

WILLIAM COTHER OF LONGFORD

William Cother was baptised at Sandhurst on 29th January 1769. He was the third son of Thomas Cother, farmer, who owned lands in several parishes to the North and West of Gloucester. Nine children were born into his family, but four of them died in childhood and on his father's death William was the eldest surviving son. During this time the family moved from Sandhurst to Barnwood - perhaps for the sake of the children's health. If so this was successful as the children born at Barnwood survived their father's death.

William Cother's memorandum book, which is the major source of this account, covers the period from 1831 until 1838, one month before his death. During this time he lived at Longford "on the Turnpike Road". This may have been the present Cheltenham Road or the Tewkesbury Road as Cother owned property in both areas and is variously referred to as being "of Longford" or "of Wooton". There is nowhere mention of wife or children and William appears to have lived alone with two house servants.

Although a considerable land-owner - his book contains records of properties in several places - Cother seems to have done little farming himself and to have received his income mainly from rents. Apart from a rather vitriolic comment on the "Free Trade Gentry" and "Mr. Peel who fills his own pocket and those of every other rich man at the expense of the middle classes" the book is concerned mainly with domestic affairs.

Cother was a keen gardener and much of his accounts consists of the records of his garden at Longford. Methods of cultivation seem not to have changed much since then - except the liberal use which Cother was able to make of "dung" which would give pangs of jealousy to many a modern gardener.

But the gardening calendar is much as today. The radish hotbed in the early year; early potatoes in March "they taste better off poor ground"; peas and beans in April; flowers to be sown in March, pricked out in April and transplanted in June. Digging and dunging were done in the winter, sowing in spring; clearing up and pruning in Autumn and Winter - even mowing the lawn once a fortnight in Cumaer (I wonder what with, and did he do it himself?).

Most of the vegetables grown you would find in a modern seed catalogue, but few of the varieties mentioned seem to have survived. Were they true varieties I wonder, or some local pet name? "Early Warwickshire", "Charlton" and "Mr. R. Help's famous Yorkshire" peas. "Early Salperton", "Ashleaf Kidney", "China Orange" and five other varieties of potatoes. "Keen's Seedling", "Wilmot's Superbs", "Scarlet Alphine" and "Scarlet Caroline" strawberries. "Ashmead's Kernel", "Non Pariel", "Golden Harvey",

"Panter's Crab" and other apples. Cother seemed to pay particular attention to his asparagus bed with its dressing and manuring in November and later mulching with grass.

There was still room for flowers - Red Carnation, Sweet William, China Asters, Cockscombs, African Marigolds, Larkspur, Hollyhocks, Lupins, Canterbury Bells, Convolvulus, Mallow, Stocks and Gillyflower are all mentioned. He could almost have stocked a Herbal Stores on his own. Sage, Balsam, Mint, Horehound (for coughs and phlegm), Wormwood, Lavender, Sweet Marjoram, Orange and Lemon Thyme, Rue, Fennel, Hysop, Borage, Featherfold, Organ (Pennyroyal), Chamomile (Camomile) were all grown.

Much of his own seed seems to have been saved during the last part of the year and some seems to have been begged or exchanged with neighbours. Cother mentions that Brussel Sprout seeds should be "innoculated by bees".

This interest in gardening seems to have been rivalled only by his interest in food. There are many recipes in his book - not all of which I suspect he had the opportunity to taste. "To Roast a Haunch of Venison" perhaps yes; but "To make Oyster Sauce" to which Cother adds the rather plaintive remark "I should think good", seems a bit doubtful - perhaps he was unable to get the oysters. But "Hodge Podge" (a lamb and vegetable stew) he certainly ate. Some of his produce was preserved. Tongues and hams were pickled or smoked; raspberries, currants and damsons were preserved in syrup; walnuts, onions, cucumbers, cabbage and broccoli were pickled; filberts were dried, and tomato and mushroom ketchup made.

Liquid sustenance also was not neglected. From March 1831 to April 1832 £32. 4. 3. was spent on Beer, Cider and Perry, and £28. 4. 0. on Wines and Spirits (some from Messrs. Martin and Washbourne). £60 per annum seems a lot for a small household where there is no mention of any entertaining, and this at a time when a skilled shepherd might earn 10 shillings a week.

Perhaps this indulgence led naturally to an interest in medicines. Many of the herbs in Cother's garden had medicinal properties and his diary contains some household remedies:- "Mr. F. Woodcock's Rect. for a Cold, Phlegm, etc." using the biblical manna; and "For the Gravel from the Glos Herald June 3 1815" which included the rather frightening ingredient "Nitre". On 17 May 1835 Mr. Cother "Discontinued taking Squill Pills regularly every day". Either his complaint was cured, or he just lost faith in the product.

To the local poor a paternalistic attitude was adopted. At Christmas 1831 and 1832 he records gifts of 6d. or 1 shilling to each of about two dozen people, with an occasional half crown, although such gifts are not mentioned elsewhere. In September 1832 he "Gave Esther and Ann (his cook and maid) $\frac{1}{2}$ lb. tea and 1 lb. powder sugar by way of encouragement to be of good behaviour and as a present on Barton Fair Day preceeding and

1 lb. tea and 2 lb. sugar on Christmas Day".

His servants seem to have numbered no more than three; cook, maid and "odd job" man, and working for Mr. Cother was no sinecure as these entries show. "1835. May 14. Agreed to give John Okey 8/- per week and 4 pints of drink per day. He is to clean boots, shoes, knives, etc., work in the garden and do anything else he is desired. To come at 6.30 in the morning and leave at 7 o'clock in the evening. If he should be wanting (sic) later in the evening he is to have his supper. To be orderly in every respect, allow no person belonging to him to be on or about the premises - No grumbling!" "1837. Jan. 14. Hired Elizabeth Freeman at 9 guineas per year" (his previous cook received £10) "To enter on his service February 1st. She says she can undertake to Cook, Roast, and Boil Meat, Fry and Boil Fish, Make Pastry, Curry, etc., etc. Will obey orders without grumbling - cut and leave meat fit to come to table when cold - make no waste, have no fat, etc., etc., use economy on all occasions, ask leave whenever she goes from home - Never leave the house after night. Has no followers - Dinner sometimes to be got at short notice - assist the other servant, on all occasions, particularly at washing ironing, etc. W.C. has informed her that he often was in the kitchen giving directions to her. She is generally to go to church every other Sunday morning. When she wished to go to see her friends (say once in three months) she might do so by asking 2 or 3 days previous, at the time she wished, or a day fixed for that purpose."

Cother died on Tuesday, 29th May 1838 aged 70 and was buried at Sandhurst. His will, dated 12th January 1834 left all his property to his brother, Lt. Col. Charles Cother.

It seems typical that Cother's last recorded act, on 21st April 1838 was to "hang up 2 hams in the kitchen and 2 flitches bacon in the store room". And two days before this did he have some premonition of his end when he returned 2 dozen empty claret bottles to Messrs. Martin and Washbourne?

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Sources

Glos. Records Office, D 177/VII/4
Q/RI 70
D6/E4

Microfilms of Parish Registers.

Gloucester City Library, Gloucester Journal.

Will and Probate Records.