

ART. XV.—*Ann Tyson's Ledger: An Eighteenth-Century Account-book.* By MARY C. MOORMAN.

Read at Carlisle, April 7th, 1951.

WHEN Mrs Heelis—"Beatrix Potter" of Peter Rabbit fame—in 1913 purchased Courier Farm at Sawrey, in the corner of North Lancashire that lies within the Lake District, she found among some books that had been thrown away into the peat-house an old ledger, its edges much frayed, but, thanks to the good quality of the eighteenth-century rag-paper of which it was made, it was still possible to read its contents. It proved to contain accounts, stretching over a period of some forty years, from about 1745 (the earlier dates are hard to read) until 1789. Some of them are for joiner's work, some are those of a small country shop, and towards the end come, chiefly in a large, childish hand and with phonetic spelling, a number of bills for schoolboy lodgers—the boys being no other than William Wordsworth, his brothers John and Christopher, his cousins Richard and Robinson, and one or two other boys. As is well known, the Wordsworth brothers all went to Hawkshead Grammar School, and all lodged with an elderly couple, Hugh and Ann Tyson, who lived at Colthouse, a small hamlet half a mile east of Hawkshead. Ann, her cottage and its environs, and the daily life of that happy breed of boys, Wordsworth described many years afterwards, in poetry that has become immortal, in the first, second and fourth books of his autobiographical poem, *The Prelude*.

Mrs Heelis did not make her discovery public, although she wrote to Mr Gordon Wordsworth on the subject and

he quoted from the ledger in an article in the Cornhill Magazine in 1920. After that the ledger was lost for some time, but it was fortunately found again after diligent search, and it has now been presented by Mr L. K. Brownson to the Trustees of Hawkshead School; I am obliged to Mr Brownson and to the Trustees for permission to examine it and to publish the present account of it.

The school accounts begin in 1784 and extend to 1789. They are in various hands, but chiefly in the large, childish hand already mentioned. This we know to be Ann Tyson's, because she signs one of the bills with her name. They were usually made up twice a year, in January and August, after the close of the summer and Christmas holidays, referring back to the previous "half". Sometimes a bill is made out under the name of a particular boy; others have no names attached. They are checked and sometimes completed in another, much more educated hand, probably that of a master at the school. It seems therefore that old Ann kept this book of accounts for the benefit of the school authorities, who then made out the bills for the parents.

There are two separate bills made out under the name of William Wordsworth — neither of them is in Ann's handwriting. The first, dated 5 August 1787, was settled on 24 January 1788, and therefore must represent William's last half-term at school, from August to October 1787, for he went to Cambridge in October 1787, in the middle of the autumn term. The account runs as follows:—

	1787	William Wordsworth Account	L. S. D.
August 5th.		To cash lent	0 10 0
		To the hair dresser	6
		To 4 cakes @ 8d.	2 8
		To honney	3 0
		To a letter or cash	3
		To velvet of Mrs. Tyson ¹	4 1½
		To velvet " "	1 4½
		To Robert Dixon for making	0 1 10
		To " " for silk	4 9
		To William cash for a letter	3
		To 9 weeks Board 6/4 Wm:	2 17 0
		To Honey for William	1 9
		To the Barber	0 0 6

We may conjecture that the velvet was for a new best coat and perhaps waistcoat for wear at Cambridge. In the same bill his brother John is charged 3s. 3d. for velvet, and two years later we find 2s. 9d. charged to Christopher for the same material. Prices, as we see from the shop accounts, were extremely moderate for everything sold by the yard.

The second entry concerning Wordsworth is under date 6 January 1789. It represents William's stay with Ann Tyson during his first Long Vacation in the summer of 1788, a stay commemorated by him in some of his greatest poetry in the fourth book of *The Prelude*. It is as follows:—

Mr. Wm. Wordsworth	L. S. D.
Horsehire	1 6
Board for 9 weeks	2 17 0
Umbrella	2 0
	<hr/>
	3 0 6

“Horsehire” means the hire of a horse or pony on which to ride over to Penrith to see his sister Dorothy, then living there with her grandparents—for the Wordsworths had been orphans since 1783. The same item occurs in

¹ Not Ann Tyson: there was a “William Tyson”, tailor, at Hawkshead; this appears from the family accounts.

other bills. Undergraduates then, as now, seem to have been partial to umbrellas.

Another bill, not made out to any particular person, but obviously referring to the Wordsworths, is dated "June 19 Day 1786" and runs:—

	Mr. Wilan (William)	o o 6
(in another hand)	Letters	o o 8
(" ")	"	o o 1
(" ")	Sealing Wax	o o 6
(in Ann's hand)	John a ribin	o o 10
	William	o 1 o
	Mr. William 4 keks (cakes)	3 o
	Letters	1 6
	William	1 1 o
	a letr	o o 3

In those days letters had to be paid for on receipt, not on posting, so that most of these entries refer to letters received by John and William, probably from their guardian-uncles at Whitehaven and Penrith. But what does William want with the advance of a whole guinea? Perhaps he had written to his uncles for leave to buy some cherished volume of poetry or travel, for which extra pocket-money would be needed. Apart from clothes (which Mrs Tyson bought for him) he had no other needs, being as he said "a wild, unworldly-minded youth, given up To nature and to books".

In an account made out to Robinson Wordsworth (a first cousin of William) in 1789 we have the following entries:—

Recd of Ann Tyson for Mr. Mingay	o 10 4
Recd " " for club	5 o

The club is the school book-club, which was formed shortly after William Wordsworth left, to help to improve the school library. A charge of 5/- was levied on each boy and the library, which was deficient in modern literature, increased rapidly in works of history, travel and poetry. Mr Mingay was a gentleman apparently of

military origins, who in 1789 opened what he advertised as a Military Academy in conjunction with the school at Hawkshead. It was a boarding establishment on fashionable lines, purporting to teach many subjects not taught in the school, including French, Geography, "the Use of the Globes, Drawing, Fencing and Music". It does not seem to have lasted long and was probably unpopular in the neighbourhood; but some of the Hawkshead boys, as this entry shows, availed themselves of some of the subjects taught there.

From an examination of the various accounts it is clear that Ann Tyson charged for fuel (either coal or peat) and candles over and above what she charged for board; she also bought paper, quill pens and ink for the boys, and saw to their clothing and outfitting. Thus an account dated August 1784 runs:—

3 per (pair) of gloves	0	1	9
a pound of candle	0	0	7½
Coals	0	3	6
paper ink	0	0	6
gartrs	0	0	3
John gartrs	0	0	3
October 2 Cotens (cottons?)	0	0	8
a cart of cols (coals)	0	6	4
a cart of pets (peats)	0	1	6
fethrs and ink	0	0	7

On one occasion she bought "A Euclid" for them for 4s. 6d. (and spelt it correctly too); she also issued to them an extra largesse of 1s. 6d. on their birthdays, besides their regular pocket-money, which seems usually to have been about 6d. or 7d. a week. Her charge for board and lodging was twelve guineas a year for each boy.

One item in the accounts needs some elucidation:—

cokpenes 4 gents	4	14	6
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This means that each "gentleman" (i.e. boy-lodger) paid a "cock-penny", the local name for the fee of about one

guinea every year, payable to the school by those boys who did not come from the immediate neighbourhood. Hawkshead was a free, endowed grammar school of Elizabethan origins, making no other charge for tuition than the "cock-penny". In Wordsworth's time boys came to it from all over the north of England and from Scotland, so that the extra income in "cok-penes" must have been considerable. Originally the term had reference to the practice of cock-fighting, always popular in the North. The boys paid a "cock-penny" to their master, who then offered a substantial prize to the owner of the best fighting-cock! There is however no evidence that cock-fighting was among the school sports of Hawkshead in Wordsworth's day. He makes no mention of it in *The Prelude*, and it is most unlikely that the Masters of his day, Taylor or Bowman, would have given it official sanction.

The lodgers' accounts throw some light on the boys' diet. "Mr. Willam 4 keks, 3s. od." informs us that for the sum of 9d. a cake could be purchased—doubtless the famous Hawkshead cake, a kind of glorified mince-pie. A boy called "Gawthrop" or "Gawthorpe" who lodged there with the Wordsworths was evidently fond of good fare. He was Thomas Holden Gawthrop, the son of the vicar of Sedbergh, and his name also appears in the Register of Sedbergh School. He, jointly with William Wordsworth and two other boys, gave a History of Greece and a Tasso to the school library when he went up to Cambridge in 1787. Three times in his account with Ann Tyson we find listed "a pound of lof shuger"; he also had "a pound of resins", "4 ouns tea", and "a hupe (hoop or cask) of apels"; and once "a botle of wine, 2s. 6d". This no doubt was for some special occasion—but no such item ever appears in the Wordsworths' bills. Their luxuries, it seems, did not extend beyond "kek" and "honney".

At the back of the ledger are some accounts of Ann's

with John Sawrey the butcher for the year 1788. Legs and shoulders of mutton abound as well as loins of veal but they seem usually to have been purchased only once a fortnight, so that Wordsworth's description of their food in *The Prelude* as "Sabine fare" that scarcely allayed the "blessing" of a "vigorous hunger" is perhaps not exaggerated.

Other names of boys in the ledger besides those of the Wordsworths and Gawthorp are Losh, Greenwood and Maude, all apparently relating to 1787 or thereabouts. Greenwood is Robert Greenwood who went up to Cambridge at the same time as Wordsworth and became a Fellow of Trinity College. A musical, whimsical boy, Wordsworth afterwards compared him to Yorick in Hamlet. Maude is T. H. Maude of Kendal who became a banker and in 1803 was commandant of the Kendal "Home Guard"; he went to St. John's College. Losh cannot be James Losh, the friend of Wordsworth and Coleridge later on in Bristol, for he was seven years older than Wordsworth and besides was educated at Sedbergh; but it may be one of his brothers; the Loshes came from Woodside, near Carlisle. Ann's cottage therefore lodged at least six boys in Wordsworth's last year there: the three Wordsworth brothers and Gawthorp, Maude and Losh.

The accounts do not go beyond the year 1789, for in that year, as we know, Ann retired from business and her lodgers found other quarters. She was seventy-six and a widow, and doubtless found the care of five or six hungry and active boys more than she could manage. She lived on at Colthouse for seven more years, dying there in 1796, having provided, all unknowing, a home that was "a sanctity, a safeguard and a love" to a great poet in his happy youth.

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The rest of the ledger consists of a number of joiner's

accounts of much earlier date—from about 1747 to 1763—and then some accounts for groceries, dress materials, etc., obviously the goods sold from a village shop. Hugh Tyson, Ann's husband, is known to have been a joiner; these accounts are presumably for work done by him, and as we come across the entry "My self 1 day", "My self 4 days", fairly frequently, the conclusion is that the handwriting is that of Hugh himself. It is a good deal better than Ann's.

He charged 10d. a day for his work, or 3s. "without meat"—that is, if he found his own food. Sometimes he stayed away for a night, or crossed Windermere by the "Great Boat" (the old name for the ferry): in such cases he entered the charge as "Lay down at Thomas Hodgson's, 3d", "Boat 4d" etc. He had two or three men who worked with him. John Grainger was with him for many years, and was paid 9d. a day; later we find Thomas Musgrove, Thomas Clarke and Thomas Hudson. Some of his work was the ordinary routine of a country carpenter—repairs to doors and windows, and the provision of "oak board" or "dail (deal) board" for flooring. He was also the local coffin-maker; thus in June 1759 he charges:—

	s.	d.
For a coffin	0	4 6
5 foot of oak board	0	10
2 pair of hinges at 10d a pair	1	8
2 snecks (door-latches) at 5d a sneck		10
for window shutter	0	3 6
for slides		1 6
3 cross bars for Dore Back	0	0 3
Board for Stable windows	0	0 2
18 foot of (?) Irish Deal for Doore	2	3
a fraim for windows upstairs and wood		6

But he also made furniture of the better sort for the gentry of the neighbourhood. Thus, for Mrs Thomas Darke of Bouth he made in October 1749 "a large Dining Table" for £1. 6s. 8d.; and for William Strickland of

Rusland "a snap table" for 8s. 6d.—presumably this was a folding table that fastened with a snap or clasp, for we have another example of this in the entry:—

for making Snap table with clasp	5s. od.
for a brass snap	8d.

In this same year 1749 he made for William Keen of Satterthwaite "9 black chears (chairs) at 16 pence a chear"; and for Mr Braithwaite he evidently fitted up a lady's bedroom, for we find the entries:—

	s. d.
for a looking glass	16 0
for Drising (dressing) Table	12 6

He also charged Mr Braithwaite 2s. "for two maps framing"; there are several other entries of picture-framing. A man with the curious name of John Sorrow ordered himself a bed, and the account for making it is as follows:—

	s. d.
1752 for a pair of Bedstocks	8 6
for a teaster (tester, i.e. the roof of a four-poster)	3 0
for 3 yards of Bed Buckram	3 0

The most expensive item of furniture in the accounts is "a nest of drores" which he made for a Dr Hodgson, charging 28s. A "corner Cuperd" cost 10s. 6d., and "a Clockace" (clock-case, presumably for a grandfather clock) 21s.; this last item was made not for a squire but for "Robert Green of Great Boat"—the ferryman on Windermere.

In 1751 Hugh Tyson did a good deal of work in Hawkshead church:—

	s. d.
for altering Cristening pu (pew?)	4
for 2 form heads	2 4
for fastening all the forms and finding wood	1 4
for mending Yets (gates)	6

A curious entry occurs under the year 1747:—

for setting up Steelmill	0 4d.
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This item has proved something of a problem. A steel-mill, as usually defined, was an early form of miner's lamp, introduced into north-country collieries in the eighteenth century and disappearing with the invention of Davey's safety lamp after 1815: it consisted of a wheel and handle "which they turn with vast rapidity against a flint and the great quantity of sparks emitted not only serves for a candle but has been found of such a nature as not to set fire to the gas"; it was suspended from a leather belt round the neck of the person who "played" it. But Hawkshead was obviously not the place where a miner's lamp would be of use, nor would such a lamp require to be set up on some sort of stand by a joiner. The clue to an explanation is to be found in an earlier volume of *Transactions*²; in the inventory of the goods and chattels of Thomas Machell the antiquary, taken shortly after his death in 1698, the contents of his buttery at Kirkby Thore are given as:—

A Steel Mill A Chest 2 Cupboards, A napkin press a
Flesh tub A chain A creampot and other things"

A steel-mill was therefore part of the equipment of a buttery. The usual works of reference do not carry us any further, but Mr J. Seymour Lindsay, the author of "Iron and Brass Implements of the English House" (1927), in answer to an enquiry by the Editor, reports that its purpose was to break up bones, no doubt to enable the marrow to be extracted the more readily from them.

Another entry which records work for one of the local industries is that of "7 charpots boarded" for William Satterthwaite. A charpot was a case in which the char caught in Windermere were packed to be sent away. Potted char had long been considered a delicacy, for Bishop Nicolson in 1717 records, as something of an event, guests dining with him "at opening of my pot of chars", and earlier still Margaret Fell (George Fox's

² CWI iv 5.

wife) sent a present of potted char all the way from Swarthmoor to Rickmansworth in Hertfordshire.

Hugh Tyson did work for people living as much as ten miles from Hawkshead. Haverthwaite and Bouth are both mentioned in the accounts, as well as the nearer villages of Rusland, Satterthwaite, Coniston and Elterwater. The last date traceable in the joiner's accounts seems to be 1763; and in 1759 we find a different type of account beginning — those of what was obviously a village shop. These are in a different hand, neither Hugh's nor Ann's; as they had no children, they may well have been assisted by a niece or a friend. Joinery items are still sometimes included in the shop accounts, and it is unlikely that Hugh gave up his own business as a carpenter as early as 1763: he may perhaps have used another ledger.

The shop dealt in sugar, tea and other groceries, also in dress materials and articles of haberdashery. The prices of such articles as sugar and tea do not differ so very much from those of our own day, but the prices of material by the yard seem to us almost ridiculous. The following are some examples of the Tysons' sales:—

1759	Jan	25	to 6 pound Lofe Shuger at 10d	0	5	0
			for mending sum doors	0	0	6
	March	7	to 3 nails of Cambrick	0	0	6
			a pound Broun shuger	0	0	6
	May	26	2 ounces Stone bleu	0	0	4
	June	29	a pound starch	0	0	7
	Decem	18	2 pound white shuger	1	9	
			2 ounces candied lemon			2
1764			A pound rice			5
			a quarter tea	1	6	

Some of the accounts are bills made out to individuals, with homely touches such as the following:—

1773	Mrs. Benson, Elterwater, widow:					
	July 14	Your Daughter	a pece Ribbon	0	0	2½
	By son Sam	a pound shuger and 2 oun.	Tea	1	1	

The following are examples of prices of material sold by the yard:—

1773	3 yards and half of Cloth at 15d	4	4½
	3 nails muslin at 3d		9
	a quarter stript (striped) cloth		4
	2 yds check at 1 4½ tape	2	9
	a quarter lawn	1	6
	2 yardes and half cloth at 15d	3	7½
	9 yards and quarter hugaback	8	1
	3 quarter yards white linen	0	1 0

Dress-making of a simple kind seems also to have been undertaken, for we have these entries in 1773:—

making a shirt thred buttons		9½
A gown linen	1	2½
Do (ditto) thred tape		2

The prices, even when the different value of money is taken into account, seem incredibly low. No wonder William Wordsworth could have a velvet coat made for twelve shillings!

The shop accounts go on somewhat irregularly till 1775. After that there is a long gap in dates, and then Ann's school accounts begin in 1784. We do not know what happened in the interval. Probably the shop was given up and they took to boarding schoolboy lodgers instead, using another ledger for their bills until perhaps it was full and Ann, when Hugh died in 1784, thought she would economise by using up the blank pages of the old shop ledger.

The discovery of Ann Tyson's ledger is a happy event, not only for its connection with Wordsworth's boyhood, but for the contribution its worn pages can make to our knowledge of the lives of simple people in those distant days. Its rescue by Mrs Heelis from the peat-house at Courier Farm, and its subsequent loss and rediscovery, make it well worthy of its present excellent home in the library of Hawkshead School.