



Charity Enquiries - Commissioner on Tour in South Wilts

At the inquiry in this parish, there was a fairly good attendance, amongst those present being: The Rector (the Rev. G. R. Hadow), and Messrs. E. Lush, J. Pretty, T. Shergold, and G. Bush.

Mr. Bush, representing the parish of Fisherton Delamere, stated that there were no charities in that parish.

The Assistant Commissioner said there were only four charities in the village, one of which appeared to have been lost. It seemed that Christopher Willoughby gave £20 and Robert Hyde gave £10, which, according to the Parliament returns of 1876, were to be given to poor men. The two sums produced £2 8s, but Lord Brougham's Commissioners' report stated that for thirty years before 1876 no payment had been made under it, and that the churchwardens of that time had never heard of it. An ancient manuscript, however, was produced to them, which stated that in 1861, Charles Willoughby gave £20 and Robert Hyde £10, which, at the discretion of the rector, was to be devoted to the poor. The minister and churchwardens believed the manuscript stated the money was invested in the purchase of a house in a place called "Chequers," in Wylde, which was occupied by poor people not chargeable to the parish, and bore an inscription setting out the object for which it was built. Continuing, the Assistant Commissioner asked whether anything more was known of that house at the present time.

Mr. Lush said he knew nothing about it.

Mr. Dowdell said he recollected the house with the inscription on it. It was occupied by old Stephen Hibberd and his wife and family. He remembered the old cottage very distinctly and as a boy knew Stephen Hibberd. It was in a place called "Chequers," and some of the walls were standing now. Mr. Shergold added that the place was now used as a wood house. Stephen Hibberd remained in the cottage as long as it was safe to do so, and when he went out, no one else went into it, because there were no funds to carry out the necessary repairs. When the cottage fell down a certain gentleman farmer took possession of the place, and said the land belonged to Lord Pembroke, that the house was put up before workhouses and poor-houses were built, and that it served in their stead.

The Assistant Commissioner observed that it was not often one heard more about a charity than the Commissioners could find out seventy years ago, as was the case in this instance. He thought there was considerable doubt now as to whether the parish could make any claim now.

The Assistant Commissioner said that if the Charity Commissioners thought any useful purpose would be served by taking steps to recover the charity, they would communicate with the parish authority. However, he thought, that after this lapse of time it would be very difficult to recover anything.

The next charity was Dame Elizabeth Mervyn's. The testatrix was the wife of the late Sir John Mervyn, and under will dated 1851, she left a sum of money in trust to provide the poor people of Wyllye and Little Langford with four quarters of wheat to be made into good household bread and distributed every Good Friday. She also directed the distribution of 50 rolls of canvas at 12d. the yard to make shirts and smocks, and 50 yards of narrow blue cloth to make the poor people coats and cassocks. The canvas and cloth it appeared had not been distributed for some time and as a result of a difficulty about baking bread, and application was made to the Charity Commissioners and a scheme was devised by which the canvas and cloth portion of the Charity were commuted for the annual sum of £8 5s, which was paid to Miss Moody, of Steeple Langford, and paid for the baking of the bread.

The Rector, in answer to question, by Mr. Wigram, said that the bread was given to any parishioner who applied for it.

Mr. Dowdell said that a lot of the people in the village were doubtful as to whether the distribution of the bread was the best way of dispensing the Charity.

The Assistant Commissioner in reply said that in the old days when wheaten bread was so dear and the people lived upon oaten bread it was a great advantage to them to get these loaves. One knew, however, that at the present time these particular charities were not very satisfactory. It could not be altered though, without the permission of the Charity commissioners.

Mr. Shergold remarked that the distribution of the canvas and cloth caused a lot of jealousy. It was given away to favourites.

The Rector said the moral objection to bread charities was that people applied for participation in them who ought not to do so. There was a good deal he liked in these charities and a good deal he disliked. He had been unable to find any instance of waste.

The Assistant Commissioner said there was another charity. Charles Willoughby, under will dated 1675 left £200 to the Mayor and Corporation of Marlborough for certain charitable purposes. Among the bequests were the following: 10s, a year to the minister at Wyllye to preach a sermon every year on the day of the burial of the testator's mother if on a Sunday, and if not then on the following Sunday: 6s to Mary Parker of Wyllye, and one other aged person of the same parish to be chosen by the minister and churchwardens and the majority of the parishioners; 10s per annum to the churchwardens for the time being to be retained to their own use for their care and expense of giving a just account to the parish – (otherwise to the use of the poor at the discretion of the minister there) – 10s to the minister for his pains in keeping a register book of the election and accounts and 10s for the parish clerk of Wyllye for the time being.

The only point of interest discussed in this charity was whether the majority of the inhabitants had a voice in the election of an aged person who should partake of the bequest mentioned after that made to Mary Parker.

The Rector said the election was made by the rector and churchwardens and no further comment was made.

The only other charity was a bequest of £500 made by William Perrior on the 10th December, 1864, which was bequeathed to the minister and churchwardens of the parish in trust, to be invested, and the interest and dividend to be divided among the five most aged and most deserving men in the parish, his old servants, or the old servants of his father or brother to have the preference. No poor man in receipt of Willoughby's charity in the same year to participate in the gift. The yearly produce of the bequest was £12 13s 4d.

The Rector stated that the terms of the will were complied with.

This concluded the enquiry.

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