



The Craven Street Gazette by Lady Reid

Benjamin Franklin was a man of many talents and one of his lifelong delights was writing good-humoured parodies of current events. In 1770 his landlady Margaret Stevenson went away on a visit and Polly and William Hewson moved in to look after him. He wrote a spoof newspaper called *The Craven Street Gazette* about happenings at home during Margaret's absence.

Saturday September 22 was departure day for 'Queen Margaret'. Franklin wrote: 'Immediately the whole street was in tears, from a heavy shower of rain.' It was also the ninth anniversary of George III's coronation and Franklin was supposed to go to the Court of St. James to pay his respects. But a common family crisis occurred: 'Queen Margaret having carried off the key of the drawers, so that the Lady of the Bedchamber (Polly Hewson) could not find a laced shirt for His Highness.'

Franklin missed his visit to Court but the household promised to be better organized for church the next day.

Sunday September 23: 'It is now found by sad experience that good resolutions are easier made than executed. Notwithstanding yesterday's solemn order of council, nobody went to church today. It seems that the Great Person's broad bulk lay so long abed that the breakfast was not over till it was too late to dress.' At least, that was the excuse.

Later that day, the Hewsons went to Kensington. Back at the house, Franklin found it preferable to make an imaginary visit. 'Dr. Fatsides made 469 turns in his dining room, as the exact distance of a visit to the lovely Lady Barwell, whom he did not find at home, so there was no struggle for and against a kiss, and he sat down to dream in the easy chair that he had it without trouble.'

The four issues of the *Gazette* are peppered with comments on food, clearly an important subject. Franklin is promised 'roasted shoulder of mutton and potatoes for his dinner' but in the determination to attend church, a hot dinner is sacrificed for cold mutton and apple pie. On the Monday, the 'Great Person' dines on cold boiled beef because the 'Ministers' (the Hewsons) are somewhere else, eating hot roast venison. 'Dr Fatsides' feels a little put out.

We don't know whether the gazettes were sent to Margaret but they were probably read and laughed over by visitors to the house and they certainly added to the hilarity and gleeful spirits that permeated 36 Craven Street.

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The Friends of Benjamin Franklin are continuing the tradition of the *Craven Street Gazette* with this newsletter, published twice a year. It sets out to inform readers of the progress of the building project and give a flavour of the life and times of Benjamin Franklin. The title is a facsimile of Franklin's original.

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