimulated the private and personal blasphemy which so alarmed authority that legislative enactments were thought necessary. An Act, 6 and 7 William III. c. II. was passed for the "effectual suppressing prophane curseing and swearing" and later a Royal Proclamation "charged and commanded all the Judges, Mayors, Sheriffs, etc, and all officers and ministers both ecclesiastical and civil, to be very vigilant and strict . . . in the punishment of 'excessive drinking, blasphemy, swearing, lewdness, phophanation of the Lord's Day,' and other dissolute, immoral and disorderly practises."

This proclamation was read at the opening of each session, but to judge by the number of convictions, governmental displeasure was no great deterrent. At the Epiphany Session 1696-7, this remarkable incident was recorded, "Thomas Bromley, convicted of swearing '20 severall oaths' on the evidence of Daniell Roos, James Cambell, and John Fowles in the Regiment of Scoch guards." Thomas his language, must have been shocking indeed to have excited the reprobation of the warriors who, doubtless, had seen service with the armies in Flanders, where Captain Toby Shandy is our authority for the sort of expression usual in military circles. The tariff for swearing was 1/- per oath for a laborer, and 2/- for the more opulent; there was no reduction for a quantity, e.g. on one occasion five people (including a lady) were each fined 10/- for five oaths.

From 1702 onwards the number convicted at each session varied from 55 to 17. We find that 4/- was charged for a second offence, and that a "prophane curse" was differentiated from an oath, the fine being the same. A study of the names shows that nearly all the offenders were from the Aylesbury district and the south of the county, very few from the north, the superior virtue of the north received a shock when in 1702, John Sturk of Hanslope was fined for twelve oaths. Some individuals were fined time and again, one of these was Francis Woodcock the jailer, goaded to profanity by his troublesome charges.

National history finds frequent allusion, if not direct mention, in many entries e.g. in 1694 the Act for granting duties upon vellum and parchment towards carrying on the war against France; affected the official printing of the orders and papers of the Sessions.

The Peace of Ryswyck in Sept. 1697 caused the County to send an address of felicitation and loyalty to the King; "We lay at your Royal Feet our hearts full of joy for your safety and the honorable peace and hope your Majesty may never more hazard your Royall person abroad, future ages will worthily characterize you to be the true defender of the Faith, the deliverer of oppressed Nations etc." In 1702 the war of the Spanish succession began and at once made the kingdom aware, by increased taxation and the impressment of men for the services.

It is the origin, fate, and end of the private soldier, the British fighting man, as depicted in these records that takes us into informative by-ways of history, and puts us in relation with continental wars. In 1702 Marlborough took the field with an army of 70,000 men, only 18,000 were British. To raise that 18,000, was offered "thrice the usual amount of levy money, to obtain recruits." It failed to get the men, the Mutiny Act of 1703 empowered the Queen to pardon capital offenders who would enlist, these criminals were competed for keenly by colonels, as they cost nothing and

were usually of good physique. In 1704 insolvent debtors were liberated on condition of serving, and commanding officers sought the debtor as ardently as he did the sheep-stealer, poacher, or homicide. Bucks seems to have supplied a good many. In Midsummer 1704, six were sent, and at the next session six more, and seven more three months later and so on. At the Epiphany Session 1704, order for "vigorous action" was given, to make diligent search for able bodied men without 'lawful calleing' and that 'have noe vote,' for enlistment. It is very sad reading for admirers of the voluntary system! Up to well into the 19th cent. our armies were manned by pressed men, mostly black-guards. It is noticed that the bravest types of men are the rakes, drunkards, poachers and rascallions, and the dandies, courage is an elegance. The navy acquired men in the same way. In 1697, Epiphany Session, twelve men were sent from Wycombe and in 1701 "a vitious and theivish boy" was sent to sea.

The last phase of many old soldiers is recorded at Quarter Sessions; e.g. 1695 William Burrall, a soldier under General Monk, received £1, a year later he produced a certificate that he served under Prince Rupert, and was awarded a county pension of £2 per ann.

In 1697 Geoffrey Savage of Winslow age 86, served King Charles I; had a county pension. In 1699 Thomas Gulliver and Thomas Preston both of Chesham, each wounded several times while serving in the Civil War. Finally Edward Billington of Cublington was admitted to a county pension of £2 per ann. "he was impressed into his Majesties service under the command of Captain Berry Namur in Flanders, in the attacking thereof he received such wounds as wholly made him uncapable etc." It is pardonable to imagine him in association with Captain Shandy when the latter received his disabling wound before the demibastion of St. Roch.

The petty constable looms largely, his presentments are a prominent feature in the business of sessions. Like the modern policeman, his lot was not a happy

one. The grand jury might present him for negligence in his office, for refusing the office, for not bringing in his presentments, e.g. in 1699 four constables offended in this respect. In 1702 the Court stimulated officials by, "takeing into consideration the great prophanation of the Lord's Day, the too common practice of "Cursing and Swearing etc. . . . and the offenders taken Boldness and Encouragement in their wicked practices from the neglect . . . of due Execution of the lawes etc." and ordered enforcement of the laws against the following offences;

- (a). Swearing and prophanation of the Lord's Day.
- (b). Travelling on Sunday.
- (c). Selling goods on Sunday.
- (d). Working on Sunday.
- (e). Sports and Pastimes, especially tippling and neglect of Worshipp.
- (f). The loathsome sin of drunkenness.
- (g). Tippling. (h). Keeping houses of ill fame.
- (i). Unlawful gaming.

The punishment of nearly all the above sins was confinement in the stocks from two to six hours, and a monetary fine.

Samples of presentments are, in 1697-8 Elizabeth Tompson "for a common scold, and a sedicious woman for raising and reporting false and scandelous lyes against her Neighbours." Elizabeth is described as of Great Marlow, at the same time Ambrose Tompson of the same provenance was presented for refusing to assist John Law the constable, and, like Elizabeth, for being "a common quareller and fighter," and for "emptying chamber potts into the King's highway."

In 1698 William King of Ellesborough, for digging turf and cutting wood off the common, and for "setting of Steele traps underground in the said common and covering them over so that they lay there unseen." Poaching was also the subject of indictment, e.g. in 1694 Edward Smith of Weston Underwood was punished for allowing three deer-stealers to escape, and

his neighbour the constable of Ravenstone, Henry Newcombe was arrested for the same offence, he also allowed three venison lovers to escape. No details are given of any encounter, but probably discretion was better than valour, three enterprising poachers would be a tough proposition for one constable. In 1699 Richard Jennings of Wendover was fined 13/4 "for keeping two greyhounds, one hand gun, and two nets, and for killing three hares, three pheasants, and three partridges." William Eldridge fine 3/4 for keeping a greyhound and killing one hare.

In 1697 John Wood of Quainton, laborer, was indicted on five charges of larceny; "for stealing and carrying away the hair" from horses etc. Evidently this was a profitable business if we may judge from a recent acquisition in the Society's Museum; an instrument about seven inches long, one end furnished with three or four fork like prongs bent well over, used as a comb on the manes and tails of a horse to remove superfluous hair, or even that which was not superfluous.

In 1698 Nicholas Rose of Great Marlow was "presented for lodging and harboring Scotch Travellers." What was the prejudice against the Scots? Much official time and energy was expended over the Poor Law. By the Act 8 and 9 William III, c. 30, all persons in receipt of parish relief and their wives and children dependent on them, shall upon the shoulder of the right sleeve wear a badge, that is to say a large roman P together with the first letter of the name of the parish, cut in red or blue cloth. The penalty for refusing to wear the badge was withdrawal of the relief, whipping, and 21 days hard labour in the bridewell. The churchwardens were liable to a fine of £1 if they relieved a pauper who was not badged. Naturally there were cases of hardship and trouble over wearing the badge. The Aylesbury overseers refused to grant relief to Elizabeth Miles, who was 80 and paralysed, unless her daughter who paid her mother's rent and looked after her, was badged. The daughter objected as she neither received nor wanted relief, and the Court upheld the objection.

Dealing with vagrants and passing paupers to their 'settlements' was a troublesome job for the constables of parishes on the great highways, especially during the early years of the 18th century when a very large number of discharged unserviceable soldiers was passed to their native places. In 1698 Elizabeth Mushett alias Thrustin wife of an Ensign in His Majesties Troops now in service at Glasgow whither she desires to go asked for help; the Court ordered the two parishes, Aylesbury and East Cleydon, now responsible to advance £1 each to her for the journey. She was subsequently arrested with her child as a vagrant in Northampton and sent back to East Cleydon her birth-place, here the Vicar and constables certified her as a vagrant, whipped her and sent her and child to Aylesbury, Aylesbury returned her to Cleydon, and the latter place threatened to return her. What was to be done, the Court decided that she must stay at East Cleydon.

Disputes were frequent about the conveyance of vagrants and paupers, when in doubt the constable apparently whipped the unfortunates. A disgraceful incident of ignorant official cruelty was the whipping of two children aged four and two years by the constables of Wing, as "wandring beggars" in 1698. Stewkley complained that the children were passed to that parish, "which arrogant doeings deserve very publique discountenance." The Court ordered that in future no constable should "presume to offend in the like nature or to whip as vagrants children under seven."

Prisoners convicted of larceny were treated as follows; 1699 three offenders ordered to be fastened to the "taylor of a cart and openly and publicly drawn gently from the goal door through the street of Aylesbury to the George Inn there and so round the George Sign Post and back again to the Goal door, and whipped by the Executioner until their bodies be respectively bloody."

Widespread misfortune was relieved in the 17th and 18th centuries by the "Brief," a method comparable to the 19th cent. Mansion House Fund. Instances recorded in this volume are, when the Lord Keeper of the Great Seal was asked to grant Letters Patent "to collect the charitable benevolence of well disposed people," towards replacing the loss caused by a fire at Haddenham which, in three hours, destroyed 197 buildings besides out-houses, stacks of corn and hay, etc. worth about £3,700, belonging to John Hill, Dorothy Sale, Daniel Franklin and 36 others. Also in 1703 for the fire at Stony Stratford, starting at the Horse-shoe Inn owned by Piercy Eyre, spreading to the adjacent houses. Total loss about £700. An interesting detailed list of losses is appended. Some of the claimants must have been commercial travellers staying in the Inn.; viz. Samuel Brooke of Manchester, linen draper, claimed £147 for goods bought in London and being conveyed by John Lee carrier, with £84 worth of clothes and plate. Richard Wrench claimed £21-15. for the loss of a box of hats. William Garnett of Leyvenshulme co. Lancaster, carrier £4 for pack sheets, etc. etc.

Certain modern problems seem to have had their origins in the 17th century; for instance Tithe troubles, in 1697 William Hakewill of Wendover appealed against his rating; In 1698 "An Act for the more easy recovery of small tyths," (7 & 8 Will. III. c. 7) allowed the Rev. Roger Hitchcock, vicar of Aston Abbots, to recover £1-19. from a parishioner Robert Greene. In 1703 George Hickman, cheesemonger, appealed against a judgment requiring him to pay 5/- "small tythes" to Rev. Thomas Penn, vicar of Great Missenden; he lost the appeal and had to pay 14/-. In 1695 five miscreants at Padbury were presented for taking hay from the 'town hadelands' which was devoted "towards the repair of the church of Padbury."

The housing shortage caused the Court to authorize the overseers of Thornborough to build cottages for the poor on the waste of the manor. Full of information

and interest for the local historian, indeed indispensable, and affording excellent browsing for the general reader, the contents of Vol. II, is made, like Vol. I., easily available by the exhaustive index. The County Council is to be congratulated and thanked for the work, which we may now expect to be carried to conclusion.

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