

BIBURY CHARITIES

by John T. Holland

In common with most other villages in this area, Bibury has a number of charities, some of them so small that, in terms of present day values, they hardly seem worth bothering about.

However, if they are traced back to the original benefactor, it will be seen that they were often considerable acts of generosity. For example, Hugh Westwood (d.1559) left capital and income from his estate sufficient to provide an almshouse to house, and income to support, 'four of the most impotent and poor men of Bibury'. In terms of present day costs this would amount to a capital endowment of over £100,000 and, had the almshouse not been sold in 1902, its value would still have been of this order.

In 1899, under an order of the Charity Commissioners, the management of the Charities was vested in a body of Trustees under the title of "The United Charities". Under this body the various Charities have since been administered, keeping their separate identities, and being as far as possible directed in accordance with the wishes of the original donors. As permitted under the Charities Act 1985, however, it has been decided that all the very small charities, ie all except the Church House Charity, and the Alfred Kennedy Trust, should be combined under a single title. Charities, such as the John Smithyer Trust, without their own endowments, are also excluded.

The purpose of this essay is to provide a short description of the village charities and, incidentally, to keep alive some memory of the donors. Also included is some background to the great changes at the end of the middle ages which rendered necessary the earlier benefactions.

BACKGROUND

In the middle ages and up to the dissolution of the monasteries in around 1536-38, the church had been by far the largest landlord in Gloucestershire, owning a third of the cultivable land. The revenue from these estates was used to maintain the ecclesiastical system but also to provide education and a degree of social security to the poor.

The manors of Arlington and Bibury were held for most of the period 1130 to 1538 by the abbey of Osney in Oxford and during this time a flock of approximately 400 sheep was kept in the parish, with other farming activities on a comparable scale.

Arlington Row was one long building, used by the abbey to store fleeces and other agricultural produce.

With the dissolution of the monasteries most of the church's educational and charitable work came to an end. Church lands were sold to the King's supporters or to the highest bidders, such as the Duttons, Masters and Hicks who tended to take a more commercial line in running their estates than the monasteries had. This resulted, not only in a degree of unemployment amongst former monks and

monastery staff, but also to labourers being laid off when they were unfit for work or in times of depression.

The more commercial attitude of the new landlords and the beginning of land enclosures led to a great increase in the general prosperity of the countryside, and the change over from wooden houses to the now traditional stone buildings dates from this period. But this prosperity arose in part out of increased efficiency, with agriculture becoming less labour intensive.

This was bound to result in an increase in destitution, which was acknowledged by the appointment of 'Beadles of Beggars' to keep vagrant strangers away, and by the introduction of a poor rate to subsidise the unfortunates belonging to particular parishes.

It was during this period that many of the grammar schools were founded in towns such as Northleach. The first village school in Bibury seems to have started in 1568. The vacuum left by the dissolution of the monasteries also provided the background which led to some of the better-off members of the community establishing charities for the poor in Bibury and other villages.

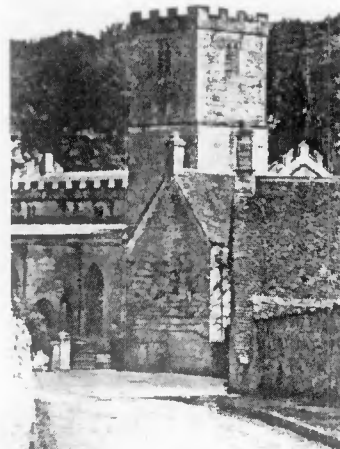
WELFARE BENEFACTIONS

Almshouse Charity of Hugh Westwood

Hugh Westwood (d. 1559) left a charge on the rents of his lands in Ampney St Peter, Ampney Crucis and Ashbrook, amounting to £18 per annum, to provide weekly payments to 'four of the most impotent and poor men of Bibury'. He also made provision for the building of an Almshouse to accommodate the four men.

Hugh Westwood came from Chedworth, and in 1554 he bought the manor of Bibury (Northumberland), adding the manors of Bibury (Osney) and Arlington soon after. Apart from his charitable bequests, he left his estates to his nephew Robert Westwood, who tried without success to misappropriate the charity endowment, and ended up in the Fleet Prison!

In 1600 the estate passed to Robert's son William who in 1625 sold it to Sir Thomas Sackville, the builder of Bibury Court. In



Bibury Church courtesy of the Gloucestershire County Library.

1641 Richard Westwood (William's son?) unsuccessfully claimed the patronage of the Bibury living, after which the family seems to have had no further contact with the village.

The Almshouse was built about 1605, and from then until the year 1900 the charity was operated much as desired by the donor, apart from its extension to women towards the end of the 19th century. However, by 1900 the building was empty and in a poor state of repair, and it was therefore proposed by the Trustees that the Almshouse should be repaired and modified so that it could be let to provide an increased income to the charity.

The Trustees were anxious to ensure that the appearance of what was one of the oldest houses in the village should not be drastically altered but, as these alterations and repairs would have cost £100, the Charity Commissioner felt that the property should be sold. It was therefore disposed of for £115 to the Sherborne estate, the sale proceeds and cash balance of £70 being invested in India 3% stock.

The Almshouse was, in fact, substantially altered and all that remains of the charity is an income of about £44 per annum, which has been applied to the provision of small annuities to two pensioners.

The Sackville and Cresswell Charity

Katherine Sackville (d.1760) left £100 for the poor, to be managed by her niece Anne Cresswell, who at her death in 1791 added a similar sum to the endowment.

The interest on £200 was distributed intermittently through the years up to 1899, when the charity consisted of £229 17s. 8d., invested in Consols to give an annual income of £6 6s. 4d. The current income is approximately £15 per annum.

Katherine Sackville was a great granddaughter of Sir Thomas Sackville, the builder of Bibury Court. The Bibury estate passed to Elizabeth, her elder sister, whose daughter Anne married Thomas Estcourt Cresswell, and was the second donor to the trust.

Anne and Thomas Cresswell had a son, Estcourt Cresswell, MP for Cirencester 1766-74, who sold part of the estate to Lord Sherborne, in 1816. Estcourt Cresswell died in 1823 heavily in debt, and his will was the subject of a long Chancery law suit which is said to have given Charles Dickens the idea for his *Bleak House*. In 1829 Lord Sherborne purchased most of the rest of the estate from Estcourt Cresswell's son Richard Estcourt Cresswell.

The last connection of the Sackville/Cresswell family with Bibury seems to have been the Revd. Sackville Cresswell, who was vicar from 1808 to 1843.

PARISH OF BIBURY.

FROM THE
REPORT OF THE COMMISSIONERS
FOR INQUIRING

CONCERNING CHARITIES.

This Report of the late 19th century gives details of the Almshouses, Poor Widow's Money, Tawney's Charity and those relating to Catherine Sackville and Anne Cresswell.

The Charity of Thomas Tawney

Thomas Tawney died in 1676 leaving £50 for the use of the poor of Bibury. In 1725 this sum was misapplied to the repairing of the church, but subsequently it was agreed that the church should accept an annual charge of £2 10s. 0d. for the purchase of linen for poor old women at Easter. This payment of £2.50 is, according to the Charity Commissioner's schedule, due to be paid by the Church, but is no longer received by the Trustees.

Not much seems to be known of the Tawney family. In 1533 William Tawney was vicar of Bibury and there are gravestones in the churchyard commemorating John Tawney (d.1736), Thomas Tawney (d.1740) and Samuel Tawney (d.1756).

In *Men and Armour* for Gloucestershire, 1608, John Tawney and William his son are shown as living in Bibury. John is shown as of middle age, with military training, and tall enough to be a

pikeman. The indication of military training may mean no more than that he was one of the men of the village selected for three years service in the county militia.

Hinton House, Ablington, dated 1753, seems to have been built by the Samuel Tawney who was buried in 1756, so by that date the family must have been fairly well off, but there is no clue in *Men and Armour* or elsewhere, as to their background.

It seems possible that our Thomas Tawney was either a son of the William Tawney, who appears in *Men and Armour* or his younger brother.

The John Smithyer Trust

By his will in 1621 John Smithyer left £10 for four poor widows of Bibury. This was borrowed for the use of the church in 1691, and the churchwardens have since then been responsible for the payment of ten shillings (50p) per annum for the widows.

Not a great deal is known about the Smithyers. Some members of the family appear in the Bibury parish burial records, but these are very difficult to read, and no trace of John Smithyer could be found. Possibly a study of the birth and marriage records would turn something up, but as he does not appear in the Record Office index it seems a slim chance.

In *Men and Armour* Richard and Matthew Smithyer, sons of Elizabeth Smithyer, are recorded as living in Arlington. They were then aged between 40 and 50. There is also a reference in the *Victoria County History* to a John Smithyer the younger of Arlington as having been alive in 1607 and 1625. Unfortunately, these references appear in deeds which are now in the Shropshire County Record Office, where most other Arlington deeds of the period are to be found. Probably John Smithyer the elder is our man.

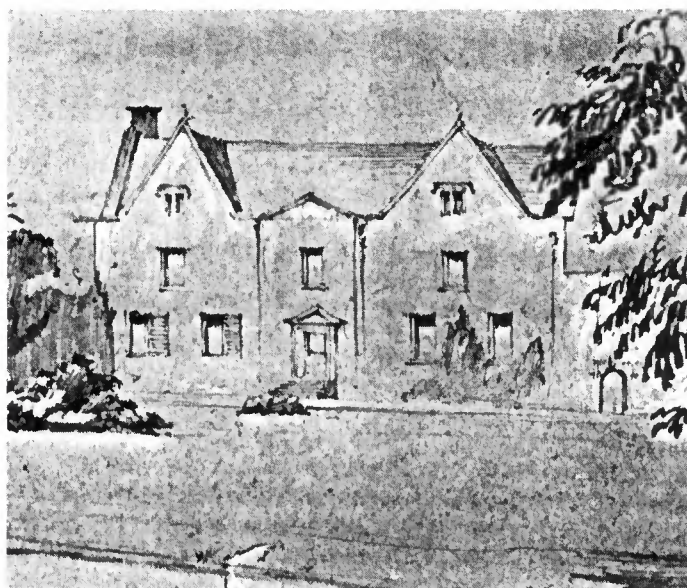
The Eric William Bowman Vaughan Charity

By a trust deed dated October 12 1926, William Vaughan left a sum invested in 2½% Consols to provide an income of £5 per annum. The object of this Charity was to provide firewood at Christmas for 32 elderly people.

Eric Vaughan is still remembered by some of us as living in the Swan Hotel in the 1920s.

The Coxwell Charity

Charles Rogers Coxwell (d.1893) by will established a Christmas charity for the benefit of the poor of Ablington. The income of the charity is now about £7 pa. which is administered by the United Charities Trustees.



Ablington Rectory c.1830 when Revd. Charles Coxwell was the incumbent. Courtesy of the Gloucestershire County Library.

The Coxwell family acquired Ablington Manor in 1565, continuing to own it until 1915, when Richard Coxwell Rogers was killed in action, and the estate sold by his sister.

INDIVIDUAL CHARITIES

Village Hall Benefactions

The fabric of the Village Hall is maintained by income from the Alfred Kennedy Trust and the Church House Charity.

The Church House Charity is an amalgamation of the original Church House Charity and the Church Lands Charity. Both charities date back to the 17th century, or possibly earlier.

The Alfred Kennedy Trust

Judge Alfred Kennedy KC lived at Ablington House. He was one of the United Charities Trustees and, latterly, chairman of the Village Hall Management Committee. The Village Hall, and the activities carried out in it, were his particular interest.

By his will Judge Kennedy left Hinton Cottage in Ablington to the Bibury Charity. This rather imprecise description was, however, accepted as referring to the United Charities, the cottage was sold, and the proceeds, amounting to £3,450, handed over to the Charity Commission for investment.

This sum forms the endowment of the 'Alfred Kennedy Trust', for the benefit of Bibury Village Hall. The income from the charity now amounts to approximately £900 per annum.

The Church Lands Charity

It is not clear when this charity was set up, but there are 17th century leases in the Record Office, one of which states that the income is 'for only use benefit and behoof of the parish of Bibury'. This is referred to by the Charity Commissioner in his letter of November 13 1896, in which he suggests that the income from the 'Church Lands' ought to be applied to secular purposes, such as the increase in the income of the Hugh Westwood Trust, instead of being appropriated by the Church.

There are references to the sale of the agricultural land in the Trustee's minutes of March 23 1926 and April 12 1927 and the cottages were sold off between 1959 and 1964, with the proceeds invested by the Charity Commission on behalf of the Trustees.

One of the cottages in Arlington was sold for £250 in 1959, and the shop and cottage on the corner next to the Almshouse fetched £1,250 in 1964.

The Church House Charity

This also is a very old charity, with a large number of 17th century deeds and leases in the Records Office.

In a lease deed of 1719 the income of the charity is stated to be 'for the purpose of the Reparations and Amendments of the King's Highways in the Parish of Bibury, and in the sustenation and maintenance of the poor men and women inhabiting and

dwelling in the Parish of Bibury'.

Later the income from the charity was applied to church purposes, much to the annoyance of the writer of an undated and unsigned note which has been found amongst the Trust's papers. However, at the time this may not have been so unreasonable, since the local government of the village had during the 17th and 18th centuries gradually moved over from the manorial courts to the Vestry. Included amongst the duties of the Vestry were the maintenance of the highways and, as late as the middle of the 19th century, they were still appointing a 'Way Warden' to supervise this work. After this the Highways Authority took over.

The Church House itself was a three storied house, with lodgings for 10 poor people. In addition there seem to have been five cottages, the rent from which was used, when not appropriated by the church, to support the 10 poor people and maintain the house.

The minutes of Vestry meetings in the 19th century are much taken up by questions relating to the letting of cottages and rooms in Church House and it is clear that rents were being charged for the Church House rooms, and that if they were not paid, resolutions were passed to eject the occupant. One occupant was a woman whose husband was in prison, but she had to vacate the room as soon as he came out. Presumably many of those ejected ended up in the work house.

In 1878 the Church House and adjacent cottages were in a very poor state of repair and at a Vestry meeting on May 14 1878, it was proposed and agreed that they should be pulled down and replaced by a reading room plus accommodation for four tenants. Lord Sherborne had agreed to pay for the new construction, but maintenance was to be covered by income from the Church Lands (and presumably from the rents of the remaining cottages, although this is not mentioned).

The Reading Room has now become the Village Hall, and it reached its present configuration in 1966, when £890 was spent on extending the caretaker's cottage and other alterations. This was financed out of the £1,250 proceeds from the sale of the cottage and shop next to the Almshouse mentioned above.

The Charity Commissioner, however, insisted that the interest from the remaining balance should be reinvested until the £890 had been replaced. This has now been achieved in time for the Trustees to finance the substantial repairs to the roof and chimneys which have recently become necessary.

The current income of this charity is approximately £450 p.a.

Thus it may be seen how the long history of charities in the Bibury area have benefitted and continue to benefit both the individuals and the community over a considerable period of time.