

ERY

NOTES ON A SEVENTEENTH CENTURY PEWTER MEASURE  
WITH HISTORIC LIVERPOOL ASSOCIATIONS

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A PAPER

read before

THE HISTORIC SOCIETY OF LANCASHIRE & CHESHIRE

on THURSDAY, 23RD MARCH 1939.

by

ROLAND J. A. SHELLEY, F.R.Hist.S.

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represent about £6000 nowadays. It is presumed that the building was completed within four years from the date of the Great Fire; so Henry Langley must have been one of the earliest customers of the restored Inn - for lessee he certainly was not.

The importance of the "Axe" in the years immediately following 1670 may be gathered from its situation and dimensions being clearly defined in Ogilby and Morgan's 1677 plan of the City; and in Morgan's 1681 map it is shown with an open Courtyard surrounded by the Inn buildings said to be capable of providing sleeping quarters for over a hundred guests. Moreover, it appears on a map in <sup>STRYPE'S</sup> Skrippe's Stow (1720) as being in a court half way along Aldermanbury on the east side. Thus we can imagine that it was likely to be patronised by well-to-do visitors to the metropolis. And now I come to the purpose of this paper.

Through the courtesy of our friend and fellow member, Mr. John F. Smith, Chief Librarian of Liverpool, and that of one of his able assistants, Miss S. B. Saxton, also a member of this ancient and honourable Society, I have had access to a number of letters written by prominent Liverpool people of the day to Richard Norris "at the Ax in Aldermanbury" (in but a few instances is it spelt "Axe") from 1703 to 1707. Richard Norris, you will remember, was of the old Speke family; he was Mayor of Liverpool in 1700, and M.P. from 1708 to 1710. None

of the letters reached him in the latter capacity, it will be noticed; but some of them tend to prove that Norris had a business association with Sir Thomas Johnson, one of the founders of Liverpool's prosperity. Thus Johnson wrote to Norris on 5th October 1705 lamenting their loss through fraud in the "Mercy's" homeward bound cargo; whilst on 13th June 1707, he told him that 'the "Ellin" took in a freight of 88 pipes of wine at Mader(a)s'. The "Ellen" in the following January was captured, doubtless by a privateer, and taken into St. Malo; "in which I have a very great loss", so Johnson advised Norris on 18th February 1708, adding "I am not able to make you sensible of it". Norris evidently was not interested in the cargo, or he would have been very sensible of the ill-hap.

But of peculiar interest is the following extract from a letter dated 25th September 1705. "We have had Mr. Defoe here. I did not see him; Mr. Done was very busy and invited him to his house, which in my opinion had been better let alone." From other sources we know that at that time the able pamphleteer - later to win renown as the author of "Robinson Crusoe" - was a stormy petrel in the political world. And we know, too, something about Johnson's political career; and from this instance of his caution may infer that he was one of those who anticipated the "Safety First" movement.

Another correspondent of Norris' was his brother-in-law William Squire, merchant, a business connection between the two being probable from Squire's advice on 27th May 1707 that "Mr. Hall has shipped the wine and brandy on the "Peter"; to which was added "all down in the mouth at the news from the Upper Rhyne". The news would be of the French under Marshal/ Villars having captured the famous lines of Stollhofen, near Strasburg, hitherto deemed impregnable - a major disaster to the Allies, as it placed the entire system of defence which had hitherto served Central Germany in lieu of an army, in French hands. Then there were several letters from Isaac Greene, said to have been the principal attorney of the County at the time. These, naturally, were on legal matters. A most interesting one was penned from "Fox Hall" on 6th October 1705 by the unfortunate Thomas Tyldesley (Grandson of the Cavalier, Sir Thomas Tyldesley) who complained about the delay in concluding "the bargain they had entered into nearly a year ago for the purchase of Holcroft." This was the seat of the impoverished family; and Fox Hall was a house near the present Blackpool to which Tyldesley had retired in his misfortune.

A further correspondent of Norris' was Henry Watts - but he wrote from the "Axe" - the host of the Inn in 1706. He was, we are told, the friend of many Liverpool merchants;

being a lively, handy fellow, at once gossip, banker and stock jobber to his country customers. In a letter to Morris on 14th September in the year named he thanked him for recommending the "Axe" to Foster Ounliffe, for long afterwards an eminent merchant in Liverpool; and expressed much satisfaction that the Siege of Turin had been raised by Prince Eugene, the Duke of Marlborough's brilliant and steadfast colleague.

But, apart from the foregoing correspondence, there is in the possession of the Corporation of Liverpool a letter dated 16th July 1795 from Henry Fuseli, R.A., to William Roscoe, enquiring whether the case with pictures sent from the "Axe" in Aldermanbury the previous month had arrived. Roscoe, perchance, was not a good correspondent; but of course it is possible that he had not been advised of the despatch of the case, and that it had gone astray. Such things happened then as now. It may be mentioned in passing that it was from the "Axe" in Aldermanbury that the first regular line of stage wagons from London to Liverpool was established towards the middle of the Seventeenth Century.

But enough, I think you will agree, has now been put forward to prove that this pewter measure through its original home has interesting associations with the Liverpool of a bygone age.

Well, who was Henry Langley, some of you may be thinking just out of curiosity, for it is plain he had no connection with Liverpool. There was a Henry Langley, Salter, of

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Southwark, as is proved by a token he issued; and he was owner or lessee of the ancient Spur Inn there. But I cannot identify him with the "Axe" gentleman. Nor can I trace him through the records of the Salters' Company, as these unhappily were destroyed in the Great Fire, and his name does not appear subsequently. I have, however, found elsewhere a Henry Langley whose will was proved on 5th October 1659. He was a tallow chandler of St. George's, Southwark, and had a son of the same Christian name; and it may have been he who took his morning draught at the "Axe". Alas! this is a surmise, and nothing more.