

## COMMITTEE ALLOWANCES

THE Corporation of London, unlike the governing bodies of other municipalities in the Kingdom, is possessed of a private estate, the income from which can be expended in such manner as the Lord Mayor, Aldermen and Commons in Common Council assembled may direct.

Possession of this private estate enables the Corporation to extend hospitality, both public and private, and Committee Allowances may be cited as an instance of private or domestic hospitality.

It will, however, be seen during the progress of this sketch that Committee Allowances as understood to-day differ from those originally instituted, and it will also be seen that the moderate sums now allocated under that heading correspond more nearly in nature, although not in amount, with the payments made, apparently without proper authority, under the heading "Committee Expenses."

A list of Committee Allowances was first given in detail in the Corporation Pocket Book for the year 1824. The list, revised when necessary in accordance with the recommendations of the General Purposes Committee, appeared annually in the Pocket Book until 1924, when it was omitted by direction of the Library Committee.

Prior to 1809 no specific allowance was made to Committees for refreshments, but there had been payments for "Coach Hire," which were intended to cover expenditure on that account and were also designed as an acknowledgment of the good services of members. As early as 1711 the City Lands Committee was allowed to draw £100 per annum, and in 1786 this was increased to £200, in consideration of an increase in the number of members of the Committee and in recognition of their spending so much time in the service of the Corporation.

The amount allotted was distributed rateably, at the close of the year, among the members who had been present at the time their names were called, attendance at two Sub-Committees counting as one attendance at a Grand Committee. A line was drawn in the Committee clerk's rough book below the names of those present when the roll was called, members arriving subsequently being entered below the line, and any member leaving the Committee before it had sat one hour, if the business should so long continue, without leave of the Committee, and after that time without leave of the Chairman, was considered to be below the line.

Members did not participate in the share-out of the allowance for "Coach Hire" in respect of a meeting at which their names were below the line, and the payment, which seems to have worked

out at about 3s. 10d. per attendance, became known as "Line Money."

These personal payments were technically abolished in the case of Ward Committees after the findings of the Royal Commission of 1836, but it may be of interest to note that in some of the rough books used by minuting clerks of Ward Committees names of members are still recorded in the manner above described, those present at the call over being marked *above*, and those arriving subsequently, *below* the line.

Another reminder of the practice is afforded by Standing Order 71, which runs as follows:—

"A special meeting of a Grand Committee shall not, except in cases of absolute emergency, be called on the same day as that appointed for the monthly meeting of another Committee; and under any circumstances the special meeting shall be called at a different hour from that of the other Committee."

This Standing Order permitted any member who was due to attend the "other" Committee, as well as the specially summoned Committee, to answer his name above the line at both meetings and to remain for the requisite time to qualify for "Line Money" at both meetings, for it must be remembered that Committees then usually met in the late afternoon and "a different hour" seems to have been interpreted literally, that is to say, if a Ward Committee was due to meet on its monthly date at 3 p.m. the specially summoned Committee would be called at 2 p.m. or 4 p.m. At the present time this Standing Order is less rigidly interpreted and 10 to 15 minutes only are allowed for the interval, but even this shorter period has its uses, as members are sometimes able to record a vote for a Chairman in more than one Committee, and cases have occurred of a member who has failed to secure election to the Chair of one Committee, hurrying away in time to submit his name successfully in another room for the Chair of another Committee.

It will be seen that Committee Allowances, in so far as they consisted in "Coach Hire" or "Line Money," were technically discontinued in 1836 and no arrangements were officially made for refreshments. The readiness with which the Court of Common Council agreed to the abolition may have been due to the growth of a practice which was rightly described as highly improper.

In 1809 a Special Finance Committee reported to the Court on the Deficiencies in City's Cash, and one paragraph read as follows:—

"We feel it a painful task to represent to the serious attention of this Honourable Court a Practice of late years adopted by the Committees of the Corporation of drawing upon the Chamber, for the payment of Tavern Bills and other personal expenses, sundry warrants *each under* £100, availing themselves of the 25th (now 89th) Standing Order empowering them to pay Artificers' and Tradesmen's Bills which do not exceed that sum, by which sums of money to a large annual amount have been drawn from the Chamber with-

out the knowledge or authority of this Court, a Practice which we conceive highly improper, and, if not checked, might hereafter lead to consequences of a very serious nature. We, therefore, propose that the Standing Order be strictly confined to its obvious meaning and that the Chamberlain do not make any payments but what are conformable to the same. And it is on this ground we so strongly recommend a limited sum to be set apart for the expenses of each Committee."

Statistics appended to the Report show that apart from the cost of the Summer Excursion, for which a separate grant was made, the City Lands expenditure for Tavern Bills and Coach Hire increased from £622 in 1795 to £1,417 in 1808; the Bridge House Committee, including the Summer Excursion, from £542 in 1795 to £1,900 in 1807; and the General Purposes Committee from £342 in 1795 to £1,200 in 1808. Other Committees appear to have increased their expenditure in a similar way.

The result of the Report was that the Court resolved on June 21st, 1809, that the City Lands Committee be allowed £700 per annum "in lieu of all Allowances, Dinners and other expenses"; the Bridge House £500, the General Purposes £500, and other Committees likewise, but on May 9th, 1811, the Bridge House, Navigation, Commissioners of Sewers and General Purposes Committees were each allowed an additional £150 per annum for a summer excursion, the City Lands obtaining a similar grant on July 8th, 1818.

Each Committee decided for itself how its allowance should be spent or divided, in most cases the sum of £200 being allocated for "Line Money," a practice which was continued until recent times in spite of the technical abolition of "Coach Hire" after the findings of the Royal Commission of 1836.

With regard to the Summer Excursion, to which reference was made in the Report of the Special Finance Committee, the cost was met in the last stages of its continuance from a block grant of £750, and members of the Corporation and their Ladies were entertained in five sections. Before its abolition the summer excursion had taken the form of a river trip in the *Maria Wood*, a State barge formerly used for the Lord Mayor's procession on the Thames from the City to Westminster on November 9th. When the water pageant was discontinued, the *Maria Wood* was bought by Birch's of Cornhill and members and their ladies were entertained to breakfast, lunch and tea on board. A band was provided and there was dancing on deck as the barge lay moored to the bank at Kingston, Twickenham or other riverside spot. These outings were discontinued about the year 1885 on the motion of Alphaeus Cleophas Morton, member for Farringdon Without, and the block grant of £750 was no longer made.

The spectacle of middle-aged and elderly Aldermen and Common Councilmen dancing with their ladies in daylight, clad in frock coats and silk hats, which were the prescribed uniform for the outing, was liable to bring the Corporation into discredit,

and within living memory there lingered in certain quarters a prejudice against the Corporation as a centre of gluttony and intemperance. It must, indeed, be admitted that the excessive feeding prevalent in England during the reigns of the Four Georges was continued in the City of London after it had moderated in other parts of the Kingdom. Less than 50 years ago dinners were consumed at The Albion in Aldersgate and at Livery Company's Halls which few, if any, Aldermen or Common Councilmen could now face. Not that the City of London was the only place at that time where excesses survived, for it is well known that in Berlin, with the encouragement of Bismarck, Chancellor from 1862 to 1890, the grossest scenes of gluttony were enacted at the refreshment bars of the Royal Opera House, during the long intervals between the acts. But Bismarck held that no man should die until he had smoked a hundred thousand cigars and drunk five thousand bottles of champagne.

Fortunately, the Corporation profited by the attacks of its enemies, and reforms were brought about from within, thus silencing the critics and forestalling those with designs hostile to the ancient institution, but it has not given way on the subject of Committee Allowances. Indeed, a good case was made out for them in the year 1854 during an enquiry by a Royal Commission into the State of the Corporation of the City of London. The system was attacked by F. Bennock, a wholesale warehouseman in Wood Street, Cheapside, and a Common Councilman from 1845, who endeavoured to prove to the Royal Commissioners that the Allowances led to the election of the least competent member of the Committee as Chairman, because a man who had other duties to perform had no time, and perhaps no inclination, to devote his evening also on the occasion of the monthly meetings to an entertainment at a tavern. Only those whose time is of little value will consent to be on the Committees, and therefore the least competent will frequently be placed in the most prominent position.

The contrary opinion was expressed by T. H. Hall, Chairman of the Improvements Committee. In his evidence, he said :—

“ I have kept the Improvements Committee from 1 o'clock to 7 o'clock, constantly at work. Almost all those gentlemen live out of town. I do not suppose that 20 or 30 out of the whole 200 Common Councilmen sleep in the City. How are they to get home in time for dinner? I cannot be brought to say that the Corporation ought to have no return at all for services rendered.”

At the same enquiry the Recorder read a statement drawn up by the “ Consolidated Committee,” which seems to have been appointed by the Court for the purpose of presenting the Corporation's case to the Royal Commission. Included in the statement was the following extract from the findings of the Royal Commission on Municipal Corporations in England and Wales, set up in 1836 :—

“ Whatever opinions may be entertained respecting the constitution of this body, the manner in which its duties have been

exercised seems to have given satisfaction, with very few exceptions, to its constituents, and, as it appears to us, justly so. The system of Committees, in particular, seems to operate very successfully, and to combine in a remarkable degree the requisites of power and liability to control."

Another extract from the same Report is contained in "A Guide to Guildhall," the official Corporation handbook, on page 156. Dealing with Municipal Corporations generally, the Commissioners said :—

"We therefore feel it to be our duty to represent to your Majesty that the existing Municipal Corporations of England and Wales neither possess nor deserve the confidence or respect of your Majesty's subjects, and that a thorough reform must be effected before they can become, what we humbly submit to your Majesty they ought to be, useful and efficient instruments of local government."

With regard, however, to the Corporation of London, they reported as follows :—

"The history of the Common Council of London is that of a body which has watched vigilantly over the interests of its constituents, and for a long series of years has studied to improve the Corporate Institutions with great earnestness, unremitting caution and scrupulous justice."

The result of the Report of the Royal Commission of 1836 was that the Corporation of London was left the only unreformed Corporation in the Kingdom. The enquiry of 1854 appears to have ended in much the same way and the practice at the close of a long Committee meeting of taking the faithful few who had stayed to maintain a quorum to dinner at the Guildhall Tavern survived until the year 1894. Some few years prior to that date sandwich and cake luncheons had been instituted by certain chairmen before the meeting opened, and in 1894, Graham King, Chairman of the City Lands Committee, moved in the Court that it be referred to the City Lands Committee to rearrange the accommodation at Guildhall, the central offices having been reconstructed by Alexander Peebles, the City Surveyor. At Graham King's suggestion the City Lands Committee set aside the room designed to accommodate Sir John Monckton, the Town Clerk, and allotted it to members as a luncheon room, and to regularize the sale of alcoholic liquors the Guildhall Club was founded, with a subscription of one guinea.

The first caterers to the club were "The Dr. Butler's Head," at that time under the management of George Goetz, but in a few years the Committee of the club changed over to Birch's of Cornhill, and until the destruction of the premises in the last week of 1940 the catering was in the hands of Ring and Brymer, the proprietors of Birch's for many years.

With a luncheon room available, a sit-down meal was introduced for the Committees and for private members, a notice being included with the summons to Committees that luncheon

would be served. Since 1924 this notice has been omitted and Committees are now summoned at 1 for 1.45, or at an equivalent time, except in the case of morning meetings, when a slip is usually enclosed bearing a notice that luncheon will be served at the conclusion of the meeting.

The change brought about by the foundation of the Guildhall Club and the provision of a substantial lunch prior to meetings obviated the necessity for the post-Committee dinners and paved the way for the final reform of Committee Allowances, which were still subject to irregular payments in evasion of the Standing Orders. Until the fire of 1940, there were in existence in the Hallkeeper's office a series of green vellum-covered account books in which the Committee Allowances were shown in detail. These accounts were audited by three members of the Accounts Sub-Committee in each case, and included in the expenditure were payments for silverware voted to a select few whose names were always to be found among those who had audited the accounts. These improperly allotted gifts were distributed at the final meeting of the year after the departure of those members who were not included in the accounts sub-committee, and were designed to absorb the balance of the allowance and so to obviate the necessity of returning cash to the Chamber. In the writer's recollection presents of cigars or game were distributed at Christmas with the same object in view.

The author of the final reform was Harvey Preen, Deputy of Bassishaw, who instituted the Budget system while Chairman of the Coal and Corn and Finance Committee. Under this system all spending Committees estimated their requirements for the ensuing year and submitted figures to the Coal and Corn and Finance Committee, thus enabling the Chairman to make provision for the Expenditure, if Revenue was available, or to persuade other Chairmen to reduce their requirements within the limits of the available resources. Under the Budget system the Allowances recommended by the General Purposes Committee were examined and their disbursement overhauled, and the improper use of balances in hand automatically ceased.

Committee Allowances were reduced during the financial depression following the war of 1914-18, but in due course they were reinstated, in most cases on a scale similar to that in force for 1913-14.

At the outbreak of the present war, Emergency procedure was in force and Committee meetings were intermittently held. Allowances were reduced to a nominal figure, but after the destruction of the Club premises in December, 1940, sandwich luncheons were again introduced. With the restoration of normal procedure and the reopening of the Club in Guildhall House, luncheons were again introduced and the Allowances were adjusted accordingly, and it is not without interest to note that Guildhall House is The Guildhall Tavern previously mentioned, the building having undergone many internal changes since the licence was dropped.

A yardstick by which requirements of the various Committees could be ascertained was suggested by Deputy W. H. Key, of Farringdon Without, when Chairman of the General Purposes Committee.

Deputy Key divided Committees into three classes for the purpose of estimating their requirements :—

(a) Ward Committees with Standing Special Sub-Committees, which met with several officers in attendance, on a day other than that allotted to the Grand Committee. Such Committees he thought should have £100 added to the normal allowance.

(b) Ward Committees without Standing Special Sub-Committees meeting on another day. For such Committees there should be a normal allowance calculated on the assumption that there would be 11 meetings of the Grand Committee and a Presentation Luncheon, without champagne. The reasonable cost of these 12 meetings could be ascertained from the Hallkeeper's accounts and to the total there should be added 10 per cent. for contingencies.

(c) Other Committees, such as Gresham, Epping Forest, West Ham Park, Special, Assessment, Privileges, etc., to be dealt with on a lower scale, in accordance with the size of the Committee and the varying needs of each.

Deputy Key explained his scheme in this way : " Taking one year with another this system should provide a Committee with an allowance sufficient for its needs, that is to say, in a quiet year there should be a small balance to return to the Chamber, and in an abnormally busy year there might be a small excess to be met by the Chairman, but this excess can be set off against the amount of the testimonial he will receive at the close of his year of office."

Such, then, in outline, is the history of Committee Allowances, compiled from various sources. It is based partly on personal research, but my best thanks are due for assistance rendered by Dr. Thomas and Mr. Jones of the Records Office, to Mr. Smith, the Librarian, and to Mr. T. Harvey Hull, Secretary of the Guildhall Club from its foundation in 1894 until his retirement from the Town Clerk's Office.