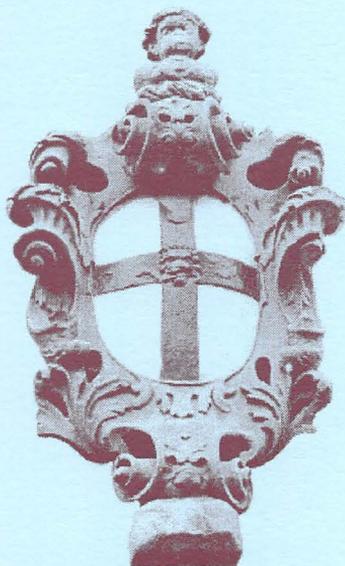


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# NORTH WANSDYKE PAST AND PRESENT



Keynsham & Saltford Local History Society

No. 11, 1999

# North Wansdyke

# Past and Present

Journal of Keynsham & Saltford Local History Society

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*Cover illustration:* Coat of Arms of Sir Thomas Bridges on the Bridges' Almshouses, Keynsham.

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# Charitable Establishments

Barbara J. Lowe

Institutions for the relief of the poor, sick and infirm have been England's inheritance for at least 1,000 years

In Keynsham, the medieval Abbey of the Blessed Virgin Mary, St Peter and St Paul was probably the earliest such charitable establishment, with its Almonry and Guest House. There may well have been a Leper house, too, on the town's outskirts during the Norman period when leprosy was rampant, but this had declined by about 1400 and leper houses put to other usage. In addition to this, Keynsham had a medieval Hospital or Hospice of St John the Baptist.

Medieval Hospitals were not hospitals of the type we know today. They were ecclesiastical, not medical institutions, and were for spiritual refreshment rather than physical relief. The emphasis was on care, not cure, and as the body became weaker, so the soul had to be made stronger. The word 'hospes' originally meant a host or guest and the early hospices in England were wayside shelters for all travellers (who were then in danger from wolves and other wild animals). Such hospitals played an important part of social life in the Middle Ages, their numbers growing as pilgrimages to shrines became more and more popular and the need grew for overnight resting places along the pilgrim routes, here and abroad. By the early thirteenth hundreds it was possible for very poor people to undertake pilgrimages at little cost to themselves. The early accommodation was provided by individual hermits (aided by charity), then by Benedictine Abbeys and then Augustinians. It was a pious duty to find accommodation for pilgrims, who were often poor, weak or infirm.

Pilgrimage was undertaken by members of all classes of society, for various reasons. Some were sent by the church as penance for their sins; others were sick or infirm and hoped the saint would answer their prayers. The Lateran Council of 1215 had decreed that sickness was caused by sin and that a visit to a shrine would be more beneficial than a visit to the physician. Later there were paid hirelings who fulfilled vows by proxy. After the Black Death spread through this country in 1348, killing so many people, there was a great increase in vagrancy. The Statute of Labourers, 1349, ruled that everyone under 60, except tradesmen, craftsmen, land owners and those with private means, should work for anyone willing to employ them at 1340-6 wages. It further decreed that poor pilgrims in good health should be given accommodation for one night only and that more care should be given to sick pilgrims than well ones. This was an attempt to deter idle wandering and indiscriminate almsgiving. Other similar Acts followed.

By the 15th century, there was a decline in visits to shrines, although anniversaries were kept. Pious travellers often lodged at special inns, such as the 'Pilgrim Inn' built by Abbot John in Glastonbury c.1475.

What type of hospital was that of St John the Baptist in Keynsham? What do

we know about it? Very little, in fact. The only real evidence being the existence of its seal of which this Society possesses a sealing-wax impression (Fig. 1). The inscription reads: 'Seal of House [?] of Blessed John the Baptist, near the Church Kvnnaisham [indistinct]'. The saint has a lamb on his left shoulder above a book to which he points with his right hand [Ecce Agnus Dei]. Below this dangles an object which Dugdale<sup>1</sup> describes as a mitre.

It seems rather co-incidental that Keynsham should have not only a church but a hospital dedicated to St John the Baptist. Were the two connected?

As far as we can tell, the parish church was begun mid-late 13th century, being appropriated to Keynsham Abbey in 1292, but probably not completed until much later. There was an earlier church (Anglo-Saxon Minster) in Keynsham but neither its exact location nor dedication is known.

St John the Baptist was a cousin of Mary, the mother of Jesus. He was a Jewish prophet who lived as a hermit, wandering in the desert. He preached repentance and forgiveness of sins and believed in baptism as a sign of a redeemed soul. He baptised Christ.

The land on which the parish church stands was part of that given to the Abbey on its foundation. The Founders of the Abbey were interested in the welfare of the persecuted Christian Jews who fled or were orphaned after the outbreak against them in 1146. Perhaps this championship of Christian Jews was the reason for dedicating the parish church to St John the Baptist.

What of the hospital and when was it built?

The cult of St John the Baptist was entwined with the history of the Knights Hospitallers who protected and cared for the sick and needy pilgrims in Jerusalem. Here, from 1048, they maintained one hospital for men (St John the Baptist's) and one for women (St Mary Magdalen's). Accordingly, in this country, hospitals for travellers or pilgrims of both sexes were usually dedicated to St John the Baptist, so we may safely assume that Keynsham's hospital was of that type. The fording place across the Avon, and later the 13th century bridge here, enabled travellers and pilgrims to pass through Keynsham on their way south to Glastonbury in particular. Also, Keynsham Abbey had its own centre of pilgrimage, that of the chapel and shrine of St Anne-in-the-Wood, Brislington, with its Holy Well. No doubt the hospital was built to encourage pilgrimage there.

It is unclear when St Anne's Chapel was founded or when it became administered by Keynsham Abbey. In 1276, the Close Rolls record that Roger de la Warre, founder of the Chapel of St Anne-in-the-Wood, came before the King and sought to replot his land and that of John la Warre in Bristleton which was taken into the King's hands for default in the Court of Gilbert de Clare (Heredity Patron of Keynsham Abbey) against the Abbot of Keynsham. We do not know the outcome but one wonders if that is how St Anne's Chapel came to Keynsham Abbey.

The seal of St John's Hospital, Keynsham, is generally thought to date to the 15th century. We do not know if it was attached to any document so there is nothing except style to help with the dating. I have compared it with the 13th century seal of Keynsham Abbey and that of Abbot Adam (1280) and can see



Fig. 1: Seal of the Hospital of St John the Baptist, Keynsham.

certain similarities which lead me to think that the seal is earlier than 15th century. There is another reason, too, to believe that the hospital dated from mid-14th century, perhaps just before the Black Death struck.

There must have been an increase in travellers through Keynsham in the 1340s because in 1347 the Abbot and convent applied to the King for permission to enclose, for the enlargement of their dwelling place, a certain way in Keynsham, 40 perches long by 1 perch broad (220yds by 51/2yds). They were allowed to do so on condition that they caused another way of like dimensions to be made on their own soil for public use. Local historians have given much thought to the location of these 'ways'. It is highly unlikely that the original way would have been within the Abbey precinct, so the extension was most likely to have been for the Abbey's Guest House. Local historian, artist and author, Miss Mary Fairclough, was the first to suggest that the replacement 'way' provided by the Abbot was what we know as the lower part of Charlton Road from West View Road to High Street. This seems to be of the right dimensions, allowing that roads were then unfenced and pedestrians and horses meandered, picking their way to avoid mud and bog.

If this theory is correct then where was the original 'way' and where was the Guest House? Local tradition asserts that the northern part of the house opposite the west end of Keynsham Church, now known as 'West End House', was originally St



Fig. 2: West End House. Drawing by Buckler in 1828. (Illustration by kind permission of Somerset Archaeological & Natural History Society)



Fig. 3: West End House in 1910.

John's Hospital. Old drawings indicate its antiquity. Fig. 2 shows the house in 1828 (clearly then two dwellings). It was drawn by Buckler, a very experienced draughtsman who travelled extensively around Somerset making accurate sketches of all interesting buildings. At that time, Keynsham still retained a large number of its early 17th century houses, but Buckler singled out this one to describe as 'ancient' in his caption, clearly indicating that it was of much earlier date than the others. Clearly, the house had been 'modernised' in the late 16th century and an early Jacobean staircase is still extant inside. Notice the bay window with two stone figures 'supporting' it. They are almost certainly from the original Hospital and perhaps portray sickness and health. Maybe the plumper one depicted a healthy pilgrim. The house again underwent major structural alterations in the Victorian era. The bay window was moved to a house on the other side of the road and has now disappeared. The figures survive in a local rockery.

Fig. 3 shows the house in 1910 before it was sold to grocer George Chapell in 1911 and the ground floor drastically altered. Kingsley Belsten, who lived in the house as a boy, provided the 1910 ground floor plan shown in Fig. 6. Thirty years ago, when members of our Society were allowed to inspect the building, there was clear evidence of major alterations over many years—removed windows, some now only visible inside the house, modern joists passing through blocked window embrasures, raised floor levels and original corbels now supporting nothing. Figs 5 and 6 show original 16th century windows in situ but now inside the building, the larger one with original glass. There is also an original third floor rear window.

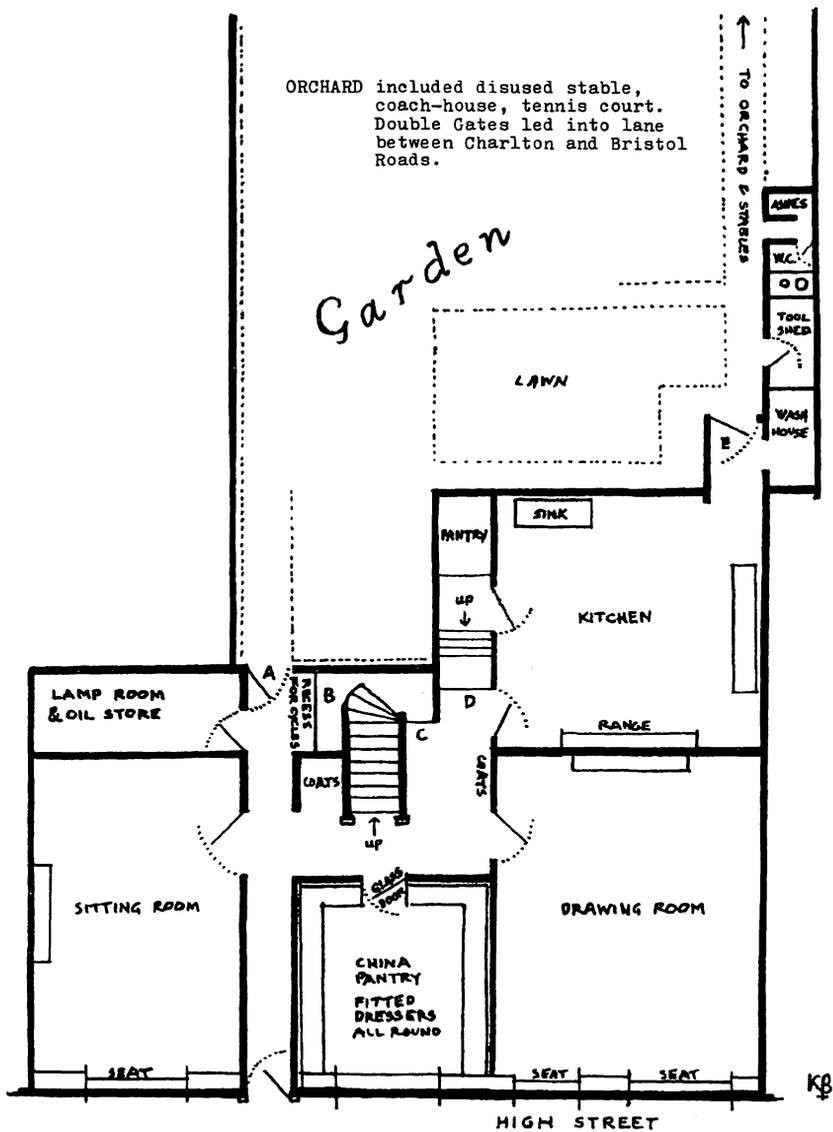
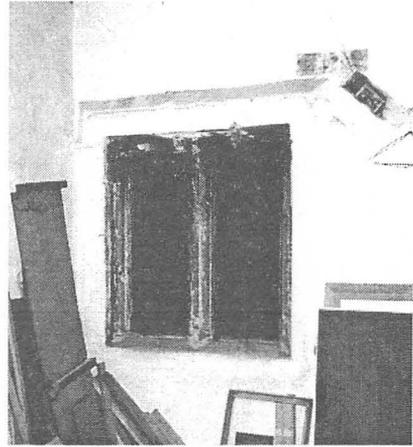
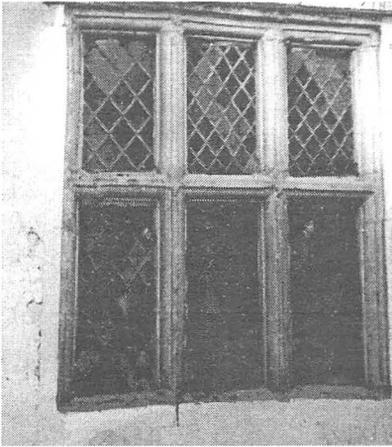


Fig. 4: West End House. Ground plan as it was in 1910, drawn in 1970 (from memory and not to scale) by Kingsley Belsten, grandson of Mrs John Belsten Senr whose home it was.



Figs 5 and 6: Original 17th century windows *in situ*.

The present 'West End House' street frontage measures 51ft 7in externally, N to S. The rear has been repeatedly added to, so its original depth is difficult to ascertain but is perhaps 20ft with an early extension to c.30ft. The outer wall thickness is estimated to 2ft 8in and window embrasure depth about 2ft 6in. Ground floors have been concreted. Fig. 7 shows the building in 1960.

If St John's Hospital was the addition to the Abbot's Guest House of 1347, then the latter must have been the southern part of 'West End House' and the 'enclosed way' would have run from opposite Keynsham Church, under the northern part of 'West End House', along Culver's Road and followed the high ground to Queen Charlton, skirting the Abbot's deer park. This is highly feasible because Queen Charlton was then an important place, with the Abbot's weekly market and annual fair. Additionally, a small portion of roughly west to east Roman road was discovered recently (March 1999) during archaeological investigations prior to the re-development of the present long-stay car parks south of St John's Court. The projected line of this Roman road, presumably leading to a crossing point over the River Avon, makes it a candidate for the pre-1347 'way' built over by the then Abbot, although no evidence of medieval usage was found in the limited area excavated.

If the Abbot provided the land for the Hospital it does not necessarily mean that it was run by the Abbot and convent. Usually, such hospitals were run independently, by laymen relying on produce from land and rents granted by the founders for their upkeep. In Keynsham's case the parish church seems to have served as chapel to the Hospital opposite.

We do not know when the Hospital became disused as such. If judged to be Abbey property it would have been Dissolved in 1539 with the Abbey. Or it could have been extinguished under the Act for Dissolving Chantries, Free Chapels, Guilds, and Hospitals in 1545.



Fig. 7: The building in 1960.

The Statute for suppressing vagrancy in 1530/1 approved the charitable work of hospitals and the Act that followed in 1535/6 contained a clause requiring those who came into possession of the land and property of religious houses to provide hospitality and services for the poor 'as had formerly been provided by the monasteries and hospitals'.

Keynsham Abbey property was split after the Dissolution. Thomas Bridges bought the site and much Abbey property in 1553 but his family does not appear to have provided any such services before the Almshouses built by another Sir Thomas in the late 17th century.

The Manor of Keynsham remained in Royal hands until 1613, so theoretically the state should have provided a poor house in Keynsham once the hospital had been suppressed. No records have survived. The earliest record I have found of local almshouses comes in 1642 when reference is made to 'a squillet of ground used for almshouses'. We believe this was somewhere behind the present 'Old Manor House'.

## References

Proc. Som. Arch. Nat. Hist. Soc., vol. 53, 1907.

R. M. Clay, *The Medieval Hospitals of England*, London, Methuen, 1909.

## Notes

1 Dugdale *Monasticon Angl.* vi.

# History of the Milward Homes and Keynsham Charities

Susan James

The Milward family came originally from Eaton Dovedale in Derbyshire but little more than a few lengths of moss grown walling remain of their house there.

One branch of the family came to live in the Bristol area and finally settled in Keynsham where they had a handsome town house. The other branch of the family is well known up and down the country, their name being on countless packets of needles.

The eldest son of the family was always named Benjamin. One Benjamin, an Anglican Priest, held the livings of Isle Brewers near Taunton and Abbotsbury on the Dorset coast. No doubt he paid some unfortunate curate a pittance to do his job for him.

Coming nearer to the present day; we find Priscilla Milward a young widow with an 18 year old daughter Louisa Jane, and a son Alfred, living in Milward House, Keynsham.

A handsome and highly eligible young man came riding over from Upton Cheyney and Priscilla's hope of re-marriage began to rise, but alas for her, Joseph Parker had chosen the daughter. So Louisa Jane became chatelaine of Upton House. Here she made several alterations including enlarging the front rooms of the house and building the present facade.



Fig. 1: Milward Homes, Charlton Road. Photo by Roger Clark.

She had plenty of money and spent lavishly travelling on the Continent with her own coach. Her husband tried to curb her extravagance, and the story goes that he would take coals off the fires which she had just ordered to be made up as high as possible.

Sadly, Alfred developed T.B. and though he spent the winters in Madeira, it was to no avail. He died in 1888. Louisa Jane had the Milward Homes in Charlton Road built and endowed in his memory.

The four houses were to accommodate needy married couples (who did not belong to the Church of Rome) over the age of 65 years, and resident in the Parish of Keynsham for at least five years. The deed setting up this charity is, as far as I know, somewhere in the depths of Keynsham Town Hall.<sup>1</sup>

In this deed, it was laid down that there should be four trustees, i.e., the Vicar of the Parish, a member of Louisa Jane's family (the Parkers of Upton Cheyney), a lawyer and one person appointed by those three.

My father, John Scott Parker, was one of the early trustees. When his work took him to France, his cousin Milward Parker took over the job. When I married and went to live on top of Mendip, I took over from Milward Parker who was not in very good health and lived so much further away in Barnstaple.

The trustees at that time were the Rev Trevor Wright, Mr. Frank Whittuck, lawyer, and Dr Claud Harrison.

Soon after my appointment the question of up to date facilities had to be faced. The gardens were very extensive, the end houses having double plots. So the plots of land each side of the building were sold and modern houses built on them. The money resulting from the sale was spent on the kitchens and building extensions to accommodate a larder, a garden shed with outside door, and a bathroom and toilet.

The question of other charities existing in the town had to be considered, some had become so out of date as to be of no real benefit to anybody such as handing out loaves of bread to passers by in High Street on a certain day in the year.

So Mr George Ashton, then Clerk to Keynsham Urban District Council approached the Charity Commissioners for advice, and there followed the setting up of the Keynsham Charities. This consisted of the Almshouses Branch, and the Poor Branch, the latter to administer funds that could be used to help people in unexpected financial straits, and young people who having won an apprenticeship needed tools.

The next step in the modernising of the Almshouses was taken as the result of two bequests to the Charities of small properties. These were sold and the money resulting used to overhaul the whole building. The roof was lifted, stair cases relocated so as to be safer than the steep and narrow ones with a tight twist at the top.

The bathrooms were re-equipped, WCs installed upstairs, gas central heating with a gas fire in the sitting room completing the modernisation.

Now the Milward Homes are comfortable little houses, and the present residents have done wonders in the gardens.

## Note:

- 1 Note by Margaret Whitehead, Hon. Archivist, February 1999. 'In 1990 I wrote to Somerset Record Office asking if they would check a list of the contents of the strongroom in Keynsham Town Hall which had been made in 1976 by Mrs. Connie Smith, then Society Archivist, and Mrs. Yerbury, Secretary to Mr. George Ashton. This they did, and ticked the items that had been deposited with them since then. None of the Feoffee papers had been sent to Taunton and so together with Mrs. Barbara Lowe I visited the Town Hall and was shown the records which were still in their keeping. The deeds of the Milward Homes among several others were not there, and I am currently, investigating their whereabouts, if known.'

# Keynsham and its Poor Houses

Elizabeth White

The Great Elizabethan Poor Law of 1601 had ordered each parish to look after its own poor. They were to erect a poor house on the edge of the parish and raise a rate from the substantial householders to pay for it and any relief needed for the old, the sick, the orphaned, and the unemployed; all were supposed to enter the poorhouse and be set to work before they could receive relief. Queen Charlton built a poorhouse, which still stands on the edge of the parish, at the top of Charlton Road at the junction with the road to Queen Charlton. Keynsham never built a poor house, but relied on renting, or buying, cheap rundown properties to house the poor. Nor were the poor required to enter the poorhouse. Many, especially the old, were given a tiny weekly pension and stayed in their own homes. The impression is that it was the undesirable poor who ended up in the poorhouse

The first clear mention of a parish poor house is in April 1747, when £4 a year was paid to Mr Thorn for the 'house and backside, late Drapers'. This was situated at the junction of the modern St Ladoc and St Francis Roads. The overseer was to see to the necessary alterations, which cost £14.7s.3d. leaving the parish in debt. Six paupers refused to enter the workhouse and had their pay stopped. Paupers were allowed to take their possessions in with them: the overseer paid for moving them. This is in contrast to many other parishes where they were made to sell their goods before they entered, the parish having the proceeds. By 1759 the poorhouse was regarded as a den of iniquity. The overseers' accounts read 'ordered that all the single young women now residing in that nursery of vice and debauchery called the poorhouse have immediate notice to go out to service or to be proceeded against in due form of law and be punished accordingly'. In 1776 the parish is recorded as having one poorhouse holding 6 paupers, and spending £10.18s. on rent. More accommodation was needed. In 1786 they tried unsuccessfully to purchase extra property from Mr Francis of Bitton. They had been more successful with 'Coles'. This property, in the Carpenters Lane area, belonged to Mrs Whippy The Parish rented this for a long time. Although the rent was higher than at Draper's (£ 10) it seems to have been a dilapidated place ,needing frequent repairs 'at the least expense'. It, too, had a bad reputation. One Widow Williams, accused of disorderly conduct, was moved out of another poorhouse, the King's Arms and sent to Coles.

Towards the end of the 18th century the parish made several efforts to build their own poorhouse, spurred on, no doubt, by the fact they were spending £65 a year on rent alone. They held meetings, appointed a surveyor, gained the approval of the justices, appointed Guardians and Governors of the Poorhouse, but nothing came of it. They continued to look round for cheap property. Another property they used was 'The Batch'. This was on the north east side of the Bath road, in the

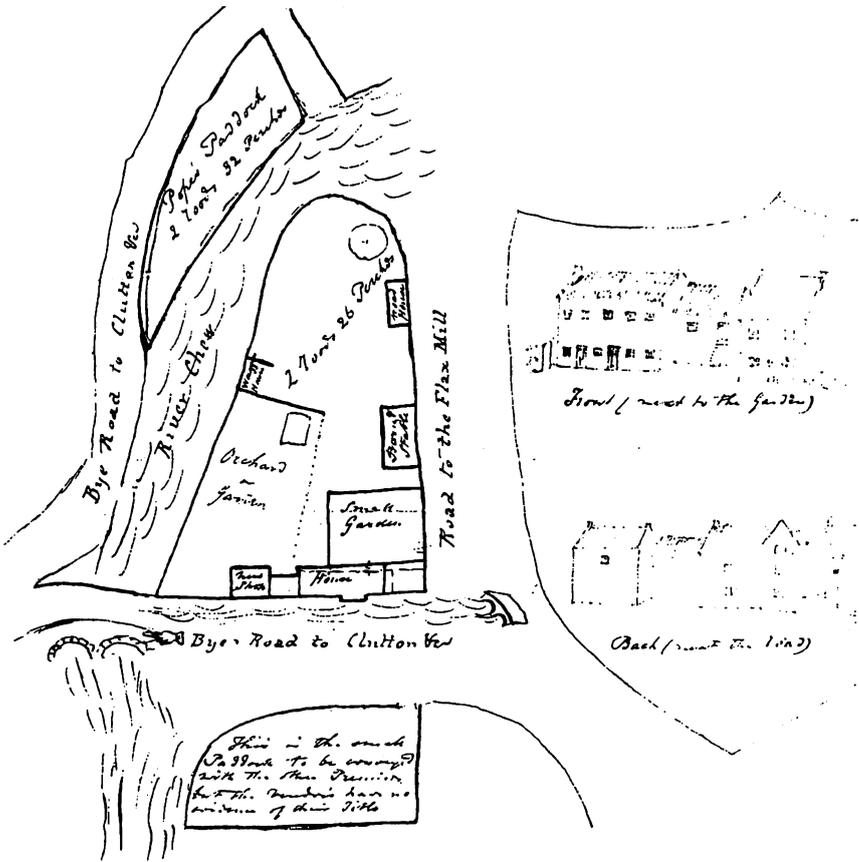


Fig. 1: Plan showing Pope's Paddock.

Dragons hill area. This, too, became very run down and a home for undesirables.

The house most frequently mentioned in the 19th century is the King's Arms. This had been an important inn in the 17th century, where vestry meetings been held, but it was out of use as an inn by 1773. All through its use as a poor house it needed frequent repairs. In 1821 it needed retiling, and although more money was spent in 1822, and 1823, by the winter of that year, the roofs of the King's Arms and Coles needed repairs. Further repairs were ordered in June 1824, and in August 1824 the house was to be whitewashed annually, the front was to be coloured, and the windows repaired, though in future the occupants were to pay for window repairs themselves. Expenses continued to mount up; in addition to the £24 they paid in rent the parish paid for 6 keys and padlocks for the King's Arms, and the Round House. In 1825 12s was paid for cleaning out the privy. This is the only reference to cleaning the privy; one hopes it was done more often!

Paupers had violent objections to sharing rooms! In attempting to reduce the expenses of the King's Arms in 1827 the Vestry meeting ordered the rooms to be numbered; one family was allocated to each room, and single people were to share. This caused uproar. The expenses continued to mount throughout the 1820s. There are two possible sites where this house was situated. One is on the Bath Road, because a sale advertisement mentions it as being adjacent to a property in Bath Road. The other site is in the Milward Lodge area.

By the 1830s attitudes to Poor Relief were changing nationally. A Royal Commission was enquiring into the administration of the Poor Law, and it was widely believed it would recommend the abolition of all forms of relief to the poor in their own homes and the adoption of a system of workhouses. In view of this, it seems strange that Keynsham at last decided it must increase and improve its provision for the poor. In 1831 it was decided to sell the Batch and to purchase Pope's Paddock, (see plan) No new poor house was built there, only the existing buildings were repaired. The parish soon had grander plans. Pope's Paddock was to be sold, a mortgage raised and property in Dapps Hill bought. This was the Swan River Tenements, (now called Chew Cottages), and the cottages behind them which had been built by John Clark, a local lime burner and basket maker, in 1824. They raised the money with a £700 mortgage from the Feoffees, the trustees of the Charity set up in the 17th century. Since the Feoffees were very largely the same men who made up the parish Vestry, they were lending money to themselves and it must have been confusing to know who was acting in whose interest, as well as being of dubious legality. The Swan River Tenements had a very short life as poor-houses. In 1834 the Poor Law Amendment Act was passed and the old system was swept away. The Keynsham Union Workhouse opened in 1838. The parish was faced with paying for the mortgage on the Swan River Tenements and paying for their new workhouse at the top of the hill. Somehow the property passed into the hands of the Feoffees; there is no record of how or when. The Vestry had tried to sell it in 1844, in accordance with the instructions of the Poor Law Commissioners. In 1859 the Feoffees made a determined effort to get rid of the properties. They paid to have them renovated and finally sold them under their new name, which they still have. So the last of Keynsham's parish poor houses passed into private hands, and who could now guess the past they have had?.

## Sources

Details of these properties can be found in the Society's Archives, along with a transcript of the Vestry Minutes (originals at the Somerset Record Office). The Minute Books of the Feoffees are in the care of the local authority, now Bath & North East Somerset.

# The Bridges Almshouses

Margaret Whitehead

In the article on the Feoffees of Keynsham by Elizabeth White (pp. 23-8) we learn that they are in existence by 1685. Apart from the references to almshouses prior to 1685 in the final paragraph of the preceding article by Barbara Lowe, if as we suspect, these references support the possibility of the Whitmores providing accommodation at an earlier date—which, as Lords of the Manor they were expected to do—research has not revealed any others so far.

Perhaps Sir Thomas decided to go one better and provide the sort of almshouses that were being built at that time in villages and town all over the country.

Sir Thomas Bridges (1616-1706) had remained a loyal supporter of the king through the Civil War (1639-1646) and succeeding years. At the Restoration he and his wife, Lady Anna, (a member of the Rodney's of Rodney Stoke family) generously presented the Parish Church of St. John's with a fine silver communion set and some elegant furnishings.

Part of a transcript done by Mr Charles Abbott taken from a manuscript book in the possession of Keynsham Urban District Council is in the Society archives. From early this century Charlie Abbott, as he was known, was Poor Rate Collector, Assistant Overseer, Clerk to the Parish Council, Deputy Registrar of Births & Deaths plus Marriages, from 1939. for Keynsham sub-district.

The first part of the transcript reads as follows:

## Keynsham Benefactions

Sir Thomas Bridges hath given £100 ye use of it to 12 poor men to be distributed by his heirs and ye minister of this parish for ever.

Sir Thomas Bridges hath erected a school and endowed it with £20 a year for teaching of 20 poor boys of this town and parish.

Sir Thomas Bridges hath erected an almshouse for 6 people and endowed it with £24 a year.

Then follows a list of benefactions which were inscribed on a board which was hung on the wall of the tower in the parish church and which can still be seen today.

While Sir Thomas Bridges founded the Almshouses they had to be administered, and this may have been the reason, along with the other bequests which had been left to the town's poor over the years, that the Feoffees were formed.

Lady Anna was an heiress of arms and it is her family shield of three double-headed eagles which can be seen emblazoned on the outside of the almshouses. The other shield is that of Sir Thomas.

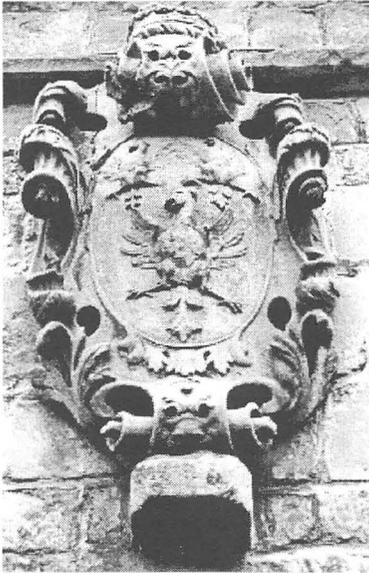


Fig. 1: Coat of Arms of Lady Bridges (Anna Rodney) on the Bridges' Almshouses, Keynsham.

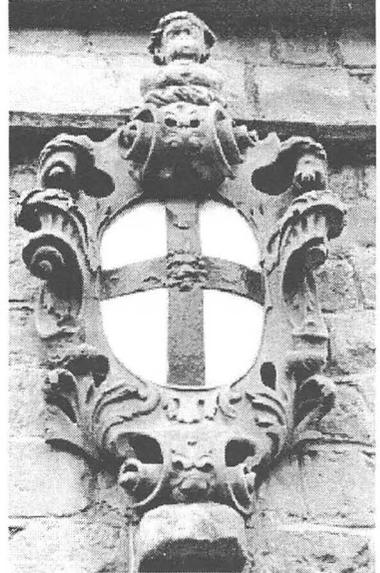


Fig. 2: Coat of Arms of Sir Thomas Bridges on the Bridges' Almshouses, Keynsham.

In the Feoffees' accounts from 1692 we find expenses appearing for repairs to the Almshouses.

1692	
For mending ye chimney in ye almshouse	£1.0.0.
Pd. to Saunders for 1 Dozen of helm* for ye Almshouses	4s. 6d. (22p)
Pd for 500 of Spicks**	1. 3d. (18p)
Pd for the Thatcher and attendance	4 0 0.
Pd for sweeping 3 Chimneyes in the Almshouse	6d. (2p)
1695	
Paid for Metarieles and Thatching ye Almshouse	£1. 4. 0d. (£1.20)
Pd for Peynting the Almes House	3. 0.0.
1697	
Pd Will Cante for mending Ye Almshouse	2s.6d. (12p)

\*Helm seems to have been a local term for straw

\*\*Spicks were long wooden split pins used to pin down the thatch. usually made of hazel.

If the almshouses were built circa 1685 the thatched roof would have been in need of the second layer of thatch by 1692.

In 1696 Sir Thomas's sister, Elizabeth Langton of Doynton, Gloucestershire, directed in her will that £20 should be allotted to the poor of the almshouses 'erected by my brother.'

The account books of the Feoffees were seen and listed in 1976 by Connie Smith, Archivist of the Society at that time. They were kept in the strong room of Keynsham Town Hall, where Elizabeth White also examined them and transcribed some pages from the first account book which I have quoted from.

In 1992 Barbara Lowe and myself visited the Town Hall to establish whether these records were still stored there and were shown the books. Unfortunately time has not permitted the full transcription of these books which list the amounts given to the recipients and the expenditure on repairs to property managed by them. It is hoped that this can be done in the not too distant future

The formation of the turnpike trusts which resulted in the road through Keynsham being altered and widened in 1822 was the reason for the roadway outside the Almshouses being raised up. Drainage has always been a problem in Bristol Road and with the development of the St. Ladoc Road area this century flooding became a real problem. After heavy rain surplus water came rushing down St. Ladoc Road and over the main road into the almshouses. It was a heart-breaking task for the elderly occupiers to sweep away the water and dry out.

However, a public spirited resident, Mr. William Thomas of St. Augustine's, Station Road, and joint owner of the Albert Mill, upon hearing of their plight, had a low barrier built in front of each door to stem the repeated flood of the front parlours.

You will have read that life did not always run smoothly for the Feoffees and in 1896 shortly after the Local Government Act of 1894 was implemented in Keynsham with the setting up of Keynsham Rural District Council, a booklet was published entitled *The Charities of Keynsham*. In the introduction it explained that 'a Committee was appointed to enquire and report on the local Charities, and the report of that Committee is duly entered in the minute book of the Council, and is open at all reasonable hours to the inspection of the Parochial Electors'

The facts found by the Committee were listed with details of the various charities being explained from the carefully researched evidence and the conclusions reached. For the almshouses these were as follows:

### **The Bridges Almshouses.**

Sir Thomas Bridges in his lifetime (? 1705) built Almshouses for six poor people, but the deed endowing these Almshouses with the payment of £24 yearly to be equally divided amongst the occupants, appears to be missing, This sum has been regularly received. The charge was originally upon the 'Park' but was transferred to a fee farm rent on property owned by the Dean and Chapter of Bristol in

the Manors of Erlingham, Broadley, Wakeley, Codrington, South Leoney and Blakeway. The owners of the fee farm rent are the trustees of the late Mr. H. B. Smith, of Bath; Mr. G. F. Fox, and Mr. C. E. Little. The right of nomination originally exercised by the Bridges' family has now (following the custom of the Duke's agent) been exercised by the owners of this fee farm rent, who have to keep the Almshouses in repair. The £24 is payable in March and September.

The mention of the Duke's agent refers to the Dukes of Buckingham & Chandos who inherited the Bridges' estates when the Keynsham family died out.

Although the Almshouses were built for '6 poor people', in fact they were always occupied by widows. Apparently they used to wear quilted sunbonnets with long ribbons and Miss Mary Fairclough tells me that she was shown a photograph some time ago of one of the ladies wearing her bonnet.

In one of the Feoffees account books setting out the sums distributed from 1893 to 1909 the six recipients from the almshouses each received £6 per annum and were specifically listed as widows. The surnames over this period were Davis, Ford, Giles, Headington, Ollis, Osmond, Purnell and Young. The one exception was Mary Ann Williams (not specified as a widow) who only received 10/-d (50p) rising to a £1 per annum for some years, finally receiving the £6 in 1906.

By 1948 the Almshouses were in a very poor condition. The defects as reported by the Sanitary Inspector to the KUDC were as follows:

1. Rising dampness particularly in front walls and penetrating damp in bedrooms due to defective roofs, flashings and copings.
2. Defective roofs, flashings, fillets and chimney stacks which may necessitate almost complete stripping of roofs to renew or strengthen timbers and retille.
3. Lighting and ventilation of living rooms and bedrooms far below standard. Living rooms have no windows capable of opening, bedroom windows much below Bye-law size.
4. Defective pointing of large areas of external wall surfaces.
5. Defective roof water gutters and pipes, and inadequate means of disposal of rainwater.
6. Absence of proper food stores.
7. Absence of scullery sinks with water supply and washing facilities.
8. Poor W.C. accommodation and defective drainage arrangements.

A report which, if made today, would immediately condemn the buildings as unfit for human habitation.

As a result of this report the Council decided it was time to take the Almshouses over, but then discovered that no-one knew who actually owned the buildings. A report by George Ashton, Clerk to the Council stated that exhaustive enquiries were made by the Council and other interested parties to trace the legal owner without success. This is hardly surprising of course as the deeds to the land would have been originally in the Bridges' possession.

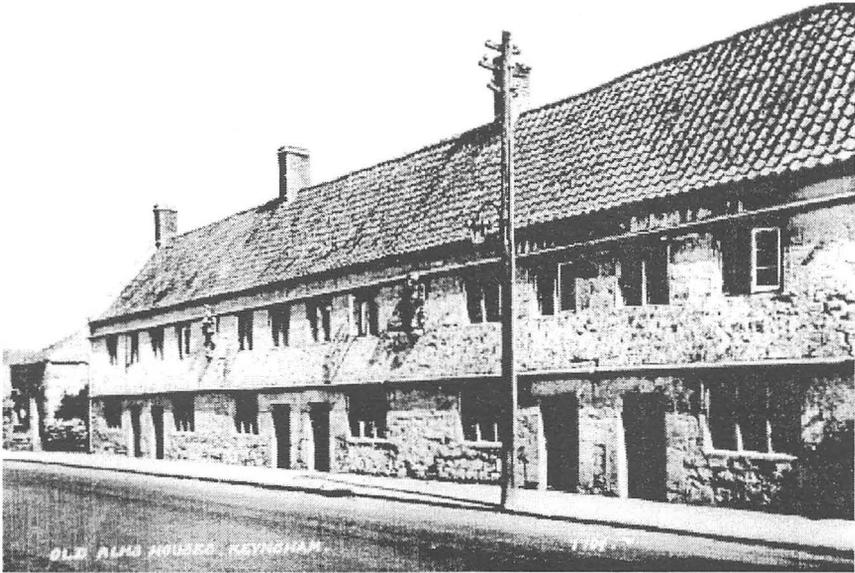


Fig. 3: Bridges Almshouses before 'modernisation'.

Research revealed that in 1909 the rent charge was purchased by the well-known Keynsham benefactor, John Nelson Fear. He carried on administering the income as formerly and after his death in 1916 his widow continued the practice. By John Nelson Fear's will the remainder of the rent charge was bequeathed to the Feoffees, who were advised by the Charity Commissioners that they could not accept this additional Trust. Whereupon the Feoffees decided to sell and it was purchased by another local benefactor, Mr George E. Chappell in 1924. The purchase price after deduction of fees etc., was devoted to the improvement of the cottages.

The income, by now £64 per annum was administered by Mr. Chappell, as formerly until he created a Trust in 1928 to make the arrangement permanent. Since then the George E Chappell Charity Trustees had devoted the income, less land tax and local rates, to the occupiers in the form of fixed grants and on repairs. By 1949 the cost of repairs exceeded the income available.

The report goes on to say that a local charity charged with the welfare of the occupiers and the trustees (i.e. the Feoffees) have been acting in the capacity of persons in charge of the premises.

A report in the *Western Daily Press and Bristol Mirror* in June 1949 explained that as the Council could not find an owner to purchase the properties from, an order for compulsory purchase had been made and was awaiting approval from the Ministry of Health. The District Valuer would then decide on a fair price

bearing in mind that at least £700 would have to be spent on them to prevent further deterioration and to improve the sanitary arrangements. In the event of no owner turning up the money would be placed in the bank in the name of the Accountant-General of the Court of Chancery.

The writer of the article went on to ask what would be the effect upon the six widows and single women (note the fact of single women now included) of straitened circumstances now living in the almshouses rent-free but felt that the Council would require only a nominal rent as their main object was to preserve the buildings.

A compulsory purchase order was pinned to the door of No. 46 which was the home of Miss Nellis Ollis who had lived there for 10 years. She told the reporter that she hoped it would not mean a change for her, she was Keynsham born and bred and did not care who owned the almshouses, it was home to her and that was all that mattered.

However, the occupants were moved out not long afterwards, and the two Misses Vile who were moved to the first council development of bungalows for the elderly built on the corner of St Ladoc Road and Cranmore Avenue and who had not looked forward to the prospect, were reported as saying that their new homes were 'like little palaces' compared to the old ones!

A small paragraph in the *Bath Weekly Chronicle & Herald* for Dec. 27 1947 entitled 'Hold That Mud' contained a plea from one of the ladies in the almshouses 'asking football players and supporters to abstain from scraping the mud off their boots outside the almshouses on the Bristol Road when leaving the field. The old people who live in these houses have to turn out after you have passed and clear away the mud in case anybody slips when passing afterwards, just when they wish to sit before their firesides. Thank you.'

The almshouses lay derelict for some time until in 1959 the Council accepted an offer of £100 for them. As they were (and still are) scheduled as buildings of historic interest the facade was to be preserved.

Mr. Bert Simpkins and his brother jointly purchased the six houses and after a great deal of hard work converted them into two beautiful homes. Mr. Simpkins recently told me that he is writing up the history of their work on the conversion of the houses which we await with interest.

When so much of Keynsham has vanished leaving us the poorer it is very heartening to pass and the Bridges Almshouses and see them still very much as part of our town and heritage.

## Sources

All material from archives of Society.

# The Feoffees of Keynsham

Elizabeth White

Like so many of Keynsham's institutions, the origins of the body called the Feoffees are shrouded in mystery. The first mention we have is in an account book beginning in 1685, which records them distributing the income from land to the 'Second Poor'. This was the function of a Feoffee, to hold land for charitable purposes. The 'Second Poor' were poor people who had not applied to the parish for relief under the terms of the Poor Law of 1601. It has always been assumed that the board on the wall of the west tower of St John's Church, which list benefactions made to the poor, and laid out in land, refers to the foundation of the Feoffees. On this eight men are listed as having given money. The largest donation, £50, came from Sir Thomas Bridges. The almshouses in Bristol Road, which he founded, and which date from around this time, may well be connected with the foundation of the Feoffees. They eventually came to be regarded as the 'owners' of the almshouses and undertook responsibility for their upkeep. Another £50 came from Walter Holbin, who seems to have been a member of the same family as Thomas Holbin who gave £5 a year to the poor in 1619. A third large donation came from Robert Bagnall; he was a merchant and a substantial tenant farmer, and gave £50. He had been on the opposite side to Sir Thomas during the Civil War, and had raised troops for the Parliamentary defence of Bristol, whereas Sir Thomas had been the Royalist governor of Bath. The other five donors gave smaller sums and £181 2s was spent buying land in Saltford. The rent from the land was given annually to the poor.

It is not known how many Feoffees there were supposed to be. Sometimes eight are listed, but that may have been simply those who were present. The earliest accounts show two distributions of money by four Feoffees and by ten Feoffees, which makes fourteen in all. If there was any legal deed setting up the charity it has been lost. It was not in existence in 1894 when the Keynsham charities were all examined to see which should be retained in the control of the church and which should be administered by the newly formed parish council.

The Feoffees were a secretive body. There was no public list of who the Feoffees were, or who were the recipients of the money. They did not have to produce public accounts, or explain the basis on which they made their distributions. We are now able to know more about them than people did at the time. Their account books have survived. They show that many widows received money, though widows were usually given alms by the parish. There was obviously no disgrace to receiving the Feoffees' alms, because many names of onetime prosperous families appear. Boucher, Sanders, Baber, as well as well known names such as Cattle, Ford, Rawlins, Gregory and Rumsey. Once on the list, the recipient remained on it till death or non-residence removed them. This could be a period of 20 years. The day and place of the distribution varied over the years, but finally settled on the

Monday after Epiphany in the Church. By the end of the 18th century they paid 2s for the help of the sexton at the distribution of the money. Then the nice minded Victorians paid a woman 2s to be in attendance at the distribution. Two Feoffees were appointed each year to see to the distribution. By the 1800s they had printed lists of all recipients and a copy given to all the Feoffees. Some early ones have survived. They show that the Feoffees had difficulty sorting out recipients, especially those with the same surname. In 1870, for example, the following list shows the problems they had with the Ollises.

'Ollis Fanny	£1 5s
Ollis George	£1
Ollis John	£1 10s
Ollis Nathaniel	£1 10s
Ollis widow of Charles	£1 MS
Ollis William Jarman	£1
Ollis William Epileptic	10s
Ollis Wm son of Nath	10s
Ollis George	10s (later described as 'one eye')
Ollis William Spring	£1 5s'

A William Ollis had been deprived of alms in 1836 when another William Ollis had claimed the money; perhaps that is why they took to differentiating the different members of the family in this idiosyncratic way. Such problems continued. In 1886 the list for the Cantle family read:

'Cantle John Thomas	15s
Cantle John (James)	£1
Cantle Wm (Busca)	£1
Cantle James Jr (Tanyard)	10s
Cantle Job	10s
<i>Cantle Wm (Freeschools)</i>	10s
Cantle Wm (Shopkeeper)	10s
Cantle James (Happy)	10s'

With so many members of the same family receiving alms for so many years, it is easy to see why some Keynsham people came to regard receiving the money as an hereditary right.

As the amount of money to be distributed increased, so did the meetings of the Feoffees. By the 19th century they met quarterly, and created a subcommittee to attend to their property, and make annual inspections of their increasing holdings, to see they were well farmed and if any repairs or improvements were needed, and report to the A.G.M. Like all Keynsham, institutions in the 19th century they met at the Lamb and Lark, and followed their activities with a dinner, which later on, they were forced to explain, did not come out of the funds but out of their own pockets.

From 1752 the records are very complete. They list who the Feoffees were, when they were elected by the other Feoffees, and whose place they took, or as the account book so nicely puts it, 'Those who were chosen in the place of those Feoffees who are dead or declined'. Bankrupts were not allowed to remain as Feoffees. Some of the clerks were particularly informative about the recipients:

'William James' wife at the King's Arms in addition to what was before given her on account of her goods having been distrained for rent, her having a large family and now being in an advanced state of pregnancy, 7s.'

This is a very unusual entry, because the King's Arms was used to accommodate the poor on parish relief. It sounds as if she had been forced to go to the Poor House but still was in a desperate state. They had granted her relief although they were supposed only to relieve those who were not receiving parish relief.

'Widow Crewe in addition her labour being done, and to put her on a footing with the Widow Lewis, 5s.'

One can only speculate on the relationship between these two old ladies!

'Mary Brookman in addition as being an industrious woman and possessing a pride not to be troublesome to her parish, 2s 6d.'

This is an entry, which reveals much about the pride of the poor, and the attitudes of which the Feoffees approved.

By 1752 the Feoffees were distributing £11 annually. By 1829 it was £134 1s 10d. By 1918 it was £222 14s 9d. That year the six almshouse widows got £6 each, and many others £5, £4, £3, and £2, the smallest amount was 10s. The Feoffees managed their affairs skilfully. They had acquired other pieces of land. For example, James Sanders had left them £100 with which they bought land at Brislington. This gave them common rights, which gained them two further acres when Brislington Common was enclosed. They had made advantageous land exchanges; for example this Brislington land was exchanged for land at Broadmead. Although the poor ultimately benefited, because of a reversionary clause it was thirty years before the Feoffees had any income from this. One wonders if this was actually outside their powers. When the Statute of Mortmain was passed in 1736 it became illegal to give land as charitable gifts, so benefactors had to give cash. Such donations were invested by the Feoffees in stocks and shares. These had to be held in the name of an individual, which sometimes caused great problems as it did in 1850. In that year one of the Feoffees, John Lintorn Simmons, who held the stocks bought with the money donated by Miss Hale, died suddenly from cholera, intestate, which was very strange because he was a solicitor. It took a long time to sort out these problems. The Charity Commissions were urging the Feoffees to sort out their affairs, but it took another

serious problem for them to change. In 1896 Alfred Wood died. He was the Feoffee who held the stocks given by Miss Eastwick in the Bristol Gas and Light Company. They would not pay any interest until they had seen the original share certificates, and the Feoffees had to pay the money from their own pockets until the Company paid up. It was this that persuaded the Feoffees to invest their money with the Official Trustee of Charity Funds

Of course all these problems were concealed from the general public. The minute books reveal that the Feoffees went through some stormy times. In 1861 there had been a stormy meeting when some Feoffees accused others of altering the minutes, and walked out. These problems were caused by the lack of clearly defined rules, but with the treasurer dead, no clerk and other members resigned, the Feoffees were in a sorry state. So a special meeting was held at the Lamb and Lark; from this came eventually a clear list of rules, a renewed body of Feoffees and a new minute book, given by George Frederick Fox, a local solicitor. This was magnificently bound with a brass lock. For many years it was written in the beautiful copperplate handwriting of Thomas Oxford, whose hand can be found in the minutes of the Guardians of the Poor and in other Keynsham records. Inside the cover of the minute book are listed the names of the Feoffees. They were all worthy and to a greater or lesser extent, wealthy men. They included Harford Lyne, the Lord of the Manor; George Robinson, the Vicar; two local doctors, William Hutchins and Edward Vaughan; R. W. R. Hassall, who owned the Blue Lias Company; and several local landowners, Charles Harris, John Score and Thomas Lodge.

However, not even the Feoffees could keep their affairs entirely secret. One row hit the headlines of the local papers and became a national talking point. It was the matter of the Vicar's dinner. It was in January 1861 that the Vicar, the Reverend George Robinson, found he was unable to attend the annual dinner following the distribution. He was somewhat annoyed to be sent a bill for 12 shillings, his share of the dinner he had not eaten, and the wine he would not have drunk (he was a teetotaler) and he refused to pay. The Feoffees held a special meeting to decide what to do. It was decided that 'if a gentleman's scruples do not permit him to maintain the observance of the time honoured custom of the body of the Feoffees, it would be at least convenient to all parties (and he would probably recognise the propriety of the step) that he should resign.' Then the matter hit the headlines of the local paper, the *Bristol Daily Post*. The Vicar felt that he had been pilloried in the press. It required considerable tact on the part of G. F. Fox to soothe ruffled feelings and restore harmony among the Feoffees. The Vicar paid up, and the receipt is in the Archives of the Keynsham and Saltford Local History Society.

It was inevitable that a group such as the Feoffees aroused resentment in a local community. They were a small closed group, seemingly responsible to no one but themselves, owning land and shares, and distributing quite large sums of money apparently as they pleased. Even official bodies had criticised their actions, as the Charity Commissioners had done in the early 1800s when they urged them to use some of their funds to improve the school established by Sir Thomas Bridges. By

the 1880s it broke out into open and vehement criticism of the Feoffees. Sparked off by a trivial incident it, rolled rancorously on, revealing all sorts of other underlying criticisms and resentments. It was sparked off by a letter to the local press by Mr T. Sherwood Smith, who lived at the Pines on Dapps Hill. He complained that the annual distribution of the Feoffees' money was an occasion for drunkenness and public disorder. A further letter came from Mr J. H. Clifton who lived at Uplands House in Bristol Road. He complained that the Feoffees were not in a position to know any thing about the poor, and that the money did not go to those who were really poor, indeed some of it went to tradespeople. He demanded to know more of the activities of the Feoffees. Without it he would demand a public enquiry. The matter looked like turning into a dispute between old established residents and the newcomers in the town who felt excluded from affairs. The Feoffees made the mistake of replying to these criticisms by an anonymous letter. The writer defends the actions of the Feoffees, and ends by criticising those who, by having these matters discussed in the newspapers have brought 'our prettily and conveniently situated, not to say well conducted town into disrepute with the public at large.' It was obvious that the Feoffees were impervious to criticism. Mr John Lloyd, a Keynsham doctor, did reply to many of the criticisms, and gave information about how the Feoffees were run, which seems to have satisfied the general public, because the matter faded from view. Mr Sherwood Smith did not give up so easily. Five years later he was writing to the Feoffees on exactly the same subject. The Feoffees simply recorded in the Minute Book that they had received his letter.

Criticism of the Feoffees did decline. Perhaps the advent of Old Age Pensions in 1908 made these annual doles seem less important. In 1911 some workers were covered for periods of illness and unemployment by the National Insurance Act, which eased another major cause of poverty. After the First World War drunkenness dropped dramatically, so perhaps there was less to criticise. Possibly, too, the 1894 Local Government Act, which created parish councils, broke up the old ruling caucus in Keynsham and opened up the administration of the town to the electorate. The new Parish Council had to discover what it was responsible for, so an investigation was made to ascertain what charities were religious and what were civil in origin. Those that were religious in origin were retained by the Church and the churchwardens, and those regarded as civil were separated. This report published as a booklet by the Parish Council is a major source of information about the Feoffees and the other Keynsham Charities. The Keynsham and Salford Local History Society has copies of this in its archives.

The period from the turn of the century and into the 1920s was a very difficult one for the Feoffees. Agriculture was in a very depressed state and the Feoffees could not be certain of even reduced rents. There was a backlog of repair work on their property, so the level of rents was low. Gradually the Feoffees sold off all their land and invested the money with the Official Trustee, which they had been urged to do decades before. The final land sale was when they sold their land in the Hams to Fry's for the new factory. They discovered to their consternation that they

did not legally own it. All they owned was the right to take the first cut of hay; they had been given this long before common land could be owned. However they were declared to be the lawful owners by virtue of long usage.

After the Second World War the whole situation was reviewed by the Charity Commissioners and a draft scheme was produced, and agreed to by the Church wardens, the Keynsham Urban District Council and the Feoffees. This amalgamated all the Keynsham charities into two separate branches; the Almshouse branch, which included the Bridges Almshouses, the Eastwick bequest and Morgan's money for poor householders; and the Poor's branch which included the Feoffees' Charity, Holbin's money, and other bequests to the poor. The scheme was adopted in July 1956 and so the independent life of the Feoffees came to an end.

## **Sources**

Some material on the Feoffees is held by the Keynsham and Salford Local History Society. The bulk of it is in the care of Bath & North East Somerset Council.

