

OBITUARIES

PERCY MILLICAN, F.S.A.

In the death of Percy Millican, F.S.A. on 17 June 1969 the Society has lost one who served it as an official for thirty years. He was, I believe, the son of a Northern Ireland Presbyterian minister. He qualified as a dental surgeon in 1916 and spent his professional career in the Norfolk Health Department, becoming Chief Dental Officer. His work took him to all parts of the county, which gave him the chance, so he told me, of inspecting parish registers and church monuments! My first knowledge of his existence was an article by him entitled "Christ's Dole" which appeared in the *Eastern Daily Press* on 7 December 1929. I found that he was a friend of our Assistant Secretary, Fred Johnson, and I immediately made his acquaintance. I was struck by his wide archaeological knowledge. He was elected to our Committee, as it was then called, and in 1935 became our Editorial Secretary, an office which he filled with distinction for the next thirty years. After twenty-five years of service the Society in General Meeting made him a presentation and on that occasion the late Mr. W. W. Williamson referred to him as "A prince of Editors". And so he was. He was tireless in the work, exact and discriminating. On the business side he was familiar with printing matters, printers' methods and their accounts.

Apart from his contributions to our Society he wrote an excellent History of Horstead and Stanninghall, and contributed to the Norfolk Record Society, of which he was honorary editor, volumes of the *Freemen of the City of Norwich*. He owned a considerable quantity of ancient documents including some Townshend MSS., and it is to be hoped that they will not be lost to the county of Norfolk.

Since 1896, when the office appears to have been created, we have had nine Editorial Secretaries, and of those who have passed away I rate Percy Millican as *facile princeps*.

B. C-H.

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CHRIST'S DOLE

By PERCY MILLICAN.

An interesting Tudor manuscript has recently come into my possession which throws light upon the ancient custom of payment of a fish-tithe or dole called Christ's Dole by the fishermen of Norfolk and Suffolk.

These people from very early times worked in three distinct areas (1) off the coast of Iceland, (2) in the North Sea, and (3) off the coast of Scotland.

They were accustomed to divide into doles the fish taken on the voyage, and each having a part in the expedition took his dole according to his share in the vessel.

The first share laid aside was called Christ's Dole. It was paid either in money or in fish, and was divided into two equal portions—one half being paid to the home port of the vessel for the maintenance of the harbour, the other half being paid to the Church.

This latter half was again divided into two portions, one being paid as a mixed tithe to the parson of the port and the other as a personal tithe to the parsons of the various places in which the fishermen dwelt.

This, as will be seen later, occasioned much friction between the fishermen and the parsons of the ports, the latter, apparently, claiming the whole tithe, leaving the former to pay the parsons of their own parishes as best they could.

In very early times this contribution to the Church was undoubtedly considered as a thank-offering for past benefits, and more particularly as a charm against future disaster. This offering became a custom—which in its turn became a right—and eventually (as in the case of Great Yarmouth in 1484) was confirmed by certain bye-laws.

These bye-laws, amongst other things, prohibited fishing journeys to Iceland without a Royal Licence owing to disagreements with the Icelanders. In fact, for many years fishing voyages to Iceland had been entirely prohibited by an Order in Council (13th Feb., 1426).

From 1522 to 1526 the residents of the Norfolk and Suffolk coasts were in fear of Scottish and French marauders entering their harbours and decamping with their vessels. Every man from 16 to 60 years of age was expected to hold himself in readiness to repel attack and Thomas Howard, Duke of Norfolk, ordered the King's men-of-war from the North Sea to protect the fishing fleet in its journeys to and from Iceland.

The following table shows at a glance the strength of the fishing fleets of Norfolk in 1528:—

	Iceland ships	N. Sea crares*	Scotland crares
Yarmouth	30	20	8
Cley, Blakeney and Cromer ..	30	10	3
Lynn	10	4	6
Wells	6	—	—

(*Crares were small unwieldy trading vessels (see *Cymbeline*, Act iv, scene 2).)

As the payment of Christ's Dole was at first based on custom and not compelled by law, pre-Tudor evidences are very scanty and consist chiefly of receipt items included in ecclesiastical account books.

Of the Tudor period I have been able to trace three evidences which are so remarkably full of information that our knowledge of this ancient custom may be now considered complete.

These evidences are (1) the Orford Agreement, 1545, (2) the Yarmouth Petition, 1597, and (3) the Wells Petition, *circa* 1591.

THE ORFORD AGREEMENT

(1) At Orford (Suffolk) an agreement, dated 18th June, 1545, was made between the fishermen and the parson on behalf of himself, his successors and the town, by

which, in respect of the tithes for the doles of the ships, boats and crares in the time of "fisheshar fare" (fishing voyages) and "Iseland fare" (Iceland voyages), the parson was to have one half dole of all fish and herring for Christ's Dole at the time of dividing the doles; and a half dole for the "skope" (scoop) nets; and a quarter dole of all line boats, etc. The parson was to pay annually to the churchwardens the sum of 13s. 8d. for the repair of the church.

This document is preserved among the muniments of the dissolved Corporation of Orford, and is apparently the only definite agreement concerning Christ's Dole made between the parson of an East Anglian fishing town and the fishermen. Much trouble would have been saved if all the clergy of the ports had followed this parson's example!

THE YARMOUTH PETITION

(2) The petition of certain shipping masters of Cromer, Sheringham, Mundesley and Salthouse to Sir Thomas Egerton, Lord Keeper, dated 1597, complaining that although formerly the "Moyetie" of Christ's Dole was divided between the parsons of the ports such as Cromer and Lynn and the parsons of the various parishes in which the fishermen resided, yet one James Osborne, Lessee of the Parsonage of Great Yarmouth, "being one who more respecteth his owne pryvate gayne than a good conscience doth gett into his handes all the saide Moyetie of the said Dole called Christe's Dole. (Chancery Proceedings, Elizabeth S. 9/12).

This James Osborne was made Freeman of Yarmouth in 1587, and was Lessee of the Dean and Chapter of Norwich.

THE WELLS PETITION

(3) The petition against the parson of Wells by the men of other towns by the coast—*circa* 1591. This MS. is in my possession, and it reads as follows:—

"To the right worshipfull Mr. Nathaniel Bacon send these with spede.

"The question betwene the Parson of Wells and the men of other townes by the Coast.

"Out of eny ship going to Iseland Northseas, or any shipping voyage, there is a Dole to be Layd out called Christ's Dole, which is payd out of the ship in regard of the tythes for the same voyage, and this hath bene accustomed so to be payd time of minde, and the payment therof is also confirmed by a Statute Anno Henr. 8.

"This Dole being thus payd in regard of the tithe is to be understood to be a personall tithe, viz., rising and growing of the onely industrie of the parties who travayle and adventure for the same, and being personall is payable to such parsons to whome the parties so adventuring are bounde to pay tithes by reason of there abode and dwelling places, and this by the very text of the lawe is clere the words being thus, *Decimae personales illi ecclesiae sunt reddendae in qua populi ecclesiastica percipiunt Sacramenta. extr. de decimis &c Lib 3^o decretal-tit-3^o*

"According to this clame men going on such fishing voyages have allwayes accustomed to pay ther partes of the sayd dole called Christ's Dole to the parsons of ther owne dwelling places thoughe they went in shippes of other places whersoever, viz., the men of Wells going in shippes of Linne, Blakeney, Yarmoth, Alborow or any other place are charged with so much of that Dole called Christ's Dole as they do beare any adventure for in the ship and do

bring home the same in fishe or in money and pay it to the parson of Wells, and likewise the men of those places going at Lynne, Wells &c. must and do pay ther partes of Christ's Dole to ther owne curates.

"Nowe men being thus charged by Lawe and Custome, the parson of Wells offereth this grievance to all such as come from other townes to go on these fishing voyages in shippes of that towne. He pretendeth a custome of taking up the whole dole called Christ's Dole to his owne use, not suffering the men to carye away such partes of the same as are by them to be payd to ther owne curats, neyther alowing them any thing for the same. Whereby it commeth to passe that pore men are subject to sutes in lawe, and are therby compelled to pay that twise which is due to be payd but once, the Lawe and Custome enforcing them to pay yt to ther owne curats which he before hath taken up and with holdeth onely upon pretence of Custome."

The parson of Wells mentioned above was William Toll, who became Rector in 1580. Blomefield tells us that "in 1591 he had sentences for his right of tithe of the Iceland fishing according to ancient custom."

Mr. Nathaniel Bacon, to whom this petition was sent, was the second son of Sir Nicholas Bacon, Lord Keeper. He was M.P. successively for Tavistock, Norfolk, and Lynn. Sheriff of Norfolk in 1599, and knighted in 1604.

Both these petitions were apparently decided in favour of the Church.

The moiety of Christ's Dole ceased to be officially collected by most ports in 1824. In more recent times (1845) a fisherman was summoned by the vicar of Lowestoft for having neglected to pay tithes for his fish. Mr. J. H. Tillett, of Norwich, for the defendant, contended that the tithe did not arise in the parish of Lowestoft, but in the sea; and that therefore it could not be enforced. The vicar, however, won his case.

The literature on this obscure subject is somewhat vague, but references may be found in:—

- (1) The East Anglian Notes and Queries, 1910.
- (2) de Caux, "The Herring and Herring Fishery."
- (3) Palmer's Continuation of Manship's "Yarmouth."
- (4) Hillen: History of Lynn.
- (5) Proc. Norf. Arch. Soc., vol. vii., p. 231.

ROBERT WYNDHAM KETTON-CREMER,

M.A., D.Litt., F.B.A., F.S.A., F.R.S.L.

Vice-President

In Wyndham Ketton-Cremer we have lost not only our most brilliant scholar and author in the field of history, but we have also lost a man who was consistently active in the administration of this Society's affairs. He was elected a member of the Council in 1930, honorary editor from 1931 to 1935, Chairman of the Council in 1945, a Vice-President in 1950, and in 1952 he held the office of President. Throughout this period, and indeed to within a few