

FRIENDLY SOCIETIES

The Friendly Societies Act 1829 pre-dated the first Building Societies Act 1836. The first Building Societies were in fact registered under the Friendly Societies legislation, and are still responsible to the Registry of Friendly Societies. The first Building Societies Act in its preamble referred to groups of people “principally among the industrious classes”. It is generally accepted that the tremendous growth of Building Societies (certainly in the numbers of Building Societies) was substantially due to the eagerness of the people to acquire a small property so as to become “Forty Shilling Freeholders” and thus have a vote. The first “Building Society” was, however, established about 1775 near Birmingham.

Friendly Societies at Wheatley in the early and mid-nineteenth century.

The old records of the Friendly Societies are now stored (so far as they exist) at the Public Records Office in Kew. In the case of the Wheatley Societies, these consist almost entirely of the Society’s first Rules, as registered, with, in some cases, notice of the change of meeting place, or appointment of new Trustees. The papers are registered under the Number FS 1 plus the individual piece number, obtained from the index book.

The following extracts have been extracted from rather long Rules, in the hope that these will be of more general interest:

“Wheatley Associated Providential Benefit Society,” (Register No. 11) which met at the White Hart Inn, Wheatley, Oxon. “Instituted” on Easter Monday, April 4, 1831. Held at Mr. Edward Robbins, The White Hart Inn, Wheatley.

..... to prevent imposition as much as possible, and to secure a fund for the support of its members in sickness and infirmity and for decently burying its Membersmeetings....in the Club Room at the White Hart. ..AW- allowance in sickness..... £6 allowance for burials. Certificate of illness to be signed by the Father of the Club (who was Edward Robbins) and to be signed by the Minister or Churchwardens, or some of them.

Rule 25 - any member calling another member by any Nick Name (during business) excepting his Christian name or Surname in the Club Room - fine 3d.

Rule 36 - The “Club” to remain so long as there is £50 in the box and three members.

(The above Rules were certified by the Registrar of Friendly Societies, but surprisingly they are also endorsed “Rules allowed and confirmed by W. H. Ashurst, Oxon., Trinity Sessions, 1831.

“Friendly Society” (no other name!), Crown Inn, Wheatley (Registered No. 101).

Rules - begun 5th December, 1823. Held at the Crown Inn, Wheatley. Committee to consist of fifteen persons. Trustees: John Slatter of Rose Hill, in the County of Oxford, Gent., John Cooper of Wheatley, Gent., and Joseph Cooper, Wheatley, Brickmaker and farmer.

Rule 7 Every new member to pay 5/- on admission.

Rule 12 No member under benefit to be allowed at a Pub. drinking...

Rule 14 No person having Venereal Disease shall receive any benefit....

- Rule 16 Every member living within one mile of the place of burial of another member is expected to attend the funeral (unless he died of the small box), two abreast, in order as their names are placed in the club book. Any member not attending such funeral shall at the next quarter night after burial pay 1/- to funds.
- Rule 17 If any member has the small pox he shall be allowed one guinea during the continuance of his distemper and no more.
- Rule 20 Every member shall keep his seat at business meetings (or be fined 6d)
- Rule 23 The name of God shall not be taken in vain.
- Rule 24 Any member swearing or using vile expressions such as 'damn it' or propose any wager, shall be fined 3d.
- Rule 36 Any member of the Committee revealing anything said at a Committee meeting so as to cause animosity - fined 2/6d
- Rule 41 Disputes - to be settled by the Justices as Arbitrators.

Rules of the King and Queen Friendly Society, Wheatley (Reg. No. 238) include:

Established 1861

- Members entering the Club Room and not paying their money - fine one shilling
- Rule 21 - members making false representation - to be expelled.

Signed (personally) Joseph Shepherd	Member
George Fisher	Member
George Gomm	Member
William Rogers	Secretary

NB The broad framework of all the rules seems to be much the same and there was obviously an official model for guidance. The rules of the King and Queen Soc. resemble the others in substantial measure.

In the packet containing the Rules of The King and Queen Benefit Society, there is also:

dated 28/5/1869 Notice ... There is also King and Queen Benefit Society ... meeting place changed to White Hart Inn, Wheatley.

signed: Thos. Shepherd
Charles Shepherd
Sidney Shepherd

John Cullum, Secretary
“(late Wm. Rogers)”

In the packet containing the Rules of The King and Queen Benefit Society, there is also:

1870 (no other date) NoticeWhite Hart Benefit Society, Registration No. 238, removed from White Hart Inn to the Railway Hotel
signed: Thos. Shepherd

George Gomm
Joseph Shepherd

John Cullum, Clerk

Rules of a Friendly Society held at The Crown Inn, Wheatley, 1861

These include:

Rule IX Age of admission 15 to 25 years

Rule XII Sickness pay ... sick, lame or blind so as not to be able to follow his regular calling or work
.. ..ten shillings benefit per week, not to exceed 52 weeks

Rule XIII Fines for working when on the box.

Signed (personally) by: Charles Bushnell (Steward)

George Munt (Steward) Joseph Penny Frampton (Clerk)

John Nott (Member)

James Munt (Member)

Lawrence Messenger (Member)

There are then an additional set of rules (but in the same rules book), which include:-

Rule 111 Officers..... Steward to receive contributions and pay the sick ... and
be responsible for any deficiency in the accounts.

Rule IV Duties of Officers: to meet in the Club Room on first Tuesday in every
month at 7 pm, May to September, and at 6 in the evening October to April If either
Steward absent - fine 1/-

Rule IX Age of admission: 15-45 years

Rule XVI Death (after 18 months in the Society) - £4 to be allowed. Every member living within
one mile is expected to attend the funeral (unless he died of the small pox) two
abreast, in order as their names are placed in the club-book. Each member absent to
pay on the next quarter night after burial, 1/- to funds.

Stewards allowed use of hat-bands and gloves at such funeral.

Rule XVII Members (of 18 months' standing) allowed £2 for burial of wife.

Rule XIX Behaviour of members: that if at any meeting of this society .. .any
member shall be intoxicated, use scurrilous language, reflect on the
character of any member, strike, seize by the collar, or make use of any
threatening language to the Stewards, or any member, he shall for the first
offence pay a fine of 2/6, and for the second 5/-, and for the third be
excluded.

Rule XX Fines for intoxicated members 6d (Officers 1/-)

Rule XXI Conduct of members: any member called to order by the stewardand
continues...fined 6d

Rule XXIV fines for vain expressions.....any member using the name of God as a
vain expression during club hours - fine 3d

- Rule XXV If any member shall lie, curse, swear, or use vile expressions, such as “damn it”, or propose any wager - fine 3d
- Rule XXVII The Annual Feast: on Tuesday in Whitsun week a feast shall be provided by the Stewards - no part to be paid from funds. No member to partake until he has paid his money.
- Rule XXXIII Admission of strangers..... not permitted until after the business finished.
- Rule XXXIV Duties of committee: 1/- fine for non-attendance.
- Rule XLIV Disputes to be settled by five arbitrators. Appointment of a Surgeon
- Rule LI

Registered No. 241 envelope is:

“Registered No. 241 “The Friendly Society” held at the Crown Inn, Wheatley.

Notice of meeting 7/ 01/1862. Trustees appointed:

W. Orpwood, Farmer of Chilworth
James Robbins, Farmer and Miller, Wheatley Archive

Signed personally: John Mott member
James Munt member
Laurence Messenger member

Joseph Peney (?) Frampton Secretary

Also included - a separate notice:-

Notice of dissolution of the Crown Inn Friendly Society, Wheatley 20/-6/1871, signed by 64 members (making their mark) and including:

George Munt, Senior. X his mark
I. Munt
George Munt, Junior
Thomas Munt
William Munt

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The funds to be proportionately divided according to the number of months each person has been a member.

(N.B. All members of the Society signed, except only one!)

As a matter of interest, I noticed in the Index of Oxfordshire Friendly Societies, a Society called "The Garibaldian Friendly Society" (of Goring, registered 1861. Another Friendly Society is registered as 'meeting at Mr 's factory.