

*Scrap  
Book*



Chedzoy Rectory  
Bridgewater  
Somerset.

April 25. 1953.

Dear St. Thomas,

Thank you for your letter &  
I am sorry to delay in answering it -

It is interesting to know there are 3 parishes  
which still hold Auction Sales by the burning of a  
Candle.

Here it takes place every 21 years -  
It was last held in 1946.

A piece of land known as "Church Acre", measuring  
3 or 4 ft. was bequeathed to the Church as is generally  
believed by Richard Seydeman whose will was proved  
in 1499. It was to be sold every 21 years, & the money  
obtained thereby to go to the Church & the land is rented  
by the purchaser for  $\frac{1}{6}$  nominal rent.  
at the burning of  $\frac{1}{2}$  inch candle

Last auction (1946) it was sold for £125 -

The Bishop of Bath & Wells was present & it took  
place in the village Inn.

The candle for the last sale burned for  $4\frac{1}{2}$   
minutes - It was especially made by the firm



Messrs George Jarman, Candle Manufacturers  
1 Bridgewater - an old established firm  
which has made the candle on several  
occasions -

The last tidden before the candle ( $\frac{1}{2}$  inch)  
goes out is declared the purchaser -  
It was bought by Mr. H. Newton of  
Chedzoy - The Auctioneers were  
Messrs W. H. Tamlyn of Bridgewater &  
Conducted by Mr. W. H. Tamlyn -

In 1883.	the sale of the land fetched	£ 71-1-10
2- 1862	. . . . .	£ 71
2- 1841	. . . . .	£ 53
2- 1925	. . . . .	£ 80

(the candle burned then for 23 minutes)

My wife & I both were in Birmingham  
many years - I was at S. Petrichs  
High gate - Seeing your name  
we feel you were also in that  
renowned city!

Please note that the  
Incumbent here is Reelin  
in case you make any reference to Chedzoy.

Yours truly  
Cecie B. Hunt.







## BECAUSE OF A NAIL...

### Candle Auction At Aldermaston

**A**N Atomic Research Station is now established in the small Berkshire village of Aldermaston. But last Friday a custom "which is worth preserving as an interesting reminder of the past and the days when Aldermaston was a peaceful, sleepy, little Berkshire village" was observed.

Drinking rum-punch and smoking churchwarden pipes, local people gathered in the Village Hall for the triennial Candle Auction of the Church Acre, a plot of land of over two acres. The Church Acre at Aldermaston has been let triennially by this method since 1815. In that year there was allotted to the churchwardens of Aldermaston "in compensation for their loss of grounds and rights of common a plot of land in Church Mead containing 2 acres, 1 rod, 33 poles."

On Friday a horseshoe nail was inserted in a tallow candle, about an inch below the wick, by the Bishop of Reading, the Rt. Rev. A. G. Parham. The vicar of Aldermaston, the Rev. Stanley Young, lit the candle and conducted the bidding, which continued until the horseshoe nail dropped out after eight minutes six seconds. The vicar exercised his traditional right, and made the first bid of £1. Last man to bid before the nail fell was Dr. Wynne Thomas, people's warden at the church. The land will be for his use during the next three years at an annual rent of 261s. The money is used for church purposes.

It is thought that only one other such renting of ecclesiastical property is still in practice. This is at Chedzoy, in Somerset, where the auction is held every 21 years. At Chedzoy half-an-inch of candle is burnt, and the last bidder before the candle goes out is the purchaser. But the Aldermaston Candle Auction is a unique sale in that a pin or nail is used.



THE SCENE at the Aldermaston candle auction. The Rev. S. Young, who conducted the auction, is in the centre, and on the right is the Bishop of Reading, the Rt. Rev. A. G. Parham.

READING MERCURY.

DEC 23. 1953







# CANDLE AUCTION AT ALDERMASTON

## Bishop and Vicar Bid in "Atom Village" Parish Hall

By BERNARD CAUSTON

**A**LDERMASTON, one of Berkshire's most picturesque villages, which was mentioned in Domesday Book, has once again witnessed the historic "Candle Auction" determining the occupation of the Parish Acre for the next three years.

This acre has been let by auction held triennially since 1815. In that year a plot of land in Church Mead was allotted to the churchwardens of Aldermaston "in compensation for the loss of grounds and rights of commons." The rent paid by the highest bidder to acquire the land for each period of three years has gone toward church maintenance and expenses ever since.

In the week-end preceding Christmas the Candle Auction was held at the Parish Hall, Aldermaston, not far from the Ministry of Supply's Atomic Weapons Research Establishment. The auction was conducted by the new Vicar of St. Mary the Virgin, the Rev. Stanley Young, who was until recently Warden of Pembroke College, Cambridge, Mission at Walworth, London, S.E. Local farmers and other residents were present in force.

Also smoking churchwarden pipes and sipping the rum punch, which is the traditional beverage for this occasion, were seated around the table the Bishop of Reading, the Right Rev. A. G. Parham, and the People's Churchwarden, Dr. G. Wynne Thomas.

The Vicar opened the bidding with £1 and the Bishop followed with £2. Prices mounted steadily with brisk bidding from Mr. Percy Surridge (brother of Mr. W. S. Surridge, captain of Surrey County Cricket Club), who gained the Acre in 1950 and had an eye to its supply of willow for the bats which his firm makes. This time, however, it was not to be.

The Vicar spurred on the auction with a rousing recital of the area's other merits as a browsing meadow.

As explained at the outset the auction would continue until the horseshoe nail inserted in the tallow candle fell out, according to traditional usage. Just after Dr. Wynne Thomas had bid £13 1s. the nail fell and the acre was therefore allotted to him. This was a record bid

exceeding the previous highest in 1950, which amounted to £12 15s. The same tallow candle, which has already served for 30 years, is likely to do the duty when Candle Auction comes round again in 1956.

Meanwhile church life continues at Aldermaston and is confronted with particular problems arising out of the establishment, some three miles from the village, of the atomic research station and of the new housing estate built for its employees. Shops and a cinema have been provided there. But there is no permanent place of worship so far on the estate, the growth of which coincided with an interregnum after the death of the last vicar of St. Mary the Virgin, Aldermaston. His much younger successor, Mr. Young, has found keen co-operation in the Christian laity among the residents

of the estate for strengthening church life there. He conducts Sunday services and Sunday school are also held in the local school in addition to worship down the hill at Aldermaston.

Christian life in the "Atom Village" does not end with Sunday worship and house-to-house visiting. A Nativity play, "Three Roses," by Margaret Cropper, was given by a cast of local children in the Boundary Hall, so-called because it is situated on the boundary between Berkshire and Hampshire. In a short address after the play the Vicar thanked volunteer talent and alluded briefly to the need for a regular church in the estate where personnel of the Atomic Weapons Research Establishment are housed. He then led the audience in prayer.

Tea was provided afterwards and a local housewife remarked to me "I was glad of those prayers. We need them here in the estate, believe me."



The Vicar of the Parish and the Bishop of Reading (right) watch the candle burn down during the traditional auction at Aldermaston.

THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND  
NEWSPAPER.

JANUARY 15 1954









- |                               |                     |
|-------------------------------|---------------------|
| 1. B. LYONS (B.O.C)           | 22. MISS M. WATERS  |
| 2. DR G. WYNN THOMAS          | 23. R. CLARK        |
| 3. THE VICAR                  | 24. S. MOBBE        |
| 4. BISHOP OF READING          | 25. K. GODDARD      |
| 5. M <sup>S</sup> NEWHAM      | 26. W. KITT.        |
| 6.                            | 27. W. COX.         |
| 7. FOGHS                      | 28. MISS M. LIEBMAN |
| 8. GARWOOD                    | 29. J. LIEBMAN.     |
| 9. P. SURRIDGE                |                     |
| 10. M <sup>S</sup> FOGHS      |                     |
| 11. C. WOODLEY                |                     |
| 12. A. WISEMORE               |                     |
| 13. M <sup>S</sup> H. GODDARD |                     |
| 14. M. COOPER                 |                     |
| 15. A. WEST                   |                     |
| 16. J. JENKINS                |                     |
| 17.                           |                     |
| 18. R. FREEMAN                |                     |
| 19. P. TULL                   |                     |
| 20. J. KAUFMANN               |                     |
| 21. C. GREEN                  |                     |





# BERKSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL.

Tel. No. Reading 3081  
REF. W/H. R5/105.  
YOUR REF.....

BERKS RECORD OFFICE,  
SHIRE HALL, READING.

ALL COMMUNICATIONS TO BE ADDRESSED TO "THE COUNTY ARCHIVIST."

PETER WALNE, B.A.  
COUNTY ARCHIVIST

21st December, 1953.

Dear Dr. Wynn-Thomas,

I enclose on a separate sheet a number of references to the Church Acre which I have found in the Churchwardens' Accounts from 1800-1882.

You will see from these that the name Church Acre was in use well before the Enclosure Award was made, though whether it was the same piece of land which is now called Church Acre is not quite so clear. There is a reference on the first page of the Accounts which says "Church Acre is 2a.1r.33p." which, of course, is the same extent as it is now. Whether this note was made at a later date or not would be extremely difficult to say.

You will see from the information which I have given that after 1815 it has not been an invariable custom to hold the auction every three years, for on four occasions the lease has been for a period of seven years. This rather upsets your calculation of how many auctions there have been. I have not come across any direct reference, so far, to the fact that the auction was a candle auction, but I do not think that this lack of information need worry us.

I have set out the information as far as possible in chronological order. That information which appears below the line across the page comes from the rear of the Account Book where it is recorded. Wherever I have given simply a date, a sum of money and a period of years, that indicates that there is a larger entry stating what on that particular date A.B. agreed to lease the land for £x for 'y' years.

After about 1839 a detailed agreement is entered in the Book with certain covenants which the lessee agrees to abide by during his tenancy. During the latter period the receipt of the actual rent is normally mentioned on the receipt side of the Churchwardens' Account for each year.

/Contd.



I have not given this information as I do not think it adds anything of value to what we already did know. In the earlier period I have included a note of rent received as that either supplements what we know or is the only actual information which we have for any particular year.

I hope that this information will be useful and the fact that it rather tends to upset some of our preconceived notions will not prove too disappointing.

If I should come across anything which gives definite proof of what or where Church Acre was before the Enclosure Award, then I will let you know at once.

With every good wish for Xmas and the New Year.

Yours sincerely,

Peter Walker

Dr. G. Wynn Thomas,  
"The Dene,"  
ALDERMASTON,  
Berks.



References to Church Acre in Aldermaston

Churchwardens' Accounts Vol.I. (D/P3 5/1)

April 6th	1801	-	John Thompson	£7. 0. 0.	3 yrs.
April 2nd	1804	-	Mr. Burn	£6.12. 6	3 yrs.
April 7th	1806	-	John Thompson	£6.11. 0.	1 yr.
March 30th	1807	-	James Burn	£6. 7. 6.	1 yr.
April 18th	1808	-	James Burn	£7.10. 0.	3 yrs.

A/C Mch. 1812-Eas.1813 Received £6.12.6. for Church Acre.  
 A/C Mch. 1813-Eas.1814 Spent on work in Church Acre £3.4.6.  
 A/C Mch. 1814-Eas.1815 Received for Church Acre £12.0.0.  
 A/C Eas.1815-Mch.25.1816 Paid for Inclosing the Church Acre £.1.10.8.  
 A/C Eas.1819-Eas.1820 Received of Mr. Byles on a/c of rent for Church Acre £14.7.0. on Aug.4th (1819).  
 March 28 (1820) received of Do. £13.18.6 overpaid £1.16.0.  
 Paid Mr. Congreve £26.19.6

April 23 1821 Received £12.12.6. one yrs. rent from Mr. Byles and paid it to Wm. Congreve.  
 April 19 1824 Vestry agreed unanimously "that an Organ should be purchased for the Church with the money now in hand, arising from the rent of the Church Acre."

A/C Eas.1824-Eas.1825 Received for Church Acre £8.10.0.  
 Eas.1826-Eas.1827 " " " " £8.10.0.

June 4th 1827 - James Goswell £8. 0. 0. 3 yrs.

1829 Received £8.10.0. for Church Acre from Mr. Byles  
 Received £8.10.0. for Church Acre from Mr. Goswell.

April 13th	1830	-	William Hickman	£7. 0. 0.	3 yrs.
April 8th	1833	-	Kendrick Hickman	£7.10. 0.	3 yrs.
April 27th	1836	-	James Goswell	£6.10. 0.	3 yrs.
April 1st	1839	-	Mr. John Wimball	£8. 5. 0.)	} (Details of lease given in both cases)
March 24th	1846	-	John Wimball	£8. 7. 6.)	
April 12th	1852	-	Thomas Wm. Hicks	£7.17. 6.	7 yrs.
April 25th	1859	-	Thomas Wm. Hicks	£6.12. 6.	7 yrs.
Dec. 31st	1859	-	Thomas Linnell	£6.12. 6.	} (took over from TWH)
Nov. 21st	1866	-	Matthew Knight	£8. 5. 0	
Nov. 19th	1869	-	Joseph James Gatcombe	£8.15. 0	3 yrs.
Dec. 2nd	1872	-	John Wright	£8. 0. 0	3 yrs.
Dec. 3rd	1875	-	John Wright	£5. 0. 0	3 yrs.
Mar. 7th	1879	-	John Wright	£4.10. 0	3 yrs.
Dec. 29th	1882	-	John Wright	£4.10. 0	3 yrs.

April 7th 1806 - A meeting of the 'principal inhabitants' agreed that the rent from a piece of land called the Church Acre should be invested in the hands of William Congreve, Esq., to be applied as occasion may require to the use of the Church.

Oct. 29th	1806	-	Receipt for £6.12. 6	from James Joplen.	
Apr. 29th	1807	-	Receipt for £6.14. 6	from James Joplen.	
Oct. 20th	1807	-	Receipt for £6.17. 6	from James Joplen.	
May 23rd	1808	-	Receipt for £7.10. 0	from James Joplen	
May 13th	1811	-	Receipt for £6.12. 6	from Mr. Odell.	
April 23rd	1810	-	John Wix	£6.12. 6.	3 yrs.
April 19th	1813	-	John Wix	£8.13. 0	1 yr.
April 11th	1814	-	Thomas Paice	£12. 0. 0	3 yrs.
April 17th	1817	-	William Byles	£12. 2. 6	3 yrs.
July 26th	1823	-	Received of Byles	£26. 1. 0	3 yrs.

Receipts 1817- 23 totalled £88.6.11. paid towards organ.





Both the Candle Auction and the Nativity Play were fully reported in the local press and I was delighted to read such good (and thoroughly well-deserved) reviews of the Play. In view of this there doesn't seem to be any need to include reports of this type and I offer instead some personal comments on these events.

I approached the Candle Auction on 13th December with a certain amount of apprehension, not knowing quite what to expect - perhaps there would only be very few people in the Hall -- perhaps there would be long silences during which the completely inexperienced "auctioneer" would have to try to stimulate some bidding. As it turned out I need have had no fears for there was quite a large crowd and the bidding was brisk from the moment the candle was lighted until, after some tense moments when having moved without falling right out, the nail finally clattered to the table. Altogether it was a very enjoyable occasion and I should like to thank all who contributed to its success.

It is a source of wonder that in its 18th year the Nativity Play could still be such a wonderful experience. It says much for the devotion of all those concerned in this production that it was so. The church was well filled on each of the four evenings, and the many people who expressed their deep appreciation as they went out were, I'm sure, speaking for all those present. Having a gathering in the Village Hall after the last performance was a splendid idea and we are all most grateful to the Wives' Group for seeing to the catering and making the Hall look so attractive.

JAN: 1975

Yours sincerely,

ROSS STONE



## CANDLE AUCTION

Candle auctions are of some antiquity, and depend on the burning of a definite length of candle, bidding lasting during the burning, the last bid before the candle goes out being successful. Milton mentions them in his letters, and Pepys describes the sale of three hulks under the date Sept 3rd, 1661, in his diary:—"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 I observed one man cunninger than the rest, that was sure to bid the last man, and to 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 he do know the instant when to bid last".

In England it is still used as a method of auctioning land in one or two places. In Tatsworth, Somerset, a local mead, famed for its watercress, has been auctioned there at Eastertide for the last 123 years. During the bidding, the landlord of the inn where the auction is held serves beer, blue cheese and water-cress sandwiches. Anyone who chatters or leaves his seat during the auction is fined. One inch of tallow candle is burned. In Chedzoy, also in Somerset, the Church Acre is let by candle auction every 21 years. Half an inch of candle is burned, and on the last occasion, in 1946, it fetched £125 plus a nominal rent of 1/6 per annum. This is the only ecclesiastical candle auction in England, other than Aldermaston, that at Haxey, in Lincolnshire, having lapsed 29 years ago. Candle auctions are still in use in parts of France for the sale of the vintage.

In Aldermaston the procedure is slightly different, in that a pin or horse-shoe nail is inserted in a tallow candle, about an



ing continues until it falls out, the  
being successful in obtaining the  
three years. The sum bid repre-

fact, 2acre 1rod 33pole, and is  
man's Cottage. The renting by  
back to 1801 when the successful  
was auctioned for varying periods  
s, but once for 1 year, once for 6  
years. Since 1866 it has apparently  
re. The present auction is appar-  
is a record.

was an award under the Inclosures  
effective on April 16th, 1815. What  
his date is not known, but presump-  
ton Common, for the award states  
urchwardens for the time being in  
grounds and rights of common,"  
about one acre in extent. Apparently  
not in good order at the time, and in  
1816 was spent in putting it in order,  
enclosed at a cost of £1.10.8.

meeting of the "principle inhabitants  
of ground called the Church Acre  
lands of William Congreve, (the Lord  
as occasion may require to the use

rent averaged £12.8.6 per annum,  
April 19th, 1824, it was unanimously  
d be purchased for the Church with  
ing from the rent of the Church Acre".  
cost of the organ was £88.6.11.

Since that date, the proceeds have been devoted to the Church Funds. The annual rent has, of course, varied, the highest recorded being £14.7.0, paid by Mr. Byles in 1819. After that it steadily declined, until in 1882, it was only £4.10.0. The lowest recorded was £3.10.0, during the 1939-45 war. At the last auction in 1953, the successful bid was £13.1.0.

So an old custom, a relic of bygone days, is still observed in a village whose name is associated with one of the most modern developments of science, to remind us of the long history of one of the small communities that make up the background of English life.



## As the Candle Burns Down . . . CHURCH ACRE IS GOING, GOING, GONE!

**NEVER** in living memory had there been such a large crowd at Aldermaston's ancient candle auction as in the Village Hall on Wednesday night—NEVER in all the 48 auctions previously held had the final bid been so high. How slowly that half-inch of tallow candle (it has been in use for 26 or so years) seemed to burn away as people bid against each other for the three-year lease of the Church Acre; how long before, with a tiny tinkle and shouts from everyone, the horseshoe nail or pin fell out of the candle on to the plate.

The last bid before the nail dropped out is the successful one. It was made by the Vicar's warden, Dr. G. Gwynne-Thomas, who had been vying in the last tense seconds with Mrs. Caiger-Smith. Three years ago Dr. Wynne-Thomas beat the nail to win the right to Church Acre—which is in fact two acres, one rod, 33 poles, just beyond Fisherman's Cottage, in Fisherman's Lane.

### Record Price

But, this time, he paid 451 shillings (£22 11s.)—the traditional bidding is carried on in shillings—last time, £13 1s. The highest previously recorded was of £14 7s., that was by a Mr. Byles way back in 1819.

The Vicar (the Rev. Stanley Young) hustled the bidding upwards as he interspersed his most professional calling with plenty of good humour. He stood well back from the table on which the candle burned—and at which sat Dr. T. E. Allibone, Lord of the Manor, and Dr. Wynne-Thomas recording the bidding—because, he said, amid laughter, "I was accused last time of nudging the table at the crucial moment; I shall stand well away to-night."

Aldermaston village jealously guards all its memories of bygone days. To-day there is only one other ecclesiastical candle auction in England, that at Chedzoy, Somerset, where the Church Acre is let every 21 years.

### Back to 1801

The renting by candle auction certainly goes back to 1801 when the successful bid was £7. Since 1866 it has been triennial and Wednesday's auction was apparently the 49th on record.

The present Church Acre was awarded under the Enclosures Act of 1811 to the churchwardens in compensation "for their lands, grounds and rights of common." What ground was auctioned previously is not known. The first monies from 1817 were put towards purchasing an organ for the church, but since 1824 the proceeds have been devoted to church funds.

Rum punch and churchwarden pipes set the atmosphere. Dr. Allibone as Lord of the Manor

stuck the nail into the candle. "I declare this open and make the Vicar's traditional first bid of 20s.," said the Rev. Stanley Young. "Two-and-a-half acres of good English soil . . ." he began. "Forty-six shillings," said the Lord of the Manor, and off it went. "Fifty-five," shouted a voice from the back. "Seventy-five," said Dr. Allibone.

### "Chicken Feed"

When it got to 305s., the Vicar interjected: "This is chicken feed—you have your own field for three years." Up it went a little more. "You can't get down the lane, but see the parish council about that," said the Vicar laughingly.

Many famous names were to be heard among the bidders. There was Lady Penney, wife of the atomic scientist, Lady Glyn Jones, wife of the High Court judge, and all the time the price was creeping up and the candle was creeping down.

A B.B.C. interviewer who was standing close by with his recording apparatus was kidded to have a go. "Four-forty shillings," he said. Then he watched tensely as the bidding dried up for a while. "Keep it in the parish," repeatedly called the Vicar.

Mrs. Caiger-Smith came to the rescue with 445s.—the B.B.C. man breathed again. Church warden: "446s."—Mrs. Smith "450s."—church warden, "451s."—and out fell the nail, it was the successful bid.



## RECORD BID AT CANDLE AUCTION

### Ancient Ceremony At Aldermaston

**A**LDERMASTON'S traditional candle auction attracted a record crowd to the village hall on Wednesday night, and there was a record bid for the three-year lease of the Church Acre, which was once again the subject of the "sale." It was the 49th ceremony to be held in the village, and everyone agreed it was the most successful of them all.

The auctioneer was the Rev. Stanley Young, vicar of Aldermaston. It was his duty to excite and sustain the bidding for the Church Acre while the tallow candle slowly burned down. It burned so slowly, in fact, that by the time the pin (which symbolises the close of the auction) fell out, both the "auctioneer" and some of the bidders were quite exhausted.

#### A Record Bid

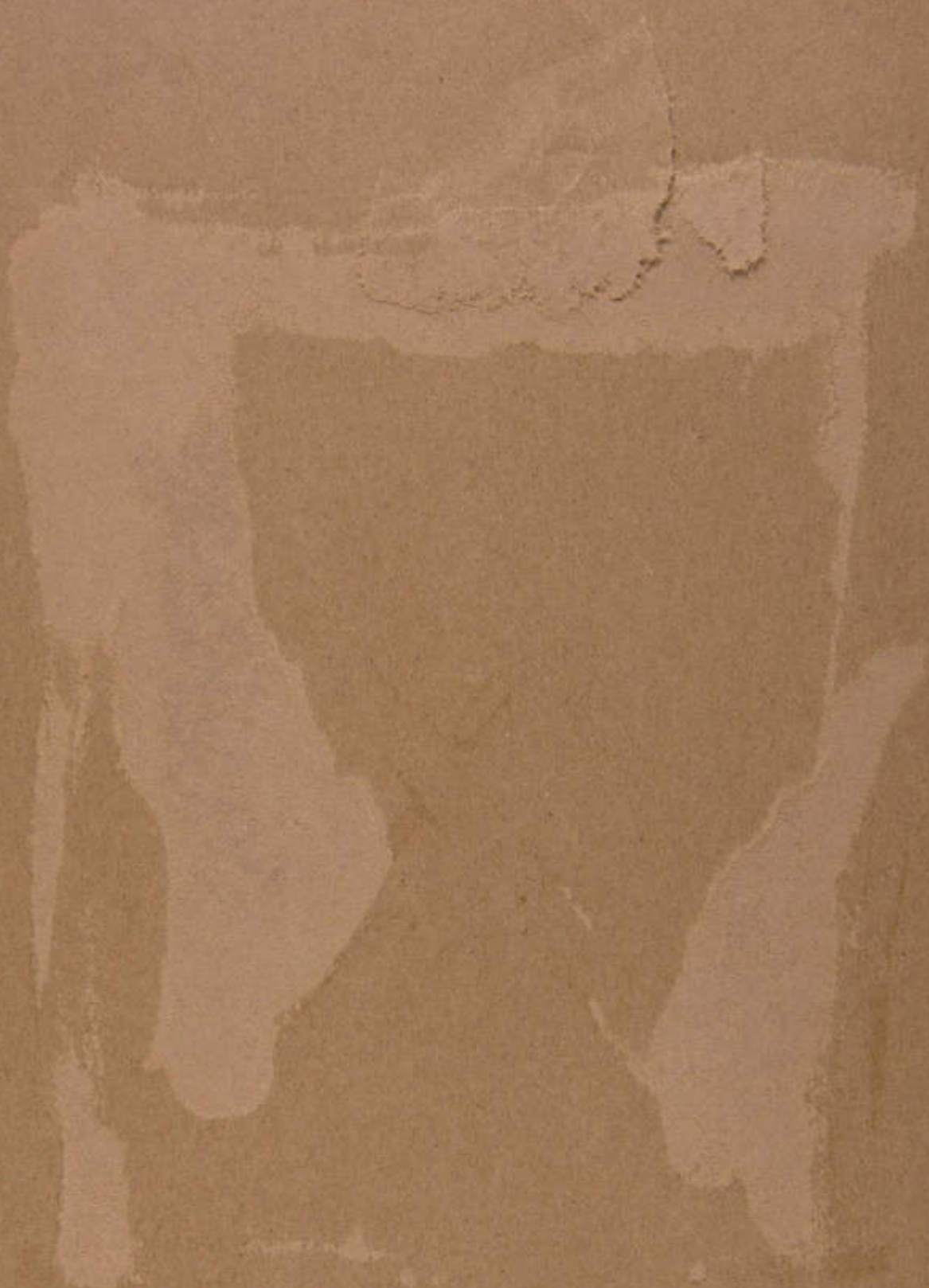
The last person to make a bid before the pin dropped on to a plate beneath the candle was Dr. G. Gwynne-Thomas, who is the vicar's warden. His bid had reached no less than 451 shillings (£22 11s.), which was almost double the existing record bid made as far back as 1819.

The present Church Acre was awarded under the Enclosures Act of 1811 to the churchwardens in compensation "for their lands, grounds and rights of common."

Church Acre is in actual fact two acres, one rod, 33 poles, beyond Fisherman's Cottage, Fisherman's Lane.

The auction was conducted in the authentic atmosphere of rum punch and churchwarden pipes. Dr. T. E. Allibone, who presided as Lord of the Manor, stuck the pin (a horseshoe nail) into the half-inch of candle which has been used at every auction for 26 years. The vicar made the customary first bid of 20s.—and from there the bidding rose while the candle burned down until Dr. Gwynne-Thomas was declared the purchaser.





*Photograph missing*





*The Vicar of Aldermaston (the Rev. Stanley Young) conducts the traditional candle auction, in which people vie for a three-year lease of the Church Acre. At the table are (left) the Vicar's Warden (Dr. G. Wynne Thomas) and (right) the Lord of the Manor (Dr. T. E. Allibone). As the candle burns down, it's going, going, and, when the pin drops from the tallow, it's gone—to the last bidder. (See story on page two)*















1959

## BY CANDLE AND NAIL

### Church Land Is Auctioned

A CEREMONY dating back to the beginning of the 19th century was observed at the village of Aldermaston on Saturday. It was the Aldermaston candle auction, for a plot of land called Church Acre (in fact the land is over two acres in size) and the successful bid of £19 1s. was made by Major-General E. R. Benson, people's warden at the parish church, in a last-minute flurry of bids that also involved Dr. T. E. Allibone, Lord of the Manor (also head of the A.E.I. research laboratories at Aldermaston Court), and Dr. C. Wynne Thomas, village physician and authority on local history.

Held in the village hall with over 50 villagers present, the ceremony (it comes up every three years) had an added attraction, a film unit had moved in to film the entire proceedings for the Rank "Look at Life" series, for issue in the spring.

Under the dazzling glare of studio lighting, 200 times stronger than that of an average room, the Rev. Donald Young, vicar of the parish, stood at the red velvet covered table, on which was the tallow candle on a metal plate. Dr. Allibone then placed a horse shoe nail an inch down its length, the candle was lit and with a warning from Mr. Young that no bids of less than a shilling would be accepted, the auction (the 50th of which there is a complete record) was off, starting with the traditional vicar's bid of £1.

#### CHURCHWARDEN PIPES

While the cameras clicked, recording the scene, with churchwardens smoking the traditional long clay pipes, and drinking a brew of hot rum punch (also traditional) the bids were shouted out, with the vicar proving that his oratorical powers are not limited to the pulpit! Clearly well primed by an auctioneer he had an endless array of phrases to describe the desirability of the lot being offered!

Candle auctions date back as far as Samuel Pepy's day, and are in fact mentioned in his diary. The only other ecclesiastical candle auction in England is at Chedzoy in Somerset, where a plot of land, famed for its watercress, is auctioned every 21 years.

On previous occasions the Aldermaston auction has been broadcast by the B.B.C. but this is the first time it has been filmed. The decision to film this year's auction followed a conversation between the film critic of this newspaper and Mr. George Grafton-Green, executive producer of the "Look at Life" series. So it is that a permanent record, in colour, of this ceremony has been made. Villagers will be able to see themselves on cinema screens where the series is screened in the spring.

This year's bid was £6 less than the last auction when a figure of £25 was bid by Dr. Wynne Thomas.



# ALDERMASTON'S HISTORIC CANDLE AUCTION



ALDERMASTON'S CANDLE AUCTION of ancient origin was held on Saturday and attracted the attention of a film company. Here the vicar, the Rev. Stanley Young, is seen lighting the candle to commence the auction, with his two churchwardens, Dr. G. Wynne-Thomas (left) and General E. R. Benson, sitting in front of him.

*Reading Mercury photos.*

DGC 19 1959



# Tense moment at candle auction



The Vicar, the Rev. Ross Stone, accepts a bid during the traditional Candle Auction at Aldermaston. With him, smoking clay churchwardens, are, from the left, Mr. Cox (Vicar's warden), Dr. Alibone (Lord of the Manor) and Major Gen. Benson (People's warden).

Photo: Bob Liddiard

THERE was even more suspense than usual for bidders at the traditional Candle Auction in Aldermaston on Friday night.

The auction, held every three years, always ends when a pin inserted in the candle on the auctioneer's table falls out. The last bid made before the pin drops is the successful one.

On Friday night the wick burnt down far enough to release the pin, but as it fell it was held by the melting wax and bidding went on for another tense minute before it finally rattled on to the table.

The rules of the auction say that bidding can continue until the pin is completely detached from the candle.

The auction is held to rent a three-acre piece of land owned by St. Mary's Parish Church, Aldermaston.

On Friday the successful bid was entered by a villager, Mr. John Dance, who will pay an annual rent of £50.50 for the land. He is likely to use it for grazing purposes.

As usual, the pin was inserted into the candle by the Lord of the Manor, Dr. Edward Allibone.

One of the churchwardens, Mr. William Cox, lit the candle, and the first bid was made, in line with tradition, by the Vicar, the Rev. Ross Stone, who offered 10p.

Bidding rose steadily and after half-an-hour increased dramatically as the flame flickered towards the pin.

After it fell out, the other churchwarden, Major Gen. Edward Benson, snuffed out the flame.



# Bidding rockets at candle auction

INFLATION ran riot at Aldermaston's candle auction last week, with spirited bidding pushing the price of the rights on a piece of land to more than double its previous record.

Under the hammer was a two acre field, the grazing rights of which are auctioned every three years in aid of church funds.

It is believed that the Aldermaston candle auction is the last surviving sale of its kind.

Since 1815 the "Church Acre" at Aldermaston has been let triennially by this method. The custom dates back to when the field was given to the Churchwardens "in compensation for their loss of grounds and rights of common."

On Friday the village hall

was packed with residents and visitors all anxious to witness the now unique ceremony . . . and to sample the hot rum punch that is traditionally served.

Time-honoured custom was observed too by the smoking of clay churchwarden pipes throughout the auction.

To start the sale a horse-shoe nail was inserted one inch below the wick of a candle. Bidding began as the candle was lit, and ended when the nail fell.

The last bid before it falls wins the rights to graze "Church Acre" for three years.

Watching fair play last week was the Lord of the Manor of Aldermaston Dr. Edward Allibone, who had travelled from his home at Little Grange, Hurst, to be at the auction.

If the bidding ever showed signs of flagging he quickly revived things by making his own offer.

Dr. Allibone told the *NWN* that he had bought the rights himself "many times" in the past, but "Church Acre" was to go elsewhere this time.

Although he has never lived in the village he has always taken a keen interest in Aldermaston and its parish church.

From 1946 to 1963 he was the head of research of the AEI company which at that time was based at Aldermaston Court. He took over as Lord of the Manor in 1951 from Sir Felix Pole.

The candle used at the auction has quite a history of its own.

Twelve years ago the original candle burned away completely.

Dr. Allibone made a replacement candle using, as tradition requires, pure tallow for the job. And to ensure that there will be no further technical hitches he has made the white taper long enough to perpetuate the auctions until the year 2030.

Auctioneer for the evening was Aldermaston's Vicar the Rev. Ross Stone. He was flanked by churchwardens Maj.-Gen. E. R. Benson and Mr. Bill Cox, who shared the Vicar's obvious delight as the bidding rose higher and higher.

Those trying for the grazing, bid for one year, but agree to pay similar sums annually until the next candle auction.

In 1971 "Church Acre" was knocked down to an American visitor to the village for under £20 per annum.

On Friday bidding started at 10p and climbed steadily in pounds and pennies while the candle burned.

Eventually the wax began to run—a sure sign the experts say that the nail was about to fall.

As the two-inch piece of steel began to move Mrs. Heather Davies, of The Old Vicarage, Aldermaston, put in a quick last bid for £42.25.

But the nail didn't fall completely, but lodged itself vertically in the soft wax.

Silence followed . . . no one had ever known this to happen before.

The bidding was restarted, for the nail must be heard to hit the table before the auction is won.

Competition was particularly keen between Mr. David Moore, Mr. Edgar Campden, Mr. Alan Caiger-Smith, Mr. Harry Smith, Mrs. Davies and Mr. John Dance, who kept up the bidding to the very end.

Suddenly the nail had dropped.

A final bid of £50.50 from Mr. Dance, of The Street, Aldermaston, had been accepted . . . making him the new official tenant of "Church Acre."

A delighted General Benson announced to the crowded hall that the price was "more than twice the previous record" sum ever raised at the candle auction.



Aldermaston's Vicar, the Rev. Ross Stone, receiving bids at Aldermaston candle auction last week.



# Candle auction at Aldermaston



For over 150 years a candle auction has taken place triennially at Aldermaston village. Churchwarden pipes, rum punch, and the Vicar urging on the bidding, help keep alive the memories of old England.

**peps Minor League**

The Newbury Sunday  
Minor League took two re-  
presentative sides to Didcot  
magnificent, both teams giving  
their all in determination not to  
lose, and with the emphasis on  
attack a good crowd of specta-







1974





All eyes are on the candle as the flame creeps inexorably nearer to the nail during Aldermaston's historic Candle Auction on Monday. Smoking the traditional churchwarden's clay pipes are, left to right: Major Gen. E. Benson (Churchwarden), Dr. E. Allibone, the Rev. F. Steer and Mr. W. Cox (Churchwarden). 1971

**A** CANDLE was burning at Aldermaston on Monday, but it was nothing to do with the festive season.

The event was a candle auction, and the piece of land up for auction was a two-acre plot at Church Acre, Aldermaston. The event has taken place every three years since Napoleonic times.

A candle with a nail sticking into it, is lit, and then the bidding starts. The last bid to go in before the nail falls out is the winning one.

The race against time was started by the Rev. Steer, who lit the candle and opened the bidding. The last bid came from Mr. Victor Bumagin, of The Grange, Silchester. His bid was £16.20.