

For immediate release

Monday 17 December 2010

Crisis cramps Christmas – in 1835

A file in the archives of the East Riding of Yorkshire reminds us that there is nothing new about an economic crisis hitting Christmas.

The file, revealed through the Archive Awareness Campaign, shows that a financial crisis of the 19th century made for a bleak Christmas for Yorkshire workers. In 1835, with the country in the depths of an economic depression, the tradesmen of Beverley decided to scrap Christmas gifts to save money.

A public notice held at the East Riding Archives and Local Studies records that over 70 of the town's tradesmen signed an agreement not to give any presents at Christmas. The notice reads:

“We, the undersigned Tradesmen, feeling that the practice of giving presents at Christmas, commonly called ‘Christmas Boxes’, is a very heavy Tax upon the Trade of Beverley..., have unanimously agreed, on account of the great depression so generally felt in almost every branch of Trade, as well as the small profits upon which business is now conducted - that, in future, we will not give any Christmas Presents, either in money or in any article we deal in.”

Sam Bartle, collections officer, says:

“At the time it was customary for shopkeepers and tradesmen to give what were known as ‘Christmas boxes’ to workers on Boxing Day, as a gesture of goodwill. Many Beverley traders in 1835 decided that this was too costly for them and abolished the custom.”

Angela Owusu, Archive Awareness Campaign Officer comments:

“It’s sad to think of the workers of Beverley being deprived of their Christmas boxes 175 years ago by their penny-pinching bosses. Had Charles Dickens taken a trip to Beverley during this time, this declaration would have given him inspiration for his Ebenezer Scrooge character in *A Christmas Carol*. In 2010, many companies are cutting back on Christmas parties for their staff, but most of us are prepared nevertheless to forget money worries and enjoy the festive season. Archives like this give us a fascinating insight into the way our forbears dealt with problems which are still relevant today.”

The notice, dated 9th December 1835, is part of Christmas related archives from the East Riding Archives and Local Studies, and can be viewed at the Treasure House, Beverley.

– Ends –

For further details, spokespeople or images on Archive Awareness Campaign, please contact **Angela Owusu** on **0208 392 5237** or email Angela.Owusu@nationalarchives.gov.uk

Notes to Editors

For more information about the records contact Sam Bartle on 01482 392 794 or Ian Mason on 01482 392 785

- To read the registers, visit the research/reading room at the Treasure House (near the library) on Champney Road, Beverley
- Archive Awareness is spearheaded by the Archives & Records Association (ARA) (www.archives.org.uk) and funded by The National Archives (www.nationalarchives.gov.uk) and the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (www.mla.gov.uk).
- Archive Awareness Campaign www.archiveawareness.com is an ongoing celebration of all kinds of fascinating archive treasures. It celebrates and promotes local and national archives. Throughout the year archives across the country open their doors to showcase history, hold open days and present workshops to help the public discover a piece of their own history.
- To find an Archive Awareness Campaign event near you or to discover more about the UK’s archives visit www.archiveawareness.com