

CANTERBURY CATCH CLUB

Initial Context – 10 mins.

By the late 18th century the City of Canterbury was a relatively quiet market town with a population of around ten thousand. Its markets provided a focus for the agricultural activity of East Kent and its own industries included silk weaving and brewing. The silk weaving, which overtook wool weaving before 1700, had been introduced by Huguenot refugees, who had made up nearly 40 % of the city's population in the early 17th century. Their influence remains in this very cathedral, a reminder of the French speaking Protestants who had originally fled war and persecution in the Spanish Netherlands. The importance of brewing, centred on the hop fields of Kent, is signified by the existence, in the early 19th Century, of some 13 breweries and over 100 public houses, by the time the population reached 15,000 around 1830.

Edward Hasted, in his history of 1800, wrote about Canterbury: "Its citizens are wealthy and respectable; many gentlemen of fortune and genteel families reside in it, especially within the precincts of the cathedral, where there are many of the clergy of superior rank and fortune belonging to it; and throughout the whole place there is a great deal of courtesy and hospitality."

The prosperity offered by the hop and weaving trades was reflected in an Act of Parliament in 1787, which permitted for the paving and lighting of the city, and the concomitant development of shops in the style of London. This development was hampered, however, by the fact that the land owning Church only made available short, expensive leases, described by Hasted “ which in every place the bane of industry”.

As tranquil as the city seemed to be however, it lay within a countryside and country that was undergoing a revolution in agriculture, social change and economic turmoil, the latter due to the prolonged war with revolutionary France and failing harvests, especially in 1795. The war inhibited trade, hitting the silk weavers hard, and their industry never fully recovered, reaching its denouement in the 1830's following the large-scale importation of weaved goods from India. With crop failure in 1795 and food shortages through to 1801, the price of food, especially grain, increased dramatically, compounded by the restrictions of trade imposed by the war, leading to food riots that were forcefully repressed. In the countryside, years of enclosure, designed to bring about more economically efficient farming, had effectively removed many of the common rights enjoyed, since Tudor times, by the agricultural commoner and labourer. With the introduction of

new farm machinery, this element of society now found itself turned into a wage earning proletariat, a change in their way in life that many found unacceptable and radicalising.

Radical – revolutionary – repression – mutiny – impressment – the contradictions and paradoxes evidencing a society at war without and within. Thomas Paine – Edmund Burke Income Tax Suspension of Habeas Corpus - Combination Acts – LCS – Cobbett Pamphleteers .

Centre piece – Club Characters – 15 mins

The Canterbury Catch Club reflected the rise of the Gentlemen's clubs in London, as Carolyn has described. The club was founded in 1779 on the basis of 'Cheerfulness and Good Humour, Friendship and a Love of Harmony.' Catch clubs promoted choral music and supported other choral performances. Canterbury Catch Club met at the beginning of each annual season to appoint a committee, and set a subscription to pay for a small orchestra and a band of singers, and agree a programme, that typically ran from October to May. Minutes show that these professionals performed whilst members ate and drank, probably before joining in the catches after their dinner. The middle class status and position of

members can be gauged by the fact that in 1802 the subscription for the season was set at half a guinea, with an entrance fee one shilling per evening – the latter also applicable to the guests of members. In addition a sum of 2 guineas was paid to the secretary and 1 guinea to the treasurer at the end of the season as ‘complement’. By way of comparison half a guinea represented about one week’s wages for a labourer in 1800. The rules for membership also stated that ‘ No articulated clerk or apprentice or any person under 21 can be admitted as a member. Gentlemanly conduct otherwise resignation and forfeiture.’ From the minutes of the Club it would appear that the membership generally averaged around thirty members, many with long standing membership that was passed from father to son, including the City’s Alderman, leading businessmen and military figures. The minutes also show that applications for membership were refused on grounds of ‘being underage or a lack of respectability.’

Perhaps the best example of the family tradition of membership, and its connection with the cathedral, is demonstrated by the Goodban and Saffery families, the most distinguished scion of which was Thomas Goodban, who at the age of 7 was sent to train in the cathedral choir, under Samuel

Porter, of which much later. Goodban's father, also Thomas was a violin player and lay clerk of the cathedral who, together with his wife, maiden name Saffery ran a tavern in the town – the Prince of Orange. It was in this tavern that Thomas snr founded the catch club, where performances were conducted by his father in law T. N. Saffery and afterward by his brother in law Osmond Saffery, a music master who been admitted a freeman of the city of Canterbury in 1790. Thomas jnr did not take straightaway to music, not learning the violin – his fathers instrument until aged 14 when, owing to a change in the family circumstances and his mother's death in 1798, he took employment as a solicitor's clerk in Canterbury. Despite the encumbrance of full time employment Thomas progressed and took over his father's music teaching business at the age of 18, following the death of his father. By 1809 he too had been appointed a lay clerk in the cathedral, and with two younger brothers to look after, he expanded his music accomplishments learning composition and the piano. By this time the catch club was in a decline and, in 1810, Osmond Saffery gave up the direction of the orchestra at the club and Thomas was approached to take over. He did this with considerable success – success which was recognized ten years later, in 1819, by the presentation of a silver bowl and salver to the value of 50 guineas.

Thomas went on to publish music works, guides to musical instruments and composed glees dedicated to the Canterbury Catch Club.

The aforementioned Samuel Porter was the organist of the Cathedral for nearly 50 years between 1757 and 1803. Samuel Porter was a native of Norwich and whilst at Canterbury he composed several anthems and services that were subsequently edited, after his demise, by his third son W.I. Porter, Head Master of the College School Worcester and Chaplain to Lord Vincent Fitzwilliam. Samuel Porter is commemorated on a mural tablet in the West Walk of the Cathedral.

The presentation of the bowl and salver to Thomas Goodban was made by the club's president, Charles Delmar, who continued as president until at least the 1840's. Delmar was a perfumer, who had become a freeman of the city of Canterbury in 1785. He married a Harriet Jackson and they had a son William in 1786, who went on to become the County Magistrate and deputy Lord Lt of Kent.

Cooper – Marrable – Baskerville

Although commencing as an exclusively male club- the year of the great reform act – a ladies room was completed for the

entertainment of the members ladies – but how far they were able to join in the principal activities of the club remains something of a mystery.

As part of the overall context for private clubs offering musical entertainment it is perhaps appropriate to mention the Licensing Act of 1737 which gave rise to censorship of speech drama by the Lord Chamberlain, giving the state the power to hold back the revolutionary tendencies of common theatre. Musical entertainment was not covered by the act hence the rise in popular musical entertainments, both public and private. In 1752 censorship was passed down to local magistrates, specifically to regulate venues where the government suspected that they acted as sources of crime and disorder. There is, of course, no evidence that CCC was involved in any such behavior and did not need a license in any event. However, the rapid expansion of theatres in the cities and provinces of England, Ireland and the Empire in the Georgian period is evidence of the commercialisation of culture, and many local theatres became the focal point of expressions of different interpretations of patriotism. Never was this more evident than in the turmoil of the 1790's when the singing of the national

anthem often gave rise to arguments, disputes and even outbreaks of violence. This, then, may enable the catch club to be seen as a place of refuge, where privately controlled membership and entertainment could be secured without interference from the state or the public. With the onset of mid Victorian 'stability' such a need may have become outdated and, given the longstanding membership of the committee and many of the members, it is understandable that the Catch Club had a limited life expectancy. In 1840, with Delmar still acting as President, the club introduced a new season of some 30 concerts, and brought in some new membership rules, which whilst maintaining exclusivity, may well have contributed to a restriction in membership. These new rules stated that:

'No person not being a member and resident in Canterbury, or within the Parliamentary boundaries of the City shall be admitted to the concerts'. The next rule concerned guests and stated: 'That non-resident gentlemen and officers of the Army and Navy shall be admitted to concerts on the invitation of a member and on payment of one shilling and sixpence.'

The minutes, from the late 1840's onwards, show difficulties in obtaining suitable premises for performance, at a cost commensurate with the means available to the modestly sized

membership. Indeed, several meetings were held at which it appears that the club was attempting to purchase a freehold premise as a permanent base, but this never became a reality, and the club had to share premises and rent spaces in local venues, mainly taverns (you may recall that's where it began). In 1860 the club relocated to the Music Hall for 26 guineas for the season and, in addition, was required to pay the cost of any necessary alterations to the premises.

As well as difficulties with accommodation and venues, there is some evidence that the club was also beginning to experience problems with performers. As an example, the minutes from 1847 show a sliding scale of fines to be levied against orchestra members and performers who turned up late or whose conduct left something to be desired. Needless to say, the cost of performers was also on the rise, as evidenced by discussions recorded in the minutes of March 1860, whereby protracted negotiations were held with a London based Comic Singer called Hodgson, who finally agreed to perform at the Catch Club for the princely sum of Five guineas 9 over seven times the average weekly wage) plus the return rail fare from London! This 'merging' with the music hall may also indicate a change in public tastes that was 'catching' up with the catch club, and may have been another factor in its demise.

Finally, the demise of the club is recorded in the minutes of the AGM held on September 13th 1864, in the Freemasons Tavern, where it was resolved:

‘That the committee having failed in obtaining a suitable room for carrying on the club to wind it up and make arrangements for the property to be placed in safe custody, free of cost, until a future season.’

Alas, there was to be no future season and the records of the Club are now housed in these very archives, with its property, notably its library and paintings, having been passed to the St. Lawrence Society.