

## Some Records of an Eighteenth Century Benefit Society.

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**T**HE Centenary of the Oddfellows' Society, which has just been held, has naturally drawn attention to the history and work of the various Friendly Societies, to one or other of which so many of our "Working Men" belong, and which have done so much to encourage habits of thrift and of independence throughout our country. Perhaps at this time some records of one of our Derbyshire Societies, which, in three years' time, will have existed for a century and a half, and is still in a very flourishing condition, may prove to be of interest to the readers of the *Journal*.

"The Tideswell Humane Friendly Indefatigable Union Society," or, to speak of it by its popular name, "The Old Sick Club," was established at Tideswell on the fourth day of January, 1764. It is undoubtedly the oldest Friendly Society in the district, and there can be but very few, if indeed there are any, still existing, throughout the length and breadth of England, which can claim to have been founded before this venerable society.

During the seventeenth century some, and during the eighteenth century and the earlier part of the nineteenth century a very large number, of Friendly Societies were originated. Some of these must have been founded by, or in the life-time of, men who in their earlier days had remembered something of the working of the old Mediæval Gilds.

Consequently it is only natural to suppose that the idea of the new societies is traceable to those ancient Gilds. And the annual procession and feast, the special service in church for the members, with the underlying objects of friendliness and brotherhood and of mutual help, together with, so far as any rate as our Tideswell Society is concerned, the constitution of the governing body, are common features both of the old and of the new fraternities.

But these latter-day clubs were not founded upon any scientific principle, and the vast majority fell upon evil days and ceased to exist. A step in the right direction was taken when Parliament began to legislate for the benefit of the movement, and the first Act for the benefit and relief of Friendly Societies was passed in 1793, when, be it noticed, the Tideswell Society was nearly thirty years old. In this Act, known as Sir George Rose's Act, they are designated "Societies of good fellowship." A later Act, in 1819, impressed the need of the proper calculation of averages in forming the rules of a projected society, and enacted that the tables and rules should be submitted to the Justices of the Peace before they could be confirmed.

But such examination and approval was customary long before the passing of this Act, for there was another Tideswell Society, possibly, as we shall see, a schism from the one we have in mind, entitled "The Friendly and Charitable Society of Tradesmen and others," etc., which had been founded on June 18th, 1777, and was "examined and approved" by R. Wright, presumably a Magistrate, on January 9th, 1797, and sanctioned (probably on behalf of the Sessions Court) by the Clerk of the Peace, A. L. Maynard, on the following day. And when this, which also appears to have borne the name of "The Supplementary Friendly Society" (if indeed they were the same society, which is not quite certain), was amalgamated with "The Old Sick Club" some quarter of a century later, the amended rules and orders were "perused and approved" by two magistrates, and

afterwards "exhibited to, and confirmed by," the Court of Quarter Sessions.

Later investigation into the whole subject with legislation followed. An exhaustive inquiry into the organisation and condition of Friendly Societies was made by the Royal Commission which sat from 1870 to 1874.

The "Humane Friendly" Society was established in the year 1764. It was an important period in the history of our country. During the reigns of the two earlier Georges, owing, in some measure, to the bad example set in high places, the morals of the people generally had deteriorated, and religion was at a very low ebb. Bribery was rampant amongst the rulers of the State. But with the accession to the throne of the young King, George III., in October, 1760, better days were in store. The "Seven Years' War" with France and Spain came to an end in 1763, and Canada became one of our dependencies. It was about this time also that, owing to the victories of Clive and others, the English power in India had become acknowledged and was consolidated. Our naval victories, moreover, had given to England an almost undisputed sway over the seas, and the trade of our country was, in consequence, immensely increased. Our troubles with the American Colonies, which eventually culminated in their complete independence, commenced a little later.

But, in some respects, it was a more important period still, because it was the very eve of what has been termed "The Industrial Revolution," when, in consequence of the invention of machinery and the growing knowledge of what could be effected by the power of steam, the system of domestic manufacture was gradually put an end to, and the factory system established. It is an interesting fact that the "spinning jenny" was introduced, and the steam engine was invented, in the same year, 1764, in which the still flourishing Tideswell Friendly Society was commenced. It was about this same time that James Brindley, a native of Wormhill (which was then, and for nearly a century afterwards, in the

ecclesiastical parish of Tideswell), was doing so much for inland navigation and was helping on so materially the commerce of the country, by means of the canals which he was engineering. The inventions of Arkwright and others followed speedily. For a time, one bad result of the introduction of machinery was the wholesale employment of child labour in the mills. Too often, alas! this became a brutal form of "white slavery." The *Memoir of Robert Blincoe* gives a melancholy picture of the terrible hardships which the apprentices had to undergo, who were employed at our own Litton Mills, about the close of the eighteenth and the commencement of the nineteenth century. Fortunately all mills were not alike, and Mrs. Sterndale's *Vignettes of Derbyshire* and Rhodes' *Peak Scenery* tell of the very different and much happier conditions of the children who were employed at Cressbrook Mill under the kindly government of William Newton, the "Minstrel of the Peak." But we are anticipating, for, at the time when the "Old Sick Club" was established, these two cotton mills on the river Wye had not yet been built. Those Tideswell people who were employed in the cotton industry for the most part worked at home.

What at this time was the condition of Tideswell, and how were Tideswell people employed? We can get some sort of an idea from the entries made of the occupations of heads of families in the parish registers of Tideswell. At best it can be but a rough estimate. Very frequently no mention is made at all of what a person's occupation was, and, when it is stated, it is only the employment of the head of the family, and not that of each individual worker. Moreover, a man may have been engaged in more occupations than one. He may, for example, have described himself as a farmer, and yet have been employed in weaving as well as in farming; and, again, the entries in the registers may several times over refer to the same person, as, for example, when children in the same family were brought to be baptised. However, so

that some idea can be obtained, the entries have been collected and summarised for a few years during this time.

The principal occupation of the district was evidently that of lead-mining, for out of 193 entries in which the occupation is stated no less than 58 are "miners," 42 are engaged in agriculture, of whom more than half are entered as "husbandmen" (*i.e.*, are apparently small tenant farmers), and another fourth are labourers. Twenty-two have to do with the manufacture of woollen or cotton goods, for there are eight framework knitters, eight weavers, three flax-dressers, and one wool-comber, for whose assistance two frame-smiths are necessary, and the miners and weavers, together with the farmers, may have accounted for the eight blacksmiths. Shoe-leather and clothing were evidently heavy items in the weekly expenditure, for there were no less than twenty cordwainers or shoemakers, and ten tailors. But Tideswell had not yet lost its importance as a market town, and it may have been the case that these shoemakers and tailors, as well as the seven butchers, supplied the country round. There were four "inholders" or innkeepers, and no doubt the two "fidlers" and one "musicioner" would make their living by playing at the public-houses, and possibly had their places in the Musicians' Gallery in the Parish Church. There were three skinnners and two saddlers. Most of the bread must have been in those days, as it is at Tideswell at the present time, made at home, for there was but one baker. One person describes himself as a "gentleman," and one as a "clerk" (*i.e.*, a clergyman). There are two masons, and one each of the following: carpenter, clockmaker, cooper, barber, glazier, grocer, slater, tobacconist, and one soldier.

At any rate, the above summary will be sufficient to give us a rough estimate of how the good people of Tideswell were for the most part employed at the time, now nearly a century and a half ago, when the Club was first formed.

As already stated, the Society was commenced on January 4th, 1764; it was governed by a Master, two Wardens, and a Committee consisting of twelve Assistants. The Master was

to serve for one year only, when his place was to be taken by the senior "Elder Warden," who in turn was to be succeeded in the following year by the "Younger Warden." The Master was to nominate a certain number of members, from whom the "Younger Warden" and twelve assistants were to be chosen at the annual meeting.

The Beadle was an important-looking functionary. From time to time charges were made on the funds of the Club for a waistcoat and coat for the beadle, and for "lace for the beadle's hat." He had to summon the members to the annual meetings, club feasts and funerals, and to remind absentees of their duties.

In the chronicles of the Society it is recorded that a violent dispute took place in 1777 as to whether the beadle should be allowed some new articles of clothing or not. The clothes were ordered, but the cost of them was surcharged at a general meeting of the members, as the following entry shows:

"December 3, 1777.—James Winterbottom's waistcoat and breeches not allowed, and it is agreed that those who ordered them, if they don't repay the same, their contributions will not be received for the future."

Apparently, in consequence of this dispute, there was a defection of some of the members, which led to the formation of another Society.

The first Master was Humphrey Morton, in 1764. A complete list of Masters from that date until the present time is in existence.

Attendance at the annual feast, which was held on the day following the Tideswell September Fair, was obligatory, and "as this is a day set apart by the society for a public rejoicing and festival, music shall be provided by the master and wardens, to attend with the society to the place of divine worship, and from thence to the house where the feast is held."

The preacher received an honorarium for his sermon. This in the early days was 5/- or 10/-; after a time the fixed price was 10/6.

The following was the cost of the club feast in 1765, so far as it fell upon the Society:—

	£	s.	d.
Paid for lace for Beadle's Hat ...	0	4	0
Music ... ..	0	7	6
Club Feast Sermon ... ..	0	10	6
Chimers ( <i>i.e.</i> , Ringers) ... ..	0	2	0
Dinners ... ..	1	2	6
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	£2	6	6

It was long before the Temperance Movement commenced, and teetotalism was of course an unknown virtue. In 1771 each member was obliged to spend 2d. in liquor, presumably as "wet rent," in addition to the payment of his contribution. In 1787 there were 130 dinners at 8d., and 127 liquors at 1/-, and in connection with the same feast there was paid for "liquor at Shott, 1/-," and in 1791 "paid at settling shot at club feast, 1/-."

Probably a bottle of wine was set before the Church officials who were present at the dinner, for in 1823 occurs the entry:—

"Liquor for clergyman and clerk ... 3s. 6d.

Ditto for waiters ... .. 2s. 6d."

And in the following year, 1824, we come across this entry:—

"Liquor for dancers ... .. 12s. od."

These were apparently the "Morris Dancers." Indeed, we find at the feast held on September 14th, 1822:—

"Modesd dancers ... .. 17s. od."

## MORRIS DANCE.

Solo Cornet, in E $\flat$

Bass, B $\flat$

Tenor Sax Horn, in E $\flat$   
open Key.

The musical score consists of three staves. The top staff is for Solo Cornet in E-flat, the middle for Bass in B-flat, and the bottom for Tenor Sax Horn in E-flat open key. The music is in 2/4 time and features a complex, rhythmic melody with many sixteenth and thirty-second notes.

To the present time the time-honoured custom of Morris dancing is still kept up, for neither club feast, nor school treat, nor any other festivity would by the "Tidser" folk be

<sup>1</sup> This is the more popular of two accompaniments in use at Tideswell. The second is given in Addy's *Household Tales and Traditions*, p. 136.

considered to have been properly observed unless they were able to take part in the picturesque Morris dance, with its somewhat "haunting" musical accompaniment.

"Liquor" seems to have been the remuneration for any little service rendered. For example, one rule runs thus:—

"When it shall please Almighty God to take any member of this Society from this transitory life," the master, wardens, assistants and beadle "are to have each of them a black hatband, gloves, and a black stick, which shall be provided by the Society for them to attend the funeral of the deceased member with decency. The master, wardens, assistants, and beadle shall be allowed to spend out of the stock, each of them a quart of ale for their extraordinary trouble."

1825. July 26:—

"Liquor at George Leech's funeral . 11s. 2d."

When making arrangements for the feast, or when paying the account, it was considered the correct thing to expend something from the common fund on refreshments:—

"Liquor at order for the Feast ... 2s. od."

And when making an investment:—

	£	s.	d.
"Oct. 4, 1824. Liquor at paying and purchasing house ...	0	4	0
Feb. 3, 1821. Paid Rev. T. Brown...	11	6	10
"    "    Expended same night	0	11	10"

And "liquor" was supplied even to those whose duty it was to visit the sick brethren:—

"1805. Paid the sick and for liquor, etc. £1 2 0"

In 1828, at the annual Feast, 100 quarts of liquor at 6d. were supplied with 50 dinners, or two quarts a head. And sometimes the proportion was still greater.

Although so much has been said about liquor, we must not think that the Society meant to encourage excessive drinking. To drink together in those days was looked upon as a sign of good fellowship. This was not confined to clubs.

The same practice was customary in Church affairs. In Tideswell, as in perhaps every other parish in the land, the Churchwardens' books show that it was an understood thing that money should be spent upon drink on the handing over of the books to the new wardens, on the payment of an account, on the engagement of men to do some work in or about the church. It was the custom of the time, and old customs die hard. And, vast as the improvement is in the way of moderation, and even of abstinence from strong drink, we have not even yet altogether got rid of the idea that drinking together is a sign of friendship, or that something "wet" is necessary to seal a bargain.

That excessive drinking was intended to be discouraged is evident from the following, which was one of the old rules of the club:—

"In order that peace and good harmony may be obtained amongst us, every member who shall come into the club room shall behave himself with decency and good order, and shall be obliged to take off his hat during his stay in the room or forfeit two-pence. If any member curse or swear, or talk profanely, or promotes gaming, or plays at any game, or offers to lay or lays any wager, or challenges or strikes another, or uses indecent language to another, or be intoxicated with liquor in the club room, he shall for every of the above offences committed therein, forfeit sixpence."

And unless such fines were exacted, each member of the committee was himself fined one shilling. Moreover, if illness was caused by drunkenness, or if a member who was receiving benefit was found to be drinking to excess, he had to forfeit all benefit.

It is satisfactory to find that the penalties imposed for misconduct were few in number:—

"1768. Samuel Bennett, for an oath, 2d."

The next two entries evidently refer to a night on which things did not run altogether smoothly in the club room:—

"1777, February 5. Edw. Leech paid 1/- forfeiture  
"for challenging and fighting John Higginbotham in the  
"club room within the hours on Wednesday, the 4th of  
"December last."

"1777, March 5. Ebenezer Eyre paid 1/- forfeiture for  
"fighting John and Joshua Higginbotham in the club room  
"within the hours on Wednesday, 4th of December last."

A few years later, in 1791, we read of a fine being imposed upon one of the members

"for misconduct at the Club Feast Day, and for being  
"disordered in liquor, and for using bad language and  
"challenging to fight."

Founded as it was long before the days when the Government of our country had taken in hand the Friendly Societies, and had offered the benefit of "registration" to those whose ratio of benefits to payments was based upon scientific calculation, when in fact the whole system was in an experimental stage, we are not surprised to find that the committee of management were not particularly desirous of having a large capital invested which could be realised in time of need. They were perfectly satisfied if, with a membership of 60 or 70, they had a minimum of £40 in hand. And in 1774 they considered that they were in such a prosperous condition that they were justified in dividing £50 amongst their members.

Considerable loss was frequently incurred through bad or light coinage:—

"1776. Spent going to Ashford for exchange of coin cash, 6d."

"1776. One guinea, deficient in light weight, 1s. 6d."

"1776. Deficiency of cine (*sic*), 12s. 7d."

"1780. Bad Silver, 10s."

"1780. I lost by one of the guineas from the box, 1/-."

"1789. Bad silver, 10s. (out of a total of £120 1s. 3d.)."

"1791. Lost by light gold, 1/-."

"1796. 4s. 9d. in bad silver and brass."

"1798. Bad silver and copper, £1 18s. 4½d."

“1805. Sold bad brass, 16s. 4½d.”

“1805. Loss to the stock, £1 2s.”

To some of the members the material feast was more acceptable than the service in Church, and in the amended rules which were drawn up in 1811 the following clause occurs:—

“But as many members have frequently made it a rule  
“and practice not to attend the place of divine worship, but  
“have come to dinner after divine service is ended, whoever,  
“for the future, be found so doing shall forfeit one shilling.”

The same penalty was imposed upon each member who did not “with his staff walk in procession through the town.”

The ornamental livery of the “beadle” has already been alluded to. In 1792 we come across an entry which refers apparently to the club banner:—

	£	s.	d.
“Oct. 15. Towards the flag... ..	1	12	10
„ Cloth for do. ... ..	0	5	10½”

About the same time:—

“Making and repairing club sticks ... .. 2 6 0”

It is not so many years since the “sticks” have been given up by those who walked in procession, and there are those still living in Tideswell who can look back with interest upon the annual “turn-out” on the “club feast day” when the sticks, the knee breeches, and the top hats of various shapes were so noticeable a feature.

Although, in 1696, by an Act of Parliament, lotteries, which had been during the previous century and a half sanctioned by the Government, were prohibited as “common nuisances, by which children, servants, and other unwary persons had been ruined,” yet the Government, from 1794 down to 1824, annually raised considerable sums in lotteries authorised by Act of Parliament, the prizes being in the form of terminable or perpetual annuities. The following extracts refer evidently to a dealing which the Society had in a State gamble:—

“1784. Nov. 7. Paid to the State lottery... £16 5 6”

“1785. July 6. Received from Mr. Thomas

Alcock from the lottery for the club use £14 0 0”

The loyalty of the club was always unquestioned. In 1791 a subscription was given from the club funds towards the purchase of "a union flag."

On February 25, 1820, the expenses to the club of the proclamation of George IV. amounted to £8 12s. 3½d. On the same day there was "received of Mr. Leech on account of the proclamation, £1 5s."

In 1776 the sum of £10 13s. od. was paid as "Militia Charge." At that time each county had to raise by ballot a certain number of men between the ages of 18 and 45 to serve in the Militia. But each person who was chosen by ballot was permitted, in place of his own personal service, to pay the sum of £10 for the provision of a substitute. One of the rules of the Society was to the effect that if any member of his own accord enlisted into the army, he was to be excluded from the Society; but if he was balloted into the Militia or impressed, although his contribution and benefit would cease during his period of military service, yet upon the expiration of that time he would again be received into membership in the club.

Football of a violent and riotous kind seems to have been played for some number of centuries in various parts of England, and more especially on Shrove Tuesday—possibly with the idea of having a little extra dissipation before the discipline of Lent began. As far back as the year 1175 it is recorded that the game was annually played in London in the fields on the day which is called "Carnilevaria"; and in 1365, and again in 1388, it was prohibited as one of the pastimes which interfered with the practice of archery. So rough was the game in the time of the Stuarts that King James I. forbade his son to play it, and described it as "meeter for laming than making able the users thereof." It is an old saying that "all is fair in love or in war," and undoubtedly, a century or so ago, there was no such thing as a "foul" at football. "Goals" were often located at opposite ends of a town, and the object was, by any means whatever,

to get the ball through them. Accidents to limb were frequent, and sometimes to life. Derby was notorious, a hundred years ago, as a place where the whole town became violently excited over the annual contest. Shutters had to be put up and windows barricaded, and it was not an uncommon thing for one of the contestants to swim across the river with the ball in his hands. At Ashborne the authorities have only comparatively recently been able to check the rough horse-play of the annual football festival. It is not surprising that in Tideswell, in the same county, football should have been something to be reckoned with, and that the Society should regard injuries received in football playing or wrestling as in a sense self-inflicted, and that the following should find a place amongst the rules:—

“Any member that shall get his illness by drunkenness, wrestling, fighting, football playing . . . (as a result of his own sinful habit) . . . or by any unlawful exercise whatever, or any action which is not within the bounds of reason, shall be denied the benefits of this Society.”

Absolute loyalty to the Club was demanded of all its members. To speak against it, or to persuade others not to join it, was to incur a heavy fine. Expulsion from the Society was the penalty threatened to anyone who proposed that it should be broken up:—

“for we agree never to break it up while ten sound members remain.”

The “Supplementary Friendly Society,” already alluded to, which was started in 1777, was never very successful, and, even in its most prosperous days, it does not appear to have had more than 90 members. It was amalgamated with the “Old Sick Club” in 1811; and in the revised rules, issued in the following year, provision was made for three classes of contributors, whose payments were respectively 4d., 6d., and 8d., with corresponding benefits. From any one of these classes the Master and other officers might be

chosen. It speaks well for the prosperity and the thriftiness of Tideswell that, whilst by its varied contributions it catered for different classes of the community, in the period of agricultural and general depression which followed this period there should have been more than 200 members of the Society who were able to keep their contributions good.

In olden times men, for the most part, lived all their days and died in the same place in which they were born. Isolated local Benefit Clubs were then sufficient for their purpose. But nowadays facility of locomotion leads men to follow their work, often to a considerable distance from the home of their boyhood, and although their contributions may be kept good, and their sick pay may be forwarded to them wherever they may be, yet they must lose the benefit of the club's medical assistance if they are located at a distance from it. And for this reason the large Benefit Societies, with their branches all over the country, such as the Oddfellows and the Foresters, have taken the place of most of the purely local societies, and have gradually driven them out of the field. It speaks well for the continued good management of the Tideswell Society that, after nearly a century and a half of isolated existence, it is still vigorous and sound, and that its prosperous condition bids fair to continue.