

UXBRIDGE UNITED WELFARE TRUSTS

The charity and its development

‘Lords of the Manor’

Locked in the strong room at the Central Library in Uxbridge, Middlesex is a historical document dating back to around **1179**. Known as ‘Basset’s Grant’ it has had a far reaching effect upon the development, prosperity and history of the town. Charitable work stemming from the Grant continues to benefit the residents of the area today.

One hundred years after the Norman conquest, the Manor of Colham, of which Uxbridge was then part, was owned by Gilbert Basset, a French nobleman. In **1179** Bassett issued a document, which like all medieval documents was written in Latin and on parchment. The first few lines began as follows...

‘Gilbert Basset to all Barons of the Honor of Wallingford and his neighbours and friends, greeting. Know ye that our Lord Harry, King of England, hath granted me liberty to make a market in my town of Wxebruge’.

To have received a charter from the King giving permission to hold markets and fairs in the town was, in those days, viewed as a great privilege. Uxbridge, being situated at a river crossing on the main road from London to Oxford, was ideally placed to take advantage of the developing corn trade. The services of millers and brewers, innkeepers and shopkeepers were soon to be in great demand. The townspeople, and the Lord of the Manor, prospered along with the corresponding increase in trade. The Lord’s steward was given the job of collecting the toll fees levied on all corn and cattle sold and all market stalls hired. By **1520**, the Lord of the Manor had become accustomed to donating part of his income to the relief of the poor. However, there were other demands on it, including the building and maintenance of a market house, the first one of which was completed in **1561**.

For many years the title ‘Lordship of the Manor’ passed from one generation to the next under inheritance rules. In **1630** it was held by the Countess of Derby, a resident of Harefield. Each year, at an annual court meeting, she returned all her collected toll fees to the townspeople to benefit local charities. However, her generosity failed to impress everybody. Many of the townspeople were of the opinion that the Grant entitled them to the fees, rather than the Lord of the Manor. The more militant amongst them demanded meetings with the Countess’s steward. These became more acrimonious each time they were held; so much so that over a year went by with no progress made on either side. The Countess became so annoyed with what was going on that she decided to send an order to her bailiffs to make it clear to all that she would collect and distribute the toll money as she thought fit.

The situation worsened again when in the summer of **1631** an armed mob threw the toll collectors out of the market and appropriated the toll corn for themselves. The Countess initiated legal proceedings by taking the leaders of the uprising to court. The townspeople argued that they were claiming their lawful rights from ‘Basset’s Grant’. When the actual document was produced in court none of the townspeople could read it, nor could their solicitor or even the judge. Only the solicitor acting for the Countess was able to translate its Latin wording. As might be expected, the court subsequently ruled in favour of the Countess.

Nevertheless, the rioting continued and so the Countess commenced proceedings in the Star Chamber. This court was notorious for enforcing excessive punishments, including torture. Not surprisingly, the leaders of the rioters wrote grovelling letters of apology begging the Countess's forgiveness.

Eventually the proceedings were withdrawn and the fines cancelled. The whole affair ended amicably with the people enjoying a venison feast hosted by the Countess, and the charities in the town once again receiving their share of the market tolls.

Today's visitors to Uxbridge library can view a mural painted by Barbara Jones depicting this remarkable series of events.

In 1669 the Manor of Colham was divided and a separate Manor of Uxbridge came into being. During the Civil War the townspeople again appropriated the tolls, only to have them restored to the Lord of the Manor in **1672**. The long running dispute was finally settled in 1695 when George Pitt sold the manor and borough of Uxbridge for £550 to seven leading inhabitants of Uxbridge. Between them, they covenanted £20 a year to six Uxbridge paupers and £10 a year to be distributed weekly, as bread, in a local chapel to six male and six female paupers. Interestingly, one of the purchasers was Edmund Baker, grandson of the man who led the dispute with the Countess.

By 1729 there was only Baker and one other survivor from the original purchasers of the title. The number of trustees was increased to seven and the manorial profits vested in a charitable fund for the general benefit of the town. The charity's trustees were given the power to appoint successors '*who shall be inhabitants and housekeepers in the said town*'. The custom of trustees appointing their successors was kept up over the centuries and is still practiced today.

The market rights and the manorial title were passed to the trustees and they became known as '*The Lords in Trust of the Manor and Borough of Uxbridge*' a title still retained.

Gifts left to the poor people of Uxbridge

John Marsh

- in **1557**, left the interest on £200 vested in the Mercers' Company to provide two shillings worth of bread every Sunday to twenty four Uxbridge paupers.

Robert Woolman

- in **1570**, left a rent-charge on land in Uxbridge, Hillingdon and Cowley to build a school in Uxbridge to give £5 annually to the Uxbridge poor. The school, which was subject to a two year limitation period, was never built and the gift lapsed.

John Garrett

- in **1589**, John Garrett an Uxbridge brewer left the income from rents on his shops and stalls in the market place for the use of *'the poor people of Woxebridge'*.

William Skydmore

- in **1600**, William Skydmore, an ironmonger left premises in Uxbridge to his heirs on condition that they should give one shilling in bread to the poor each Sunday morning after divine services in Uxbridge chapel.

Sir George Garrett

- in **1648**, left four acres in Moor Field to the use of the 'Woxbridge' poor. The land was sold in the nineteenth century to the Great West Railway Co. and the proceeds were invested in £273 stock.

Michael Pearce

- in his will of **1695** left in trust tenements in Uxbridge for the benefit of poor people of the town. Small cash payments were made. In 1823, for example, £23 was distributed amongst one hundred and seventy two paupers.

Lord Ossulton

- (died **1695**) was driving his carriage through Uxbridge one day when he ran over and killed a small boy. By way of expressing his sorrow he left in his will £100 to form a trust to enable poor children from Uxbridge to be apprenticed to a trade.

John Clarke

- his gift was created by deed in **1704** when his widow carried out her husband's wish to provide a distribution of bread weekly amongst six of the poorest men and six of the poorest women inhabitants of the town.

John Hill

- in **1744**, left £1 a year to provide forty Uxbridge paupers with a sixpenny loaf each on Christmas day.

Henry Fell Pease

- by will dated **1820**, left an uncertain amount to assist in the education of poor children.

Poor Allotment

- Under the **1825** inclosure award, four acres on Uxbridge Moor were allotted to the Uxbridge poor. One acre was sold in 1903 and the proceeds invested in £313 stock.

William Wells

- in **1835**, left £600 stock which brought in an income of £15 a year for the benefit of the poor of Uxbridge.

The creation of Uxbridge United Charities

On **25th May 1906** the Charity Commissioners approve an application from the Lords in Trust together with the trustees of two other charities for the creation of Uxbridge United Charities.

The trustees also manage **Lord Ossulton's** charity which was set up to pay for needy boys to be indentured as apprentices.

The Charities of Clarke and Others

By a Scheme of **1907** the charities of John Clarke, Sir George Garrett, John Garrett, John Hill, John Marsh, William Skydmore, William Wells, Robert Woolman, and the Poor Allotment are consolidated as the Charities of Clarke and Others. The charities are also administered by the trustees of Uxbridge United Charities.

Legacies bequeathed to the charity in later years...

Emily James

- In **1920**, left the income of £300 stock for the relief of the poor

Sarah Hunter

- In **1922**, left a legacy of £300 to supply coals for the almshouses

Charles Woodbridge

- In **1924**, left a legacy of £100 also to supply coals for the almshouses.

Florence Winifred Eden,

- In **1988**, Florence Eden, an almshouse resident, left £5,000 to the charity in recognition of the care and kindness afforded to her during her many years at Woodbridge House.

The connection with the Woodbridge family

Woodbridge's, a family firm of solicitors in Uxbridge, have long been connected with the Trust and the town. For 60 years or more, the trustees would meet at Woodbridge's offices in the High Street opposite Barclays Bank. Their solicitors provided advice on investments and leases and kept a store of important Trust documents, some of which were later to be transferred to the National Archives for safe keeping.

Early in the **1960s**, when Woodbridge's offices were compulsory purchased to make way for the Pavilions shopping centre, the firm moved into offices at the top of Vine Street. The trustees resumed their meetings there until the early **1980s** when they had built up sufficient funds to extend the almshouses in New Windsor Street to accommodate an office for the trustees.

In recognition of the long standing connection with the Woodbridge family and in an effort to shed the old 'hospital for the poor' or 'workhouse' image of almshouses, the trustees voted in favour of Lewis R. Pond's **1962** proposal to name the almshouses '**Woodbridge House**'.

For many years, the role of Clerk to the trustees was taken by a succession of Woodbridge family members. In **1984** after much searching, the trustees found a suitable administrative assistant who would also act as Clerk to the trustees.

Applying the Income of the Charity

The Lords in Trust were involved in the provision of almshouses in The Lynch prior to **1727**. In **1729** their income is less than £100. Their more tangible assets include the tolls from the markets and fairs and the market-house, together with various other properties and pieces of land from which they receive rental income. They employ a Town Crier, a Keeper of the Pound and a Hogherd, and, after expenses, the rest of their income is set aside for local charitable purposes.

In **1732**, the income of the Lords in Trust is listed as £89 with expenditure also at £89.

As the popularity of the market grows it becomes increasingly obvious that the accommodation in the market-house is inadequate and that its position in the town is hindering the flow of traffic along the High Street. In **1788** the decision is taken to demolish the building and erect a new market-house on an extended, more spacious site. The cost of this, £3,000, is met by the Lords in Trust and from voluntary contributions. Corn is traded on the ground floor. Rooms on the upper floor, designed for storing corn, are soon to be used for other purposes including a boys' school, a girls' school, a savings bank and a reading room.

The market continues to prosper, as does the income from tolls. In the year **1800** the takings from the market-house are averaging £1,000 a year. Uxbridge is by now the largest pitched corn market in the country.

Giles Hutson, an Uxbridge saddler and harness maker, describes the market at its peak...

'Early in the morning, even by five and six o'clock, the farmers' waggons laden with corn for sale begin to arrive. They came from Shepherds Bush, Willesden, Edgware, Hendon, Staines, Hounslow, Hampton and other places on the Thames between Marlow and Kingston, many came from Rickmansworth, Chalfont, Wycombe, Amersham and Missenden and even from the country around Chinnor'.

The custom of the market authorities is to take one pint from each sack of corn as the toll charge. The quantity thus taken (representing 2,752 sacks of wheat) is offered for sale with a monetary value of £4,000. Corn received from the tolls is sold by the trustees and this together with other income is used for charitable purposes.

From that peak of activity followed a decline in the corn market, a fall in corn values and a reduction in the income available for charitable purposes. This is at a time when there are squalid slums and distressing poverty in the yards of the town. The resources of all charities are stretched to the limit in an effort to meet the needs of the poor, especially the elderly poor.

1821: The gifts of John Marsh, Robert Woolman, John Garrett, William Skydmore, Sir George Garrett and John Hill are together worth £30. No doubt taking into account the abject poverty at the time, the trustees decide to distribute the whole amount as bread, except for three shillings given away each Sunday in part satisfaction of Sir George Garrett's gift.

1823: The Charity Commissioners investigate Uxbridge Charities and produce a detailed report of their findings. It shows that the charity's expenditure is too great and the Trust is in debt. The trustees are criticised for not collecting rents and for issuing over-extended leases on their properties. In order to balance their books, the allowance to widows of two shillings per week is reduced by sixpence; support for the girls' school is cut in half to £10.10s per annum; support for the boys' school is reduced from 50 guineas to £21 per annum and the salary of the Clerk to the Market is reduced from £40 to £30 per annum.

1840: Despite the 'rap over the knuckles' from the Charity Commissioners and the economies introduced to balance the books, the trustees still manage to attract the wrath of an anonymous contributor to the local newspaper. It seems that they had held one of their regular meetings at the 'George Inn' where the writer describes the scene...

'A grand tuck-in on the appointment of fresh trustees. The problem is the old trustees; 'Old Brown' a worthy feeder when it costs him nothing, a money lender. Will Lake who allowed one of his sons to die from want and transported another. Poor Old Joe Bassett, a corn salesman, who could not attend the feast as it was on market day.

Now comes fresh elected W C Brown, tailor, son to the Chairman; R Anie, son-in-law to the Chairman, liar extraordinary and not a parishioner of Uxbridge; W Hill, tenant of the Chairman; Robert Austin, protégé of the Chairman and partly connected to the above tenant; John Lovell, the churchwarden; W Hammond is on the point of marriage with the Chairman's niece, a widow with plenty of cash; W Goodman, lay churchwarden and fresh imported to the town of Uxbridge; Thomas Lake, son of the Trustee and not an inhabitant of Uxbridge; John Mercer, lay churchwarden. Now Mr Editor, there must surely have been some good pickings as the party did not separate until nearly two o'clock and most of them very lushly'.

It is likely that the author was one of a group of radical writers for which Uxbridge was well known at the time as the records show that throughout the latter part of the nineteenth century the trustees paid meticulous attention to detailing the income and expenditure of the charity. Although, by this time, there is no longer any substantial income from market tolls, the income from rents on property and land are increasing.

1845: The trustees allocate £1,007 to providing almshouse accommodation for sixteen 'inmates' as they were then called. Eight new almshouses are completed in **1846**. By the end of the century the almshouses need to be replaced but the Manorial trustees realise that the costs involved in rebuilding them on a new site are substantial and much greater than they can afford.

1905: A Scheme for new almshouses, twenty self-contained apartments for single persons is agreed with the Charity Commissioners. These are built next to the Methodist chapel in New Windsor Street at a cost of £3,400, met by temporarily appropriating the income from the Ossulton and Pearce charities. The old premises in Windsor Street are sold off, the site redeveloped and for many years it is occupied by Uxbridge Post Office.

1906: In its first year of operation the newly formed **Uxbridge United Charities** has an income of £689. The income left in trust by **Lord Ossulton** allows for grants of £20 to £51 for outdoor apprentices and fixed grants of £30 for indoor ones. Land and properties now owned by the charity include the site of the 20th century almshouses, the buildings in the Lynch used as almshouses, the fire-engine station, the market-house, cottages in Chapel Street, the Lynch and New Windsor Street, and £43 stock.

1907: The new almshouses are ready and the first occupant moves in. Priority is given to maintaining the almshouses and providing the ‘inmates’ with a pension of two shillings a week. Any residual money is reserved for the general benefit of the poor in Uxbridge, of whom there are many.

1933: The Clerk to the trustees produces a detailed report on the land and properties owned by the Trust, the tenants and the gross yearly income (£742.5s.5d). Throughout the misery of two World Wars, the trustees quietly carry on running the almshouses and making charitable provision for the poor. They marshal their assets sensibly and prudently.

1961: The annual income of the United Charities has grown to £8,265. The charity of Clarke and Others realise £394 and Ossulton’s gift £403. Hunter and Woodbridge’s gifts together realise £11 with the income from the Pease charity £95. The income is used mainly to provide pensions to the almspeople and to maintain and insure the almshouses and market-house. Small amounts of money from the income are spent on coal for the poor.

1981: The market house is sold advantageously to an insurance company. The proceeds are used to purchase other properties in the town. Twenty-three commercial and residential properties in the centre of Uxbridge are now owned by the charity.

1985: Careful and continual preservation of resources means that when the almshouses need modernising again, the trustees have sufficient funds to carry out the work. All twenty almshouses are extended to include stylish new kitchens and other much admired improvements.

2003: The almshouse flats are completely refurbished throughout. The outside areas are landscaped, winning a succession of awards for best kept communal gardens. The aim now is to help elderly or frail residents live at Woodbridge House in comfort for as long as possible.

2005: A purpose built hall, ‘Woodbridge Hall’, opens in July giving residents the space to take part in a range of social activities, all designed to encourage healthy and active lifestyles, both in mind and body. The charity remains fiscally independent, receiving no income from government grants or public appeals.

Although its benefactors acted with the best of intentions, the amounts they left to the charity would, without subsequent proper control or investment, have had little effect on the wellbeing of the thousands who have sought help or refuge from it in the intervening years.

Keeping abreast of change

Early in the 20th century the general public begin to wake up to the fact that poverty had bred harshness on an unacceptable scale. National reforms are introduced, leading to the introduction of a range of state benefits for the poor. People who are sick or unemployed no longer have to rely on charity aid alone. Along with other independent charities, Uxbridge United Welfare Trusts finds it necessary to review their ways of working in the light of such historic changes in systems of welfare support.

1906: The Charity's Scheme limits the area of benefit to Central Uxbridge and Hillingdon West only. During the **1930s** many families are moved out of the slums in the town centre and housed in the outlying district. So that they could continue helping these people, the trustees successfully apply to the Charity Commissioners to extend the area of benefit applying to the Relief in Need branch and to Lord Ossulton's charity to the whole of the Urban District of Uxbridge.

1983: After a lengthy period of consultation the Charity Commission eventually approve a new Scheme for the regulation of Uxbridge United Charities under a new name 'Uxbridge United Welfare Trusts'. No longer is the word 'charity' to be found in its title. The revised Scheme reaffirms the duty of trustees to ensure that their properties are well maintained and that the charity expenditure is applied (i) for the Almshouses and (ii) for Relief in Need. It also relaxes the period an applicant needs to reside in Uxbridge before qualifying for grant aid. Today, when there is any doubt as to whether there is sufficient reason or funds to allocate a grant, the trustees refer once more to the wills of their founders who gave express instructions that their gifts be used to help the poor, needy, and established, residents of the Uxbridge Urban area.

2005: Eleven trustees, all of whom are volunteers, continue to be responsible to the Charity Commissioners for efficiently managing the charity's resources. At a time of rapid change in legislation and in a climate of unprecedented law suits, the trustees make sure there are sufficient funds set aside to protect the Trust and its future. They take all steps to ensure that the properties they have inherited, or purchased from legacies, are maintained resourcefully, managed efficiently and the income from them invested wisely.

Rents from local properties continue to produce most of the income. The remainder comes from investments made through approved companies such as the Charities' Official Investment Fund. A five year budget plan is produced and regularly updated. This has to take into account the high costs of maintaining a portfolio of properties, many of which are in a conservation area, some dating back to the late 17th century. The ongoing plan provides the evidence, if needed, that the trustees are managing their finances responsibly by neither over-committing themselves nor keeping too much in reserve.

When the almshouses were opened in 1906, they were run by a matron-in-charge on strict institutional lines. In contrast, today's residents of Woodbridge House are simply asked to observe a set of common sense rules. The trustees do all that they can to make their almshouse residents feel part of a safe, secure and happy community. Close attention is paid to health and safety matters. Regular risk assessments are carried out, the results of which help trustees plan the budget. Although the Trust must not, by law, provide any form of medical care to the residents, to help them live comfortably and independently the manager will liaise with outside medical, welfare and support agencies on their behalf.

In the year **2004-2005**, the Board approved **grants** totalling £37,042.00 under the **Relief in Need** branch of the charity and £3,954.00 from the **Lord Ossulton** fund. Applications for assistance arrive in the Trustees' Office in varying numbers and for various purposes. Each application is considered in line with the charity's Scheme and in accordance with the rules of confidentiality. The Trust employs a suitably qualified Grants and Benefits' Officer to interview applicants and assess their individual circumstances. In general terms, the Trust aims to help people who live within the area of benefit, whose health, safety or development is at risk and whose needs cannot be met within the state sector.

For the past 300 years, Lord Ossulton's charity has helped young people in Uxbridge gain a foot on the employment ladder. Used initially to enable poor boys to be apprenticed to a trade it now provides a more comprehensive range of educational support for young people who live or study in the area of benefit.

A curious, and rather worrying, consequence of investigations made by the Grants and Benefits Officer is the number of people trustees come across who are not receiving the state benefits to which they are entitled. Often this is because people find it so difficult to cope with complicated form filling and the unrelenting demands of officialdom. In 2004 alone, the Trust managed to recover £66,215 in unclaimed state benefits on behalf of people who initially applied to them for grant aid.

Poverty today can no longer be defined in simple terms such as the need for bread or coal. Trustees are now seeing many more families in crisis because of spiralling debt, particularly on credit cards. Drug abuse is another major factor causing untold problems to individuals and to the community at large. Alcohol abuse, and the violence it encourages, is all too evident. Too many children are growing up without father figures as responsible role models. Young parents go from one unstable relationship to the next, having had very little guidance or support from their own parents. Trustees are therefore disturbed, but no longer surprised, to find an acute lack of parenting skills in many of the families who turn to them for support. Added to this are the problems connected with placing mental health patients back into the community with few resources and not enough ongoing support, as well as the increasing number of asylum seekers and refugees with no permanent work or accommodation.

The task now is for the trustees to find ways of 'plugging the gaps' in state provision, by supplementing the help available from the various support agencies working to lessen the effects of poverty and ill health in the community. Now, as well as providing, for example, a new washing machine or a bed, the trustees always seek to maximise people's incomes and to point them in the direction of more long-term focused support. In the meantime, they are delighted to hear about the progress many beneficiaries do make, as the numerous letters of heartfelt thanks bear testimony.

The Trust has a long history of helping local people genuinely in need. The decisions made by trustees are based, just as those of their earliest benefactors, on the need to look after people less fortunate than themselves. The trustees work to ensure the charity has all the resources it needs to tackle poverty in whatever form it presents itself this year and in the years to come.

Inthe then trustees were approached to sell the title they had held since 1729. The trustees are delighted they had the foresight to reject the sum of £8,000 then on offer which meant they continue to this day to be '*Lords in Trust of the Manor and Borough of Uxbridge*'

Acknowledgements

Philip Colehan (Trustee 2003 to date) – for his detailed research of the archives at Uxbridge Central Library and the National Archives which led to the production of this fascinating and intriguing history.

Sue Pritchard (Trustee 1996 to date and current Chair) – for writing up the final document and for detailing the advances made by the Trust in recent years

Lewis R. Pond (Trustee 1953 to date) – for his wealth of knowledge about the Trust, and in particular its financial development over the last half century

Ken Pearce (local historian and author) – for helping with the research and adding to it

**and to all trustees, past and present,
for contributing to the history and to the success of**

Uxbridge United Welfare Trusts

Board of trustees as at October 2005

Sue Pritchard (Chair)
John Childs (Vice-Chair)
Lew Pond
Betty O'Rourke
Pat Spargo
Philip Colehan
Pauline Crawley
Michael Enskat
John Lonsdale
Ken Lobo
David Routledge