

Tom Marshall's Weekly News, June 26, 2006

Hiding Money at Oxford (England): Here is an anecdote from my travel agent days. In July, 1952, the Quakers held a Friends World Conference at Oxford, England, the third such held up to that time. Since I was a Quaker travel agent, I had the inside track to book Americans going to the conference, and I worked hard for nearly two years in promoting the trip from our agency. We booked 305 people for the transatlantic crossing, all but about 20 by steamship. In addition, I sold short tours of from one to 10 days from a temporary office in the Randolph Hotel in Oxford.

The hotel rented me a large music room on the mezzanine to conduct business, and on several afternoons, the lines of people waiting to see me totaled 20 or 30. As I booked them, I was collecting pounds and shillings like mad. Having no money drawer or safe, I stacked the bills in the grand piano in the room. At the end of the day, I retrieved my gross receipts and carried them to my lodging place, the Cotswold Lodge, about 1½ miles away. The lodge and its proprietor named North-Brown accommodated about 20 guests in all types of rooms from singles to triples. North-Brown put up a wonderful front. At breakfast time, he would be seated at a table for one, read the menu carefully, place his order with the head waiter, then disappear to the kitchen, as he was also the cook.

Pownall Jones and I occupied a large room with a fireplace. The ledge inside and above the fireplace opening was my more permanent hiding place for my pounds and shillings. The day after the conference concluded, those I had booked left Oxford on tours in all directions, and Pownall with his wife Peggy was on one of them. I was busy getting people off, and I planned to go to Stratford-on-Avon that day, returning to the same room by bedtime. I told North-Brown I wanted to keep the room, and I'd be glad to pay the double rate, as I did not have time to pack up (nor retrieve my English fortune from the fireplace).

Upon returning about 10 P.M., the assistant manager was on duty, but everyone else had retired for the night. In the dark as I opened the door to my room, a surprised voice from inside said "you're in the wrong room!" I went to the desk and confronted the assistant manager. He said they had had an opportunity to rent my old room and had put me in a small single room and, "the manager had supervised the moving personally." I didn't sleep much that night, worrying about my holdings in the chimney. The next morning, I watched for my chance, and when the occupants of my old room went to breakfast, I entered and felt up on the ledge inside the fireplace. The money was still there! Much relieved, I packed up and went to the desk to check out. I told North-Brown why I did not want to be moved and how concerned I was about my money. He said, "Oh, yes, Mr. Marshall, we knew it was there."