

THE LYTHAM CHARITIES -

THE LYTHAM SCHOOLS FOUNDATION

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It only needed a spark to set alight the fire fuelled by the enthusiasm of the inhabitants of the Ancient Parish of Lytham to promote and provide for the children of the parish an opportunity to benefit and improve their lot by school learning and the provider of that spark was the Parish Clerk Revd. James Threlfall. In the early part of the eighteenth century very few people in the rural villages could read or write and most spent their life in that situation, for education was privately conducted and expensive. The only money the villagers had was for survival, food and shelter which could only be obtained by labour, barter or charity from very limited resources. It is recorded even 100 years later in the births, marriages and deaths archives that in the marriage register only 20% of women and 50% of men could sign their name. Due to the good example set by James Threlfall and other like minded villagers followed by wise and prudent management of what was to become a charity the endowment of which supported an educational trust. Today we see the results of that charity and the dreams of those early benefactors of so long ago fulfilled to provide schools for the children of the ancient Parish and their successors who today share the benefits of the Romance in the Town History.

A Romance in the History of Education

An event which can truly be described as a romance unique in the history of education opens with a disastrous flood which washed away part of the Ancient Parish of Lytham in 1719. The storm which broke down the sea defences did enormous damage in the Lytham area wrecking all manner of buildings, destroying cattle, crops and household goods. It was estimated that this damage amounted to £2,055 and upwards. This was a huge sum in those days for not a century earlier the whole of Lytham and St. Anne's as we know it today and the manor had been purchased by Sir Cuthbert Clifton for £4,300 in 1605. The Fylde Coast has been subjected to these disastrous inundations throughout its history. In his book "The Lytham Charities", subsequently called "The Lytham Schools Foundation", Geoffrey Wright begins so aptly by quoting the old hymn writer William Cowper, in 1770:

*"God moves in a mysterious way
His wonders to perform
He plants his footsteps on the sea
And rides upon the storm"*

These profound words truly set the scene for this wonderful story that gave Lytham and its inhabitants that special and rewarding period in the town's history.

Lytham in 1720 was sparsely populated with the village concentrated around and mainly on the East side of what is now Clifton Square and Market Square and apart from Kirkham, was the largest village on the North West Side of the Ribble. The cottages were primitive, built on cruck frames, thick walls of cobble and clay, thatched and a falling step to an earth floor; peat and wood were the only fuel. The inhabitants were dependent on agriculture of a primitive nature with some inshore fishing, shrimping, gathering cockles and mussels for these were plentiful in a clean tidal estuary. There were also a few tradesmen, tailors, blacksmiths and such like although the number of inhabitants at the time was given at about 850. In 1676 a true account of every inhabitant of the Parish of Lytham is given as 261. This was witnessed by James Threlfall, minister, and four churchwardens of which only one John Gaulter could sign his name - the other three made their marks.

There were tenants, farmers, husbandmen and yeomen who enjoyed a better position than the majority of the villagers some of whom were employed by the estate. The trade of boat building on a small scale provided for those in occupation as fishermen. There had been salt refining at what is now an area at the East end of Lytham, Saltcotes, referred to in the original foundation Charter as Snartsalte.

All along the coast there were sand hills thrown up by the force of wind and tide, beaches of shingle and clean golden sand. Inland was thickly wooded with oak, beech, birch, elm and willow. Crofts in and around the village and fields stretching further inland, the field lands to become, as we know today, the area The Fylde.

There was a windmill between what is now the cricket field and Lytham Hall, the land in that area and on most maps since that period has been referred to as Mill Hill Wood and Mill Field. The hall stood almost on the present site and was occupied at the time by Thomas Clifton, Squire and Lord of the Manor.

In 1190 from a grant made by Richard FitzRoger a gift of land in Lytham went to the monks of Durham for them to erect and establish a cell dedicated to Blessed Mary and St Cuthbert. This area of land was to become the ancient Parish of Lytham and is fully described in the foundation charter of the cell of Lytham. It is also interesting to note that the ancient Parish of Lytham including what today is Ansdell and St.Anne's-on-the-Sea amounted to a total of some 5,325 acres, and had boundaries which are much the same today as those handed to the Prior of Durham in 1190 by Richard FitzRoger and which were subsequently purchased by Cuthbert Clifton of Westby in 1605 along with the manor and manorial rights, he was knighted by James 1st in 1617. Before his death in 1634, Sir Cuthbert Clifton had improved the estate, pulled down the old manor house, rebuilt himself a new manor house in Jacobean style, improved the land by fencing and ditching, and made areas of good agricultural land available by rent to tenant farmers.

The storm, one of the recurring inundations of the sea that has plagued the Fylde Coast throughout its history; a westerly gale, high tide and torrential rain inland brings about a violent conflict of the elements with devastating results. The sandhills, as a natural barrier other than the banks and ramparts built by the villagers, provide the only protection.

It was such a disaster and is picturesquely recorded in a petition. Robert Bawbell, Richard Gerrard, Thomas Wilkinson, James Carter, Thomas Bell, Robert Bennet, Thomas Dewhurst, Robert Hardman, John Ball, John Heys and Richard Fisher, inhabitants, farmers and tenants within the township of Lytham, Warton and Westby-cum-Plumpton within the County Palatine “sufferers by the dreadful inundation of the sea,” in a Petition which they afterwards presented to the Justices of the Peace for the County Palatine of Lancaster at the General Quarter Sessions of the Peace, held at Preston in and for the said county on the 12th day of January, 1720, for the grant of a Brief or Royal Warrant authorising the collection of charitable donations in the following words “That upon Sunday and Monday the eighteenth and nineteenth days of December last past (1719) at the change of the moon and very height of the Spring Tide there happened to be a violent tempest of wind which occasioned such an extraordinary and uncommon flood that it broke down and washed away the Banks , Rampets and Sea Fences in the said towns and overflowed the greatest part of Land lying there utterly destroying their winter corn thereon growing and doing very great damage to all their houses, with the barns and outhousing thereto belonging and all their corn, hay and household goods and a great number of their cattle. And your petitioners being ready to make appear to your worships not only by their own oaths but also by oath of several credible persons who have viewed the premises that the damages done to your Petitioners by the said inundations amounts to £2,055.

“Your Petitioners humbly pray that your worships will be pleased to grant your petitioners a proper certificate under your hands with a due representation of their sad losses in order to obtain His Majesty's most gracious Letters Patents for the collecting and receiving the charitable contributions of all such disposed Christians as shall be duly touched with a sense of human misfortune and therefore be ready and willing in some measure to contribute to such an unexampled loss.” Richard Fisher was the only petitioner capable of signing his name. The rest made their marks.

In those days people were, by and large, rather more respectful to those perceived to be their betters and may be judged by the terminology used in the petition. Sadly the resulting collection raised only £103 which was a disappointment to the expectations of these desperate men. They met to decide how the money should be divided, and because agreement could not be reached these humble and good-hearted folk considered how best the money could be used to the advantage of the villagers.

It was agreed to pursue another avenue. These unselfish petitioners, poor and almost destitute as they were, decided to add the £103 to certain charitable gifts that had been made a few years earlier. In 1702, James Threlfall, who appears as minister of Lytham and in a visitation is described as vicar of Lytham 1674-1708 gave £5 for poor children’s schooling. His example was to be followed by William Elston who died in 1704 and his will left £3-3-0 to make a free school. He was employed part time on the estate and in 1694 in the Steward's Account book received 15 shillings for half a year's work. He was also a churchwarden in 1678. John Shephard of Mythop, who died in 1726, gave £10 in trust to his heirs and the minister of Lytham and his successors, the profit to be devoted for the use only of poor children’s schooling.

It may be interesting to note that the concern leading these original benefactors to promote

schooling may have been influenced by the number of people in the village who could neither read nor write as is indicated by the men who made their marks for identification.

There was at this time a private school but no endowed schools until Mr. Silcock was appointed as schoolmaster to the first Lytham School. In 1728 John Harrison gave the residue of his estate to Timothy Pollard and Richard Salthouse in trust for such charitable use as they should think proper for the Township of Lytham.

William Gaulter, whose gift is worth recording in 1745, gave several securities yielding £99 interest which was to be paid yearly to the school master. The same gentleman also bequeathed the residue of his estate in trust to William Gaulter and John Webster

“to place out at interest, and to pay the produce (except twenty shillings)” to the school master “for his better support and maintenance, upon condition that each schoolmaster should, in consideration thereof, teach and instruct, without any gratuity or reward, all such poor children within the Parish of Lytham as should be yearly appointed by the said trustees or their successors” and he directed that the said sum of twenty shillings should be yearly divided equally amongst the trustees and their successors, in order to defray the expenses of their meetings, and as a gratuity for their care and trouble; but in case the school master of Lytham should refuse or neglect to instruct such poor children, or in case the school should be vacant, so that no children could be taught there, then he directed that the money intended for the benefit of the schoolmaster should, during the time of such refusal, or vacancy, be distributed by his trustees as they in their discretion should think proper, amongst the poor inhabitants of such township, whose poor were free or thereby intended to be made free. The residue of William Gaulter's estate realized £335 and this sum was put out to interest till the year 1754, when it was called in by the trustees and invested in land.

Other gifts for charitable purposes were to follow to benefit the inhabitants of Lytham, relieving of the elderly poor of the parish of Lytham or for the benefit of school learning or other preferment of the poor children. So was born, out of the unselfishness of these humble folk, what came to be known as the Ancient Lytham Charities and the foundations of a trust as an educational charity.

So enters the second part of this amazing story. Further and larger, sums were given for the education of poor children. It was felt the monies should be invested “to secure them for fear of being lost.” It was at this point that a remarkable thing happened. It is said that the Clifton estate declined to sell the freehold to any of its land in Lytham. Accordingly the trustees looked further afield. And where did they look? A little further along the coast was the village of Layton-with-Warbreck, consisting of no more than 28 houses of which only four had a slate roof, and turf stacks for burning stood at every door. The trustees viewed this area of freehold land and purchased a total of 25 acres. These fortunate trustees had made a wise decision, for ten of these acres were eventually to become the centre of the most famous seaside resort in the country - Blackpool. In fact land which was also acquired adjoining the 25 acres was sold in 1938 for £89 per square yard, in those days an enormous sum for a square yard of land. Seventy-five years later leases on building land were being granted for 1,000 years and the trustees, unaware of the immense possibilities, in 1821 reduced the terms to 99 years and shortened leases for others. In 1938 the

income exceeded £9,000.

These investments in freehold land continued and inspired other people to give sums to support the charity with the same aims of educating the poor children of Lytham Parish and care of the elderly poor. The first meeting of the Trustees of "The Ancient Lytham Charities" was held in 1793 and from then on continued to meet under that title to administer and conduct the business of the charity, inviting the interest and valued experience of prominent businessmen and gentlemen holding trusted positions in the town. Charles Birley of Kirkham, James Fair of Lytham, John Talbot Clifton, William Carr Birdsworth, Rev. Barton Robinson, Charles Swainson, Thomas Salthouse, Thomas Cookson, and others residing or having estates in the Parish of Lytham attended a trustees meeting at the Commercial Inn, Lytham in 1846. Meetings were held annually at the Clifton Arms, Blackpool, the Ship and Clifton Arms Hotels, Lytham, and Lytham Urban District Council offices.

The first mention of a Lytham School is the report and description by the Revd. Timothy Pollard 1717 - 1741. "The school stands as well as possible in a dry and healthy situation about two stone casts from the sea shore and a stone's cast from the agent's house and about the same distance away from the Schoolmaster's." There is mention of a master at this school, James Silcock, who was appointed by the trustees of the ancient charities in 1729 to teach a free school. This school was thought to have been built by a Richard Salthouse. Having spent some considerable time in establishing the site of this school the conclusion to be reached is that it stood on Church Road at the end of Beach Street.

In 1793 this building became unsuitable for its continuing use as a school and Sir Thomas Clifton had a new school built in what is now Lytham Hall Park. The site of the building is shown on the Clifton Survey of 1812 and was eventually used as an estate building. This school was used until pulled down by Mr. Thomas Clifton for being too near the hall. A new school was built on a site in Church Road, Lytham and in the Tithe Index is described as school and schoolmaster's house.

This school was demolished and a new school built on the site in 1853 to accommodate 250 children with a master's house. The trustees of the charity made a grant of £500 towards the cost, the total cost was £1,027-18-7. John Talbot Clifton's family freely conveyed the land to the trustees. Sadly this school also was demolished. In fact it seemed to vanish overnight. The St. Cuthbert's Court flat complex now occupies the site of that school. The master's house was next to the school site and is now No. 24 Church Road.

Heyhouses School in St. Anne's-on-the-Sea started in 1775 and in 1783 it became an annual charge on the charities; the building is described as a poor place at which teaching went on. It was a long white-washed extension to a cottage. The teaching at that time would include religious instruction but the potential of the school attenders was already determined as labourers, servants etc and therefore sewing, knitting, gardening and even ploughing were taught. Heyhouses original poor school was rebuilt in 1833 and enlarged in 1869. But this school was pulled down and a new school erected. Mr. Clifton gave £500, Lady Eleanor Cecily Clifton gave £125, the charity foundation gave £400 and the balance was provided by voluntary contributions. Mr. Clifton, Lord of the Manor, freely conveyed the land to the trustees.

In 1906 the schools could not provide the accommodation then required and in 1907 a new infants' school was built and an extension to the mixed department followed.

The old St. John's School in Lytham (now also demolished, this time to provide residential accommodation for the elderly called "St. John's Court") was built in 1851. In 1880 proposals were made that this school should be taken over and become one of the Lytham Charity Schools. However, it was not until a new scheme was issued by the Charity Commissioners in 1899 that St. John's School was recognized as a school of the Foundation, and benefited as an endowed school. Perhaps not surprisingly, religion began to play a part in the use of these schools for children of all denominations and at a meeting held by the trustees 1846 "for the purpose of taking into consideration certain observations made use of in the schoolroom on 22nd. August, led by the Revd. Joseph Walmsley in the presence of the master and scholars, Revd. Joseph Walmsley was requested by letter not to interfere with the school in future due to the remarks he had made in criticism of the system of education pursued at the school and the gentlemen having the superintendence of these. Father Joseph Walmsley was to reply at some length - "I have been the Catholic Pastor of this mission (St. Peter's Roman Catholic Church had been built in 1839 but as yet provided no school - eventually built in 1850) for upwards of seventeen years" and that he had made his visit to the school because the "poor Catholic children were made to join Protestant prayers twice a day, to hearken to the explanation of the scriptures several times a week from Protestant clergymen, and that he would complain from his pulpit". All however seemed to be resolved in an amicable and an agreeable conclusion to the satisfaction of Father Walmsley. One might understand Father Walmsley's concern; for being the new evangelist of the faith, encouraged by the Catholic Emancipation Act which had also accorded his status of civic equality, enabled him without fear of criticism to call for the spiritual well being of his flock. This incident may well have been brought to mind when Canon James Taylor who, as parish priest of St Peter's in 1889, had challenged the denominational character of the charity and that all schools were equally entitled to support because the trusts of the charity were undenominational. This emotional situation was resolved after correspondence between the commissioners and Canon James Taylor following which on 6th. August, 1894 Mr. Hanbury, MP, tabled a question in the House of Commons resulting in a statement that the Lytham Charity was non-denominational and that it was undenominational. Following this it was agreed that all the public elementary schools in Lytham at that time would receive annual grants and in that year a grant was made to St.Peter's, Lytham.

There were by now three schools of the Foundation. These were all by denomination Church of England schools, all receiving benefit from the Lytham Charities Trust, and accepted as schools of the Foundation. The views of the trustees, supported by the Charity Commissioners, were that the two original schools, Lytham Endowed and Heyhouses, could not have existed without the support of the Church of England. They had, therefore, to be accepted as schools of that denomination, and should have first priority. St. John's was regarded as an extension of the Lytham Schools and must also be included as a Foundation School. At the same time, going back to the origins, the aim was to promote the education of poor children. The second priority was to help with the care of other elementary schools in Lytham, so it was agreed that when funds allowed, other schools would continue to receive a share of the charity money. The next, and most ambitious priority, was to provide higher education by way of secondary schools for boys and girls.

In 1901, when the income of the Lytham Charities was about £1,200 per year, a Trustees' meeting was called. A resolution was passed that "it is desirable to erect within the Ancient Parish of Lytham a good secondary school for boys". It was also agreed that any preferential advantages would be limited to children living in the area of the Ancient Parish of Lytham.

Much speculation was voiced at the various meetings that took place when it was proposed that secondary education must be provided out of the Charity's funds, and a suitable site found. Many suggestions were put forward for consideration, even an opinion that a site in Blackpool should be included as the land and property in which the money was laid down and invested had increased in such value. This was dismissed and it was agreed that the Charity benefit was for the Ancient Parish of Lytham and that the site should therefore be in Lytham or St. Anne's-on-the-Sea. It was generally agreed that the site should be convenient to both towns and in a centrally placed location near to a railway station. Finally, after various sites had been surveyed, (Headroomgate Road, St. Anne's-on-the-Sea, Woodlands Road, Ansdell, and Saltcotes, Lytham) an area of land which was then part of the original Fairhaven Golf Club course and part sandhills, amounting to some thirty-two acres in all was chosen. The price paid for this area of land was some £22,000. It is also interesting to relate that, with the consent of the Lancashire County Council, an alteration in the boundary between Lytham and St. Anne's-on-the-Sea was agreed. At a meeting of both councils, Lytham Urban District Council and St. Anne's-on-the-Sea Urban District Council, a resolution sanctioning the alteration so that the School would be erected partly in Lytham and partly in St. Anne's-on-the-Sea was passed. The School, to be called King Edward VII, Lytham was built by Messrs. William Eaves of Blackpool costing in all £59,424, a sum that could be afforded because of the wise investments following the sale of land in Blackpool. With the successful provision of a boys' secondary school, the Governors now looked at the possibility of providing a suitable secondary school for girls on part of the site. A further parcel of land westward was acquired at a cost of £10,000 and a school built by Messrs. J. Sutcliffe and Sons Limited at a cost of £80,473 to be called Queen Mary, Lytham was opened on 23rd. September, 1930.

The original school of the Foundation, "Lytham Endowed School" or St. Cuthbert's School as it was often known locally, has now gone, the buildings and land on Church Road, Lytham having been sold by the Charity to make way for a block of residential flats. St. John's Church of England School has also gone, to be replaced by St. John's Court, the buildings and land having been sold to Fylde Borough Council. Both schools have amalgamated into the new school now located on Park View Road and called Lytham Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School. Heyhouses Endowed School is still on St. Anne's Road East, with a new infants department on Clarendon Road, also in St. Anne's-on-the-Sea. Although these remain original schools of the charity, they have not over the last few years benefited to any great extent from the Charity's funds (N.B. The Trust document was substantially altered in 1980/1).

Because schemes like the old Eleven Plus, and the Assisted Places Scheme have come and gone, schools like King Edward's and Queen Mary's throughout the land have seen good and bad times. King Edward's and Queen Mary's have been fortunate to have had such a substantial endowment behind them, for they have weathered the storms of change and become independent establishments, and now having become one co-educational establishment they are indeed, as the

current prospectus proclaims, a new school for a new century.

The management of such an unusual charity has not been easy; so many opinions are to be considered, the public meetings which at one time reached and were tabled in the House of Commons became regular headlines in the local press. When local feelings ran so high the claims by the schools not of the foundation, but seeking help for the education of their children, The Charity Commissioners acted as arbitrators in all these arguments and deliberations to try and satisfy all. Such also was the lot of the Board of Trustees who administered the Charity.

It also does well to remember the example and sacrifice made by these good people. James Threlfall, a man who saw the need to progress the right for poor children to attend an establishment of learning and all those who followed his good example, William Elston who left what must have been his life savings, the unselfishness of those destitute villagers who lost so much in the great flood, the wise and shrewd investment income raised by the honourable trustees who handled and managed the investments so well from so many years ago. All have weathered storms of a different nature, being swayed one way and another and were forced to agree with schemes set by the Charity Commissioners, battered by religious and public opinion in trying to please all.

As this very long established charity moves into a new century and a new millennium many will hope that the original and noble aims have not been lost or diluted and will once again carry forward the needs of the education for all, and especially those less fortunate children, of the Ancient Parish of Lytham.

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