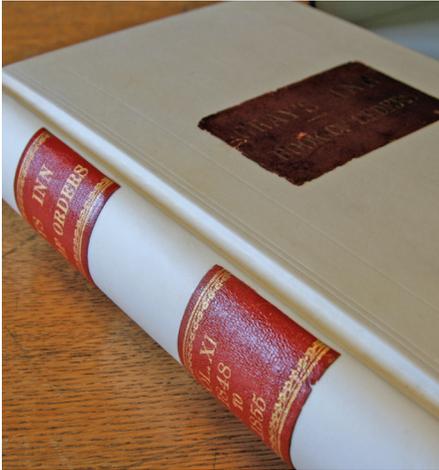


Gray's Inn Pension Books 1800–1850

The Pension Books of Gray's Inn, which start in 1569, are a record extending to the present day of the orders made 'in Pension' by the Benchers of the Inn. The use of the word 'pension' derives from the Latin 'pensio' – a paying out – and the application of the term to the proceedings conducted by the Benchers was probably due to the fact that the business of administering the affairs of the Inn was largely financial. Most of the Inn's other earlier records, apart from some account ledgers and admission records, were destroyed along with the Library in the fire of 6th January 1684. Up until 1848 they have now been either microfilmed or digitised – with a gap of a few years in the 18th century. Since so few of the Inn's other records have survived, the Pension minutes are the only source for most of the historical information.

Their main use is as the Inn's records of its own policies, decisions and administration. The commonest sort of external enquiry of them now is biographical and genealogical, and they are also pressed into service for wider enquiries into legal and local history. They were never intended as a chronological record of the Inn; many things of interest did not require Pension orders and so are not recorded. The Pension Books were originally edited by the Preacher, the Revd Reginald J. Fletcher, and published in two volumes in 1910, covering the periods 1569–1669 and 1669–1800. He wrote an introduction for each volume, outlining the main events in the life of the Inn as recorded in the Pension Books, followed by a summary of the minutes for each year. Any matters relating to renewal of leases etc, which took up a considerable portion of discussion at each meeting of Pension, were however excluded as being of little intrinsic interest.

A programme of transcribing the Pension minute books in the first half of the 19th century was embarked upon under the leadership of Master Robert Hardy, assisted latterly by Master Rosemary Jeffreys, with the unfailing assistance of the Inn's Archivist, Andrew Mussell. The transcribers worked for the most part from scans of the original minutes, written in beautiful clear copperplate English, following the pattern set by Revd Fletcher.



Surprisingly, for the opening years of the century, there is no mention of any celebration in the Inn to mark the two great victories over Napoleon at Trafalgar and Waterloo, for example. There had, however, been regular requests of the Benchers from local militias. As early as May 1801 Capt George Ross of the Highland Armed Association was granted permission 'to exercise for two hours on any one evening in The Gardens of the Honourable

Society during the summer' and, in August 1803, St Andrew's and St George's Corps were also granted permission to deposit arms in The Hall and to parade and exercise in The Gardens. The North Briton Volunteers were permitted in November to perform musters and exercises two days a week, while, in November 1806, Lt Col Chas Price impressed on the Benchers the 'absolute necessity' of requesting the use of The Gardens for the purpose of drilling and exercising the Fourth Regiment of Loyal London Volunteers. Permission was granted. Was perhaps the Battle of Waterloo won partially at least on the playing fields of Gray's Inn?

In 1838 permission was granted for a dinner to be held in The Hall for Children of the Poor of the parish to celebrate the Coronation of Queen Victoria. A dinner was held in The Hall for Benchers, Barristers and Students in 1840 to mark the Queen's marriage. Loyal addresses were presented to the Queen on behalf of the Inn following the assassination attempts on her life in 1840 and 1842.

A major preoccupation throughout the period was the Inn's property which provided the main part of its income. In 1801 there was a fire which necessitated expensive repairs at Holborn Court, now South Square. New buildings were erected, including Verulam Buildings in 1804, which were extended in 1811. In 1843 expensive building works were undertaken at 8 and 9 South Square, which involved buying chambers there that did not already belong to the Inn. At the same time the Library and Pension Room were refitted. Chambers at this time were

not let exclusively to barristers, but it can be seen from complaints about musical parties in 1849 that the main occupation of those living in the Inn, at least at that stage, was the study and practice of the law.

But the Inn's property was not limited to chambers and included a coffee house in Holborn, which was let at a profitable £250 a year from 1800, a baker's next door and a law stationers at 12 Gray's Inn Square. William Lill, the hairdresser, was permitted to sell oysters at the shop under the Gray's Inn Gateway in 1813 until the following year, when this was made into the Head Porter's lodge; and the Benchers finally stopped chambers being converted into shops in 1815. George Henekey, of the Queen's Head Tavern in Holborn, was allowed to use part of the external wall of 14 South Square, from which it would seem that the Inn did not own the pub that some of us still call 'Henekeys'.

In 1806 the Benchers confronted the financial position when the accounts were examined and it was realised that a surplus of £237 15s of income over expenditure was nothing like enough to fund repairs, let alone other outgoings. Various recommendations were made, including a levy on all barristers and members who did not have chambers, an increase in fines and rents, a charge to residents to fund the salaries of watchmen and lamplighters, plus inevitably an increase in the cost of wine. The price rose in stages from 3s 6p to 5s per bottle. On two or three occasions Consols had to be sold to fund building works in the hope that the forthcoming rents would improve the situation. Until 1850 students for the Bar had either to live in the Inn for two years or pay a 'fine' of £20 and a levy for the Library, in addition to the normal £150 paid by all on Call.

The Benchers' obligations to former members of staff and people of the locality were expressed in several ways. In 1802 land was offered the whole length of Gray's Inn Lane in order to make a public footpath, provided that the Commissioners of Paving paid for the building of the path in Moore stone and that it be 4'6" in width. In the event the Benchers consented to part of the width being only 4'3", possibly to allow three carriages, each 7' wide, to travel in the Lane at the same time. Gray's Inn had its own 'Overseers of the Poor' and donations were made to local charity schools, hospitals and dispensaries, as well to former servants and their widows. It is easy to forget that until the middle of the 20th century there were no state pensions and often no means of support, other than charity, for those who were too old or infirm to work. The Inn looked after at least two foundlings, named Gray, who were educated at the Inn's expense and employed as servants.

1
Michaelmas Term 1841.

Grays Inn
 3.^o November 1841

Penio ibnd' tent. 3.^o die Novembriis
 1841.^o coram Thoma^o Greenwood Thesaur.
 Herbert Juner Mi^o Francisco Michmarsh
 bencil. Dna Regina Joh^o Terry Joh^o
 Salfray Burrell Thoma^o James Georgio
 Long Roberto Greene Bractley Samuel
 Turner Thoma^o Jarvis et Archer Ryland
 Armigeris.

Ordered that Thomas James Esquire
 a Benchet of this Society having paid all duties
 to Michaelmas day last and on payment of a Fine
 of Ten Pounds set on the Renewal of his Chamber
 on the Ground floor south side at N^o 11 in Gray's
 Inn Square with a cellar thereto belonging pursuant
 to an Order of Pension made the 5.th day of July 1809
 for the Renewal of Terms in Chambers and to other
 Orders therein referred to shall have Seven Years
 added to the Term of Fourteen Years which was
 to come in the said Chamber and cellar at Mich=
 aelmas 1841 so as to make up the same Twenty
 One Years in the said Chamber and cellar from
 Michaelmas 1811 aforesaid subject to the following
 proviso in the abovementioned Order contained that
 is to say "Provided that if any Chamber shall
 by Death or otherwise fall to an Executor Administrator
 or any other person or persons not being a Member
 or Members of this Society and such Executor or
 Administrator or other person or persons shall

A major preoccupation throughout the first half of the century was the problem of water closets and drains and, in *The Uncommercial Traveller* (1860), Charles Dickens expressed disgust at the rats and rubbish in the Inn. While the Inn was clearly no worse than elsewhere, the Benchers did take steps to address the problem: a new drain and sewer was installed to take water from Field Court and South Square at a cost of £340 in 1832, and all drains appear to have been inspected regularly, but steps taken by residents to try and improve their individual positions by asking for a cesspool to be filled or even building their own drain were discouraged. The Scavenger was paid to remove 'dust and ashes' from tubs at the base of each staircase, put there by the laundresses and servants who cleaned the chambers, but by 1849 the Inn had to pay for this to be taken away, no doubt to one of the vast 'Dust Heaps' mentioned by Dickens at the north end of Gray's Inn Lane.

Prayers were read in Chapel every Wednesday and Friday morning, with Divine Service on Sundays. Eminent clergymen applied for the positions, where the annual stipend was between £100 and £200 pa, together with commons and free accommodation, since it was thought desirable that residents in the Inn should have spiritual assistance whenever required. A fine point of protocol arose in 1809 when The Chaplain and Preacher, Rt Rev Walker King DD, was appointed Bishop of Rochester and had an 'intimation' from the Archbishop of Canterbury that it would be derogatory to his dignity as a Lord of Parliament to have commoners sitting above him and that he should instead be required to dine in Hall next to the Treasurer. The Benchers were relieved of having to make a decision when the Chaplain resolved the situation by taking his normal seat in Hall before resigning his position.

The Inn employed an organist for the organ purchased in 1830. Music was clearly of importance and the Benchers instituted a scholarship of £25 pa at St Mark's Practising School for two students, and it was decided that these students, together with five or six boys from the school, should be brought at the Inn's expense by omnibus to sing in the Chapel and be paid a shilling each per session. It was not until 1824, and not without some protest, that the requirement to have taken the sacrament before Call was dropped, when it became clear that the other Inns had already done so.

By the late 1840s legal education had assumed a much greater importance and the Inn endowed a Lectureship in Real Property to which a Mr Lewis was appointed. His inaugural lecture was marked by

a dinner to which Benchers from the other Inns were invited. The Inns had an understanding that each would appoint a lecturer in a different subject: Lincoln's Inn in Jurisprudence and the Institutes of Civil Law, Inner Temple in Common Law. Lectures were followed by examinations which were at first purely voluntary; later it was decided that the names of those who had been successful should be made public. Lectures took place in Hall as did moots.

The Library increased in importance in the Inn, and one of its heroes emerged from the Minutes in the shape of a Bencher, John Perry, who single-handedly seems to have taken on its reorganisation and cataloguing, for which he was rewarded with several gifts of 50 guineas. There was a librarian throughout the period, who was paid between £30 and £70 pa, plus accommodation. In 1812 the librarian, John Dean, appears to have absconded with taxes owed by the Inn. He was dismissed and sent to Newgate.

The Hall itself saw several changes in the first half of the century. In 1815 it was used for sittings of the Exchequer Court, but this was discontinued in 1822 when the Benchers admitted that the Hall was no longer adequate for this purpose. South Square became known as such in 1829. Wearing a hat in Hall was declared 'a breach of good order and decorum'. The time for dinner was changed several times from 4.15pm in the summer and 5.00pm in the winter to 5.30pm. A major decision was taken in 1846 when it was ordered that pewter plates should be replaced with china and earthenware. 'Repasts' were charged at the same rate for Benchers, Barristers and Students. Treasurers in particular were generous in their donations to the Inn of silver and pictures and sometimes asked for coats of arms to be included in the west window in Hall, which was glazed in 1826. Much of this visible way of life, considerably enhanced in subsequent years, is still preserved for us to enjoy today having survived the devastation of the Inn during the bombing raids of May 1941.

Master Robert Hardy
Master Rosemary Jeffreys