

Scrap Book



7 Dec. 1899

Dear Sir,

Just a line to say that I was asked  
to write a little notice of the letting by  
Candle, & which I feel to be (obscure  
before witnessing the proceedings at his trial,  
to I find I am at fault as regards  
the details. In the notice in N. L. L.  
it is stated the 2 1/2 acres was allotted  
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would give a modern aspect to the  
whole thing. Whereat I find it was  
a very ancient endowment of one  
acre. Having investigated the origin  
of many of the Church endowments  
'Lump-land fields', 'unknown acres',

*First page of a letter written on 7 December 1899*

**SNELSMORE  
NEWBURY**

7 Dec 1899

Dear Sir,

Just a line to say that I was asked to write a little notice of the letting by Candle, & which I gave to Mr. Corburn before witnessing the proceedings at his wish. So I find I was at fault as regard the details. Intro notice in h. h. h. it is stated the 2 1/2 acres was allotted under the Enclosure Award, which would give a modern aspect to the whole thing. Whereas I find it was a very ancient endowment of one acre. Having investigated the origin of many of these 'Churchwardens acres', 'Lamp-Acre fields', 'Unknown acres',

...

*The big clue as to the writer of this page is the embossed "SNELSMORE NEWBURY" at the top left of the page.*

*Research has identified that **Walter Money FSA** lived in the small village of Snesmore near Shaw, Newbury according to the 1901 Census. Further research revealed a blue plaque exists with the following citation "Near this spot stood Harborough House, the home circa 1880-1896 of Walter Money FSA (1836-1926) The founder of modern Newbury historical studies. Author of *The First and Second Battles of Newbury and the Siege of Donnington Castle* (1881), *The History of the Ancient Town and Borough of Newbury* (1887), *A Popular History of Newbury* (1905)".*

*FSA stands for: Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries of London.*

***Charles Edward Keyser**, Lord of the Manor at Aldermaston, was a fellow member of the Society of Antiquaries of London at the same time and it is highly probable that he requested Walter Money's help with this matter.*

*Research by Christopher Boott,  
Aldermaston History Group,  
3<sup>rd</sup> April 2020*



## *"Candle Auctions"*

"You could hear a pin drop."

I wonder how many people know the accepted origin of this phrase. I learnt it quite by accident to-day, while talking with an official at Lloyd's. Many years ago, I was told, it was customary to hold ship auctions at Lloyd's Coffee House on Tower Hill. Instead of a hammer, a pin was thrust into a lighted candle about an inch from the top; and the last bid made before the pin fell out of the melting tallow was accepted.

When this critical stage in the "candle auctions"—as they were then called—was reached, a deathlike calm came over the assembly, to enable those present "to hear the pin drop."

### *A Berkshire Survival*

So far as I know, Aldermaston, in Berkshire, is the only place in England where "candle auctions" are still held.

Every three years a piece of land, known as God's Acre, is let by auction. The churchwardens of the parish preside, and a pin is used instead of a hammer.

### *More Candle Auctions*

Aldermaston is not the only place in England where the candle auctions, to which you refer, are held (writes a correspondent). There is a piece of land at the curiously named village of Chedzoy, in Somerset, which at rare intervals is let by a similar method.

The custom also survives at Haxey, in Lincolnshire, where a candle auction is held every third year on Easter Monday.



"Newlands"

Lower Walton

Warrington

Lancashire

16<sup>th</sup>. July 1832

Rev. & Dear Sir

"Letting by Lighted Candle"

I understand that by  
an ancient custom in your  
Parish a field known as "Church  
Acre" is let every three years  
according to the following custom  
viz:— A Candle is lighted and  
one inch below the flame a  
pin is inserted in the Candle.  
Biddings are then taken and  
the last bidder when the pin  
drops out is declared the Tenant.

Will you please tell me if  
still observed?  
section was  
the last

5.0  
in annum?  
Nov 1929. (Confirmation)  
Nov 1831

much obliged  
information  
which you  
and as to send  
imped addressed  
ly

Yours faithfully  
Westbrook



2

Could you kindly tell me if  
this custom is still observed?  
When the last Auction was  
held? What was the last  
bid? <sup>a</sup> 2.1.33 £5.5.0  
per annum? Nov 1929. (Confession  
from 1880)

I should be much obliged  
to you for any information  
and particulars which you  
may be so kind as to send  
me.

I Enclose stamped addressed  
Envelope for reply

Yours faithfully  
H. J. Westbrook

The Vicar of Aldermaston  
nr, Reading  
Berks.



Newlands  
Lower Walton  
Warrington  
Lancashire  
16th July 1932

Revd & Dear Sir,

"Letting by Lighted Candle"

I understand that by an Ancient Custom in your Parish a field known as "Church Acre" is let every three years according to the following custom viz :- A Candle is lighted and a pin is inserted in the Candle. Biddings are then taken and the last bidder when the pin drops out is declared the Tenant.

Could you kindly tel me if this custom is still observed? When the last auction was held? What was the last bid?

I should be much obliged to you for any information and particularly which you may be so kind as to lend me.

I enclose a stamped addressed envelope for reply.

Yours faithfully  
H.J. Westbrook



1.

## The Candle Auction.

"The 'Candle-Auction' will be held on Monday  
December 12<sup>th</sup> 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 12<sup>th</sup> 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



3.

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.

Lusurily 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 height's 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.



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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 Aldermaston, in compensation for their lands, grounds and rights of common, a plot of land in Church Meadow containing 2a.1r.33p. 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 one acre. 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 search before that ordinary but almost obsolete domestic article could be obtained.

The Lady from "The Court" 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 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.

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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.

12-12-1932



# "CANDLE AUCTIONS"

By H. J. WESTBROOK

A legal contributor to a monthly Law Journal of December, 1931, recorded that when advising on a case under the Housing Act 1930, where the local authority had ordered the demolition of a small cottage as unfit for human habitation, he had found with the papers, an auctioneers' advertisement, stating that they had been instructed to sell by auction, on a certain day in 1925, a cottage and out-buildings and arable land known as "Church Acre," situate at Chedzoy, Somerset, and that the property would be sold for a term of 21 years as from Michaelmas 1925, in accordance with the wish of the donor and according to an ancient custom viz., "During the Burning of Half an Inch of Candle," the last bidder, prior to the said candle being consumed, to be declared the purchaser.

Feeling interested in this account of this old custom, I have been at some trouble to obtain more information and particulars, especially as to its present survival and in what districts.

Acknowledgment cannot here be made to all the persons, nor disclosure of all the sources from whom and from which I have been assisted with or derived information and particulars.

Much has been gleaned from the letters of correspondents to the "Sunday Times" newspaper, to each and all of whom I express my indebtedness and thanks.

In particular, however, I acknowledge the assistance afforded to me by Medical Dr. William Stephens, of Newquay, Cornwall; Science Dr. Dexter, of Perranporth, Cornwall; Mr. George Penrose, the Curator of the County Museum and Art Gallery, Truro; the Rev. F. Newham (vicar of Aldermaston, near Reading, Berkshire); the Rev. George R. Mullens (rector of Chedzoy); Admiral H. L. Parry, of Aldermaston; the Rev. F. W. Paul, M.A. (retired vicar of S. Columb Minor, Cornwall); the Rev. T. H. Sheppard (vicar of Haxey); and others who I hope will forgive me if, from lapse of memory or lack of documentary record I fail to notice nominatim.

Dr. Stephens writes.—

This quaint custom, known as "Candle Auction" is said to be a French one; it became legalised in England in the reign of George III, when an Act was passed directing that herbage should be sold by candle-light, and that the last bidder, when the flame had burned out, should be the purchaser. The custom is still observed at Tatworth, near Chard, in letting a field called Stowell meadow.

In the museum of the Royal Institution of Cornwall is a fine auction glass (to protect the flame) twenty-two inches high, and with a folded base eight and a-half inches in diameter. I bought it from a dealer many years ago; he found it at Evercreech, in Somerset.

Here is a photograph of the auction glass above referred to, which by pro-



An Auction Glass

tecting the flame from air draughts prevented the candle from swaling or guttering.

Dr. Stephens sends a copy of a cutting from a newspaper describing a Candle Auction at Tatworth. The article states that the tenants on the estate of which Stowell meadow forms a part, were invited to meet at the Village Inn, and during the burning of an inch of candle, made bids for renting the ground for the ensuing year. During the evening those interested partook of a supper. Certain fines were imposed and afterwards spent upon refreshments for the company.

When in Cornwall in June, 1932, I inspected at the County Museum, Truro, the auction glass above mentioned.

Candle Auctions were not limited to the sale or letting of land. They were concerned with the sales of ships and stores, goods and articles of different sorts and even of slaves.

Milton in his letters said:—

The Council thinks it meet to propose the way of selling by "inch of candle," as being the most probable means to procure the true value of the goods.

Here are some advertisements of Candle Auctions:—

In an old Liverpool newspaper, "Williamson's Advertiser," of August 20th, 1756, are the two following announcements:—

To be sold by the Candle, at 1 o'clock noon, at R. Williamson's shop, twelve pipes of raisin wine, two boxes of bottled cyder, six sacks of flour, three negro men, two negro women, two negro boys, and one negro girl.

For sale by the Candle, at the Merchants' Coffee-house, a fine negro boy, 11 years of age, imported from Bonny by Mr. Thomas Yates, Guinea merchant in Cleveland Square, where he may be seen until the time of sale.

is an auction bill which runs thus:—

For  
S A L E  
by the  
C A N D L E  
at the

Bank Coffee-House, Threadneedle Street, on Wednesday the 19th May, 1790, Immediately after the Change is over; The following GOODS, Being part of the Stock of the Saw Mill, Dartford, Kent. Then follows the list of the goods, and the conditions of sale, which begin, "The highest Bidder (in due Time) shall be declared the Buyer . . . ."

The "Times" of January 1st, 1788, advertised:—

SALE BY CANDLE.  
At Garrways Coffee-house, in Exchange Alley, Cornhill, On Friday the 18th of

January. At Five o'Clock in the Afternoon.

The following Goods,—viz.,  
113 bags St. Domingo Cotton, just landed.  
107 pockets ditto.  
4 bags Granada ditto.  
1 ditto Montserrat ditto.  
50 ditto Brazil ditto.  
1 Matt Smyrna ditto—damaged.  
3 casks Sago.  
3 ditto short long pepper.  
15 sacks Aleppo Galls.  
2 casks Gentian.  
12 ditto Gum Arabic.  
6 ditto Verdigrease.  
10 bags Smyrna Cotton.  
39 casks of Naples Argol, damaged.  
Catalogues of which will be timely delivered by Rychard Kymer and Co.

In the "Daily Courant" of 31st March, 1726, appears the following:—

For Sale by the Candle.—At the Marine Coffee House, in Birch Lane, To-morrow, the 1st of April, at Five o'clock in the Afternoon, 33 Bales and Bags of Thrown and Raw Silk; Being the remainder of the goods of Mr. James Angelras, Merchant, taken by Commission of Bankrupt. To be seen till the Time of Sale, at the House of Sir George Caswal and Mr. Henry Symonds (commonly called the Sword Blade Company's House) in Birch Lane, near the Royal Exchange, and to be sold by—Edward Williams, Broker.

Pepys, in his diary, under date 3rd September, 1662, writes:—

After dinner to the office, and there we met and sold the Weymouth, Success and Fellowship hulks, where pleasant to see how backward men are at first to bid; and yet when the candle is going out, how they bawl and dispute afterwards who bid the most first. And here observed one man cunninger than the rest that was sure to bid the last man and carry it; and inquiring the reason, he told me that just as the flame goes out the smoke descends, which is a thing I never observed before, and by that he do know the instant when to bid last, which is very pretty.

A correspondent from Croughton, Brackley, Northants, contributes the following:—

Every summer the crop of hay on a portion of a particular field is sold "By the Candle" in this parish. I have been at the sale on many occasions, and have dealt with the matter from time to time in the local Press. There are many places where sale "by candle" is, or has been, carried on.

Admiral Parry, of Aldermaston, sends me the following contribution:—

"The 'Candle Auction' will be held on Monday, December 12th, at seven 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.

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"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 2a. 1r. 33p. 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 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 December 12th, 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 Mass 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 nine miles to the nearest market town, and a lengthy search before that ordinary, but almost obsolete, domestic article could be obtained.

"The lady from 'The Big House' solemnly inserted a large-headed scarf pin into the candle at a distance of one 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 20s. per annum rent.

"Leisurely the bid rose to 40s., 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 to change hands, a few of the sales being these weekly sales, few jobs called 'of' . . . ."

WARRINGTON

GUARDIAN

SAT. MAY 62

1933



"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 5s., and very cautiously, 75s. 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 collapse, in this case, during the momentary silence following the 75s. 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 three 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."

The Rector of Chedzoy, Bridgewater, Somerset, writes:—"There is a small plot of land just outside the boundary of this parish, known by the name of 'Church Acre,' being slightly less than an acre in extent. This land was left to the Rector and churchwardens of Chedzoy, to be sold every 21 years for the benefit of the Parish Church, while half an inch of candle was burning, the last bidder before the fall of the wick to be the purchaser.

"I have seen this done twice during my incumbency. It takes place at the village inn, a local auctioneer presiding. When all is ready and the auctioneer has made his opening remarks, the half-inch candle is placed on the table before him and lighted, and the bidding commences, slowly at first, but more rapidly as the fall of the wick draws near. The auctioneer announces who the purchaser is in the ordinary way. The whole proceedings create a considerable amount of merriment.

"There is an ancient brass figure of a man in armour in the church, date about 1450, said to be of the Somerset family of "Yeo," though all trace of any inscription is missing.

"It is commonly reported in the parish that it was he who left the 'Church Acre,' but I should say that this is, to say the least of it, doubtful."

From the foregoing it would seem that a pin was not used at Chedzoy.

The Vicar of Haxey, Doncaster, writes:—"The candle auction is held here every third year on Easter Monday at an inn. The meadowing and grass cutting of the grass-covered wide pathways through the fields are let in this

way. These grass 'roads' are called 'meres.'

The auction is conducted in the way usual in such ancient ways. A pin is stuck into a candle, which is then lit, and the person who bids as the pin drops from the candle is the winner.

"We still have the curfew rung here at seven p.m. all the winter months, and have an ancient game played here called the "Haxey Hood" on January 6th, which, I believe, is only played here, and here only, on January 6th—old Christmas Day.

"Most of the land here is carefully cultivated: so grass is sometimes at a premium."



## LAND BY INCH OF CANDLE

SIR,—The proposal, made public, to establish an Air College at Aldermaston, Berkshire, a village within three miles of Silchester (*Calleva Atrebatum*) reminds me of an ancient custom that survives at Aldermaston almost alone.

I mean the letting of land by inch of candle. Since 1815 two-and-a-half acres of meadow called Church Acre (*sic*) have been let triennially by this method, the land having been bequeathed for the benefit of the Parish Church.

Here at Aldermaston a pin is stuck horizontally through a tallow candle an inch, or even half an inch, below the tip of the candle; the auctioneer lights the wick, and bidding begins. The successful bidder is he (or, as it happened three years ago, she) who is last to bid before the pin, as the tallow melts, slips and falls to the table.

I remember witnessing the ritual at Aldermaston more than 30 years ago. The auctioneer was the vicar; around him were a score of farmers and tradesmen, who were joined by the squire. The bidding, started at £3 10s., rose by half-crowns to £5, at which the auction closed.

Nobody had seemed in a hurry. As the candle burned, the party talked crops and sport, and now-and-then one member would obliquely bid another half-crown. In this way the proceedings dragged out for 20 minutes.

But, I remember, there was a sporting finish. The pin faltered as the butcher cried "£5"—and fell as a neighbour raised the bid. There was

good-humoured disagreement. "Toss up" said the squire; and so the rivals did.

The squire was the late Charles E. Keyser, President of the British Archaeological Association and one of our soundest authorities on English church architecture. He died in 1929.

The auction used to be an excuse for innocent festivity, the circulation of the punch-bowl, and the puffing of churchwardens. But 30 years ago, I vouch, it was already very matter-of-fact with little jesting on the slow journey.

Inch-of-candle letting was known in 1652: there is evidence that it was a borrowing from the French. In a London newspaper of 1779 I saw this advertisement:

"For sale by the candle at the Buffalo Tavern, Bloomsbury, to-morrow the remaining quantities of several cargoes of——" there followed a list of timbers lying at Belvidier Wharf, Lambeth (to-day the site of the County Hall, London).

The present vicar of Aldermaston has been good enough to tell me that he knows of only two other places where the custom persists: Chedzoy, near Bridgwater, Somerset; and Haxey, near Gainsborough, Lincolnshire.—A. G. CLARKE, 23, Parkside, Mill Hill, London, N.W.7.

COUNTRY LIFE

FEB 1945





How far that little Candle  
throws his beams !

So shines a good deed in a  
Naughty World.

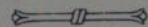


ALDERMASTON  
CANDLE AUCTION

1950

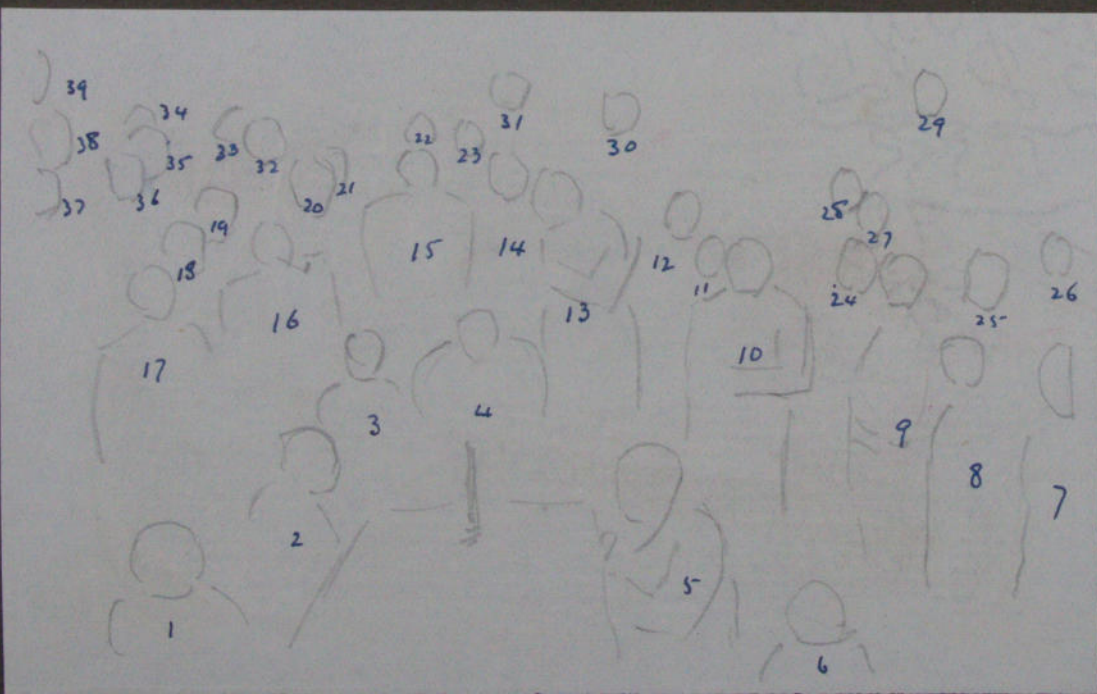


*I*T is said that but three of such auctions continue to be held in England. At Aldermaston (or Elder Mason) it is a triennial event for the grazing of Church Acre for the ensuing three years.



*A Souvenir of the Candle Auction  
and a token of Good Wishes.*

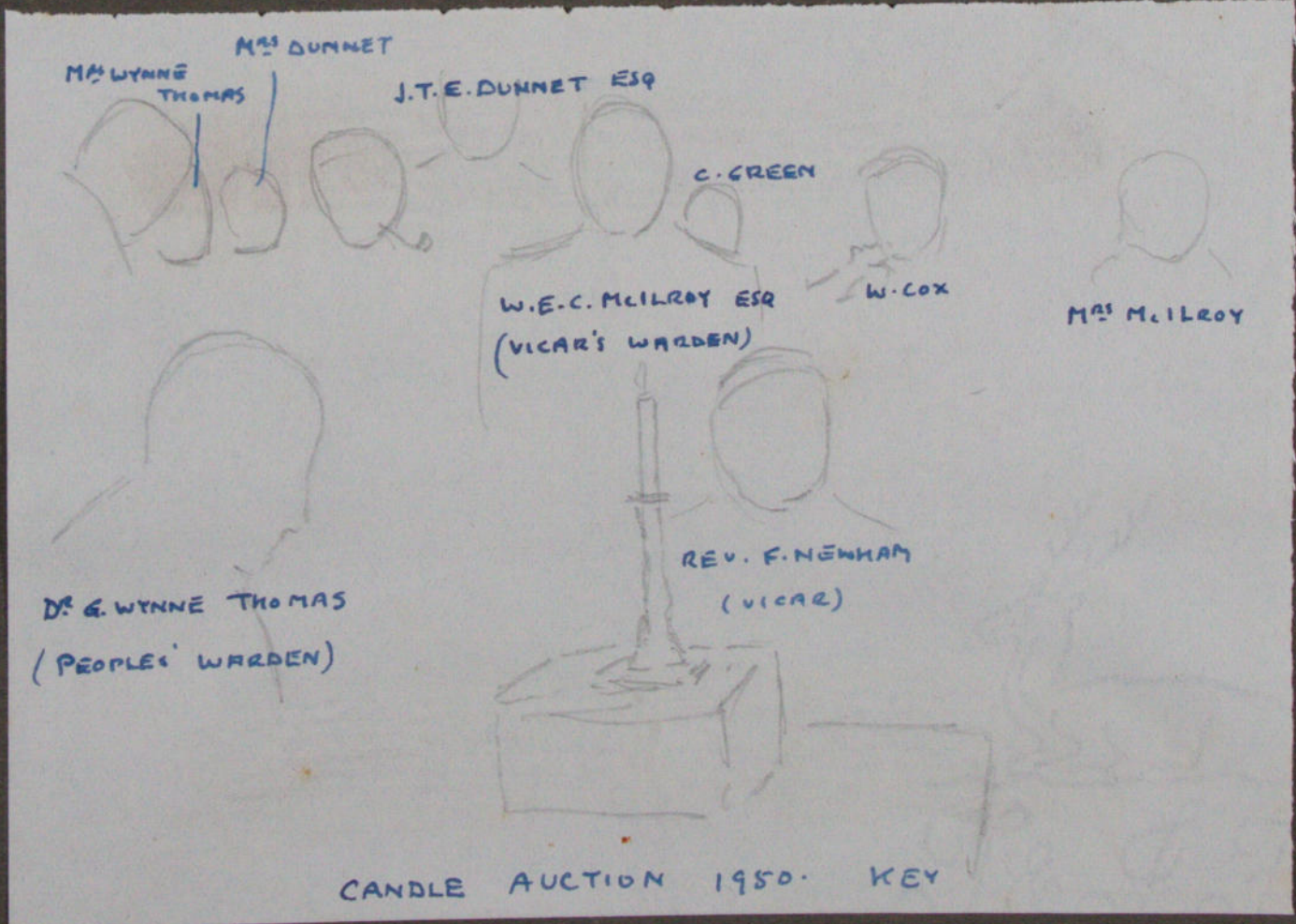




KEY.

1. MRS NEWHAM
2. DR G WYNNE THOMAS (Paragon Warden)
3. D. JEGGO.
4. REV F. NEWHAM (Vicar)
5. W.E.C. MULLROY ESQ (Vicar's Warden)
6. MRS A. COX.
- 7.
8. MRS BREWERTON.
9. P. BREWERTON ESQ.
10. A.F. BLAKE ESQ.
11. M. GODDARD.
12. MRS H. GODDARD.
13. W.S. SURRIDGE ESQ.
14. F. COMAE ESQ.
15. D. SURRIDGE ESQ.
- 16.
17. A.B. HEWITT. ESQ
- 18.
- 19.
20. H.B. WALTER
21. MRS M. GODDARD.
- 22.
23. A. STEPHENS.
24. G. EVANS ESQ.
25. D.R. CHICK ESQ.
- 26.
27. MRS G. EVANS.
28. R. CLARK ESQ.
- 29.
30. C.G. FORD ESQ.
31. S.E. MOORE ESQ.
32. J. GODDARD.
33. MRS WYNNE THOMAS.
- 34.
35. MRS DUNNET.
36. MISS NEATE.
37. MRS MULLROY.
38. S.R. NEATE ESQ
39. J.T.E. DUNNET ESQ







## CANDLE AUCTION AT ALDERMASTON



THE VICAR of Aldermaston, the Rev. F. Newham, presiding over the triennial candle auction for the grazing of Church Acre, Aldermaston, held in the parish hall on Wednesday. In only two other places in the country does such a custom survive. Bids are accepted so long as a horseshoe nail remains stuck in the side of the candle.

SEE OVER



# One Candle Holds the Limelight In 'Atom Village'

"Evening News" Reporter

SCIENTISTS of Aldermaston, Berkshire, are talking not of their atom-smasher, which develops an electrical pressure of 4,000,000 volts, but of a one-candle-power auction sale which is to be held.

The scientists work at the village's Big House, the old mansion of Aldermaston Court. Behind walls in 130 acres of parkland they are engaged in research. Their responsibilities are huge.

But the responsibility for the solitary candle and the auction sale is that of Aldermaston's new vicar the Rev. Stanley Young, who has come to the village from mission work in South-East London.

On December 18 in the parish hall the vicar will carry out a custom which has not changed since the reign of George III and probably dates back to the Middle Ages.

## A PIN DROPS And the Bids Stop

He will sell by candlelight auction a two-and-a-half-acre meadow to farmers who want to graze their cattle there.

A pin will be stuck through the candle half an inch from the top and the wick lit. As the candle burns down to the pin the farmers will bid.

When the flame reaches the pin and it drops to the ground the bidding will cease and the last bidder will have bought the land.

Once this custom was common throughout Britain as a means of leasing grazing rights. Now it is only to be seen at Hazey in Lincolnshire, Chedzoy in Somerset and at Aldermaston where it is held every three years.

At the last Berkshire candle auction a farmer secured the acreage for annual rental of £8.

The vicar who conducted that auction had done so for 20 years using only one tallow candle a foot long during the whole of that time.

EVENING STANDARD. FEB. DECE 11/3

# CHURCH ACRE GOING —GOING—GOING BY CANDLELIGHT

Evening Standard Reporter: Aldermaston, Berks, Friday

Farmers will gather next Friday at Aldermaston's village hall, not far from the Ministry of Supply Atomic Weapons Research Station at Aldermaston, Berks, to take part in an auction of a plot of land owned by the church.

But it will be no ordinary auction. It will be held by the vicar of Aldermaston, the Rev. S. Young, and it will be a candle auction.

The vicar will place a pin in the candle about an inch from the lighted wick. As the tallow melts the farmers will bid for the land. When the pin drops the auction will end.

During the auction every care will be taken that there are no draughts in the hall. Should the lighted candle be blown out before its time it is a sign of death, say the superstitious.

Candle auctions date back to the Middle Ages. The selling of Church Acre, established at Aldermaston in the reign of George III, takes place every three years.

At one time candle auctions were common. Now it is believed they are only held at Chedzoy and Tatworth in Somerset, Grimston in Leicestershire, Broadway in Dorset, and Aldermaston.



13/12/1950

## AUCTION BY CANDLE LIGHT

**A**LDERMASTON, Berkshire, held its triennial auction sale by candle of 2½ acres of Church Meadow last week. The method was laid down in 1698 for imported East Indies goods, although it was commonly used before this. A horseshoe nail, stuck into the candle near the tip, falls when the flame reaches it, and the last man to bid is successful. The last half minute is vital. In 1622, Pepys, attending the sale of three ships, "observed one man, cunninger than the rest, that was sure to bid the last man and carry it, and, enquiring the reason, he told me that, just as the flame goes out, the smoke descends, which is a thing I never observed before, and by that men do know the instant when to bid the last man." The custom also survives at Chedzoy, Somerset, and Haxey, Lines.



The Rev. F. Newham, auctioneer, lights the candle. Church Acre has been let triennially since 1815.



The flame goes out, the nail falls, and for £12 15s., Mr. Percy Surridge buys three years' grazing.







Dear Sir  
 Sorry to have kept you so long

in reply to your inquiry about Conde Auction  
 - some years ago, there was some such  
 affair at Low Burnham - in the Parish -  
 but L. B. is two & half Miles from the  
 Vicarage - had a "wait my chance"  
 get over that -

Apparently about 26 yrs ago, there  
 was some such effort - evening of Easter Monday  
 when lands were "let" under the idea, with  
 plenty of free beer &c. - but could not  
 get hold of any other details. I have  
 been here 15 yrs & have not heard of any  
 celebration of this kind.

Yours faithfully,

F. Turton Dixon.

April 28th 1953.



### WICK AUCTIONS

To the Editor of The Daily Telegraph

Sir—I was interested to learn from Mr. John Herbert's article that wick auctions are still held in France, because at least one such auction has been held regularly in this country for 122 years.

Shortly before Eastertide each year, bids are made at the Olde Poppe Inn, Tatsworth, Somerset, while an inch of tallow candle burns away, for the tenancy of a local mead famed for its watercress. The last bid before the light goes out is accepted.

The few people eligible to bid are traditionally served by the landlord with beer, blue cheese and watercress sandwiches, and are fined if, during the 20 or 30 minutes while the candle is alight, they chatter or leave their seats. Yours faithfully,

London, W.1. G. V. PEARSE.

D. TELEGRAPH 25.7.13



The Homemaker —By MONA PURSER

## Ancient English Custom Governs Land Leases

The quaint and colorful local customs in England would surely fill not volumes but libraries and one that was brought to our attention recently is observed every third December in the parish hall of the Berkshire Village of Aldermaston—a stone's throw from Britain's newest atomic research station—where it has persisted ever since the reign of George III.

Some time in the evening of the 13th of December the Rev. F. Newham, vicar of Aldermaston, carried across the road from his ivy-covered vicarage to the hall, a foot-long tallow candle—cracked with age—and a long heavy pin. Farmers and their families gathered 'round as the pin was stuck through the candle, half an inch from the top, and the wick lit. The flickering of the flame was signal for bidding to begin on a three-year lease of a 2½-acre meadow of lush green razing land. As the diminishing candle approached the pin the bids rose higher and when finally the melting wax loosened the pin and it fell with a clang into a tin the last bidder was awarded the use of the land and the candle auction was over until 1953.

This system was legalized about 200 years ago and widely used at country markets. Now, it is only known at Haxey, in Lincolnshire, and Chedzey in Somerset, outside of Aldermaston, where the land was bequeathed to the church in 1815 with the provision that its use be derived in this way. Mr. Newham says that he has conducted the auction himself for the past 20 years and with the same candle.

\* \* \* \* \*