

## The Poor of Langham

and

a Salter, a Baker's Boy and the Tallow Chandlers' Company  
Liveryman Maurice Cocking reflects upon a curious coincidence.

It was a warm, Summer's afternoon when I received the news. On return from school, my Mother greeted me with the intelligence that she had discussed the matter with the village baker, Ken Hale, and had secured for me the office of after-school baker's boy at the not inconsiderable stipend of 7s 6d a week. It was the Dawn of Prosperity.

The Time was wartime 1943: The Place, of beloved memory, was Langham ("where they hang 'em"), a quiet backwater lost in England's smallest County, Rutland, four miles from nowhere and two miles from the County Town of Oakham ("where they poke 'em"). The Circumstance: escape from the attentions of the Luftwaffe over South-East London.

Thus it was that one came to grease (tallow) tins, cut and weigh dough, bake and to deliver golden loaves. Two memories abide: the toppling of a trade bike propped against a telegraph pole, spilling a multitude of loaves, higgledy-piggledy across the main road and, nearby, Miss Horton, a wild figure of a customer, her hair confused about her skimpy shoulders, her torso draped about with many cats, climbing, descending, clinging. The City of London and, for that matter, Tallow Chandlers, would have needed very patient explaining.

Scene II: The Time, 1997, fifty four years on. The Place, the Dowgate Dungeon, otherwise, the cramped basement of Tallow Chandlers' Hall. The Circumstance: our baker's boy turned Tallow Chandler, aged and stooping, blows dust from, and sorts accumulated material for, the Company's Scrap Books. His young and sparkling assistant, Susan Higgins, passes a large, brown envelope. It is marked - The Poor of Langham.

Langham? Not my Langham, surely? But it is. Of all the villages in all the world, how have the Tallow Chandlers come to walk into my village of half a hundred years ago? Dear Reader, they were involved close on 400 years ago! Here is how:

There lived in the Parish of Langham during the second half of the 16th century one, Roger Clark - "who had gone to London and made his fortune as a member of the Salter's Company". In a brief, village history he is described as Alderman Roger Clark. Alas, the Salters' Company can shed no further light. All their records ascended into Heaven in the Great Fire of 1666. However, the Langham history and our own 'Records of The Worshipful Company of Tallow Chandlers' by M F Monier-Williams reveal that his widow, Mrs Frances Clark, gave £200 to the Tallow Chandlers' Company in 1608 to purchase an annuity. The condition was that they pay her £10 a year during her lifetime, £10 on a Dinner for the whole Company on her death and, subsequently, £10 every year to the Vicar and Churchwardens of Langham "for the poor". She died in 1618. It remains a mystery why the, then, considerable sum of £200 should have been entrusted to the Tallow Chandlers rather than to the Salters.

Now, for 379 years, the £10 has been paid each and every year since 1618 when James I sat upon the throne of England. Recently, one is pleased to report, the Company has increased its donation to £25 p.a. Frances Clark's wish is adhered to: the money goes still to The Poor of Langham.