

# On Her Majesty's Service

WASC1111



Steeple, agreeably to Mr. Saxon's advice in his letter of the 24th August last, and that the same be done as speedily as convenient."

The final settlement of the account, however, was not made until three years later, when the authorities resorted to drastic measures to raise the amount required to defray the expenses, as we learn from the Minutes of a sixth Vestry, held on 12th October, 1813, when the following paragraph occurs: "It appearing to this Vestry that there is a deficiency of £359 and upwards due and owing from the Churchwardens to the Surveyor, Builders, and others, for the repairs done to the Church Steeple, and that the arrears of the last Church Rate are not nearly sufficient to answer the same. It is therefore ordered that such arrears of the last Church Rate as are due from persons able to pay, be immediately enforced by legal measures, and that a Rate at sixpence in the pound be forthwith granted to the present Churchwardens, who are directed to make out and collect the same. Also ordered that the Churchwardens do employ the Vestry Clerk to enter the last Rate as are due from persons able to pay, be immediate account of their payments and arrears."

It is singular that the upper stage of the Tower, which was the cause of so much trouble and expense to our predecessors in the parish at the beginning of the 19th century, should again be the fruitful source of anxious solicitude at the beginning of the 20th century, but we trust that this dilapidated portion of the venerable structure may soon be repaired, and improved in such a manner that our successors in the next century may have no cause to complain of inferior style, material, or workmanship.

Shortly after the repair of the Tower in 1810-11 a disastrous explosion occurred at the Royal Gunpowder Factory, and resulted in the loss of eight lives. This fatal accident took place on the Lower Island below Waltham Lock, at a quarter-past eleven on the morning of November 27th, 1811, when No. 4 Press House first exploded, setting fire also to the Corning House and Reel House. Seven poor Workmen were killed on the spot, and Thomas Wiltshire, foreman of the Reel House, the only survivor, died on December 13th, from the effects of the terrible shock and burns which he had sustained. The names of the other victims were as follows: William Stevens, foreman of Corning House; Benjamin Parker, Thomas Belsham, Henry Wakeland, John Grapes, Joseph Chapple, and Daniel Goats, Corning House men. The following account of the disaster was published in the *Cambridge Chronicle* of November 29th, 1811:

"A DREADFUL ACCIDENT.

"A powder mill at Waltham Abbey was blown up on Wednesday last, eight lives lost, and seven of the persons left families. The whole of the town of Waltham was in great danger, as it was thought the magazine would have been blown up. A man was, in consequence, sent through the streets of Waltham to caution the inhabitants to leave their houses instantly. No further explosion had, however, taken place at the date of our last account. At Stepney a mirror

of plate-glass was broken by the shock; at Hackney several panes of glass were forced in; and at Blackwall the windows throughout the whole street were shattered. Near the New Road, Marylebone, several of the houses were much broken; and the labourers who were excavating in the park felt the ground shake where they were at work. Even ships on the river were shaken. Some of the morning papers mistook it for an earthquake. This seems singular that the shock should be felt so much more in London, while the damage done in the town was but trifling, excepting that the current of air at the time might have directed the concussion from the town."

The Funeral Service was solemnised in the Abbey Church, but not until December 16th, three weeks after the explosion, as the shattered remains of one of the poor men were not discovered for some time, and Wiltshire was not released from his sufferings until December 13th. The mutilated forms of the unfortunate victims were reverently laid in one grave in the Churchyard, the Rev. Thos. Pickthall officiating, and he records the interment as follows:

"Burials, 1811.—December 16th, Wiltshire Thomas, one of the eight poor men who were destroyed by the explosion of the Powder mills on the Lower Island. The names of the others are inserted from memory, as no proper account was transmitted to the Registrar." These names appear in the following order: "Stevens, Chappel, Parker, Wakeling, Goats, Grapes, Belsher." Below this sad list is appended a memorandum referring to the Burials of the whole year: "The above have been duly and faithfully entered by me,

"THOMAS PICKTHALL, Curate."

Donations and allowances were eventually granted to the bereaved relatives by the Board of Ordnance, and William Peyton, or Paton, a carpenter, also received a donation of £20, in recognition of his heroic act at the time of the accident in extinguishing a firebrand that fell near the door of the Magazine, which had been forced open by the explosion, thus securing the safety of the town and inhabitants. The demand for Gunpowder throughout the period of the Continental wars was so heavy that the men in the Factory were working at high pressure seven days a week. It is related\* that "the horses (who set the machinery in motion) had bells on their harness, and when they passed round they struck against a spring which caused the ringing of a small bell, to let the heads of the Factory Department know if they performed their work regularly, and at the proper speed. These work-bells were to be heard jingling from mill to mill all the way along each side of our marsh, at the same time as our Church bells were chiming for Divine Service."

On November 23rd, 1812, it was reported that 22,000 barrels of 90 lbs. each had been made since the beginning of the year, and the hope was expressed "that 30,000 barrels would be manufactured in 1814 with

\* See "Historical Notices of the Royal Gunpowder Factory," by the late W. Winters, F.R.H.S., page 63.

the aid of the new mills and one Corning House." It was further stated "that the quantity could be raised to 53,000 barrels by adding an horse mill: two double mills on Lower Island, four ditto at Upper Mill Yard, and four at Cheshunt inlet."

J. H. STAMP, Curate.

19th May, 1904.

## WALTHAM ABBEY.

The 19th annual Church Parade of the local Friendly Societies was held on Sunday afternoon, July 3rd, when the service in the Abbey Church was conducted by the Vicar, the Rev. F. B. Johnston, who also preached an appropriate sermon on Exodus xxi. 19. In the concluding portion of the discourse an earnest appeal was made on behalf of the Tottenham Hospital, the Hertfordshire Convalescent Home at St. Leonards-on-Sea, and the Cheshunt Cottage Hospital. In referring to the Convalescent Home the Vicar alluded to the serious loss recently sustained by that institution through the death of Canon Burnside, its pious Founder and devoted manager. The collection in the Church and streets amounted to £25 7s. 8d.

On July 10th sermons in aid of the British and Foreign Bible Society were preached at the morning and evening services in the Abbey Church by the Rev. H. A. Raynes, Home Superintendent, who also preached in the afternoon at the Mission Church, Copt Hall Green.

The annual Festival of the Waltham Abbey Branch of the Mothers' Union took place on July 7th, when a special service was held in the Abbey Church at 3.30. An impressive sermon was preached by the Rev. W. Sydney C. Seacombe, Secretary to Missions to Seamen. After the service the members were entertained to tea by the lady associates in the Victoria Hall, kindly lent for the occasion by Mr. and Mrs. J. Parnell, who also generously provided tea for Associates and Friends on the beautiful lawn in front of their residence.

## WALTHAM ABBEY CHURCH TOWER FUND.

At the meeting of the Ladies' Bazaar Committee on June 22nd it was decided that application should be made for the use of the new Town Hall about the third

or fourth week in October, and the application has since been granted by the District Council.

At a meeting of the General Committee on July 5th the Hon. Clerical Secretary reported that Mr. J. A. Reeve, the architect, had received tenders as follows from the three local firms invited to send in estimates: Mr. P. Paul, £2,090; Mr. E. J. Hanchel, £2,000; Mr. J. Bentley, £1,759. It was then unanimously agreed to accept Mr. Bentley's tender, and after a financial statement by Mr. J. Eve (one of the Lay Secretaries), in which he showed that the sum of £1,600 was practically assured, the Committee decided to guarantee to raise the five hundred pounds still needed to cover all expenses connected with the work of restoration, that there might be no further delay.

Donations to the Fund, and articles for the proposed Bazaar will be gladly received by the Hon. Secretaries, and by Miss M. B. Lee, Hon. Sec. to the Ladies' Committee.

## FOURTEENTH LIST OF SUBSCRIPTIONS.

|  | £      | s. | d. |
|--|--------|----|----|
| Per Rev. F. B. Johnston—                 |        |    |    |
| Sums already acknowledged ...            | £1,743 | 11 | 7  |
| Miss A. E. Francis ...                   |        | 3  | 0  |
| Per Mrs. Bury—                           |        |    |    |
| Mrs. Hyde Clark ...                      |        | 3  | 0  |
| Miss M. A. Tottenham ...                 |        | 1  | 0  |
| Per Miss M. B. Lee—                      |        |    |    |
| Rt. Hon. Sir Albert H. Hime, K.C.M.G.    | 5      | 0  | 0  |
| Mrs. Kingsley ...                        |        | 5  | 0  |
| Per Mrs. Renshaw—                        |        |    |    |
| A Friend ...                             |        | 1  | 0  |
| Per Mrs. J. M. Bentley—                  |        |    |    |
| Mrs. Bentley, Sen....                    |        | 1  | 1  |
| Per Miss E. Dean, Collecting Card ...    |        | 0  | 5  |
| Per Mr. A. G. Hubbard—                   |        |    |    |
| Interest on money deposited in the Bank, |        |    |    |
| and returned by J. Parnell, Esq....      |        | 0  | 17 |

|                                 |        |    |   |
|---------------------------------|--------|----|---|
|                                 | 20     | 2  | 7 |
| Amount already acknowledged ... | 1,743  | 11 | 7 |
|                                 | £1,763 | 14 | 2 |

The Abbey Church Bells were rung on June 24th in honour of the King's Birthday, which was celebrated on that day.

On the following day our local Ringers went on their annual outing to Hornchurch, and after a pleasant drive through the Forest rang upon the peal of eight bells in the steeple of that pretty Essex village. The Hornchurch Ringers paid a return visit on July 9th, when they ascended our ancient tower, and took part in some merry peals on the Abbey Church Bells.