

IV.

AN OLD CHAPMEN'S STANDARD YARD-MEASURE FROM CERES,
FIFE. BY JAMES L. ANDERSON, F.S.A.Scot.

In the summer of 1914, when on a visit to the late George Millar-Bowman of Logie (of old known as Logie-Murdoch), an estate giving name to that parish in the north of Fife, he presented to me what he described as the Standard Yard-measure of the Chapmen of Fife for the parish or district of Ceres, and I now present it to the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland. It is not of itself a measure. It was the standard or gauge by which the ellwands (so called whether containing 36 or 37 inches) were tested and regulated. Of iron and strongly wrought, it weighs 3 lb. 2½ oz., and has a hinge in the centre so that it can

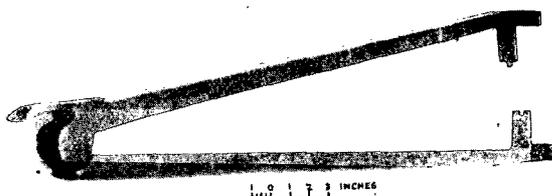


Fig. 1. Chapmen's Standard Yard-measure.

be folded over into half its real length. Between the flanges at each end its total length is exactly 36 inches. These flanges dovetail into each other. There is a small downhanging projection at each end, so that it can be easily lifted for use; and at the back of the hinge there is a lip of iron, preventing back pressure and so keeping it always on the straight when open. There are two notches upon one of the outer sides, each indicating 4½ inches, which is ¼th of a yard. The photograph of the article (fig. 1) shows it partially opened.

Mr Bowman informed me that it was purchased by his mother (who was born in Ceres, where her father was a clergyman) round about 1860, from David Henry, a general merchant in the town, who was the last boxmaster and clerk there of the Chapmen. He died shortly afterwards. I remember him well. At the same time he offered her the Official Box of the Society which by that time had ceased to exist. She regretted she did not acquire it also. Where it is now Mr Bowman did not know. Neither do I.

There are two inscriptions on the inner side of the measure, but both

are faint and somewhat obscure and worn. It was thickly coated with rust when I got it. From what can tentatively be deciphered they appear to be:—

On the left-hand half,	ER)) EP
On the right-hand half,	RO ND	ON CLERK 1705

The words appear to have been incised somewhat lightly by a chisel, when perhaps the metal was cold, and are now difficult to read, save the word and figures Clerk 1705, which are more plain, except that the date may be 1703. ER may represent a part of the name of Ceres, and a Robert Anderson may have been the clerk at that time. But to have thus to prove the genuineness of the article is to call it in question, and, in view of its provenance, it may well be presumed.

The Scots ell consisted of 37 inches, whereas this is of 36 inches, or 1 yard exactly. In the fourth Parliament of James I, held at Perth 11th March 1436, it was ordained that the "elne shall conteine thrittie seven inch," as in the corresponding statute of King David. By the Act 2, Charles II, 1663, c. 18, the foot-measure is declared to be of 12 inches, whereof the ell contains 37 inches; and iron or copper measures are ordained to be made and kept by the burghs according to it. The article now presented is a standard issued by the Chapmen of Fife, based upon the official dimensions, and by it the travelling Chapmen, as has been said, regulated the measuring rods they carried as they perambulated, sometimes on horseback, their several districts. False measures were stigmatised by the Societies, and the condemned ellwands, etc., were destroyed.

The Societies of the Chapmen regarded themselves as corporations within their own separate shires or districts, and had their office-bearers chosen annually, of whom one was a clerk, as the records show; and there are many interesting references to them in old song and story. In the time of the persecution in Scotland the Chapmen were credited with having, in their rounds, convened people to conventicles; and on p. 102 of the ninth volume of the *Scottish Antiquary*, 1895, there is printed an account (from a MS. in the Advocates' Library) which states that Captain Buckholm, in command of the King's Guards, in 1678, near to Kinross, took Gilbert Marnock, Lord of the Chapmen in Fife and Kinross (such was the title of their head official), and David Barclay, and carried them to Edinburgh, where they were imprisoned a long time, and afterwards sentenced to banishment to foreign plantations; they were carried to London, but were released there.

However, our subject need not carry us further.

Reference may be made to the Standard Ellwand of Inverkeithing,

of bronze and iron, dated 1500, which was described by Sir James Balfour Paul in the *Proceedings*, vol. xxxi. p. 215, and to the wooden standard yard-measure of the City of Edinburgh bearing the initials of Patrick Lindsay, Dean of Guild, 1726, which is preserved in the Museum (*Proceedings*, vol. iv. p. 442). There is also an old ell-gauge at Dunkeld, of which mention is made in the old *Statistical Account*, vol. xx. p. 433, and to which attention has been directed by Mr Henry Coates, F.S.A.Scot., who has kindly furnished the following details, and to whom I am indebted for the use of the block illustrating it.

This ell-gauge (fig. 2), which is made of solid bronze rods, is built into the front of a house on the west side of the Square, Dunkeld, being the corner building at the entrance of Cathedral Street. This is the oldest part of the town, Cathedral Street containing the only houses which survived the fire in 1689, when Dunkeld was attacked by the Jacobite troops. The building to which the gauge is fixed is known as St George's Hospital, which was rebuilt in 1757. As the gauge bears the date "A.D. 1706," it had probably formed part of the original hospital, and been transferred when the building was reconstructed. The hospital is an ancient endowment. Six or seven old men belonging to Dunkeld still get 14 lb. of meal each fortnight, called the "Beedesman Meal," provided out of the rent of the hospital building.

The gauge is built into the front wall of the hospital in an upright position, and is kept firmly in its place by means of two Y-shaped arms at the top and bottom. It is in a perfect state of preservation. The date is incised in the metal at the top of the shaft. The bottom is 32 inches from the ground, the measurement of the gauge being $37\frac{1}{8}$ inches.

The dimensions of the gauge are:—Total length over all, $52\frac{1}{2}$ inches. Length of shaft, between the springing of the arms, 43 inches. Length of gauge, between the sockets on the left side, 39 inches. Length of

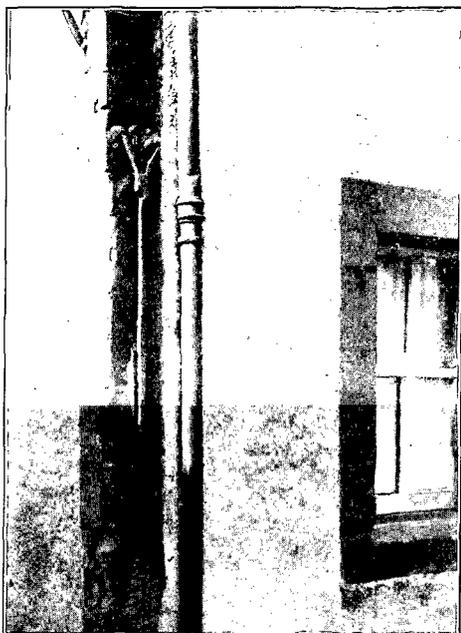


Fig. 2. Bronze Ell-gauge at Dunkeld.

gauge, between the sockets on the right side, $37\frac{1}{8}$ inches. Length of arms, outside, 6 inches. Length of arms, inside, $5\frac{1}{2}$ inches. Width of metal of arms, $\frac{1}{2}$ inch. Width of metal of shaft, above upper socket, $1\frac{1}{2}$ inch. Width of metal of shaft, below lower socket, $1\frac{1}{2}$ inch. Width of metal of main body of shaft, $\frac{1}{8}$ inch.

The length of a Scottish ell being 37 inches, the space between the sockets on the right side of the gauge ($37\frac{1}{8}$ inches) would allow an ell measuring-stick to go in easily; but possibly the metal may have been reduced by about $\frac{1}{8}$ inch at each end, either by wear and tear, or by the action of the weather.
