



The Trade and Customs of Chester in the 17th and 18th Centuries, as shown in some old Parish Registers

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SHORT time ago, a letter from a correspondent in New York led me to search the old Register Books of S. Bridget and of S. Martin for entries connected with his family.

Though the object of my search was not attained, so far as he was concerned, I came across a great many points of general interest, as illustrating the trades and customs of the City in the 17th and 18th centuries, and thus showing what changes have taken place in both since that period.

The Registers under consideration are S. Martin's 1680 to 1744; and S. Bridget's 1710 to 1779.

Before turning to these points, a few words will not be out of place as to the character of these and other old Registers.

It would seem from the nature of the writing as if the entries were often made at one and the same

time, say at the end of the year, in which case the particulars must have been noted on separate slips of paper, or in a smaller memorandum book. This would not of course conduce to the accuracy of the Registers; but they cannot now be called in question. Then, these entries were only in some instances made by the Rector; more generally they were made by the Churchwardens, or the Clerk. In the S. Bridget's Register, Thomas Parry, Rector (who wrote a good clear hand), signed at the end of each year whilst he was Rector; in the S. Martin's one, there is a change in the handwriting at the burial of "Thomas Minshull, late Clark," in April 1736; from which we may reasonably conclude that he had been accustomed to make the entries.¹

It will be gathered from this that the literary character of the entries varies considerably; and in some the spelling is atrocious, even when account is taken of the progress of orthography. Then there was no prescribed form, as now, for the entries which had to be made; and in consequence considerable variety is found.

Some of the writers furnish additional and interesting particulars, and so, incidentally, give to us an insight into the manners and customs and history of their times. It is this circumstance which invests our old Parish Registers with so much interest.

¹ In 1653, an Act of Parliament was passed enacting that a Register should be appointed in every parish; but this only had force until the Restoration. In 1653, the Clergy were deprived of the custody of the books, which were kept in the house or office of the Lay Register. There were no doubt professional peripatetic scribes who went from parish to parish, and made a year's entries at a time from paper records.—[*Editor*].

When the Church of S. Martin, "being ruined," was closed for repair and being rebuilt, the marriages for that parish took place in S. Bridget's Church; and some of these marriages are entered twice over, being in the books of each parish.

One other matter connected with the marriages comes to light. Apparently it was not considered necessary, as now, in the case of marriages by license, for one of the parties to be resident in the parish. Again and again the persons to be married came both of them from other parishes, and these not always in this Diocese. Personally, I have no doubt that all such marriages were quite irregular. By the 102nd Canon, which was only abrogated by the Marriage Act of 1823, "the said matrimony by license was to be celebrated publicly in the Parish Church or Chapel where one of them dwelleth, and in no other place." This certainly is a necessary requirement at the present day for marriages by license, and I can only suppose that at the time referred to there was considerable laxity in observing the regulations.

Turning now to the entries, the frequent mention of *mariners* (spelt in various ways), seamen or sailors, reminds us of the importance of Chester as a seaport in those days. Even at the end of the 18th century, when the New River had been cut through a large tract of white sands, we are told in the Chester Guide that "great quantities of cheese (esteemed the best in England), coals, and lead, are exported from this Port; and from hence different nations are supplied with large quantities of cannon, the *Ultima Ratio Regum*, which are cast at Bersham, near Wrexham. The imports of linen cloth from Ireland are very considerable,

particularly at the times of the Fairs, on July the 5th and October the 10th; likewise hides, tallow, feathers, ox-bones, butter, and sundry other articles." We are reminded that Chester was the port for Ireland by the following sad entry: "Elizabeth Sadler was buried upon ye first day of May, 1704. Shee was a poor stranger, and had a pass designing to go to her relations in Ireland, but fell sick and dyed in Thomas Palmer's house in this parish, who had some cloaths and things shee left behind her." Whether Mr. Wm. Griffith, who is designated a *Land Waiter* in 1743, had any duties connected with the port as a shoreman, I cannot say, as the term is strange to me.

The quotation just given from an old Chester Guide will account for certain trades which have now vanished from our midst. For instance, in 1703 and 1709, Price Williams is described as a *Feather Man*; and, in 1705, as a "Dresser of feathers dwelling in this Parish in Nun Lane." The ox-bones or the hides would probably include horns, and would thus give rise to the occupation of *horn-breaker*, a trade which occurs again and again. Sometimes it is associated with that of *comb-maker*, though the two are generally distinct. It suggests that certain persons broke or split the horns, which were afterwards manufactured into combs. Twice, at least, mention is made of a *lanthorn-maker*; and this, again, was doubtless an adjunct of the same trade, and refers to the old-fashioned lanterns, which were fitted with horn and not with glass. Then we have also mention made of an "ink-horn maker," and are thus reminded of the old-fashioned form of ink stand. *Dean Swift*, in his letters, writes: "Two days ago I washed the mould out of my ink-horn,

and put in fresh ink." The word is now practically obsolete, as the article is no longer used; but, at one time, it had its special use and meaning. An "ink-horn term" was one that had reference to literary work, and an "ink-hornist" a pedant connected with literature. Then, the hides which were imported were no doubt of various kinds, as we learn from a poem published in "Hakluyt":

" Irish wooll and linen cloth, sالدinge,
 And martens good be her merchandise,
 Hertes hides and others of venerie
 Skins of otter, squirrel and Irish hare,
 Of sheep lambe and foxe is he chassare,
 Felles of kiddes and conies in great plentie."

This refers to a much earlier date (1430), of course, than the Registers, but it points in the direction of what was, according to *Lysons*, the staple trade of the city, namely, that of the glover. Accordingly, we find many entries of "glovers," and, occasionally, this is "wet-glover." According to *Murray's Dictionary*, this expression signifies "a maker of leather gloves." It is found in *Randle Holme's "Academy of Armoury"* in 1688, and in the "London Gazette" in 1724, and at other times. Though Gloverstone, where the trade was carried on, was not in either of the parishes, it was near at hand, and naturally those who practised it would have their homes not far off. It is supposed that an indication of the importance of this trade in the city is to be found in the custom of hanging out a glove by the Pentice at S. Peter's Church fourteen days before the commencement of each fair, and until its conclusion, being twenty-nine days, during which time non-freemen were allowed to trade within the city. At the Midsummer Show, too, a glove was formerly delivered by the wet-glovers to the Mayor.

It is, therefore, not to be wondered at if we find such frequent mention of *glovers* in the Registers of our Chester parishes.²

We find also a man described as a hair-buyer (spelt "heir"); whether this has reference, as seems most likely, to the hair which would be taken from the hides when they were dressed we cannot certainly say; but in all probability this was another adjunct or accessory of the skinner's trade. It can hardly refer to the operations of the peruke maker or "perriwig maker," of whom mention is made in several entries.

Amongst other trades which have passed away from us, and of which there are indications in the Registers are the following: *paperman* or *peperman*, explained later as *paper-maker*; *thread-maker*; *felt-maker*; *mault-maker*, explained later as *malster*; *button-maker*, whether of bone or metal is not said, but probably the former; *flaxdresser*; *weaver*, *linen-weaver*, and *broad-silk weaver*. The tradition of these latter may be preserved in Weaver Street, which is in S. Martin's parish, but no place is now left there which would be suitable for the carrying on of such trade. In the country districts of the West Riding of Yorkshire where hand-loom weaving was practised, you still see in many of the old houses a remembrance of it in the long line of windows, separated only by stone-mullions, in the upper rooms, thus giving the fullest possible light to the weaver. Then we have a *shott-caster*, who may have followed his occupation at the Leadworks.

² In Vol. I. p. 36 of our Journal is the following, being a quotation from *Rev. C. Boutell's* Book of Christian Monuments: "In the Church of S. John in the City of Chester, lies a slab which bears a cross placed between the figures of scissors and of a glove elevated upon a slender rod; and thus, with all simplicity, yet clearly and impressively, denoting the religious faith and the worldly calling of some glover."

The following are a complete puzzle: a *translator*, and a *picklid maker* or *picklid*³ *maker*. The former may be meant for a *slater*, and the latter for a manufacturer of pickles, but the writing, like the spelling, is very uncertain. We find also not only a *wool-comber*, but also a *jersey-comber*. From *Murray's Dictionary* I gather that *jersey* or *jarsey* is still (*i.e.* in 1882) the local name for worsted in Lancashire, and the definition given of it in the dictionary is "wool that has been combed, and is ready for spinning." If the Irish wool continued to be imported, it, as well as the local supply, would need combing, and thus to be prepared for the spinner and weaver. *Randle Holme*, in his "Academy of Armoury," tells us that "Jersey is the finest wool taken out of other sorts of wool by combing it with a Jersey-comb." Here again we have a lost trade or occupation, so far as the City is concerned. In one entry we are told that "John Harrison, a soldier, had served an apprenticeship, and was a Jersey-comber and stuff-weaver in ye town of Kendal in ye County of Westmorland." Then we have more than one "writing-master," a *nealer*, presumably a *nailor*, just as a *sealer* must be meant for a *sailor*; a *horse-courser*, whatever that may mean; a *musicioner* and a *harper*, a *tumbler*, a *comedian*, and even a *courier*. These particulars are supplied at the fancy of the person who inserts the register; and there are, of course, a very large number of entries where the names only are given.

In 1711, Mr. Thomas Bolland is described as a "Chyrurgeon," whilst three years later he is styled "Barber-Chyrurgeon and one of the Sheriffs of the

³ *Picklin*: a kind of coarse linen or fine canvas, of which seedsmen make their bags and dairy-maids their aprons. See *English Dialect Dictionary*.

City." In 1723, Samuel Catherall is designated, in an entry made by the Rector, "Chirurgeon-Barber." Whether any difference is implied by the different order of the words I cannot say. The spelling of the long and unusual word was very various, and at last settled down to "scirurgeon," from which the modern "surgeon" is not far removed. It points, in fact, to the opening letters *ch* having a soft and not a hard pronunciation.

In an old diary of *P. Henry* we read, under date 24th August, 1661, "Sister Mary went to Chester to a Shirurgeon," whilst in the year previous we have mention made of the "Worshipful Company of Barber Chirurgeons." The title opens up an interesting theme for discussion by our medical friends, as showing the connection which once existed between the barbers and the surgeons. The former, *I believe*, were supposed to be blood-letters, in the days when bleeding was a prescribed remedy, not, however, by the accidental slip of the instrument which they are supposed to wield. Only the other day I was told by a medical man that the barber's pole bears witness to this: the red signifying the bleeding, and the white the necessary bandage!! The *barber*, however, was sometimes only what we mean by the word; and in 1715, "Ambrose Johnson of Cuddington in ye parish of Malpas" is described as a "Barber-Perri-wigmaker." Sometimes, too, the title *barber* occurs alone.

In 1712, a child of "a seaman belonging to ye yote," and in 1714 one of "a seaman belonging to ye King's yott," were baptized. No doubt this refers to the vessel which was in later times styled "the revenue cutter." Chester being a seaport, it would be necessary to have a vessel stationed here to see that the Customs were not

evaded, and this was known by the name of the yacht or the King's yacht. The memory of this is preserved in the names of two old hostelries in Watergate Street, "the Yacht" and "the Old Custom House Inn," the latter being in close proximity to the Custom House, which adjoined Trinity Church, where Mr. Shone's offices now are.

In 1717, Mr. Edwards is described as "Receiver General of the Glasse Windows," and in 1738 more clearly as "Surveyor of glas windows." This, no doubt, has reference to the window-tax. This was imposed by Act 6 and 7 William III., and frequently reimposed, though injurious to ventilation and so to health; and the house-tax was substituted in 1851. An officer was apparently appointed (in the early days of the tax, at any rate), whose duty it was to collect this special impost, and see that no evasion of it took place. I may say here that dairy windows were exempt—a considerable item in this county of Cheshire—and I can remember in my early days seeing in certain farm-houses the word *dairy* painted outside in a conspicuous manner above the window, thus enabling the surveyor at once to see what windows he was not to include in his claim for payment.

There are very many entries in which persons are described as *invalides*, spelt in many different ways. This does not, of course, mean one who is in indifferent health, but a soldier of some sort. The definition given by *Murray* is a soldier or sailor disabled, by injury or illness, for active service; formerly often employed on garrison duty or as a reserve force. *Lysons* tells us that the Castle was usually garrisoned by two companies of invalids; in time of war, generally by a detachment of regulars

or the militia. Sometimes in the Registers we have two terms used, "a pensioner or invalide"; sometimes these are used separately; sometimes also to the term *invalide* is added that of soldier. We can thus gather that the persons so described were those on garrison duty in the Castle; and similar entries will be found in the Registers of S. Mary-on-the-Hill.

They apparently had the usual class of officers, sergeants, ensigns, captains, and others being specified. Thus, Mr. Par Donôch Ensign of the Invalids whose wife was buried on ye 2nd Septr. 1723, was married again by license to Rebecca Starkey, Widow, on 23rd April 1724. In 1730 was buried "Thomas Evason an Invaleed, who was unfortunately drowned in the Castle Well." Then we have a "drummer of the company of the Invalides"; and in another place a "pensioner drummer." The *pensioners* are frequently mentioned; sometimes an *out pensioner*. Probably the Invalides were recruited from the pensioners, so that there were pensioners who were not Invalides. In Anson's Voyage, we learn that "500 Invalids were to be collected from the out-pensioners of Chelsea College."

In addition to the Invalids, there were other troops stationed here. On one occasion four soldiers (their names are not given) were buried from the hospital. The description of the soldiers is often detailed, as in the following instances: "Wm. Thody, he had been a soldier in Captain James Labally's company in Colonel Heyman Rooke's regiment of foot, but was disbanded from ye said regiment by reason of lameness"; or "John Harrison, a soldier in Captain Glegg's company of ye Regiment commanded by Col. Grove." Occasionally, we have "Prince George's Ridgment," in which

John Evans was a drummer, and Andrew Alston a "fugeman," whilst Richard Maweer was a "grane-deer in Captain Butler's company of Colonel Haines' Ridgement." Then we have "a trumpeter in the King's Service"; while, in 1689 (a fatal year, as there are thirty-eight burials in S. Martin's Registers), besides three other soldiers, we have "*Mouchier parisien a solddier*" buried. The last sounds very like a nickname given to one who had, or affected, a foreign appearance, "*Monsieur Parisien.*"

Turning now to some old city customs, we find John Taylor spoken of as a *City Wait*, and Matthew Trueman as "one of the wates of the City," and elsewhere, as "a musician and one of the waits."

Hanshall tells us that the Mayor of Chester had, on his civic establishment, four *Waits* or Musicians to play before him on public occasions. They had annual salaries and liveries. The same authority tells us that the *Customers*, or Grantees of the four Gates, had, each of them, a Musician in attendance, and hence, probably, arose the appellation of City Waits. *Canon Morris* writes: "The City had a body of Waitsmen, who were provided annually with gowns, but, according to the custom of the age, they appear to have found their own instruments."

In 1555, Mr. Thomas Smythe was payd 39 shillings and eightpence for 7 yards of cloth for the wettemens gowns. Wm. Young, in 1706, had a poor man's gown; and, in 1724, Roger Williams is described as a "Bedeman." These, however, were probably not *Waits*. In the old Guide Book, from which I have already quoted, we learn that thirty decayed Freemen, of upwards of sixty years of age, "are allowed Four Pounds yearly,

and a Gown every third year. They go in procession before the Mayor to Church on Public Days, when they are allowed one shilling and a Beverage." There are also Bedesmen at the Cathedral. John Casey, in 1705, is called one of the Beadles of ye City of Chester.

The following entries refer to old means of travelling and transit: George Ruthledge, who was buried the 15th of December, 1728, is said to have "died in the *Waggon*." The conveyances mentioned in the Guide Book are the *Machines* (which took two days or two and a half days in the journey to London, at a fare of two guineas); the *Post Coaches*, which also took two days at a fare of £2 15s.; and the *Waggons*, which took *six days*. There were Coaches also to Holyhead and Warrington, and *Waggons* to Birmingham, Manchester, Shrewsbury, and many other places. It was in one of these slow-moving vehicles that the poor man died on his journey, and was buried in Chester. Isaac Falconer, a *Waggoner*, buried on November 18th, 1750, must have been the driver of such a vehicle. Then there were Welsh carriers to Carnarvon, Anglesea, Denbigh, Ruthin, and many other places in the Principality; and we have the name of Richard Morris, the Carnarvon carrier. William Wynne is styled a Cheerman or Chairman; and this calls to mind the old mode of conveyance in the city. In the old Guide Book are given the rates which may be charged, and the rules which must be observed; whilst two May-Poles are mentioned, one in Handbridge, and one in further Northgate Street.

Some of the parishioners of S. Martin's lived to a good old age; for in the two instances in which it is stated we have centenarians: "April 26th, 1690, Dorothy Hughes being 100 years old and upwards

was buried"; and "Richard Hughes, Butcher, aged 107 was buried ye 6th day of January 1739-40."

Some entries suggest pathetic reflections. After a good many is written the word *poor*, sometimes *very poor*. It speaks of the trials that beset humanity, and we can, perhaps, picture to ourselves what the lot of those thus described must have been like. How pregnant are these words, "*Master John Dawson, a decayed gentleman.*" The very title, *Master*, shows that his former position was recognised, and that pity was felt for him in his altered fortunes. Then frequently the description is *a stranger*, and we think of the person dying, away from home and from friends, calling to mind it may be memories of bright early days, but with no relative or friend near now to say one last *good-bye*, God be with you. And this is intensified in the case of "a stranger poor dumb woman who was buried on ye 15th January 1721," no name even given, and she unable to make her wants known. Or listen to these, "a poor child," or "a child June ye 5th unknown," evidently deserted by a heartless inhuman mother; or "John Powell a *young* man," no age given, but the scribe who made the entry, feeling pity for one cut off in the prime of life. All this we can imagine from the laconic description given to us. Occasionally a longer story is told, as in the following: "John Bennett was buried upon ye 17th day of July, 1705. He dyed in this parish on ye Crofts: received no alms of ye parish, but had been a common beggar for many years; and when he dyed he left behind him no relations nor anything else but a few raggs, and some neighbours begged of good and charitable people a little money to buy a coffin to bury him in." What a life he must have led, and how sad and piti-

able his end must have been. Yet the record gives us indication of human sympathy aroused, and taking practical shape to provide for him Christian burial. Then, in 1702, we read of the baptism of "*Thomas, ye son of Thomas Justice, lately drowned,*" and we think of the child who was never to know a father's love, and of the widowed mother with the anxious care of bringing up that fatherless son. Truly, these old registers contain much food for reflection, and suggest many incidents full of pathos and interest.⁴ The Registers also give us an insight into the habits and customs of former generations, and are thus of great historical value, besides having their importance in connection with genealogical enquiries.

It would be a great misfortune if these interesting records were removed, as is sometimes urged, to some distant place where it would be difficult to consult them. It is all the more necessary that every care should be taken of them in every parish, that they should be kept in proper fire-proof safes, and never be allowed out of proper custody. I am glad to think that, in my capacity as Archdeacon, I have been able to press this upon the proper authorities, with the result that, in many instances, safes have been provided instead of wooden boxes or chests, and thus the safety of the Registers has been secured.

⁴ I have seen somewhere the title of a book, "*The Romance of Parish Registers,*" and even from the slight survey which I have given to-night you will understand how that title is justified by many of the entries which are found in them, and how easy it would be to fill in imaginary details, which would fashion a romantic and pathetic story.