

# THE WEEDON CHARITY IN CHESHAM

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Three hundred and fifty years ago, on the 6th of September 1624, a will was executed by Thomas Weedon, draper, of St. Clement Danes and on the 23rd of the same month he was buried at Chesham. From that will stemmed the foundation of the still-existing almshouse in Chesham.

Thomas appears to have been born in 1571 and was a member of a family of ten, offspring of Richard Weedon of Pednor in Chesham.<sup>1</sup> He was the third son, and presumably prospered as a tradesman in St. Clement Danes, where, in those days, Holywell Street housed a concentration of the drapery trade.<sup>2</sup> In the inquest on his property taken after his death he is described as a 'mercator scissoris'; presumably this refers to the cut lengths of cloth he sold rather than a cutting instrument.

Not only did Richard Weedon father a lengthy family. He had also acquired a considerable body of property to divide between them, after at least three generations of steady collecting of lands and dwellings in Chesham and Great Missenden, leading to the achievement of 'gentleman' status.

There had been previous Weedons with aspirations to rise in the world, notably the line which supplied three successive bailiffs to the manor of Chesham Higham, William, John and Robert, in the fifteenth century. They were also farmers of the ecclesiastical Manor of Chesham Leicester.<sup>3</sup> Robert's wife was a member of the Bulstrode family, who were related by marriage to Richard Empson, and that unpopular royal official was named as one of the supervisors of Robert's will in 1504.<sup>4</sup> However, only daughters survived long enough to inherit, and most of the estate that had been built up passed eventually by marriage to Christopher Ashfield.<sup>5</sup> It was his son, Thomas, who was to acquire the one-time monastic lands of Chesham Leicester, which, later, were to have a certain link with the foundation of the almshouse.

Not long after the bailiff's line faded into daughters the slow build-up of the fortunes of the Pednor line began. The first reasonably firm record is found in 1523, when a customary holding in the Manor of Chesham Higham was surrendered to the use of Richard Wedon by a John Wedon. The latter had acquired it at the same court from Richard Holyman who, the previous year, had been the heir of his father, William Holyman. The fact that Richard Holyman surrendered to John Wedon 'and his heirs' does suggest that John may

<sup>1</sup> Chesham Parish Register.

<sup>2</sup> *London Beyond the Bars*, D. Newton; B.A.S., Chesham Papers, Court Book 1461-1552.

<sup>3</sup> B.M. Cotton Mss. Galba E III; *Cal. Pat. Rolls 1476-85*, p. 485.

<sup>4</sup> B.R.O., We/1/210.

<sup>5</sup> B.A.S., Chesham Papers, 1535 Bury Rental (Transcription by A. V. Woodman).

have been the father of Richard Wedon. Even so, the manorial records throw no light on the origins of that particular John among the numerous holders of that name.<sup>6</sup>

Earlier that year Richard Wedon had purchased a freehold property under the same manor, lying in Botley and Chesham Dene, lands in which William the bailiff had had an interest many years earlier.<sup>7</sup> Richard died in 1528 with a son, Thomas, old enough to inherit, but surrendering the customary lands to his mother for her life.<sup>8</sup> This Thomas, in 1535, was granted a lease by the Abbey of Missenden of the farm at Pednor for 70 years at £4 per year.<sup>9</sup> It cannot be established whether this was a new lease or a sequel to one inherited by Thomas from his father. It may well have been the latter for, if Richard can be identified with the Richard Wedon who figures in the 1522 Muster Book as holding only eight shillings worth of land but £30 in goods, he was well endowed from some source, indeed one of the most substantial men in the parish.<sup>10</sup> The long lease was a not unusual move at this period when a royal take-over threat hung over monastic property. One wonders whether the fact that the last Prior of Missenden was a John Wedon had anything to do with the transaction.

Thomas continued the building up of an estate and bought some sizeable properties, one from Sir Anthony Lee at Asheridge and another in Hundridge from John Newdigate, as well as the George Inn at Great Missenden. By his will in 1561 he left bequests to two sons and two daughters, with some rather dictatorial conditions concerning his daughters' marriage choices.<sup>11</sup>

Richard, the elder son, was the chief heir, and was regularly described as 'Mr. Richard Wedon of Pednor'. With him the speed of property acquisition increased. It included various lands in Chartridge and Hundridge, culminating in the purchase of the ex-Missenden farm at Pednor from the Earl of Bedford, some seventeen years before the lease ran out.

It was this transaction that brought Richard within the purview of a property post-mortem, drawn up after his death in 1593, for as one-time monastic land, it was now held of the Crown. It is to this as well as to his will that we owe the neat catalogue of the family's acquisitions over three generations, though it does not cover customary manorial lands held by him, and there were certainly some of these.<sup>12</sup>

From this collection of holdings Richard was able to provide monetary bequests to three daughters and lands for all five sons then living. William, the eldest, received Pednor, and Robert, the second, was made executor and inheritor of his father's goods and given responsibility for his mother, Mary. Two years later Robert 'of the Middle Temple' and of Asheridge, Chesham, was dead, willing part of his inheritance first to his mother and then to his brother, Daniel, together with a little more Chesham land that he had had time to buy.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, Court Book.

<sup>7</sup> P.R.O., Common Pleas, Trin. 15 Hen. VIII.

<sup>8</sup> B.A.S., Chesham Papers, Court Book.

<sup>9</sup> P.R.O., E318/952; E315/405.

<sup>10</sup> *Certificates of Musters Bucks 1522*, ed. A. C. Chibnall (Bucks Record Society, vol. 17, and R.C.H.M. no. 18), p. 238.

<sup>11</sup> B.R.O., W/A/We 14/147.

<sup>12</sup> P.R.O., PROB II/85/6; C 142/237/118.

Wainscotting and glass in the house at Pednor were to go to William, suggesting that, even at this period, such items still ranked as moveable chattels.<sup>13</sup>

The remaining brothers continued the program of property acquisition, including Thomas, who was to die in 1624 without wife or family. William when he died in 1636 was able to divide his accumulation of lands between his five daughters, his only son having died as a lad.<sup>14</sup> Twelve years later his widow, Foelix, had various jewellery and other quality goods to bequeath. Daniel, in 1645, was also able to provide handsomely for three daughters and Thomas, the one son, who, in this case, did survive to inherit. In his turn he was succeeded by a son, Thomas, who died in 1682, whereupon the lands of that line passed to a Philip Doughty, whether by purchase or inheritance is not clear.<sup>15</sup> Of the remaining brother, Josias, little is known, except that he became resident in Little Missenden and married there in 1642, when he would have been about sixty-six.

It seems, therefore, that the direct male line of the Pednor family had faded away into female heirs by the end of the seventeenth century, at any rate in Chesham. Whether, among the numerous Wedon families in the town or elsewhere over the centuries, there had been any collateral branches stemming from the earliest members of that line cannot yet be established. Most likely there were.

Turning back again to the early days of the Pednor Wedons it has so far proved impossible to work out a firm descent before the beginning of the sixteenth century. The name recurs constantly, back almost to the beginning of the surviving Chesham manorial records, but the entries are not informative enough to permit the untangling of the threads of relationship.

This is disappointing, since the reference to these 'township' Wedons overlap briefly in the early years with the last representative of the knightly line of the same name, whose descent can be discerned right back to Domesday Book, with even hints of an earlier ancestry.

It would be rash indeed to assert that all or any of the later lines descended from this knightly family. It is not impossible, for some junior members of such families did go down the social scale if they had not the wit or luck to make their own way in the world, or marry a landed heiress. However, it is also possible that in these early times when surnames were spreading through society, some families in Chesham might have received the name of Wedon or 'a Wedon' because they lived and worked on Wedon lands. It may be of some significance that the Christian name of Ralph, which recurs frequently in the knightly line, only appears once among the later Chesham Wedons, and that only some two centuries after the death of the last Sir Ralph, suggesting coincidence rather than descent.

Apparently the Pednor Wedons considered they had some claim to a link with the early family, for their seals on an early almshouse deed appear to carry the same device as that of the arms borne by the last Sir Ralph three centuries

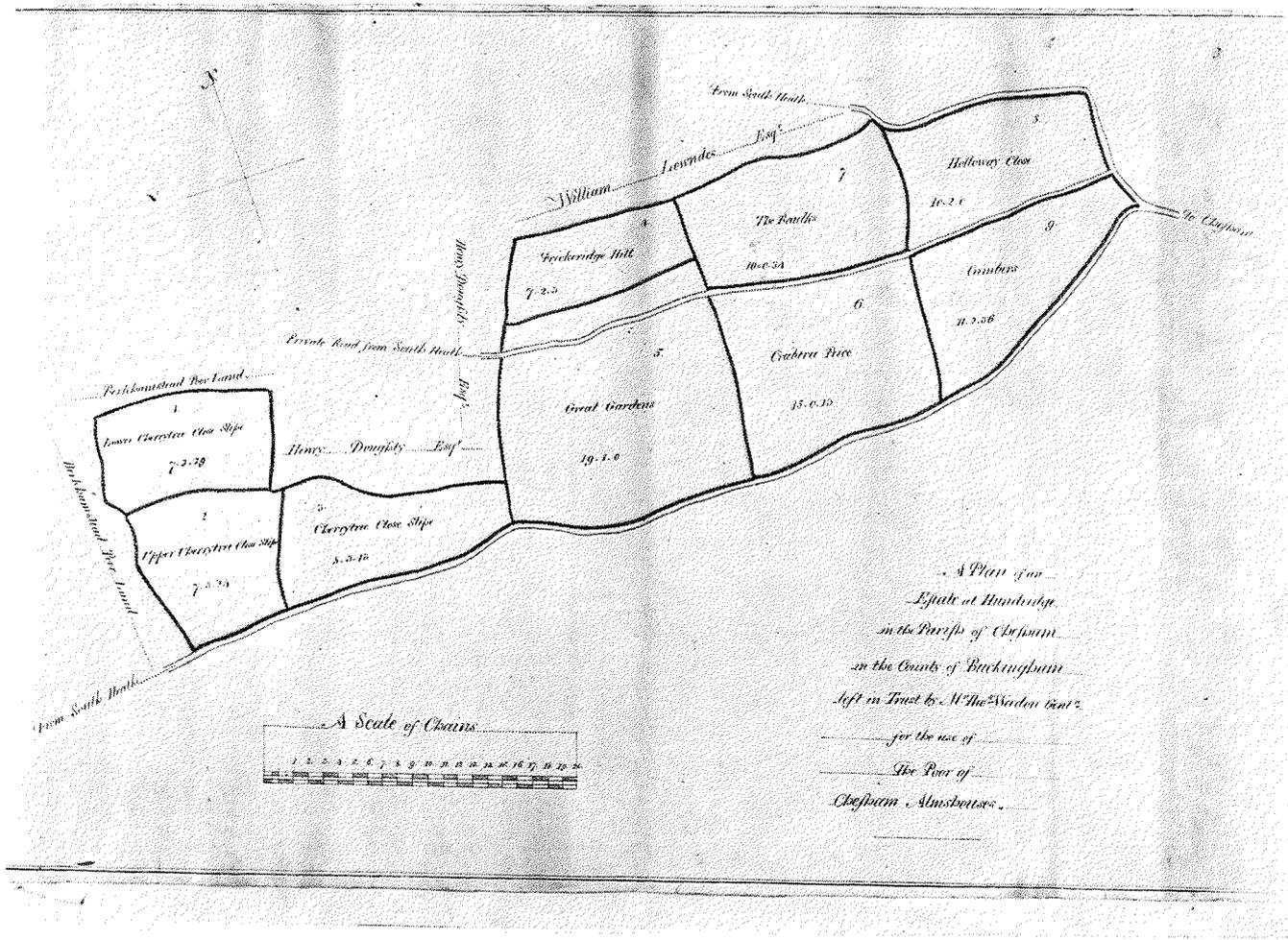
<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, PROB II/85/35.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, C 142/523/9; B.R.O., D/A/We/31/71.

<sup>15</sup> P.R.O., PROB II/194/130; B.A.S., C3/360.



PLATE I. CHESHAM. Weedon's Almshouses. 1973.



A Plan of  
 Estate at Chesham  
 in the Parish of Chesham  
 in the County of Buckingham  
 left in Trust by M<sup>rs</sup> Weston  
 for the use of  
 The Poor of  
 Chesham Amsbury

PLATE II. CHESHAM.

earlier. Whether this represents a legitimate claim or the social aspirations of the period is an open question.

At this point, back once again in the seventeenth century, it is time to consider the provisions of that will of Thomas Weeden's with which this study started.

In the absence of witnesses it is impossible to make a guess as to whether it was made in London or Chesham, where Thomas was buried on the 23rd of September 1624, though he was said to have died on the 11th, five days after signing the will.<sup>16</sup>

Its provisions are simple enough, detailing a few bequests to his three sisters and members of his household, as well as 'two mourning cloaks of my best black cloth' to two friends. His three remaining brothers were to be residuary legatees and the official inquest on his property suggests a comfortable inheritance. There were various lands in Chesham, Chesham Bois and Drayton Beauchamp, as well as a half share in the advowson of Ellesborough. There were probably also customary lands, in fact one such holding in Tring is mentioned in the will. No reference occurs to the property in St. Clement Danes, so that, presumably, was leased.<sup>17</sup>

The main item was the bequest

to the Parish of Chesham where I was born the summe of five hundred pounds of lawfull English money which my will and meaning is shall be paid out of the debt which is oweing unto me by Mr. Thomas Ashfield Esq upon a Mortgage of the Parsonage of Chesham and to be disposed as followeth (viz) that the said five hundred pounds immediatly after the same shall be paid in by my Executors unto the said Parish shall be bestowed upon the building of an Almshouse in the said Parish for four poor Almspeople and to purchase a proportion of Lands of the value of thirty pounds a yeare at the least for the Maintenance of the said Almspeople for ever, to be purchased and taken in the names of twelve of the most honest and sufficient Freeholders there In trust for the use of the said poor Almspeople for ever And that upon the death of any of the twelve there be from time to time another Freeholder of the same parish joyned with the other eleven which said twelve ffeoffees in trust shall from time to time have the nominacon and plaising of the same four Almspeople in the said house to be built And if the said ffeoffees shall not agree about the placeing of the said Almspeople That then the Parson or Minister of the Parish shall be an Umpire.

The next step was not so simple, judging from the sequence of events detailed in the record of an inquisition held at Chesham on the 1st of October 1627.

A Commission of four county gentlemen had been appointed on the 1st of March by the Court of Chancery to hear the sworn evidence of fourteen local men, under an Elizabethan statute directed to 'the redresse of the Misemployment of Lands, goods and Stocks of money heretofore given to Charitable

<sup>16</sup> Chesham Parish Register; W.B. 1627 Inquisition.

<sup>17</sup> P.R.O., PROB II/144/82; C 142/420/90.

Uses'. The jurors stated that the Ashfield mortgage was due to be paid on July 3rd 1625, but that the executors had not yet paid over the £500 to Chesham parish because that mortgage had not been so paid. Apparently Thomas Ashfield had been threatening an action in Chancery against the executors within six months of Thomas Wedon's death, though the grounds of his complaint are not stated. By an arbitration on 18th April 1625 of Sir William Fleetwood and William Tottill, Ashfield had been given until 3rd July 1628 to settle the amount of £1890. Now, the 1627 official Commission directed that the executors, 'being now present and herewith contented', were, on 4th July 1628, to pay over the £500, together with £120 'for their forbearance of the same' from 1625 to 1628, to a certain five parishioners of Chesham 'att or in the South Porch of the parishe Church of Chesham aforesaid'.

The Commission went on to direct that within three months of the payment, the laying out of the money on the Almshouse project was to begin. Seven more names, including William and Josiah Weedon, were added to the above five parishioners to form the first trustee body, termed Feoffees. Any departed Feoffee was to be replaced by another Chesham freeholder within a month by the election of the survivors, and the body was to have full power to choose or displace inmates. One of the twelve was to be elected each year as Treasurer, and the House was to be maintained by the rents received from the lands to be purchased as directed in the will. Vacancies in the House were to be filled within a month by written vote of the Feoffees handed to the incumbent of the parish.<sup>18</sup>

This time the financial settlement must have gone through, for, by October 1629, when the purchase deed for the site was drawn up, it was described as 'threescore and fower Poles be yt more or lesse whereupon an Almshouse . . . ys begunne to be builte'. It was bought from one Ezekiel Norwood, butcher, and lay beside the road from Chesham towards 'Lattimers' amongst other lands owned by the Norwood family. The price was £8 but there are no records of the cost of the building, or when it was first occupied.

Six years were to pass before the Trustees were able to buy the lands required for an annual income. The lands lay in Hundridge and amounted to about 100 acres, being bought from a body of trustees apparently constituted to clear up the financial difficulties of the owner, Robert Dormer, first Earl of Carnarvon.<sup>19</sup> This property cost £580 and one wonders a little how these financial transactions were contrived, for, with the cost of the building added, the total must surely have been above the £620 required from the executors.

Following on these initial foundation documents there is a sequence of property deeds in the Weedon Box, continuing on into the nineteenth century, which falls into two classes. The first is concerned with maintaining the proper legal status of succeeding sets of trustees by means of a series of releases from time to time as need arose.

The other series records a few leases of the Hundridge lands to various tenants. Only one of these dates from the seventeenth century and is, in fact,

<sup>18</sup> W.B., 1627 Inquisition.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 1635 Bargain and Sale deed.

the very first one, made shortly after the first purchase of the land. The rent is set at £30 a year, the minimum required by Thomas Weedon's will, an amount which lines up with the rate prevailing in the locality at that period. By 1719 the rent was up to £35, and by 1808 to £75.

From the early part of the eighteenth century a more detailed view of the affairs of the Almshouses is possible, from the minutes and accounts of the Trustees available from then on, which are wanting for the first century of the institution's existence.

. . . . .

The day to day expenses incurred in the upkeep of the four little almshouses, behind their high wall, situated at the beginning of Waterside, together with the deliberations of the Trustees in choosing inmates and seeing after their welfare, are recorded in three account books and two minute books. The account books date 1711-1913: the first minute book, also called an 'account book', dates 1719-1869.<sup>20</sup>

The later minute book, covering the years 1870-1969, which had to be abandoned half used because of its fragile state, is in the custody of the present Secretary to the Trustees, Mr. K. Marks, but Minute Book 1 and the three account books, together with about 170 bills and receipts dating from 1754 to 1900, and a map of the Trust's estate at Hundridge, drawn in 1808,<sup>21</sup> are all kept in a splendid box, which dates from 1759. It is inscribed as follows:

This box contains the writings belonging to the Almshouses in Chesham Bucks.<sup>22</sup>

It is doubtful whether earlier minute or account books existed. The Trustees seem full of good intentions on those first pages, which are neat and business-like. They remind themselves of the objects of the Charity, and outline the biographical details of the Donor. Some important decisions are made, too; not least they decide to have 'a vault or necessary house erected in some convenient place nigh the almshouse for the use of the poor people inhabiting therein'. The accounts show that John Turner built it, aided by Lias Darvill. But it was Humfrey Osbon and his man who 'dig the pit and carried y<sup>e</sup> stufe out'.

The Trustees also decide at this time that all their writings are to be placed in a box, and 'this to be put in the Great Chest in the Church for security'. Any earlier minute or account books, had they existed, would have stood a very good chance of surviving under these conditions. Incidentally, this box would have been earlier than the above mentioned one, which is in any case much too large to fit into the Chest.<sup>23</sup>

In 1720 another important decision is made. The Trustees, who at this same

<sup>20</sup> Three quires of paper to make it cost two shillings and sixpence, and Mr. Bagwell charged one shilling and ninepence to bind it, with two skins of parchment at three shillings and eightpence.

<sup>21</sup> W. Davis drew it and charged four guineas.

<sup>22</sup> The painting of this inscription cost two shillings and sixpence. In 1796 it was repaired, at a cost of one shilling and sixpence, by John Potter. When the box was lent to the Chess Valley Society it was, once more, in dire need of repair. As a "labour of love", Mr. Arthur Stratford restored it, making by hand the broken pieces.

<sup>23</sup> The earlier one was made in 1718 by Lias Darvill (of the privy), and cost two shillings and sixpence. The "ritin" on it was executed by Mr. Bagnall and cost twopence.

meeting reiterate that their number must be made up to the requisite twelve, also think that the doorway leading to the almshouses should be beautified, and that the inscription 'now almost worn out and defaced by time, should now be engraven on a fair stone in gratitude to the memory of the Donor'. The corresponding accounts show that the stone (black marble) cost fourteen shillings: the cost of carrying it from London was two shillings and four pence, and Mr. Deley's charge for cutting 418 letters, 'all at a peny a leter', was One pound, fourteen shillings and ten pence.<sup>24</sup>

Men as well as women, widowers and widows, bachelors and spinsters all qualified for election to the houses. Applicants as young as fifty-four and as old as eighty-seven years of age were considered. There were only two stipulations: anyone applying must possess no assets, savings or any other means of financially supporting themselves, and they must originate from the Parish of Chesham, the eight hamlets included, of course.<sup>25</sup> In 1838 Sophie Dwight was not elected because of doubt about her residential qualifications, while in 1797, Abraham Gascoigne had been 'disannulled' because he was known to possess thirty guineas.<sup>26</sup>

One interesting phenomenon occurs in 1736, when an erstwhile Trustee, John Halsey, lacebuyer of Chesham, becomes in his turn an inmate. He had been elected a Trustee in 1731 and resigned in 1735. In the next year his name appears as a beneficiary.

The length of inmates' occupation varied considerably. Widow Darvill occupied a house from 1719 to 1741, and Widow Widmer lived in hers from 1733 to 1759—a period of twenty-six years.<sup>27</sup> Other beneficiaries lasted only a few months, as did George Lion in 1771, and Will Saunders in 1743. Most inmates occupied their houses until they died, but there are examples of resignations. In 1799 and 1801, Richard Benning and Widow Price respectively, resign their houses and retire to Chesham Workhouse!<sup>28</sup> In 1858 the Trustees have to threaten ejection to one disorderly inmate, but he does appear to have settled down. In 1858 they have to resort to a certificate, signed by George Faithorn, Surgeon, in order to remove an inmate in need of care and attention, although they are at pains to maintain that she herself chooses to leave. There was obviously a waiting list for houses, and applicants could come up for election more than once.

In 1711 the occupants received two shillings per week, but this was raised in 1720 to two shillings and sixpence. From that time onward their allowance fluctuated, sometimes according to funds and sometimes because of external pressures.<sup>29</sup> By 1813 the inmates were receiving five shillings: after a drop in pay,

<sup>24</sup> "7 days work digin ye holls to putt ye Gate posts in & helping feling of trees" cost eight shillings and ninepence.

<sup>25</sup> Successful applicants from Latimer, Botley and Bellingdon are recorded.

<sup>26</sup> They slip up badly when in 1838 they discover, after her death, that Elizabeth Hester had owned property "to the amount of £150 or thereabouts" and was therefore found to have been "an unworthy object of this Charity".

<sup>27</sup> In 1828 four people occupy the houses of respective ages 97, 93, 88 and 88—*Buckinghamshire Local Records* 3, p. 168, 1880, R. Gibbs.

<sup>28</sup> Ann Wager does so in 1805, but no reason is given.

<sup>29</sup> The Napoleonic Wars appear to affect payments. In 1795 the accounts state that wheat is £3. 7. 0. a load of five bushells: in 1800 an increase of pay to the inmates is given as a direct result of "bread being 13 pence the quartern loaf".

they were receiving five shillings again by 1842. In 1879 the Trustees, embarrassed by an accumulation of funds, tried to get rid of some by paying the inmates eight shillings. However, by the end of the century the figure had dropped to four shillings.

The Trustees, twelve in number, as already stated, met in any case once a year to receive rents and settle accounts. Appropriately enough, their Annual Meeting was held on St. Thomas' Day, 21st December, at least until 1752-3. After the Calendar (New Style) Act had been passed they meet on 1st or 2nd January and call it 'Old St. Thomas Day'. Other meetings occur during the year to discuss important matters which arise, but mostly to elect new inmates, or replace losses to their own number, as vacancies occur.<sup>30</sup>

The rules of the Charity stipulated that if ever a tie vote occurred over an inmate's election then the incumbent of the Parish Church should be umpire. This happened in 1743, when John Ball Senior acted as arbitrator. The name of John Ball—but this time Junior—also occurs among the signatures of Trustees from 1751 to 1766. Obviously the interest of the clergy had been aroused but there is no mention of his having been elected a Trustee. Later, from 1798 to 1804, the name of John Simpson, curate, appears in the lists of signatures.

And what of the Trustees themselves? They are freeholders, again from all parts of the Parish of Chesham. In 1722 Thomas Grover of Codmour makes his appearance, and in 1729 Edward Eames of Botley: in 1744 John Putnam of Slough Land, and in 1749 Searanke Bun of Waterside, William Potter of Hundridge and John Pope of Latimer. When two Trustees possess the same name, as did the Messrs. John Birch in 1729, they are distinguished by their place of residence. In this case one was 'of the Well' and the other was of Chartridge. Even in the eighteenth century Chesham seems to have been surrounded by Channers. In 1752 Henry Channer of Hundridge was a Trustee, and in 1765 Joseph of Chartridge.

Many trades and professions are represented among the Trustees. In 1728 there occurs Thomas Edwards, ironmonger, while, in 1736, John Geary, attorney, must have been a very useful member of the Trust.<sup>31</sup> Samuel Ware, elected in 1749, was a glazier from Church End; Foster Nash in 1765 and Charles Collins in 1855 were both grocers. At the end of the nineteenth century Alfred Gee, miller, of Cannon Mill and Daniel Clare, draper, were both Trustees.

Chesham's notables are well represented in the lists. Hepburns, Sutherys, Fullers, Fields and Clares are all Trustees in their turn. However, one Chesham gentleman, Squire William Lowndes, although elected to the Trust in 1890, declined to accept.

Most Trustees retained their position for life, only occasionally resigning: and instances did occur when more than one member of a family served at the same time. In 1816, both John and George Suthery and John and James Pope appear in the signatures. In 1818 Joseph and Thomas Nash served together, as, in 1845, did two Weedons, Francis and William. Sons and nephews followed

<sup>30</sup> They are very active in the field during the years 1767 to 1771 and in 1828.

<sup>31</sup> He is Treasurer in 1743 but dies while holding office. His obviously very capable wife Elizabeth carried out her late husband's responsibilities for the rest of the year.

fathers and uncles in succession. In 1754 Thomas Hobbs of Bellingdon followed Joseph. In 1782 Thomas Nash replaced Foster (the grocer), and in 1808 Edward Groom of Botley replaced his father Joseph. In the following year Edward died and was succeeded by his brother John, also of Botley.

Many of the Trustees performed other duties in the town, and can often be found occupying positions in the Parish Vestry.<sup>32</sup> In the 1760's Patrick Hepburn was Churchwarden:<sup>33</sup> in 1824 George Suthery was an active Vestry man,<sup>34</sup> and in the 1860's William Geary often took the Chair at Vestry Meetings, as did Edwin Birch in 1876.<sup>35</sup>

The Trustees held their meetings variously in hired rooms in several of the local inns. In 1720, and again in 1722, they met at 'harrow and y<sup>e</sup> plough'.<sup>36</sup> In the next forty years they used also 'The Crown', 'The George', 'The Nag's Head', 'The Red Lion' and 'The Swan'. But by the end of the eighteenth century, and until 1894, they were nearly always to be found at 'The George'. In that year, however, possibly as a measure of austerity during the Charity's lean time, the Trustees decided to meet at the Mechanics' Institute, just across the road from 'The George'.<sup>37</sup>

All through the eighteenth century, and until 1848, the Trustees entertained themselves lavishly on meeting days. Bills from 'The George', dated 1829-35, testify how well they fared.<sup>38</sup> Of course, the Box containing the minutes and accounts was always present at these meetings. Until 1848 there is no indication of how it got there but, after that time, the name of the man who carried it appears in the accounts. He was paid two shillings, which presumably reimbursed whatever wage he had lost. Charles Coughtrey, Thomas Gomm, and J. & G. Bunker were all box-carriers at some time.

If the Trustees, at least until 1848, looked after themselves quite well, nevertheless their prime concern within the Trust was the practical welfare of the inmates, and this duty they executed carefully. Throughout the years the Trustees made sure that the inmates had some kind of fuel. In the early days this was wood, of course, with four hundred faggotts provided regularly,<sup>39</sup> usually purchased from their tenant, but sometimes from other sources (in 1848 a Trustee appears to have been the supplier). Prices ranged from about four pounds to eight pounds the load, but settled somewhere between these two. From 1862 coal bills begin to appear with Hodgkinson & Son of Water-side the supplier. Various other merchants make deliveries as time goes on, several in the same year.<sup>40</sup> The quantities of coal drop, until, in 1895, when times were hard for the Charity, the Trustees suspended deliveries.

In 1779 occurs an entry 'paid the poor people in the almshouse one pound'.

<sup>32</sup> This is also true today, of course.

<sup>33</sup> Chesham Parish Churchwardens' Accounts Book, 1767-1807.

<sup>34</sup> Chesham Parish Select Vestry Accounts, 1824-25.

<sup>35</sup> Parish of Chesham, Vestry Order Book, 1866-83.

<sup>36</sup> "The Plough" at the bottom of Whitehill, perhaps.

<sup>37</sup> They did save money, too. "The George" cost them five shillings but the Institute only charged two shillings.

<sup>38</sup> Dinners £1.5.0.: wine, £2.5.0.: a pint of gin! 2/-: brandy, 4/-: punch 5/-: beer, 2/-: tea for nine 9/-: tobacco, 2/-: servants 5/-. After 1848 they pay their own expenses.

<sup>39</sup> The Trustees did, in 1731, draw the attention of relatives of deceased inmates to the fact that all residues of wood must be left at the almshouse, rather than carted away with the effects!

<sup>40</sup> In 1877 Hodgkinson, Reading and Collins delivered 10 tons between them.

This was, in fact, a Christmas box of five shillings per person, and is so called first in 1783. Tips were given on other special occasions, for example in 1840 for the Queen's marriage, and in 1863 for the marriage of the Prince of Wales. From 1848 the inmates received money for beer at Christmas, and also from that time Christmas beef, supplied by various butchers: the names Climpson, Batchelor, C. Archer (the Trustees' tenant?), Collins, Ware and Mayo, all appear in the accounts. But sadly in 1889 they had to discontinue these gratuities owing to 'reduced income'.

Plumbing, or the lack of it, seems to have occupied quite a bit of the Trustees' time and not a little of their funds. The decision to erect a privy has already been mentioned. In 1732 the Trustees decide that

a well should be digg'd exactly by the frontispiece of the Almshouse, and a leaden pump put in as soon as possible for the use of the Poor People dwelling Therein: and also that a shed should be made over the said pump to prevent all Filth or other things from falling into it.

Many times through the years both privy and pump need attention, but the pump seems to have given more trouble. In 1805 a blacksmith was called in to mend the iron-work: in 1824 J. Collier did more repairs and charged half a crown: and in 1855 extensive work was done by William Potter, who replaced large quantities of the lead pipe but allowed the Trustees discount on the old pipe.

By 1889, however, accounts appear for items such as ball-cocks and cisterns, so the pump had had its day. Just ten years after Chesham Vestry, prompted by the Public Health Act of 1875, had discussed sewage disposal,<sup>41</sup> the Trustees did so as well. They decided to forge ahead and invite tenders for the work. Several were submitted, ranging from R. Darvill & Sons, for thirty-six pounds, fifteen shillings down to James Bingham's for twenty-nine pounds, five shillings. They chose W. C. Sear's for thirty pounds, five shillings. It seems fortunate that the Trustees were faced with such heavy expenditure at a time when their funds were still in good heart.

Innumerable repairs and odd jobs were done both inside and outside the houses through the years. The wall was repaired at various times: in 1713, and again in 1717 by John Turner. In 1772 the almshouse bank was mended.<sup>42</sup> In 1718 'wetherboreds' were replaced by Lias Darvill, whom we have met before. In 1854 a bill appears for 'glazing, spouting and iron guttering': in 1835 water-table bricks were purchased from Amersham, presumably to put in a damp course. Insides of houses were also repaired: in 1719 even a 'Dreaser'—one presumes a dresser—was built in, as well as shelves. Literally pounds of nails, hooks, screws and hinges are paid for from time to time.

There were many other incidental and regular payments. Snow clearing and weeding occur pretty frequently, as does privy emptying. In 1784 the first fire insurance of seven shillings was paid to the Sun Fire Office. A splendid fire insurance plate resides in the Charity's box. Its red and gold are as resplendent as the day its was made, since it has never been put up on the houses!

<sup>41</sup> Parish of Chesham, Vestry Order Book 1866-83.

<sup>42</sup> This is the lowest Balk of the Forelands and forms a boundary at the side of the houses.

As precaution against fire, the chimneys were swept regularly from 1869—coal would necessitate this. The cost was sixpence per chimney, rising to three shillings and then four shillings the four. After the sweep had cast off his anonymity he is named as 'Summerlin'.<sup>43</sup>

Amidst all incidental payments that arise,<sup>44</sup> the Treasurer rarely makes a financial error. The odd mistake does happen as in 1775, 'Lost by Light Gold 13/6', or, in 1856, an error occurs, 'no one knows where'. But generally things run pretty smoothly, especially after 1866 when the Trustees put their affairs in the hands of the Chesham banking firm of Butcher.<sup>45</sup>

Officialdom is seen to creep more and more into the Charity's affairs through the latter half of the nineteenth century. The Charity Commissioners intervened in 1872 to prevent the Trustees using up surplus funds on two new almshouses. Even a petition, or 'memorial' to the Commissioners, signed 'numerously by all classes in the Town and Parish' failed to move them and they refused even to receive a deputation, owing to 'accumulated business in the Office and the urgency of other matters prior in date'.

From 1876, with events backdated to 1873, details of the local Charities are found entered in the Vestry Order Book.<sup>46</sup> Chesham acquired a local Board of Health in 1884 and in 1894 this became an Urban District Council, which soon acquired the Parish's powers with respect to local charities. Since 1918 the Council has appointed four of the Trustees, and relations have gradually become closer. The present Secretary is the Town Clerk.

The Charity's funds had always come from letting the estate at Hundridge, and they had good and not so good tenants over the years. From the beginning of the eighteenth century, John Childe and then Ellis Cogdell had known what it was to be in arrears with rent, and the Trustees seem sometimes to have become resigned to the fact. Mostly the arrears are recorded as due 'Michaelmas last'. But whoever was minutes secretary in 1749 must have been gifted with an apocalyptic turn of humour, since Cogdell's arrears are stated as due 'at the Feast of St. Michael the Archangel last, Anno Domini 1748'.

But then, who can blame the tenants? The Trust land was not best farming land, and if a man depended largely on it for his livelihood, then sooner or later he would probably find himself in difficulties. Tenants such as the Lowndes and Sutherys paid regularly but they had other irons in the fire. On their bleak hillside, the tenants were victims of the depressions of agriculture which occurred during the 1880's. The Trustees, in fact, made an 'abatement' in rent of 10 per cent to assist the tenant (even when he was William Lowndes, Esq!).

During the mid-1880's the Trustees were able to raise a little extra cash by renting the shooting rights to the Lowndes family, but when William Lowndes becomes the tenant no further mention is made of shooting rent.

In 1888 Lowndes gave up his tenancy and the Trustees advertised for a new tenant in the 'Bucks Herald' and the 'West Herts Post'. In due course, Mr.

<sup>43</sup> Mr. Summerling of Church Street.

<sup>44</sup> "One days work for a man, 1/2": "paid a poor man 3 days work for sarven ye mason, 3/-".

<sup>45</sup> Francis J. Butcher's signature appears among the Trustees from 1897.

<sup>46</sup> 1866-83. One interesting piece of information occurs in the Weedon entries: the inmates' pay-day is always Tuesday.

Charles Archer of Chesham became tenant, having agreed to pay eight shillings per annum per acre. But very soon he, and consequently, the Trustees, were in financial trouble. As noted above, the inmates lost their privileges; the Trustees moved into the Mechanics' Institute, and even sold some of their Consols to realise capital. More trouble ensued when Archer became stubborn about paying his tithes, and by 1899 the Trustees had had enough of him. They advertised the land once more and accepted the offer of sixty pounds per annum from Mr. Samuel Sherman, whose arrears soon mounted up. Nor did bad crops in 1904 help matters. The Trustees even considered selling the land in front of the almshouses, but luckily for the future of the Charity, they left the decision open, and never did sell it.

They struggled on for three more years, but in 1907, on September 18th, with Mr. Sherman still very much in arrears, the Trustees came to the conclusion that they must try to sell the land in Hundridge, which for so many centuries had furnished the Trust with its income.

In January 1908 William Frith Lowndes of Chesham Bury offered the Trustees £1,850 for their farmland. They demanded £2,000; he responded with £1,500, then £1,600. In January 1910 both agreed on £1,850 but the Charity Commissioners demurred. The Trustees thereupon invited tenders for the tenancy and accepted Samuel Sherman's at £82 per annum (sixteen shillings and sixpence an acre) free from tithe, with sporting rights. He did not sign the agreement and forthwith fell into arrears again, but in 1913 he undertook to pay the back rent and £60 a year thenceforward.

In April 1919 the Berkhamsted Poor's Land at Little Hundridge, 61 ac. 0 r. 32 p. rented by Sherman at £45 per annum, was sold by the Sir Henry Atkins and Young and Saltmarsh Charities to Lowndes, who resold to Howard Sawyer Harrington of Pednor part of Stock Ground,<sup>47</sup> First and Second Stubbins,<sup>48</sup> Little Stubbins Orchard and Long Platt.<sup>49</sup> Harrington already owned Cow Croft and The Malm, held by Henry Doughty in 1808, almost severing Weedon's land. The inconvenience may go back to the twelfth century assart on William de Wedon's land which Ingelram de Leia acquired for Missenden Abbey,<sup>50</sup> and which our Founder's father bought in 1563.<sup>51</sup> Lowndes retained the rest of Stock Ground<sup>52</sup> with Third and Fourth Stubbins and Little Hundridge Close,<sup>53</sup> Barn Platt Meadow,<sup>54</sup> Barn Field<sup>55</sup> and Barn Wood (chiefly of beech, cherry and Spanish chestnut), Sherman's farmhouse, formerly Barn Cottages, with two wood-barns and a wash-house, and the eponymous Barn, with pigsties, stables and loft and a three-bay shed.

<sup>47</sup> Ordnance Survey (1898) no. 1414; 4 ac. 0 r. 23p. (arable); Tithe Award no. 654 (part).

<sup>48</sup> O.S. 1416; 14 ac. 2 r. 11p. (arable); T.A. 688, 656. "Stubbing" (clearing, assart) is evidenced in Middle English, but could well be Old English.

<sup>49</sup> O.S. 1415; 2 ac. 3 r. 20p. (grass); T.A. 689 (Stubbins Orchard) and 690 (Long Slipe).

<sup>50</sup> J. G. Jenkins, *Cartulary of Missenden Abbey* (1955) ii. 18, no. 295.

<sup>51</sup> *V.C.H. Buckinghamshire* (1925) iii. 213.

<sup>52</sup> O.S. 1413; 6 ac. 3 r. 9p. (arable); T.A. 654 (part).

<sup>53</sup> O.S. 1412; 22 ac. 2 r. 29p. (arable); T.A. 655 (Stubbins), 630 (Further Stubbins), 658 (Tank-ridge, perhaps the last use of that ancient *hrycg*-name).

<sup>54</sup> O.S. 1435; 1 ac. 1 r. 6p. (grass); T.A. 624 (Barn Meadow).

<sup>55</sup> O.S. 1433; 4 ac. 1 r. 38p. (arable); T.A. 623.

With Sherman under notice from the Official Trustee, his other landlords were almost obliged to sell. They so decided on 9th July, Dr. J. A. Churchill (hero of the 1871 cholera epidemic) being Chairman and F. D. Clare Secretary. Weedon's land was "rather under the average state of cultivation" but Sherman had followed the rotation and the land was not starved. An independent valuation put it at £1,374; without tithe, it would have been worth £742 more. A free rent of six shillings and fourpence per acre may be the last trace of the twelfth-century Bolbec overlordship of Hundridge.<sup>56</sup> The oaks had been sold in 1915; there were no minerals, except flints of no prospective value,<sup>57</sup> and hardly any building value.<sup>58</sup> Herbert's Hole was a cart track, and a cart (not heavily loaded) could be taken through Blind Lane with difficulty. At the auction at the Town Hall the bidding went from £1,375 by £25's to £1,550; eventually Lowndes bid £1,600. The Trustees gave Sherman notice at Michaelmas and completed the conveyance at the Institute on 22nd October 1919, the valuers, lawyers and auctioneers taking £104 9s. 8d. between them. The proceeds were invested in £1,972 9s. 6d. four per cent Funding Loan; in 1960 this and £450 Old Consols were reinvested in £2,843 10s. 11d. four per cent Consols to increase the income.

Particulars of Weedon's estate in its final form are as follows:

<i>No. on Tithe map</i>	<i>Name</i>	<i>Crop (1919)</i>	<i>Area<sup>59</sup></i>	<i>Tithe to Vicar</i>	<i>Tithe to Impropriator</i>
			<i>ac. r. p.</i>	<i>£ s d</i>	<i>£ s d</i>
588	Great Cumbers	Barley, oats	12 2 29	— 12 3	3 5 6
589	White Piece	6 acres wheat	9 3 19	— 8 8	2 6 5
601	Freckeridge Baulks	Pasture	7 3 8	— 7 7	2 0 5
602	Freckeridge Hill	Oats	10 1 4	— 9 11	2 13 8
603	Crabtree Field	12 acres oats	15 1 2	— 14 9	3 19 2
604	Great Gardens	12 acres wheat	19 1 32	— 17 11	4 16 1
626	Further Cherry Tree Close	Barley, mangolds	8 0 5	— 7 5	1 19 8
627	Upper Cherry Tree Close	Mangolds, swedes	9 0 5	— 8 4	2 4 8
629	Lower Cherry Tree Close	Pasture	6 1 14	— 6 5	1 14 5
	Underwood in do.		— 3 1		
			99 2 9	4 13 3	25 0 0

<sup>56</sup> *V.C.H. Buckinghamshire* (1925) iii. 212. The Almshouse site purchase deed has a quit-rent clause in common form, "the rent and service from henceforth to grow due to the chief Lord or lords of the Fee or Fees of the said premises only expected and foreprised", but the Hundridge purchase deed contains no reference to rent. However, the first lease to a tenant does include such a clause, and a 1652 Higham Rental shows that tenant as due to pay "for the pore's land in the hamlet of Hundridge 5/4". A series of receipts for 6/4 from 1752 to 1889 indicates that the Trustees must have taken over this responsibility, together presumably with 1/- for the Almshouse site. By the time the Hundridge lands were sold in 1919 the whole sum appears to have become attached to them. It was due on Lady Day, but, after the change of style, was often paid on 7th April.

<sup>57</sup> Though in 1909 Sherman was asked not to pick so many stones off the ground.

<sup>58</sup> Though the land was advertised as "eminently suitable for Country Residences". It is still free from them. For a contemporary description, see G. Eland, *The Chilterns and the Vale* (1911), 32-35 "The Ridges on the North-West of Chesham".

<sup>59</sup> These are Tithe Award acreages. According to the Ordnance Survey the area is 101 ac. 2 r. 8p.

The almspeople's weekly allowance was increased from four shillings to five shillings in 1922 and six shillings in 1933; they usually had half a ton of coal (one ton from 1928) and a load of wood, or two bags before Christmas and two after. In 1941 the Trustees terminated the free wireless introduced in 1931, resolved "not to purchase a Stirrup Pump at present" and did not meet again until after the war, when they discontinued the coal. The balance thus built up was spent on necessary repairs. From 1950 the rates were remitted. Electric light was installed in 1953 from the balance of the Chesham Soup Fund "which cannot now function". From that year, owing to increasing maintenance costs and having regard to supplementary pensions, new residents did not receive the allowance.

From 1920 the Trustees spent £5-£10 per annum on planting the long gardens. These were often over-grown, and in 1936 thirty of the sixty-four poles were let for thirty shillings, which went to the almspeople until 1939 but was then accumulated. In 1950 the foresight of 1629 proved justified. W. J. Standring's trustees offered to allocate £3,000 for almshouses on the garden ground. Weedon's Trustees expressed deep gratitude and undertook "to consult the public Authorities on the possibilities of the Site". Cyril Howard, Trustee since 1936, submitted plans for four flats. The necessary licence was obtained, but the County demanded a lay-by for waiting vehicles. Councillors Geoffrey Bell<sup>60</sup> and A. C. Sayward expostulated successfully, but agreed to dedicate a strip for road improvements, if necessary (it did not prove so). Ivo Nash, Clerk of the Council, called in from his adjoining office, fruitfully advised the Trustees to seek Exchequer assistance as a Housing Association. The building committee comprised John Francis of Botley House<sup>61</sup> and Councillors Andrew Patterson,<sup>62</sup> William Sills<sup>63</sup> and Frances Kate Brandon of Waterside.<sup>64</sup> The flats were completed in October 1955, just escaping a reduction in subsidy necessitated by national stringency. A plaque records their dedication:

to the glory of God in memory of the late W. J. Standring and A. P. Patterson, through whose generosity these dwellings were erected for the benefit of the people of Chesham.

The former contributed £3,500, the latter £500, not revealed until after his sudden death at the Council dinner in 1956. His son David Patterson succeeded as Secretary until June 1963; during this contentious period the Standring Almsflats were cleared of debt, an appeal to the Town being delivered by voluntary youth organisations to every house, and the old Almshouse roof was repaired. Weedon's joined the National Association of Almshouses in 1961; this led to the resumption of Christmas gifts, from an anonymous donor, and Rotary gave television sets.

As late as 1966 the Trustees thought that the Almshouses "would have to be demolished in the not too distant future" but the Council, anxious to see them fully modernised instead, offered improvement grants. A tender of £3,641 was

<sup>60</sup> Trustee 1937-53, Chairman 1948-53.

<sup>61</sup> Solicitor; Trustee since 1935, Chairman since 1953; trustee of W. J. Standring's estate.

<sup>62</sup> Draper; Trustee 1931-56, Secretary 1935-56.

<sup>63</sup> Shoe retailer; Trustee since 1949.

<sup>64</sup> Butcher; Trustee 1953-67; daughter of Henry Glenister Rose.

accepted in December 1967, and in March 1969 the Charity Commissioners finally authorised Weedon's to spend up to £1,492 from capital, recouping from income over twenty years. Inevitably the tender increased, but the National Association offered £500 interest-free for five years. The residents' weekly contribution had to be fixed at thirty shillings for the improved cottages and twenty shillings for the flats.

When in 1888 the Local Board "decided to lower the path in the Waterside next to the Wall" the Trustees were asked to have it underpinned; they did so in 1896, holding the Council responsible for any resulting damage. When in 1971 the wall became unsafe there were no recriminations; the Council voted £250 and its Chairman<sup>65</sup> organised the collection of "bricks for Weedon's Wall". The work should be complete, the gateway reconstructed and the broken inscription replaced in time for the 350th anniversary. Chesham is not unmindful of past benefactors, especially one whose family's local connections extend over eight centuries. This paper forms part of the celebrations.

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#### NOTES

B.A.S. Buckinghamshire Archaeological Society  
B.M. British Museum  
B.R.O. Buckinghamshire Record Office  
P.R.O. Public Record Office  
V.C.H. Victoria County History  
W.B. Weedon Box

<sup>65</sup> Mrs. Kathleen Harries, Trustee since 1965. Co-optative Trustees appointed since 1954 serve for five years.