

# Candle Auction Scrapbook

## 1962-1986

*probably compiled by  
Revd Richard Miller*

*It is part of the Church Archives  
of St Marys, Aldermaston*



CANDLE AUCTION  
1962

13-12-1962

**T**HE persuasive tongue of the Rev. Stanley Young raised the bidding to a record £28 when Aldermaston's famous candle auction was staged in the Village Hall on Thursday last week. He weathered the doldrums which set in after the first bids to exact over £5 more than the previous record set up in 1956. The sum bid represented the annual rent of about two acres of land beyond Fisherman's Cottage.

The record offer came from Dr. T. E. Allibone, director of Associated Electrical Laboratories at Aldermaston Court, who himself made the tallow candle which was used. The previous candle had come to an end after being used in these auctions for over a hundred years.

It was Dr. Allibone who placed a horse-shoe nail about an inch from the wick, which was lighted by the vicar's warden, Dr. G. Wynne Thomas.

Bidding continued until the nail fell with a clatter from the candle.

The traditional triennial auction at Aldermaston goes back at least to 1801, but the method has been used for centuries before this.





# ALL SET FOR ALDERMASTON CANDLE AUCTION

*The candle is lit — so are the churchwarden pipes — and the punch begins to circulate*



If there were any auctioneers in Aldermaston Village Hall on Thursday evening, there must have been a speculative gleam in their eyes after hearing the Rev. Stanley Young in action.

With a mixture of specious argument and lyrical praise, Aldermaston's vicar coaxed a record £28 bid from his receptive audience at the parish's traditional and triennial candle auction.

The successful offer came from Aldermaston's Lord of the Manor, Dr. T. E. Allibone, director of the Associated Electrical Industries' laboratories at the Court.

Dr. Allibone was a keen contender the last time the auction was held in 1959, but on that occasion was edged out by Major General E. R. Benson's last minute bid. This time the previous record, set up in 1956, was beaten by over £5. The £28 bid represents the annual rent of just over two acres of land beyond Fisherman's Cottage.

## NEW CANDLE

The auction carried on a tradition which goes back at least to 1801, when the successful bid was £7. It looked at first as if there would be no tallow candle this time, for the previous one had come to an end after being used for over a century. A beeswax substitute seemed the only answer—until Dr. Allibone set to and made a

THE  
THIRSTY  
AUCTIONEER



tallow candle himself.

Appropriately, it was he who inserted a horse-shoe nail an inch below the candle wick, which was lit by Dr. G. Wynne Thomas, the vicar's warden. The Rev. Stanley Young followed tradition by making the opening bid of £1.

## WHEN BIDDING SLOWED

A flurry of offers followed, and the record was soon in danger. Bidding

ceased considerably once the £20 mark had been passed, and it took all Mr. Young's eloquence and ingenuity to inch it higher. But his persuasive tongue took offers to £28 before the nail fell from the candle.

Long churchwarden pipes were smoked, and there was a ready market for steaming glasses of rum punch.

Candle auctions—which use the burning of a definite length of candle as a time limit—have been known in this country for centuries. Milton mentioned them in his letters, and Pepys describes the sale of three hulks in his diary in 1661: "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 a man cunninger than the rest, that was sure to bid the last man and to 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."

Aldermaston's present Church Acre has been on a three-year tenure since 1866. It was an award under the Inclosures Act of 1811, which became effective in 1815.

It is thought about an acre of Aldermaston Common was auctioned before that.

G. M. H.



1962

## Aldermaston candle auction

A record £28 bid by Dr. T. E. Allibone, director of AEL Research Laboratory at Aldermaston Court, won him the right to lease Church Acre for the next three years at Aldermaston's famous candle auction in the Village Hall recently.

Dr. Allibone was a keen contender when the auction was last held in 1959, but was edged out in the dying seconds by Major-General E. R. Benson.

The sum bid represents the annual rent of just over two acres of land beyond Fisherman's Cottage.

The previous record price paid was £22 11s. in 1956.

The auction carries on a tradition which goes back at least to 1801, when the successful bid was £7.

The ceremony begins when a horse-shoe nail is pushed into the candle an inch from the top. Then a churchwarden lights the candle and the vicar conducts the auction.

At first the bidding is slow—at one time a barrel of beer was provided to pass away the time—but as the flame burns lower, the bids come more frequently.



DR. ALLIBONE pushes the horseshoe nail through the candle to start the auction.

The winner is the person who makes the last bid before the nail falls.

At one time it looked as if no replacement would be found for the tallow candle which had burnt low after being used for over a century.

A bee's wax substitute seemed the only alternative, but Dr. Allibone, made a tallow candle himself.

It was he, as Lord of the Manor, who inserted the horse-shoe nail an inch below the candle wick

at the auction and the candle was lit by Dr. G. Wynne Thomas, the vicar's warden.

Auctioneer was the vicar, the Rev. Stanley Young, who followed tradition by making the opening bid of £1.

### HOT RUM PUNCH

Bidding eased considerably once the £20 mark was passed and it took all of Mr. Young's eloquence and ingenuity to raise it. Long churchwarden pipes were on offer and glasses of hot rum punch found a ready market among the 70 or so people who attended the auction.





Churchwardens' pipes in hand, spectators at Aldermaston's candle auction watch as the horse-shoe nail is placed in position.

13-12-968

IN 1698, the method to be used for auctioning tea was laid down: a tallow candle was to be used, with only an inch of candle for each lot. The last person to bid before the candle burnt down was successful. It is many years since tea was auctioned in this way, but the old candle auction ceremony survives in Aldermaston, where it is held once every three years.

In Aldermaston the candle auction is not for the sale of tea but to decide the tenancy of "Church Acre", a 2½ acre field. The triennial auction was held with due ceremony in the village hall last week when the auctioneer was the vicar, the Rev. Ross Stone. Officiating with him were the Lord of the Manor, Dr. Allibone, the vicar's warden, Bill Cox, and the church warden, General E. R. Benson.

The candle used was made by Dr. Allibone. It was originally 18 inches long, and will, he estimates, last until the year 2,005. Dr. Allibone managed, with some difficulty, to obtain a pound of tallow in 1962, and made two candles, which should keep the auction going until 2,100 AD.

Tallow, which was used to keep alive the historical tradition, is mentioned as the material used for candles in his day by Pepys. It is made of sheep's fat and is very hard and greasy.

In Aldermaston's church records, the candle auction can be traced back to 1801, although it is believed to have started long before this. The village and it still follows the same pattern. Scrapbooks detailing the ceremony's past history do not mention the exact plot of land originally let in this way, but in 1815 "there was allotted to the churchwardens of A — in compensation for the lands and rights of common of a plot of land in Church Mead."

In 1801, the annual rent decided by the candle was £7, rising gradually over the years. In 1945, however, it was lower than this, and somehow two people, the local butcher and another local man, tied for the field with a bid of £5, and had to toss for it.

guinea by Dr. Allibone. Several local people joined in the bidding, urged on by the vicar — the rent goes to the church.

When the candle fell out, after sticking for a few moments, Bill Cox was the new tenant. It was the first time the field had gone to him, although he says he has been attending the auction and bidding for nearly 40 years, making it his 13th time lucky.

As Mr. Cox had no particular use for the field, but the previous tenant was anxious to retain it, a swift agreement was reached, and for the second time local journalist Penny George, became the tenant, agreeing willingly to Mr. Cox's suggestion to pay the same as before (£50.50), making up the difference as a "voluntary contribution" as no change can be made in the final official bid. Penny George has two mares, which will be able to continue grazing in Church Acre at least until the next auction in 1980.

Throughout the bidding, the vicar, Lord of the Manor, and wardens smoked long clay pipes known as "churchwardens", and hot rum punch was passed round to all present — another old tradition.

Aldermaston is almost the only place where a candle auction is still held. Until recently, there was a similar auction at Haxey, near Gainsborough in Lincolnshire, while at Chedzor, in Somerset, there is still a candle auction once every 21 years.

It is doubtful whether the skill at judging when to make the last bid still exists, as it was observed in his diary by Pepys. At an auction of ships, he noticed one man, "cunninger than the rest, that was sure to bid the last man, and carry it." He asked him his secret,



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Before this year's bidding got underway, the rector explained the procedure. A horseshoe nail was inserted in the candle an inch from the top, and whoever cast the last bid before it fell out would have the field for the next three years — the bid being, he was careful to point out, the annual rent. (A few years ago, the field went to an American, who apparently did not realise this, and left after paying only one year's rent.)

The candle was lit by Mr. Cox, and the vicar started the bidding at £1, which was immediately raised to one

guinea by Dr. Allibone. Several local people joined in the bidding, urged on by the vicar — the rent goes to the church.

When the nail fell out, after sticking for a few moments, Bill Cox was the new tenant, at £46. It was the first time the field had gone to him, although he says he has been attending the auction and bidding for nearly 40 years, making this 13th time lucky.

As Mr. Cox had no particular use for the field, but the previous tenant was anxious to retain it, a swift agreement was reached, and for the second time local journalist Penny George, became the tenant, agreeing willingly to Mr. Cox's suggestion to pay the same as before (50.50), making up the difference as a "voluntary contribution" as no change can be made in the final official bid. Penny George has two mares, which will be able to continue grazing in Church Acre at least until the next auction in 1980.

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This, of course, would only occur with the short candles then used; with Dr. Allibone's longer tallow candle it is more a matter of luck and careful timing, but the atmosphere of expectancy and even tension can still be felt in Aldermaston's unique ceremony.

JUDY LOMAX





13-12-1971

# Land bid—and it's right on the nail

A VICAR auctioned off a piece of church land last night.

But everybody was too busy studying a length of tallow candle to watch him do it.

For they were all bidding for the land, and it doesn't do to let your attention stray, especially when you're a comparative newcomer to the delicate business of a candle auction.

And though the ceremony has been held in Aldermaston once every three years since Napoleonic times, none of the local people seemed to have developed much expertise.

## Last bid

So there wasn't much surprise when the winner turned out to be a newcomer — and not only a newcomer but an American as well — Mr Victor Bumagin, of The Grange, Silchester.

Mr Bumagin won the leasehold of the two-acre plot at Church Acre, Aldermaston, for the next three years, because his was the last bid made before an iron horse shoe nail, placed in the candle, dropped out onto the tray below.

And for the lease he paid just £16.20, slightly over twice as much as the first recorded successful bid of £7, paid at an auction in 1801.

The ancient ceremony was presided over by a vicar of Aldermaston, the Rev Frederick Steer. The nail was placed in a specially made tallow candle, which was then lit, and Rev Steer opened the bidding at £1.



■ The bidders watch as the candle burns down.







13-12-1971



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).

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.







18<sup>th</sup> DECEMBER, 1971





# 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.

13-12-1974



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

1974  
Rev. Ross Stone's  
first Candle  
Auction.



# Candle Auction - 16th December 1986



Rev. Richard Miller opens the bidding at the Aldermaston candle auction while (from left) Commander Michael Porter, Mr Tony Jackson and Miss Aroha Barr take up their clay pipes.

## Nailing the rent

ONE of England's last remaining candle auctions drew a record bid for the lease of two acres of land at Aldermaston last week.

The candle auction determines the rent for a two acre piece of land at Aldermaston church which was first offered in 1801.

Since then the auction has been held every three years. A nail is inserted into a special candle made from pig's fat, and whoever holds the bid when the nail falls out may rent the field for the next three years.

Bidding was opened by the vicar of Aldermaston, Rev. Richard Miller, who described himself as the only unlicensed auctioneer in the country.

From an opening offer of 20 shillings or one pound, the gallery soon lifted the bid to beyond the £100 mark

for the first time in the history of the auction.

After about ten minutes the nail dropped and Mrs Diana Brown's bid of £104 secured the land.

Mrs Brown, of The Street, Aldermaston, said she and her husband Roger, had been looking for a field for a horse. "It's difficult to get land around here so we are very pleased to have it," said Mrs Brown.

While the auction was in progress, church wardens, Commander Michael Porter and Miss Aroha Barr joined the Lord of the Manor, Mr Tony Jackson for a traditional smoke with some old clay pipes.

1986



Chedzoy Somerset 21 years.

Welcome to the 58th Candle Auction, begun here in 1801.

For the Auction.

Annual Rental for 3 years, "Church Acre" known in olden times as "God's Acre".

The field is in fact 2 acres, 1 rod and 33 poles.

10,678.25 square yards.

or 0.80963 hectares, (10.117 ares,) 834.669 square metres.

~~10.117~~ 0.99429 = Hectares

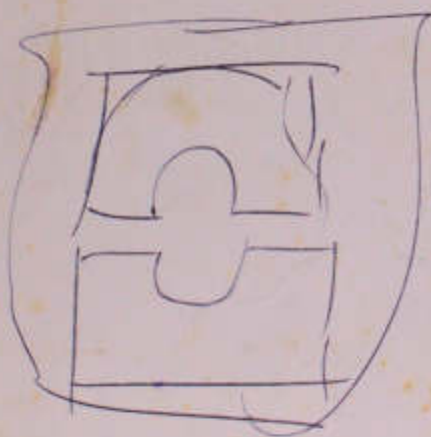
(The field has a stream at the bottom and occasionally the field is at the bottom of the stream.)

Cricket bat willow.

Anthony Jackson

I now call upon the Lord of the Manor Dr. Allibone to insert the nail in the Tallow Candle.

As Vicar and the only unlicensed auctioneer in the country, I open mek make the opening bid of £1 or 20 shillings for this piece of Old England.



Parnells Printers Reading. Tel. 52503

*must be Revd Richard Miller's notes from 1980  
(as Revd Miller came to Aldermaston in 1980)*



in Aldermaston  
Custom of a candle auction/goes back at least to 1801.  
First successful bid was £7.

Aldermaston's Church Acre has been let on a three year  
tenure since 1866.

It reached a record low of £5 in 1945 when the local  
buthher and another local man tied for the field.  
A coin had to be tossed to decide the winner.

Only one other place in the country has a candle  
auction Chedzoy in Somerset. every 21 years, 1988  
was the most recent.

Custom.

A tallow candle is used. Dr. Allibone has made  
two candles, and there should be enough to last until  
2100.AD

Dr. Allibone a former Lord of the manor, in a moment  
call on the present Lord of the manor, Mr. Tony  
Jackson.

Church Acre God's Acre.

2 Acres, 1 rod and 33 poles.

0.99429 Hectares.

Unlicensed auctioneer.

Lord of Manor. to insert nail and light the  
candle.

Open the bidding with £5 for a piece of old England.

*Revd Richards Miller's notes for 1983*

*(Tony Jackson took over as Lord of the Manor  
in 1983 from Dr T.E. Allibone)*