

SOME ENTRIES OF NUMISMATIC INTEREST IN THE
MASTER'S ACCOUNTS OF THE MERCHANT TAILORS'
GILD OF DUBLIN, 1553-61.

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MONG the papers in the *Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland*, vol. xlviij, part 1, June, 1918, is an entertaining one by Dr. H. F. Berry, I.S.O., entitled "The Merchant Tailors' Gild—that of St. John the Baptist of Dublin, 1418-1841," which contains some items which may interest the members of this Society. These occur in the extracts from the Master's account for the years 1553 to 1561 which appear on p. 22, as follows:—

1553.

Priests and clerks St. John's Midsummer Even, 8*d.* Irish. Wine and bread to the same company St. John's Day, 4½*d.* Sir John Callan, your priest, 3*s.* 4*d.* (wages for year).

Paid Steven Basse (Casse) for playing Pilot on Corpus Christi Day, 2*d.* Irish: for his dinner and his lady's, 12*d.* Irish: gloves and trayels (?) to Pilot, 9*d.* Irish.

1554-5.

Bellman, 3*d.*; clerk for ringing the mind, 6*d.*; ale against St. John's Day, 3*d.*; cakes, 4*d.*; aniseed, 16*d.*; comfits, 3*d.*; saffron, 18*d.*; butter, 12*d.*; eggs and milk, 6*d.*; sack, 3*d.*; claret wine, 21*d.*

Paid to the Emperor and Empress, 9*d.*; for their breakfast and dinner, 18*d.*; for painting the Emperor's head, 8*d.*

In 1556-7, the receipts of the gild, in rents, quarterages, fines, &c., amounted to £34 5s. 6½*d.* Irish, and the disbursements to £14 18s. 10*d.* Irish.

1557.

Paid Sir John Kelly for reading the Roll, 6*d.* The parson, for his light at Dirige and Mass, 12*d.* Charge of myself and brethren that went to the Basken, 8s.

1558.

Received at Mass the Sunday after St. John's Day, of our part of the offering, 21*d.* Irish: do., St. Mydrype's Day at Mass, 9*d.*

Paid for drink for the priests and clerks after Dirige, 18*d.*; Ringing the mind for brethren and sisters, 6*d.*; mending St. John's nose, 4*d.*; for five "coppes" on the standards in St. John's Church.

1560.

Paid for my company's breakfast and mine when we went to the Tallange (Tallaght) to the lord chancellor, 18*d.*

Making a sword for the Emperor, 12*d.* Irish.

1561.

Recd. of John Roche, Shepe St., fine due, 12 white groats.

John Kene, fine for an income as a brother, 8 white testers.

Jeffery Mysell, income as apprentice, 6 testers, 2 groats, 3 ob.

Henry Small, income as journeyman, 2 white groats.

Recd. of John Desmond, Wicklow, rent, Mich. term.

Walter Byrford, for loft over the poor house, 9 brown backs.

On reading this page, the first thing which interests us is that some of the amounts are stated in Irish currency. I expect, however, that all are meant to be, and this idea is strengthened by the total receipts and disbursements for 1556-7 being given in Irish money. In the whole of the extracts from the accounts, this is the only page in which items in Irish currency are mentioned.

The next is that all amounts under two shillings are written in pence, *e.g.* claret wine, 21*d.* This continued for a long period. It

last appeared in an entry in 1617-18; when 12*d.* were paid for white lights at Walter Gorry's burial. After 1617-18 there are no entries between one and two shillings till 1711-12, when there appears "Spent on a walk with the two new wardens, 1*s.* 8*d.*" These walks were for the purposes of search and of surprising craftsmen engaged in practices contrary to the Guild rules. The change may have occurred before then, as the accounts from 1658 to 1699 are missing.

Last of all are the entries for the year 1561.

Before entering into an examination of these items, it will be necessary to review the value of the coins then current in Ireland. There were: (1) The "Harp" groats issued by Henry VIII. (2) The base shilling and lower denominations issued by Edward VI both for England and Ireland. (3) The "Harp" shilling, groat, half-groat and penny of Mary, 7 oz. fine. (4) The harp shilling, groat and rose penny of Philip and Mary, 3 oz. fine. (5) The base shilling and groat of Elizabeth issued in 1558-9, 3 oz. fine; and, lastly, her silver shilling and groat of 1561 of 11 oz. fine.

Their value according to a Proclamation published in Dublin on July 14, 1561, was as follows¹:—

"The harp shilling of Mary, at 8*d.* Irish.

"The harp shilling of Philip and Mary and that of 1558-9, 5¼*d.* Irish.

"The harp groats of the same stamp and standard, 1¾*d.*, or three for 5¼*d.*

"The harp groats of Henry VIII, 1¼*d.* Irish.

"The rose penny 3/2 farthings, Irish, or four for 1½*d.*"

The value of the monies of Edward VI were not referred to in that Proclamation, but in a previous one published in December, 1560, they are given as:—

"The shilling countermarked with the portcullis, 7*d.* Irish, and that with the greyhound, 3½*d.*"

¹ "The Elizabethan Coinages for Ireland," by H. Symonds, *Numismatic Chronicle*, 4th series, vol. xvii, p. 105.

but no mention is made of the smaller denomination coined at Dublin during that reign.¹

The fine shilling of 1561 was current at 12*d.* Irish, or 9*d.* English ; and the groat at 4*d.* Irish, or 3*d.* English.

Taking into consideration the different values of these coins, how very difficult it must have been for the cashiers and accountants in Ireland to have kept their own accounts in those days.

I will now consider the different items of the accounts of 1561.

The fine of John Roche, 12 white groats, were evidently the fine groats of 1561, and that of John Kene, 8 white testers, were the shillings of that year. The 6 testers, 2 groats, 3 ob. from Jeffery Mysell gives much more trouble in estimating the value of his fee. They must have been of the old base money. There were then no less than four different values for the tester, viz. one of 8*d.*, one of 7*d.*, two of 5½*d.*, and one of 3½*d.*, so the value of these 6 testers varied between 1*s.* 9*d.* and 4*s.* The groats likewise varied, as there was one of 1¾*d.*, another 1¼*d.*, so that the value of the two groats varied between 2½*d.* and 3½*d.* As for the 3 obols or halfpence, it is difficult to say what coin this would refer to. The halfpenny coined in Dublin for Edward VI was really three farthings Irish, but was probably then not worth a farthing, as the rose penny was only current for three half-farthings. Another coin that might be the equivalent to a halfpenny is the Edward Dublin penny, or three halfpence Irish. These Dublin coins, it must be remembered, were 4 oz. fine to the rose penny's 3 oz.

Then come the 9 brown backs paid by Walter Byrford. Here I must acknowledge that only a surmise can be given. The only nickname given by Simon is that of "Bungal," which apparently applied to the base English groats. I can only suggest that a brown back was a term applied to the base shillings of Edward VI, which can be assumed to have become very brown in appearance by that time. If this surmise is correct, the value of the entry varies between

¹ "The Elizabethan Coinages for Ireland," by H. Symonds, *Numismatic Chronicle*, 4th series, vol. xvii, p. 101.

2s. 7½*d.* and 5s. 3*d.* All these show, as I have before stated, the difficulties of keeping correct accounts, and what an opening there was for fraud.

Some explanation of some other items on the page may be of interest.

The Festival of the Guild was held on June 24, Midsummer Day, being the feast of St. John its patron Saint, when the members of the fraternity attended divine service at the Church of St. John the Evangelist, now no more, and afterwards adjourned to a banquet; the amounts paid for refreshment on this day frequently appear in the extract. It is to be hoped that the Chaplain had other sources of income than the stipend of 3s. 4*d.* St. John's Day was also called St. Mydrype, *i.e.* the middle of reaping before full harvest. On certain days the Guild was entitled to a share of the offertory. It appears to have been the custom for the Guild to have taken part in the pageant always carried out in Dublin on the Festival of Corpus Christi. In 1553, Stephen Casse was paid 2*d.* Irish for representing Pontius Pilate, and various small sums were paid for articles of apparel and for refreshment of his lady and himself.

The Emperor and Empress probably refer to the characters of Herod and his wife in the Corpus Christi or some other pageant.

The "baskin" was a property belonging to the Guild, and it was a custom to visit it in state once a year, when doubtless the deputation had an enjoyable day.

The Chancellor of 1560 was Hugh Curwen, the Archbishop of Dublin, who had a residence at Tallaght.

It always gives me great pleasure to read these ancient accounts. They are generally written in such a naïve manner, and give quite an insight into the habits and customs of those bygone days, and afford such a contrast to the bald and dry entries of our present-day accounts.

