

A bit more about Sir Charles D'Oyly of 'Newlands' Charlton Marshall

In September 1891, at a concert in the Reading Room (Club House) Sir Charles told a story from his time in India. It was entitled 'One for his Nob'.

In the hot season in the North-west Provinces of India, when Sir Charles as a mere Captain in the army had just returned from home leave in England, he was in charge of a Government Stud Depot comprising some 1,800 young horses that were being bred for army use. Large quantities of hay and straw were grown across the area and stored at the site. He was returning from the stables one day when he was approached by an Indian man who wanted to talk privately with him.

On being assured that there was no-one within a quarter of a mile, he said that a gang of robbers was regularly stealing hay and straw at night from one of the rick-yards. When asked why he had not given this information before, he said he had done so, but that Sir Charles's predecessor had called him a liar just hoping for a reward.

Sir Charles was obviously a little more canny than his predecessor, for although, as he said, he was initially inclined to share his predecessor's opinion, on reflection he thought 'what can be the object of this man telling me a falsehood which can be so easily proved or disproved?'. So he called the man's bluff and offered him fifty rupees if it was proved true, or a beating if it was proved false. The man accepted the offer without hesitation, and they arranged to meet at 10.30 pm that night under a particular tree near the store.

So they parted, and in order to have some support on the exploit, Sir Charles invited the depot veterinary surgeon to dinner, who, when told of the exploit, readily agreed to accompany him. They set out in the dark after dinner and found their informer at the pre-arranged spot, but there was no sound of any activity in spite of the fact that it was a still night. The informer assured them that the robbers were already at work; they put their ears closer to the ground and could hear the sound of voices and movement in the rick-yard nearby.

They crept up, went around the ditch, that had been created on the inside of the yard when the mud for the wall was dug out. They surprised a man carrying away a load of straw on his back; he dropped it, Sir Charles fell over it in the dark, pulled out his revolver, and fired in the direction in which the man had fled. Hearing a thud, he feared he had killed him, but all was well, he had only fallen to the ground in fright so was taken prisoner.

Sir Charles then caught sight of someone else slinking away in the darkness; so left the first man with his companion and gave chase. When he caught up with him, the man tried to evade capture and was given a hefty whack on the head with a bamboo truncheon, which stunned him for a moment. When a lantern was shone on him, it turned out to be their original informant, presumably having second thoughts about what he had done and hoping to escape unidentified, fearing retribution from his own people.

They took him back with them and got him patched up by the doctor and gave him double the promised sum as some sort of compensation for injury.

The robber who had been caught was also taken back and eventually persuaded to disclose the identities of his accomplices; when the head clerk went to the village to apprehend them, he found a large store of stolen forage. Five men were arrested and later tried, found guilty, and sentenced to terms of imprisonment ranging from six months to two years.

Sir Charles finished his story by saying 'Thus ended our nocturnal police adventure, for our management of which, I received a handsome letter of acknowledgement from our Departmental Chief, for having discovered and broken up this organised system of wholesale robbery'. Mark Churchill.