

## THE SOUTHWELL POOR AND SICK POOR CHARITIES

I wonder how many visitors to the Minster notice the large boards on the east wall of the south transept, referring to the benefactors' donations to the less fortunate? Probably those who do look at them see them merely as a historic relic, dating as they do from 1621, with their quaint wording and amounts of money which, unless updated into present-day coinage, seem miniscule by modern standards.

You may be surprised to discover that these early charities still exist, in more modern forms, and are regularly administered to help people in the parish.

The original charities came about when those who were wealthy and who felt a sense of responsibility towards their poorer fellows endowed land, property or money to provide the necessities of life for their neighbours. (The earlier dissolution of the monasteries meant that that safety net had been removed, and it was long before the welfare state came into being.) Coats, coal, flour and bread were among the items specified; other charities gave money – one specifically to help at Christmas – bed linen or medical aid. The charities were administered by Trustees.

As the years passed some older charities became obsolete and in 1960 application was made to the Charity Commissioner that they should be listed as the Southwell Charities for the Poor. At the same time, permission was granted for two later twentieth century charities, both of which were for sick nursing, to be registered as the Charity for the Sick Poor.

The order empowering the two groups as new charities was sealed on 1<sup>st</sup> July 1960. The "Area of Benefit" of the Charity is the Ancient Parish of Southwell. The body of Trustees consists of 13 "competent persons", representing a broad range of Southwell life. The Trustees meet four times a year.

In applying the income, the Trustees must satisfy themselves that the individuals are deserving and in need, and they must not commit themselves to making recurring grants. Neither must the income of the charities be applied directly in relief of rates, taxes or other funds, but it may be applied to supplement these. Most grants recently have been to pensioners, but grants have also been made to young people needing help in furthering their education, e.g. help with books or equipment.

The Trustees work quietly in the background investigating cases of hardship and need, either noted by them personally or brought to their attention by members of the public. At the present time the Chairman is Dr Henry Cottell (Southwell Medical Centre) and the Clerk is Mr Robert Beckett (A.J.Beckett, Market Place). Any approach made to them on behalf of a sick or needy third person will be welcomed and dealt with in confidence.

In this way the wishes of the long-departed benefactors are still carried out to the benefit of the people of Southwell.

*(An article written for "Leaves", January 2007, by Mollie Toy)*

# The Southwell Charities

IT is likely that few people locally will have heard of the Southwell Charities for the Poor and the Sick Poor. Those who have, may not realise how important local charities were in relieving the burden of poverty and infirmity prior to the inception of the Welfare State.

The two Southwell Charities for the Poor and Sick Poor were formed by an Act of Parliament in 1960 to amalgamate a multitude of older charities formed by the will of various, usually local worthies. They were too numerous to mention then all but some are of interest. Several provided straightforward financial relief, for instance the Pierpont Charity of November 1621 and Nicholson's Charity of March 1677.

Some charities provided clothing: for example Thornton's Charity of August 1714 "annually provided six coats to the value twelve shillings for six poor aged persons." Some provided basic necessities of life such as flour, bread or coal and these were often given to

those in need at Christmas time: examples of these charities were Fillingham's charity of March, 1696, Burton's Charity which appears to date from around 1570 and Spofforth's Bread and Coal Charity of 1823. Many of the old charities provided for educating the children of the poor. Examples of these charities are Stenton's Charity of August 1771, Holden's Charity of June, 1856 and Warwick's Charity of August 1873, which established a "free library for the Poor and Working Classes of Southwell."

Not all benefactors were local people. By his will of January 1692, Thomas Wymondesold of Lambeth, provided money for the maintenance of chimes in the church at Southwell: poor housekeepers of the town would only benefit from the money if the chimes should be "out of repair by the neglect of the Chapter" for the space of 6 weeks or more! Henry Nicholson lived in North Marnham but by his will of 1677 provided for 10/- to be given half yearly to as many of the poor of

Southwell as could be provided for. Bartholomew Fillingham, who endowed a gift of bread, was a "Gentleman of the City of Westminster."

The area of benefit of these local charities is the ancient parish of Southwell, which of course now includes the parish of Holy Trinity Church. The present two charities are administered by a body of trustees who meet four times a year and the income from the investments goes towards providing a box of groceries or equivalent sum of money for those who are felt to be most in need in the area at Christmas time. Other cases of hardship can be dealt with at any time during the year and if you know of somebody in desperate need or you feel that you, yourself, should benefit, then a word to any of the trustees will be dealt with quickly and discreetly.

Of course the effects of inflation have considerably diminished the value of investments and hence the benefits that can be achieved. With this in mind the trustees would like it to be more widely known that additions to the Charities can still be made and if anybody feels able to include the Southwell Charities in their will then we can assure them that their money will be put to good purpose in the local community.

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