



WILLIAM BUCKWELL MEMORIAL ALMSHOUSES

You will find the William Buckwell Memorial Almshouses along Godstone Road, Lingfield, opposite the junction with Mount Pleasant Road

History

The Almshouses were built in 1907 in memory of William Buckwell, a prosperous bootmaker who lived and worked in Deptford for the greater part of his life.

William Buckwell was born in Brighton in 1823 or 1824. Very little is known about him but by 1851 he was living at 20 High Street, Deptford and working as a bootmaker. He continued to live there until his death in 1904. It would appear that his father, also named William, was a shoe manufacturer, so seemingly William joined him in the business and carried it on after his father's death. He was married on 9th May 1858 at St Martin's in-the-Fields Church, then in the County of Middlesex, to Ann Calvert Wakelin. She was then residing in George Street, Greenwich and her father was a Mariner. Ann died on 26th August 1888 and was buried in a family vault in Nunhead cemetery South East London. There do not appear to have been any children of the marriage.

William Buckwell died on 11th March 1904 and is buried in the family vault in Nunhead Cemetery. His last Will was made on 10th March 1904, the day before his death. By that Will, William Buckwell left his residuary Estate to his executors (Henry George Pitt and Charles Turing Brookhouse) upon trust to divide and pay the same between and to such Almshouses and hospitals as they in their absolute discretion should think fit. His gross Estate was valued at £51,879, quite a considerable sum in 1904.

On 5th September 1873 William Buckwell had purchased a cottage and two pieces of land in Godstone Road Lingfield from the Revd G Carpenter and others for £300. On the land purchased by William Buckwell stood Falconhurst Cottage and Rose Cottage.

On 24th April 1894 William Buckwell sold the cottage and land to James George Thomas of 70 High Street, Deptford, an undertaker, for £950. Subsequently John Thomas built Tower House (adjacent to Falconhurst Cottage) and moved into it. He sold Falconhurst Cottage on 18th October 1901 to William Eagles. Sometime after March 1954 a new house was built adjoining Rose Cottage and named Wellside. For

a number of years a subsequent occupier of Wellside was John Lawson, a local architect, who served as a trustee in 1905.

On 29th June 1877 William Buckwell purchased another property in Godstone Road from Mary Holt for £709. That property comprised what is now known as the Thatched House and The Old House, together with a large orchard, on which the Almshouses were built in 1907. At the time of this purchase this land was let to John Terry for a term of 21 years from 29th September 1876 at a rent of £25 for the first year and thereafter at a rent of £35 per annum. Presumably, therefore, William Buckwell bought it as an investment.

It is not known why William Buckwell chose to buy property in Lingfield when he lived in Deptford. It is known that he was an executor of the Will of Robert Piper who died at Falconhurst, Godstone Road, Lingfield on 26th November 1880. As we now know William Buckwell then owned Falconhurst. Robert Piper's business address is given as 20 High Street Deptford and he was also a bootmaker. It would seem that he might have been in partnership with William Buckwell in Deptford.

One of the legatees mentioned in William Buckwell's Will was Miss C George of Paris Farm, Lingfield, probably related to William Buckwell.

We do not know what prompted William Buckwell's executors to consider using part of the residuary Estate to fund the cost of Almshouses in Lingfield but that is what they decided to do. This necessitated applying to the Chancery Division of the High Court in London for the required authority to spend part of the Estate in this way.

On 19th December 1905 the High Court made an Order permitting the Trustees to retain one and a half acres of the land in Godstone Road as a site for the erection of the Almshouses. All other freehold and leasehold property was to be sold. The estimated value of such was £30,000 and £15,000 was set aside to cover the cost of the erection of the Almshouses. The land was vested in the Official Custodian for Charities.

The Almshouses were erected in 1907. The supervising architect was Louis Jacob and the builder was H D Leng, neither of whom were local to Lingfield.

The Almshouses

The Almshouses are in an open situation, lying well back from the main road, with fine views of the North Downs at the rear.

The Almshouses comprise a single building within which have been constructed nine separate living units, for one or two occupants. Each of the larger units comprises a first floor bedroom with an adjoining toilet and washbasin and on the ground floor a lounge, kitchen, bathroom with WC. Two of the units, both on the ground floor, comprise a bedroom, sitting room, kitchen, and bathroom with WC. The other unit is located on the first floor in the centre of the building and comprises a lounge, two bedrooms, kitchen, and bathroom with WC. Each resident has an area of garden at the rear for personal use.

Alterations and improvements carried out since the original construction have included (in 1967) the addition of a bathroom and WC at the rear of each unit together with central heating and (in 1984) the erection of front porches to each unit. Over the past 30 years each of the larger units has had a WC and wash basin constructed at first floor level adjacent to the bedroom. Six chimney flues were removed in 1988, as they were then in a dangerous condition and no longer being needed.

It has been the policy of the trustees to endeavour to keep the units in a comfortable condition commensurate with modern standards.

To the rear of the back gardens is an extensive area of land containing a number of old apple trees and is known as the Old Orchard. It is maintained as a garden area for use by the residents.

A Clerk is employed on a part-time basis who is responsible for collecting the weekly maintenance contributions as well as keeping a general eye on the building and, where appropriate, attending to the needs of the residents. Nursing and care services are not provided, it being the responsibility of each resident to arrange for his or her own care.

Residential and other qualifications

Under the original Scheme for the Almshouses the persons eligible for occupation were required to be 'married couples neither husband or wife being under 60 years of age who should have been married for at least 10 years or widows or widowers of the same age and all such persons should have continuously resided for at least the 10 years previously to the date of their election either in the Borough of Deptford in the County of Kent or in the Parish of Lingfield and should have been during the said period of 10 years of temperate habits and good behaviour and should not be in receipt of parochial relief and should not in the opinion of the trustees be otherwise in receipt of or able to earn sufficient means of livelihood'.

In December 1921 the Scheme was varied to reduce the residential qualification from 10 to 5 years.

Today would-be residents of the Almshouses must be not less than 60 years of age and at the time of their appointment be residing in any of the Parishes of Lingfield, Dormansland, Felbridge, Crowhurst or Horne, or in the London Borough of Lewisham (with preference being given to people living within the former Metropolitan Borough of Deptford). When a married couple applies one of them must be aged at least 60 and the other at least 55.

The variation of the Scheme in 1921 also gave the Trustees power to permit the District Nurse or some other suitable woman approved by them to occupy rent free a house or rooms within the Almshouses during the pleasure of the trustees upon her undertaking that she would (in addition to any outside work of hers which should not be interfered with) attend to any of the occupants of the Almshouses who were in need of services of a nurse.

The Wardens

During the 1930s Nurse Short, the Local District Nurse/Midwife, occupied one of the flats. Nurse Short retired in 1936 but continued to live at the Almshouses until her death in 1938. She was a well-known and popular figure as she cycled around but it then became necessary that she should have a car, so she learnt to drive and was provided with a little Austin car. As there was no place to keep a car at the Almshouses and it could not stand outside in Godstone Road, the Nursing Association rented a little garage at 'Carrier House' in Mount Pleasant Road.

Others who have lived at the Almshouses whilst acting as District Nurse or resident warden have been Miss Cowley (1939-1940), Mrs Mundy (1941-1942), Miss Bishop (1942-1945), Miss Briggs (1945-1949), Miss J B Woods (1950-1955), Miss L Suddaby (1955-1973) and Mrs S Susie Ward (1973-1987). In 1988 the Trustees decided to appoint a non-resident warden, Mrs Dorothy Tye, who acted as such until her death in December 2008.

Trustees

The responsibility for the management of the Almshouses falls on a number of Trustees. The number of trustees was originally limited to eleven. There were three ex-officio Trustees, namely the Mayor for the time being of the London Borough of Lewisham, the immediate past Mayor and the Chairman of the Lingfield Parish Council. The remaining eight trustees were known as co-optative trustees and served for a term of five years. Such a trustee could be re-appointed after his/her term of office had ended. Four of the Trustees had either to reside or carry on business in or near Deptford and the other four had either to reside or carry on business in or near Lingfield. Until 1963 co-optative Trustees had to be approved by the Charity Commission but that requirement no longer applies.

The first appointed trustees were Harry George Pitt (Deptford); John James Pitt (Lingfield); Benjamin Joseph Jacob (New Cross); Herbert Orpe Brookhouse (Brockley); Revd Robert Pratt (Deptford) and Revd Justin Evans (Brockley).

The Reverend Pratt, who was the vicar of Christchurch Deptford, conducted William Buckwell's funeral service in Nunhead Cemetery on 17th March 1904.

In October 2008 the Trustees amended the Scheme of appointment of trustees to reduce their number to six co-optative Trustees, three from the Lewisham area and three from Lingfield. The Trustees now meet three times a year.

The present Trustees are Alan Till, Chairman (Lewisham), Ms Jackie Addison (Lewisham), Joy Segun (Lewisham), Stuart Hellier (Lingfield), Leslie Quie (Lingfield), Cath Hearnden (Lingfield).

Clerks to the Trustees

The day-to-day administration of the Trust is undertaken by a part-time Clerk appointed by the Trustees. The present Clerk is Laura Jackson who has acted as Clerk since April 2016.

The first Clerk was John C Brookhouse, a solicitor in Cheapside in London, who acted as Clerk until 1947, when he was replaced by C L MacDougall (1947-1973),

followed by T A R Levett (1973-1978) who was then succeeded by John Head, LLB (1978-2009). Thus for the first 100 years of the life of the Almshouses, there were four Clerks, all of them solicitors. Keith Reynolds (2009-2016) then took over the position as Clerk in 2009.

The Gardens

A gardener is employed to look after the gardens at the front and at the rear. One of the early gardeners was a Mr George Jenner of Newchapel, Lingfield, who was paid £8 a year. Other gardeners have included D Cowley (1932-33); W L Dearling (1933-1937); S Agate (1937-1941); A Boorer (1941-1942); E P Hodge (1942-1945); S W L Yates (1945); R C Papworth (1946-47); K M Burch (1947-1950); Wm Piper (1950-1951); F S Whybom (1951-1955); G P Head (1955-1957); E Dumford (1957-1958); R N Carter (1959-1961); V E Emery (1961-1963); J Fuller (1964); J Birt (1965-1977); A Ward (1978 -1987); George Ross (one of the residents) (1987-1993) and Vernon Deller (1993-present time).

Special events

The custom of the past few years has been to organise lunch for residents at the Almshouses each June.

1907 was the centenary of the erection of the Almshouses and the trustees marked the occasion on 4th May 2007 by holding a tea party at the Almshouses graced by the attendance of the Duke of Kent. The Duke planted a tree in memory of the centenary. The Vicar of Lingfield prayed a prayer of blessing for the tree and gave thanks for the life of William Buckwell. A steel band from Monson School, Lewisham, provided a musical background during the tea party.

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February 2009 (updated 2019)