

*A NINETEENTH CENTURY
JACK-OF-ALL-TRADES*

JAMES ROBBINS OF WHEATLEY

BY

MARGARET ROSENTHAL

THE DAILY JOURNAL,

OR

GENTLEMAN'S, MERCHANT'S AND TRADESMAN'S
COMPLETE

Annual Account Book,

FOR THE POCKET OR DESK,

FOR THE YEAR OF OUR LORD
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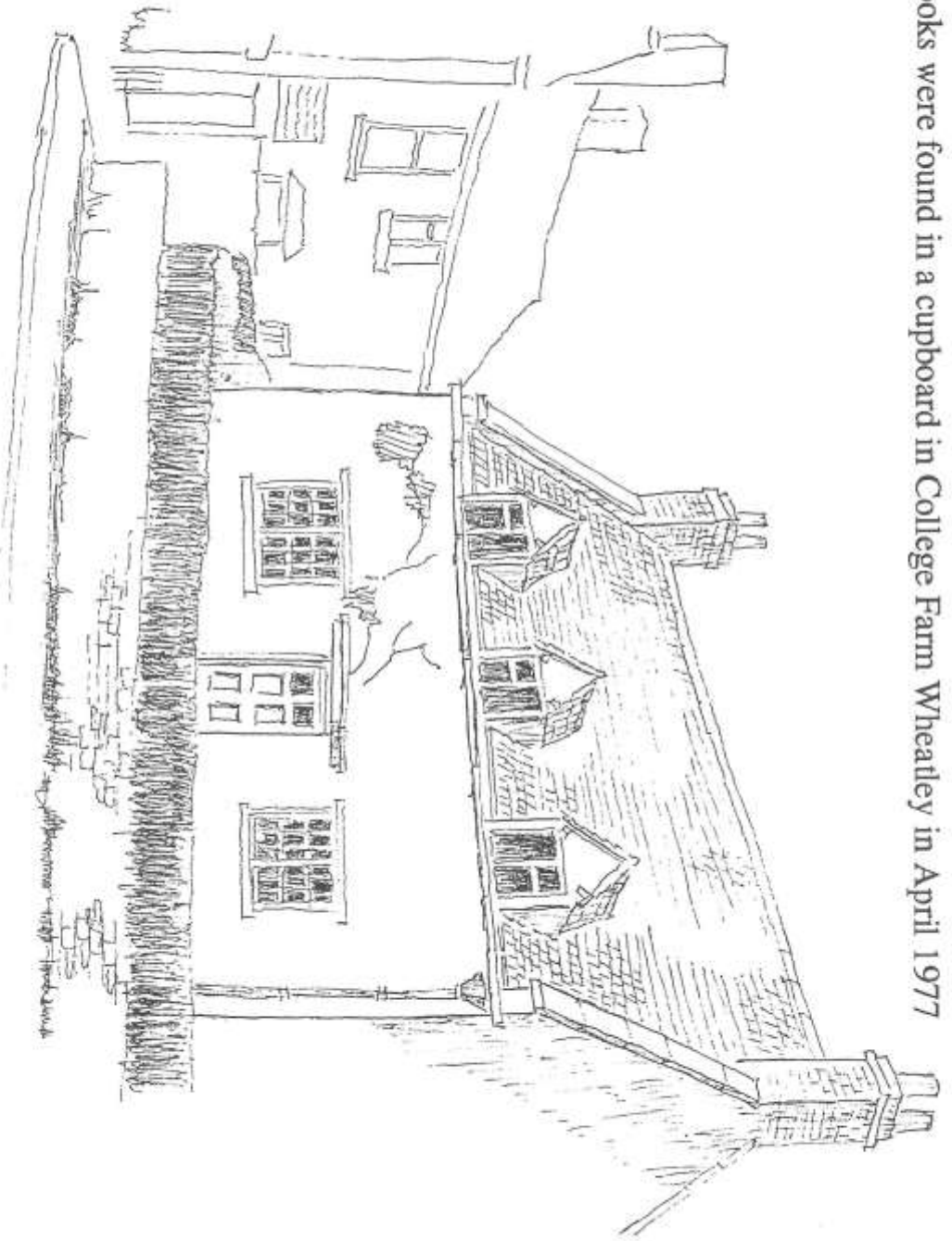
Title page from the pocket book used by James Robbins in 1840

*A NINETEENTH CENTURY
JACK-OF-ALL-TRADES
JAMES ROBBINS OF WHEATLEY*

In April 1977, Mr Alan Rooney of College Farm, Wheatley, found a box full of old pocket books in a cupboard which had been wallpapered over and forgotten. They were thick with dust but proved to be legible and to give an unusual insight into the activities of the owner, James Robbins of Wheatley. It was already known from the Census of 1851 and 1861 that he was licensee of the White Hart, an inn which still exists in the High Street and his grave in the churchyard records his death in 1864 at the age of 49, but the pocket books soon made it clear that he had followed many trades besides that of innkeeper. They cover the period from 1830 to 1860 and he evidently carried them with him as he went from farm to farm and house to house, writing in them, often with a very blunt pencil, his notes on jobs undertaken, prices charged and other business details.

The Wheatley Local History Group devoted most of its meetings during 1978 to examining the pocket books and extracted more than a thousand entries which show that James Robbins was a carpenter, a jobbing builder, dealer in timber and corn and a pig-keeper, and which give a vivid picture of these multifarious activities and occasional glimpses of his private life. The earliest book, dated 1828 includes some childish drawings and scribbles as well as records of receipts in a handwriting different from that in the later books. The drawings look immature for James Robbins himself, who would have been thirteen at the time, but they are carefully done and depict the various rooms in a house, including parlour, 'the little room', 'skulery to be washed down everyday', and kitchen, showing clearly the open grate with a large cooking

The pocket books were found in a cupboard in College Farm Wheatley in April 1977



COLLEGE FARM

H.S. DRAKE

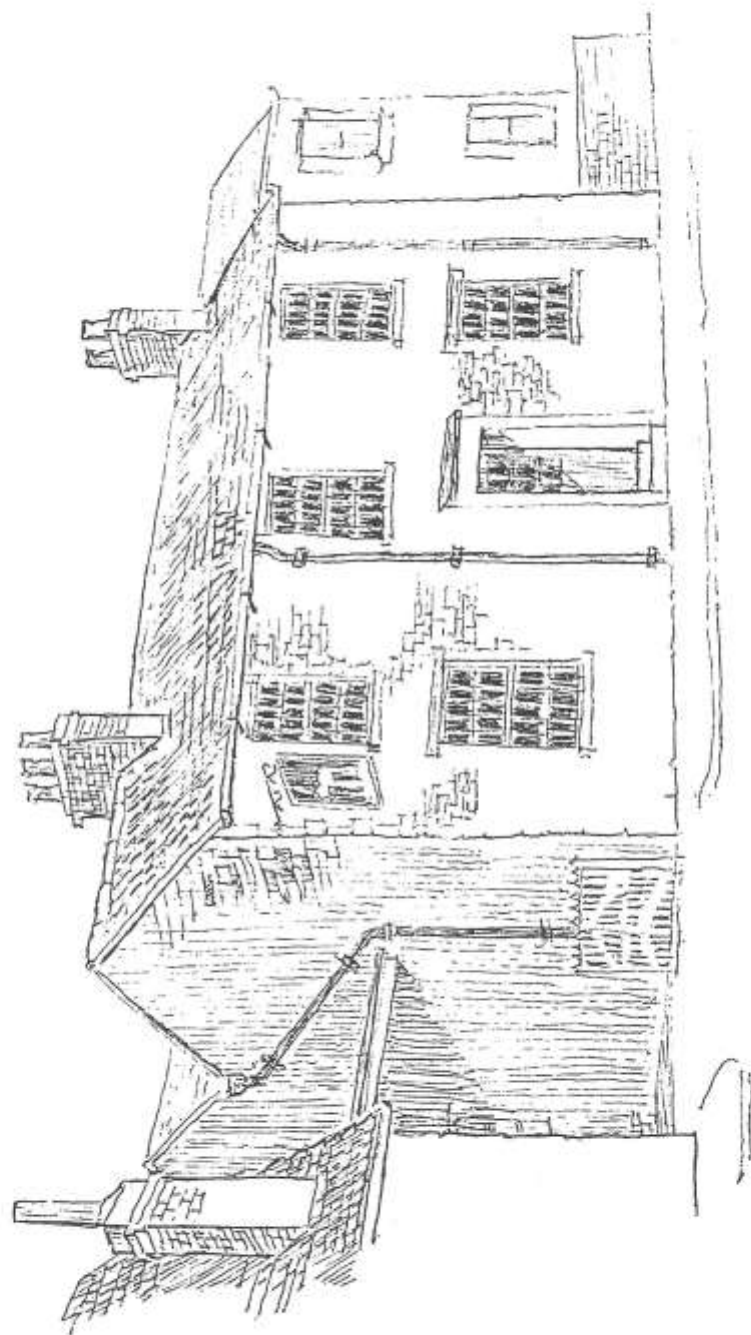
pot and hooks for suspending pans. In 1835 the series of notes begins in a printed book 'The Daily Journal or, Gentleman's, Merchant's and Tradesman's Complete Annual Account Book for the Pocket or Desk. FOR THE YEAR OF OUR LORD 1835: being the third after Leap Year the sixth of the reign of King William IV.'

In addition to pages for every day of the year the editors provided such useful matter as tables of Duties on Windows, Male Servants and Horses: the Church Calendar and a full list of the members of both Houses of Parliament. There is also a weather table, 'constructed upon philosophical considerations' and forecasting the type of conditions to be expected according to the exact position of the moon, for example 'if it be new or full moon between 2 and 4 afternoon changeable weather can be expected in Summer and fair and mild in Winter.' Inside, this journal includes a recipe for polish, a number of lists of names with sums of money beside them, pages of incomprehensible figures and an entry beginning 'Mr Ways Cowhouse 90 ft long..'. This is characteristic of the later books: many of the jottings, while no doubt perfectly clear to the writer, are obscure to us and it is not always possible to connect the specifications for a job with a later bill or payment.

The next few years are covered in a single journal which has become almost impossible to read but from 1840 on the sequence is almost complete until 1860 and two small notebooks survive from 1863.

His activities as a carpenter may be illustrated from his work for one family, the Chapmans, which spans the whole time. In 1841 he mended a tail board for them, he supplied a child's coffin (price £1.10) and a new handle to a dung prong: he also arranged to make

James Robbins was known to be the licensee of the White Hart during the mid 19th century



THE WHITE HART

H.J. DRAKE-
1988

a pig trough - with one inch board and with an oak block at one end. In 1844 detailed measurements for Mr Chapman's bed are given: it had posts 4ft 9" high; the winnowing machine also needed repair. In 1847: 'agreed with Mr Chapman for 4 new gates and hanging and painting (£3.12.0)'

In the same year a Com Bin, 17/0, a Bottle of Rum, 3/0, a Grindstone, 10/0, a new Whipple Tree, £2.10.0, a new Spreader, £3 6.0, two pieces of deal and a cream cistern were supplied: it was a year when he was more systematic than usual about noting prices. As the years went by he continued to serve this family, attending to their farming machinery including a chum, and 'repaired draws and provided 8 new knobs, 4/3'.

For other customers he put up 'hovels' and made ladders: in 1849 he gives not only the specifications but also plans for two privies. A job for Wheatley Church must have called for special skill: 'The rising up large Bell and taking out the Gudgeon and putting in new one and wedges', but he charged only eight shillings.

He must have been very welcome to the ladies of the district for he frequently undertook such small jobs as repairing a stool, 'close horses', rocking horse (1/6): providing a new knife board, door frames and doors to an Ice house, 'coffee pot andle', hand rails round staircase, pulley for bird cage: altering bedstead, 'fixing Dining Room Curtings'. In 1844 he gives specifications for 'Mr Earle's Water Closet' which must have been a novelty in the area. In 1852 he records, perhaps with some pride, 'The Bishops Gates' with a drawing of a very solid one. In 1848 he undertook some work on gates and fences for 'The Right Honourable the Earl of Macconsfield'.

As a builder he was several times employed on large scale repairs at Headington Union: in 1844 there was extensive work on the flooring, 'Glazing little room above over the Celler' two windows in large room downstairs, partition and new frame and door in Privy, new well frame and lid to frame. He built barns and stables: in 1858; 'Stable for 8 horses. Chaff House in middle, Cow house for 6 cows, 2 Pigstys and hog tub house'. The cow house was to be 42ft by 14ft, and the buildings were to be tiled, though he sometimes undertook thatching. His work for Holton Church ranged from '2 new pair of Pew Hinges, Screws and fixings (1/6)' to repairing the churchyard wall for £27.14.2 and included frequent attention to the wheelbarrow. In 1859 there are several pages of highly technical details of work on a windmill.

One very important job came to him in 1858; 'Arch at Wheatley Bridge. Both Sides to be underpinned with bricks 12ft of side 9" brickwork 18 high 2 ends taken out and rebuilt 2ft at each end span 6ft wide from bottom to crown of arch 6ft.' Other work for public bodies included attending to the Turnpike Gates at Islip, Wheatley and Headington. A smaller but unusual job was the making of a 'wood leg' for William Mortimore. He drew a careful diagram for this but charged only 15/6.

In the 1851 Census he described himself as a farmer and the journals contain many records of dealings in wheat, barley, oats, hay and potatoes. These give some evidence about prices: in 1846 a ton of hay was £1.15 0 but in 1860 half a ton cost £2.10.0. In 1839 seven quarters of oats went at £1.4.6 a quarter. In 1856 ten sacks of potatoes cost £2.10.0. He also kept pigs and the price in 1846 for a pig weighing 28 score 6 lbs was £14.3.0 and this had

changed little by 1855. In 1847 he listed the food bought for 2 pigs, including 2 bushell of beans at 11/10 and one of barley at 4/6.

Another major enterprise was the buying and selling of timber. Dealings in bark occur constantly: in 1849 a load of 114 cwt was worth £2.1.0 and in 1855 the price was £3.6.6 a ton. Trees bought include walnuts: in 1856 two cost £11.0.0 and at the same time 27 sycamores and 1 large ash were £46.10.0. He often gives lists of trees measured, for example 17 oaks at Waterperry Wood. Other timber bought or sold was yew, lime, fir poles, faggots, sacks of shavings: planks 'yall' (presumably yellow) frequently occur. He was often charging for drawing timber 'home' or to Oxford or to Islip station. In 1855 he quotes sixpence a foot for drawing 42 foot of oak timber from Stanton to Oxford. This activity carried him to many neighbouring areas: the Baldons, Oakley, Shabbington, Garsington, Abingdon and Worminghall, to mention a few.

In 1846 and the two following years he was busy making gunstocks. The usual price was 5/3 so the 200 sent off in May 1846 were worth £52.10.0. Some at least of these were sent to Birmingham. At times, though not consistently, he provided coffins and often the same bill includes beer:

April 6. 1848 To Coffin	2. 5. 0
To 4 1/2 galls of beer	<u>6. 0</u>
	2. 11. 0

In 1856: 'To Coffin lined with flannel, ful set of furniture £1.15.0'.

Among all these working notes we sometimes find details of his own financial affairs. 1846 ends with a summary of outgoings, starting:

Rent	35. 0. 0
Tithe	11. 2. 6
Poor Rates	4. 10.0
In 1857	
Rent	17. 0. 0
Land tax	12. 4. 0
Property tax	1. 3. 2

but there is no evidence to show what house was concerned, whether the White Hart or some other. He often records small loans, of a few shillings and once: 'Lent Sparrow on handkerchief 4/-' and his receipts were sometimes 'on account'. He is described in the 1851 Census as employing seven men but only a few of these are recognisable in the notes. David occurs frequently: he was often doing small jobs for the gentry and was paid 3/- for a day's work. Other names of employees are Charles and Mortimore.

James Robbins' father, Edward Robbins, was a founder member of the Wheatley Friendly Society and in 1847 and 1848 and the pocket books show that James was an officer, presumably treasurer, for they include many such entries as: 'Received of Thomas Smith for 2 Quarters Club 11.6d. For one member, Mr Tooms, a full record is given from January 1847 to December 1848. He paid in a total of £3-2-2., including two fines of a shilling 'for not going to Church' and two sums of 2/6 for 'Dinner'. At Whitsuntide 1849 the Club evidently met for a dinner at the White Hart; the entry reads:

Whitsun 1849	£	s	d
To 73 Members	10	19	0
To 10 Musicians	1	5	0
To Ringers		5	0
To Pipes		7	0
To Bread and Cheese		1	2
To 2 barrells of Beer	4	19	0
To Kilderkin Do	1	10	0
To Extra		10	0
To Cash to Pay the Musicians	2	15	0

It is not clear whether the following entry refers to the same convivial occasion; 'Had of Mr Wilkins for Whitsuntide

To 102 lbs of Boiling beef	2	6	9
To 86 of Rost Beef and Veal	4	6	2

Scattered among these weighty matters we find shopping lists that suggest that the expeditions of the head of the family to town were important events. A typical one of 1844 reads:

Sash Pulleys
 1d of tin rivets small
 Bit of sheet iron 20 inches long 5 wide
 Cupboard lock
 1/2 lb mustard
 1/4 lb of Pepper
 1 Gallon of Vinegar
 Tea Kettle
 Good Skimmer
 Coffee
 Skittle Ball
 Tobacco
 Cheese

Tobacco and cheese occur regularly in these lists; a cheese bought from 'Undrill' cost 12/7 in 1847. Other items are; Childs shoes 4

inches, Handkerchief 4s. Leg of mutton, pair of side combs, shoe laces. Saltpetre, Eye Pils, 3 yards of Calico 4 ½ yd, Broom, Top to umbreller, candied peel, currants, plumbs, thimble, night lights, bottle marking ink, reel of blue marking cotton, 2 ½ yards of lemon colour satin ribbon about 7/8 wide, Bottle of port, New frock, putty, Tincture of Rhubarb, pair of stays. Few of these lists give any indication of the prices paid but occasionally some light is thrown on the cost of everyday items. In 1857 a cwt of coals was 1/3, a quart of gin 3/2 and half a pint of brandy 2/0. We must remember that David took home only 3/0 for a day's work spent mending hovels, barking trees or building a churchyard wall.

Much more work could be done on this mass of information but the impression left by this first study is of admiration for the many skills of James Robbins and the way he managed to perform all these complicated tasks with no better records than the close written pages of his pocket books. It is also impressive to see how widely his business connection ranged. During those twenty years he had contacts in Oxford (including New College and Queen's College), Thame and most of the villages in the area but also in High Wycombe, Beaconsfield, London, Wolverhampton and Birmingham (where he gives the address of the Captain of a boat named Eliza). He dealt with the local landowners and clergy, including the Bishop of Oxford and the Earl of Macclesfield and with such characters as the oatmealman, the blind fiddler and the umbrella man.

From a little known Oxfordshire village with a population of about a thousand this many-sided craftsman, scarcely touched by the Industrial Revolution, lived a life perhaps common enough in his own time but unthinkable today. It is a remarkable chance that his pocket books should have survived to give us so vivid a picture of his life and work.

LIST OF THE ASSESSED TAXES.

CARRIAGES.—For every coach, chariot, landau, chaise, caravan, &c. with four wheels (except carriages or coaches licensed by the Commissioners for managing the stamp duties) is to be paid as follows:—

For one such carriage with		Five such carriages	.....	39	7	6
four wheels	.....	Six such carriages	.....	49	4	0
Two such carriages	.....	Seven such carriages	.....	59	10	0
Three such carriages	.....	Eight such carriages	.....	70	8	0
Four such carriages	.....	Nine such carriages	.....	81	13	6
And so on at the same rate for any number of such carriages.							
For every additional body used on the same carriage	.....			3	3	0
Carriages with two wheels except of less value than 20 <i>l.</i> , and name of proprietor painted in letters one inch in length			each	£3	5	0
Ditto drawn by two or more horses or mules				4	10	0
For every additional body used on the same carriage				1	11	6
Four wheel carriages, drawn by one horse only				4	10	0
Four wheel carriages, with each wheel of less diameter than 30 inches, drawn by ponies or mules, exceeding 12 hands and neither of them exceeding 13 hands in height				3	5	0
Carriages used by common carriers and occasionally carrying passengers	.....	{ with four wheels	.....	2	10	0
		{ with two wheels	.....	1	5	0
For every carriage kept for the purpose of being let to hire without horses for any period of time less than one year	.....			6	0	0
For every such carriage let to hire for travelling post, by the day or by the mile, by any post-master or innkeeper, &c. duly licensed, and for every stage coach, with four wheels, duly entered	.....			5	5	0
When the carriages are never drawn by more than one horse	.....			4	10	0

WINDOWS.—The windows of every kitchen, cellar, scullery, butchery, pantry, larder, wash-house, laundry, bake-house, brew-house, and lodging-house, belonging to or occupied with any dwelling-house, whether contiguous to or disjoined from the body of such house, are still subject to the duty.

All skylights and windows, or lights however constructed in staircases, garrets, cellars, passages, and all other parts of dwelling-houses in the exterior parts of the house are to be charged.

No.	Duty.	No.	Duty.	No.	Duty.	No.	Duty.
	<i>l. s. d.</i>		<i>l. s. d.</i>		<i>l. s. d.</i>		<i>l. s. d.</i>
8	0 16 6	22	6 9 0	36	12 6 9	90 to 94	26 12 3
9	1 1 0	23	6 17 6	37	12 15 3	95 97	27 14 9
10	1 8 0	24	7 5 9	38	13 3 6	100 109	29 8 6
11	1 16 3	25	7 14 3	39	13 12 0	110 119	31 13 3
12	2 4 9	26	8 2 9	40 to 44	14 8 9	120 129	33 18 3
13	2 13 3	27	8 11 0	45 49	15 16 9	130 139	36 3 0
14	3 1 9	28	8 19 6	50 54	17 5 0	140 149	38 8 0
15	3 10 0	29	9 8 0	55 59	18 13 0	150 159	40 12 9
16	3 18 6	30	9 16 3	60 64	19 17 9	160 169	42 17 9
17	4 7 0	31	10 4 9	65 69	21 0 3	170 179	45 2 6
18	4 15 3	32	10 13 3	70 74	22 2 6	180.....	46 11 3
19	5 3 9	33	11 1 6	75 79	23 5 0		
20	5 12 3	34	11 10 0	80 84	24 7 6	Every window above	
21	6 0 6	35	11 18 3	85 89	25 10 0	180, <i>1s. 6d.</i>	

Every window, including the frame, partitions, and divisions thereof, which by due admeasurement of the whole space of the aperture of the wall of the house or building, on the outside of such a window, shall exceed in height 12 feet, or in breadth 4 feet 9 inches, not being less than 3 feet 6 inches in height, shall be charged as two windows, except such as shall have been made of greater dimensions prior to the 5th of April, 1785; except also the windows in shops, workshops, and warehouses.

Windows in farm-houses, in any dwelling-house used wholly for the purpose of a manufactory, warehouses, or workshops, and not having any communication with the

The 1841 pocket book, for example, provided other useful information as diaries do today

dwelling-house, are exempt: and also windows (not exceeding three) in front shops and warehouses on the ground story though communicating with the dwelling-house.

Distinct chambers or apartments in any of the inns of court or Chancery, or in any college or hall in either of the universities of Oxford or Cambridge, or any public hospital; also houses divided in different tenements, *being distinct properties*; where the number of windows does not in each case respectively exceed seven, to be charged *one shilling and ninepence* for each window; where the number of windows exceed seven, to be charged as if the same where an entire house.

Windows and lights in dairies and cheese-rooms, if made with splints, laths, or wires, and without any glass, and the words "Dairy or Cheese-room" is painted over the door, or one glazed window in a dairy or cheese-room in a farm-house occupied by a tenant, if never used to sleep in, but wholly kept for that purpose, are exempt.

Every dwelling-house, being a farm-house, *bona fide* used for purposes of husbandry, the rent of which shall be under 200*l.* a year, is exempt from window duty, provided the occupier shall not derive an income of more than 100*l.* a year from any other source than the said farm.

MALE SERVANTS.—Masters to pay yearly for one, 1*l.* 4*s.*; two, 1*l.* 11*s.* each; three, 1*l.* 18*s.* each; four, 2*l.* 3*s.* 6*d.* each; five, 2*l.* 9*s.* each; six, 2*l.* 11*s.* 6*d.* each; seven, 2*l.* 12*s.* 6*d.* each; eight, 2*l.* 16*s.* each; nine, 3*l.* 1*s.* each; ten, 3*l.* 6*s.* 6*d.* each; eleven and upwards, 3*l.* 16*s.* 6*d.* each.

Male servants under the age of eighteen, having a legal settlement in the parish of his employer, is exempt from duty, provided he shall not have attained the age of eighteen before the 6th day of April in the year for which any such assessment shall be made, and provided the exemption be duly claimed. Servants of Roman Catholic clergymen are exempted from the additional duty paid by bachelors.

Bachelors to pay annually, additional, for every man servant, 1*l.*

For every male-servant employed as a waiter in any tavern, eating-house, &c., 1*l.* 10*s.*—For every occasional waiter employed for six months in any year, 1*l.*—If employed for less than six months . 0 10 0
 For every person employed as an occasional waiter in any private house, not less than six times in the year..... 0 10 0
 For every driver and guard of a stage-coach, or carriage let on job 1 5 0

HORSES.—For every Horse, Mare, or Gelding, used for riding or drawing carriages

For 2 ditto	4 14 6	For 9 ditto.....	27 6 9	For 16 ditto	51 0 0
For 3.....	7 16 9	For 10.....	31 15 0	For 17.....	54 8 0
For 4.....	11 0 0	For 11.....	34 18 6	For 18.....	58 1 0
For 5.....	13 18 9	For 12.....	38 2 0	For 19.....	61 15 0
For 6.....	17 8 0	For 13.....	41 8 9	For 20.....	66 0 0
For 7.....	20 18 3	For 14.....	44 12 6	For horses let to hire, &c.,	
For 8.....	23 18 0	For 15.....	47 16 3	each 1 <i>l.</i> 8 <i>s.</i> 9 <i>d.</i>	

Race Horses

.....	each	£3 10 0
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Horses rode by butchers in their trade..... 1 8 0
 Where two only kept, the second at 0 10 0
 Horses not exceeding the height of 13 hands 1 1 0
 Other horses of the height of 13 hands, and mules..... 0 10 6

For every greyhound, 1*l.*
 For every hound, pointer, setting dog, spaniel, lurcher, or terrier; and for every dog, where two or more are kept, of whatever denomination the same may be (except greyhounds) 14*s.*

In every case where one dog only is kept, such dog not being a greyhound, hound, pointer, setting dog, spaniel lurcher, or terrier, 8*s.*

Persons compounding for their hounds are to be charged 36*l.*

HAIR POWDER DUTY.—Persons wearing or using hair powder, 1*l.* 3*s.* 6*d.*

ARMORIAL BEARINGS DUTY.—Persons using armorial bearings, and keeping a coach or other taxable carriage, 2*l.* 8*s.*

Persons not keeping such carriage, but charged to the window duty, 1*l.* 4*s.*

Persons not keeping such carriage, nor being chargeable to the window duty, 12*s.*