

EDITORS' NOTE

'Romps run mad' in the Deanery garden

The 18th century cleric the Rev Edmund Pyle had a sharp eye for social comment which he shared in many letters to a fellow clergyman, the Rev Samuel Kerrich.¹ In summer 1756, he was in Winchester in his role as a Cathedral prebendary and observed the relationship between the local gentry and officers from the visiting Hessian troops who were quartered at Barton Farm to the north of the city.

He obviously enjoyed his time at a party in the Deanery garden, which was much grander and probably much larger than it is today. Pyle told his friend Kerrich that the Dean and Canons 'did honour to these foreigners at their table with high gentility'. He had witnessed and admired the military exercise of the Hessians and their devotions on Sunday in the Cathedral nave, and he called the party in the Deanery garden 'the prettiest entertainment he ever was at'.²

'The Dean of Winchester has a fine and large garden which is a place of resort on summer evenings for all the persons of fashion in the city. It consists of a large lawn at the end of which passes a quick river, that has a Chinese bridge over it, and is formed into two cascades as it runs along. There is also a large grove, fine walks of gravel, and two or three alcoves.'³



Hessian Officer, 1753

'Here the officers desired to introduce the music and give the ladies a ball. The Dean consented, and all the gentry and quality were put together there; and for three hours twenty-five couples danced on the lawn on one side of the river, the [Hessian soldier] musicians standing on the other. There were twenty-five ladies and all good ones'.⁴

¹ Albert Hartshorne (ed.) *Memoirs of a royal chaplain, 1729-1763 ; the correspondence of Edmund Pyle, D.D. chaplain in ordinary to George II, with Samuel Kerrich D.D., vicar of Dersingham, rector of Wolferton, and rector of West Newton*. London: John Lane, 1905.

² G.H. Blore, *Thomas Cheyney, Wykehamist* (Winchester: The Wykeham Press, 1950), p. 9.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid*, p. 9-10.

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'They (the Hessians) have learnt at home the tunes of our English dances, which are practiced there in compliment to our Sovereign [the Hanoverian George II] and country. In the dancing one could not but observe how true the officers stepped both to the time and tune; whereas the dancing of the English gentlemen, and most of the ladies, too, was what one may call 'romps run mad'.⁵

Pyle also preserved some of the criticisms expressed privately by the guests on the dress and manners of fellow citizens, who were not as industrious as the Germans of those times. However, as the Winchester College historian George Blore commented in 1950, 'at least one is glad to know that the Dean and Chapter were polite and hospitable to our allies'.

- It was Edmund Pyle (1726-1778) who mischievously defined the prebendary's life as, 'a pretty easy way of dawdling away one's time: praying, walking, visiting, and as little study as your heart would wish'.⁶
- Pyle's memorial tablet is in the Cathedral, high up just beyond the western end of the Holy Sepulchre chapel.

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Illustration: Officer's uniform for the Prince Anhalt Regiment (1753), Hessisches Staatsarchiv Marburg, Germany (15:33)

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

⁶ Hartshorne, *Memoirs*, p. 266.