

"The Candle Auction."

"The 'Candle-Auction' will be held on Monday December 12th at 7. p.m. in the Parish Hall."

Such was the brief announcement in the Parish Magazine concerning a very old custom, which it is believed is only kept up in three places in England and in each case it is concerned with the letting of land!

In the case here referred to the following extract from the Official Report of Endowed Charities will explain the above announcement.

"Church Acre — By the Award of 1815, there
 "was allotted to the Churchwardens of A—,
 "in compensation for their lands, grounds and
 "rights of common, a plot of land in
 "Church Mead containing 2 a. 1^r. 33^p.
 "No trusts were declared by the Award nor is
 "it known what land was previously held by
 "the Churchwardens, but, presumably, the above
 "title indicated that they had held land of
 "about an acre."

[The Land

"The land is let periodically by "Candle-Auction"
"for terms of three years. The net rent,
"after the cost of fencing is defrayed, is
"applied to Church purposes."

On the 12th December therefore I was present
at the Parish Hall to witness the proceedings.

At one end of the Hall was a small table
in the centre of which in solitary grandeur was
an enamelled candlestick containing THE Candle -
I thought how much more appropriate an
antique brass candlestick would have been. -

Seated around the table, in a wide circle, was
an assemblage of about a dozen, comprising
the leading 'citizens' of the village, and including
the probable bidders. The Vicar was
in the Chair officiating as 'Auctioneer' and he
explained that he had been at some pains
to procure a 'tallow' candle which he understood
was essential for the proper conduct of the Auction;
in fact it had entailed a special journey of
9 miles to the nearest Market-town and a
lengthy

lengthy search before that ordinary but almost obsolete domestic article could be obtained.

"The Court"

The Lady from "~~The Big House~~" solemnly inserted a large-headed scarf pin into the candle at a distance of 1 inch from the top, (I believe an antique gold tie or scarf pin is the more correct but apparently this was not forthcoming!) The Vicar then read out the before mentioned Extract from the Report, lighted the candle and declared the Auction open, starting the bidding himself with 20/- per annum rent.

Lazily the bids rose to 40/-, after which silence, since the candle had still a good quarter of an hour to burn before endangering the stability of the pin.

In order somewhat to enliven the proceedings detached discussions took place as to the shooting and fishing rights, these

[appeared]

appeared to be negligible, although the plot is bounded on one side by a stream - tributary of a fairly well known trout stream.

One of the assembly remarked caustically that the plot reminded him of a famous property, which, if memory serves me aright, was described by its owner the late Dan Leno as having a stream at the bottom of the garden - at any rate in the summer - but in the winter the garden was at the bottom of the stream.

Meanwhile the flame was steadily approaching the pin, and bidding was resumed, rising by steps of 5/-, and very cautiously, 75/- was reached just as the candle level reached the pin.

To what heights the bidding might have reached will never be known as, although the pin is expected to and usually does wobble and give some indication of

Impending

impending collapse, in this case during
the momentary silence following the 75/- bid
the pin literally 'crashed' suddenly into the
basin of the candlestick. Thus bearing out
the old saying - "You could have heard a pin
drop", which saying is stated to have
originated from these self same Candle-Auctions.

Nothing remained but for the Vicar
to declare the Auction over, enter the name
and bid of the new tenant and then
carefully to stow away the precious candle
for future occasions, fearing no doubt
that, with the present rapid advance of
civilisation, in 3 years time the essential
tallow candle might itself be a thing of
the past and unobtainable.

Not a particularly exciting proceeding
but distinctly interesting in view of its
antiquity and present rarity.