

THE CRIPPLEGATE FOUNDATION 1891 - 1991 (100 NOT OUT!)

Historians will recall, from the paper delivered by Historian Rosemary Humphreys last year, that when the City Parochial Foundation was established by statute in 1883 it was provided that the largest five parishes should continue to manage their own endowments. This is the story of one of them, Cripplegate, whose Foundation Scheme was approved by Queen Victoria in Council on 23rd February 1891, and whose governors first met in the Quest House on Fore Street on 11th March that year.

The funds of the Foundation originated from gifts dating back to at least the year 1500, from former parishioners of St. Giles, nearly 100 of whose names are still on record. They are still commemorated by an annual lunch in memory of the Pious Donors on All Saints Day.

The objects of the Charity, then as now, were the relief of poverty, hardship and distress, and the improvement of the quality of life, in the area of benefit, which at that time was the parish of St. Giles. In Queen Elizabeth's time, Cripplegate was the fashionable quarter of the City. After the plague and fire it became the poorest. A report written at the end of the 19th century stated that "its great characteristic is the employment of women in making costumes, shirts, collars, artificial flowers and feathers, gold and silver embroideries and similar to order. It is estimated that about 5,000 women and girls are thus employed daily in the parish". They were a downtrodden lot.

The Foundation's income for the first year was budgeted at £3,109, roughly half of which was pre-empted under the Scheme for payments to St. Giles' and for eleemosynary pensions. Its bankers were the now long-vanished Cripplegate Bank. The Governors decided almost from the outset that they could best achieve the Charity's wider objects by devoting the balance and any other moneys they could raise, to building an institute containing reading and reference libraries, news and magazine rooms and classrooms for teaching photography, dress-cutting, first aid and other subjects, with a programme of lectures and entertainments.

A site for the building was acquired on Golden Lane and the foundation

stone was laid by the Duke of York on 3rd July 1894. The HAC supplied a guard of honour and band. The children of the Lady Eleanor Holles Girls School, to which the Foundation still today supplies the clerk and a number of governors at its present location in Hampton, sang "Let the hills resound" and "Hurrah for the sleigh bells", neither of which seems entirely suitable for the time and place. The Cripplegate Boys School sang "Stars of the summer Eve", which sounds more apt, and "Whistle and hoe".

The site and building cost about £40,000 and furniture and library stock another £10,000. The opening ceremony was performed by Lord Mayor Sir Walter Wilkin on 4th November 1896. All the planned activities quickly got under way, with the ground floor reading room opening at 8 a.m. so that people seeking employment could read the morning papers at the start of the day. There was accommodation for about 150 readers.

Less than two years later, in July 1898, a theatre was opened in the building, the only place in the City licensed to stage plays. At the second anniversary conversazione that November, the guests were shown students in the cookery and dress-cutting classes at work, the carpenters' and joiners' workshop and an exhibition of photographic classwork. The ensuing concert, a lengthy affair, included a whistler, farmyard imitations and a recital on the copophone among the items.

Within ten years of the opening, the governors' annual report was recording over 35,000 issues by the library from its stock of 48,000 books and over 1.25 million visitors to the reading room. The library operated as the Cripplegate and West City Free libraries, with the main library in the Cripplegate Institute and branches at 69 Queen Street and St. Bride's and St. Luke's Institutes.

The 14th anniversary, celebrated six months late in April 1911, was marked by the opening of a gymnasium, a rooftop rifle range and new classrooms. Activity at the Institute was slightly, but not seriously, affected by the 1914-18 war, but this apart continued with little change on its pre-arranged course until the second World War, which was destined to change the course of the Foundation's history.

As early as September 1939, nine of the twenty-eight pre-war staff had been called up and three more were scheduled to leave, which led to acute difficulties in maintaining services. The first bombs fell on the area on 9th September 1940 and the following nights. The Institute only suffered minor damage, but public access to it became impossible for several weeks

and eleven of the twenty-two blocks of Bleyton's Industrial Dwellings, one of the Foundation's main donor charities, were badly damaged.

29th December 1940 was the night of the great incendiary bomb raid on the City. The entire area of Cripplegate was almost obliterated. The Institute was one of only fifteen buildings in the parish of St. Giles to survive the fires, with almost insignificant damage. But, because of the dangerous condition of other buildings, permit-free public access to the Institute was barred for nearly three months, and when it was allowed its former users were scattered far and wide. Virtually the whole of Cripplegate lay in ruins until the 1960's. It became a totally different kind of neighbourhood when it was eventually rebuilt.

Some rooms were rented or requisitioned by the authorities for civil defence and kindred purposes during the remainder of the war. In the immediate post-war period the theatre and associated catering activity picked up again, but most of the pre-war classes had gone for ever and the library never again approached its previous level of use. When the librarian, H.W. Godfrey, was presented with a pair of clarinets in 1950 on completing 50 years' service, his beloved charge had seen its best days.

Faced with this problem of under-utilisation, the Clerk presented the governors with a plan for opening a City secretarial college in the building. This was implemented with an initial intake of twelve students in September 1949. A second class was needed for the forty applicants for the 1950 course. By 1963 the college had become so popular that a hundred and fifteen students enrolled for the various courses by then available. It was particularly favoured by Commonwealth students because of the great patience exercised by those with learning difficulties. The first of many Nigerian girls was awarded a special prize for perseverance for passing her 100 words per minute shorthand test after two years and at the eleventh attempt.

In 1960 the possibility arose of incorporating the Institute's site in the Barbican scheme and giving the Foundation "equivalent reinstatement" elsewhere. The governors deliberated among themselves and canvassed widely among others, concerning the needs that a 1960's institute should be designed to cater for, but without reaching firm conclusions. In the end, the Corporation decided in 1963 to exclude the Institute from its scheme. From this point onwards the numbers in the college began to fall away, and in 1966 the Corporation took over the running of the library in preparation for moving it to a more densely populated part of the City. Faced with an increasingly uncertain future, the governors accepted an offer from the Arts

Educational Schools, whose tenure of their building at Hyde Park Corner had become insecure, to lease the entire building for twenty-one years from September 1969. The Foundation simultaneously moved its office and the forty-nine students of that year's intake (fourteen of these from overseas) to premises in Wilson Street. The college eventually closed in July 1973, in anticipation of the retirement of the clerk, who was de facto the principal, in March 1974.

The Foundation had for many years been distributing surplus income to charity in accordance with its charter. But the amount available had been fairly insignificant. In the years prior to the leasing of the Institute building, annual income from rents and dividends was only around £25,000, about half of which was required to subsidise the Institute's running costs. Grants to third parties were inevitably few and fairly small.

Coincidentally with shedding day to day responsibility for administering the Institute, however, and closing the college, the Foundation in 1973 achieved a new role for itself by selling low-yielding property in South Kensington for £1,162,500, reinvesting the proceeds in securities to produce a much higher income and creating a cash flow upon which significant charitable donations could be based.

As the existing area of benefit was not, in the 1970's, a needy area, and as the Foundation had no expertise in disposing of such sums as were becoming available, a committee of governors was appointed to draft a grants policy document. In the autumn of 1974 it issued an interim report which it is interesting to note, in the light of subsequent developments, recommended that "a sum not exceeding £10,000" should be made available by way of grants in 1975, pending further developments. The recommendation was supported by a detailed breakdown of the money, which reads as follows:

Travelling scholarships for young people	- 8 x 400 -	£ 3,200
Art or music scholarships	- 10 x 250 -	2,500
Youth organisations for expedition, camping or water activities	- 10 x 150 -	1,500
Holidays for single or widowed elderly or disabled	- 20 x 15 -	300

Holiday grants for needy families	- 4 x 150	-	600
Youth organisations/Duke of Edinburgh's Scheme	- 8 x 50	-	400
Grants to organisations in area of benefit for development of social, educational, community or cultural activities	- 6 x 50	-	300

10,000

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This was only, literally a tithe of the money that proved to be available, but it was at least the start of a policy for lending that continues, in essence, today.

The most significant outcome of the policy review, however, was the decision to ask the Charity Commission to extend the area of benefit to cover the whole of the original parish of St. Giles, which included the modern parish of St. Luke's in the southern part of the London Borough of Islington. This was coupled with a suggested reduction in the number of ex officio governors, an invitation to Islington to nominate to four places on the governing body and a request to the City Corporation to reduce its own representation to this number. All parties agreed to these proposals, and the new scheme was sealed on 16 December 1977.

Interesting though it has been, at least for those involved, there is no time today for a step-by-step review of the evolution of the Foundation's grant-making over the subsequent fourteen years. But a significant landmark along the way was the departure of the Arts Educational Schools from the Cripplegate Institute to new premises in Chiswick in 1986. Approaches had been made to the Foundation by developers at intervals since the early 70's and they were renewed with an opening bid of £1.5 million when the building was put on the market on the AES's departure. After an exciting series of negotiations and some anxiety when the facade and front hall and staircase were listed, the sale was completed in April 1987 at a price which left a net £4.5 million in the hands of the Foundation. The building has changed hands several times since the sale. It is well worth a look, in its partially redeveloped and nearly completed state, by any historian who passes that way.

An analysis of the grants made in 1986, the year before the benefits of this sale come into account, showed that they amount to £567,000 - including

over 250 small ones totalling £50,000, under the chairman's discretion and 213 (£23,000) under a scheme for subsidising telephone bills. The remaining £495,000 comprised larger grants to 86 clients approved by the Grants Committee, endorsed where necessary by the governors. Analysis by category showed that £134,000 had been allocated to social services, £94,000 to schools and training, £66,000 to the "inadequate", £59,000 to the disabled and handicapped and the remainder to recreation and the arts, the young, the old and hospitals.

Inevitably, the greater part of the grants now goes to the Islington part of the area of benefit, where such bodies as Inner City Action on Drugs, the Clerkenwell Citizens Advice Bureau, Islington Voluntary Action Council, the Family Welfare Association and the Little Angel Marionette Theatre have become regular recipients of grants which are each now in five figures annually. Historians will, though, be pleased to note that City customers have not been overlooked. The City's Citizens Advice Bureau has received £45,000 over the last three years towards the cost of an outreach worker. The largest single grant this year, as in some other years, has been to the Guildhall School of Music and Drama, in the sum of £40,000: after the Corporation, the Foundation are the School's largest benefactors.

At the opposite end of the spectrum, direct support for the needy individual continues at an ever-increasing level through the Chairman's discretionary grants of up to £500. Full details are circulated at every governors' meeting, and they are often very moving:

"to settle electric and gas bills for elderly man who has cancer and has been begging on the streets to try and settle the above debts and rent arrears
- £220.25"

reads one.

"to provide bicycle and a bit extra for clothing or whatever is necessary for 13 year old boy in children's home. Andrew has had an awful life so far, with parental rejection and sexual abuse, but the Social Services are hoping to repair some of the damage done and this will be the first real treat he has ever received

- £350"

reads another.

Such grants are made at the rate of about one a day throughout the year and now total over £100,000 per annum.

So how do things stand as the Foundation celebrates its centenary? Since 1982 it has operated with a very small and highly experienced staff from one floor of one of its own remaining properties in Worship Street. Income on investments valued at over £16.5 million is now running at over £1M, rents from remaining properties at £95,000 and income from secretarial and other services at £17,000. Just sixteen years after that initial portfolio of £10,000 of grants in 1975, the grants committee has this year been allocated an expenditure of £950,000.

The Foundation is now listed as among the hundred largest grant-making trusts in the country. At their very latest meeting early last month, the governors approved proposals introducing stricter disciplines into lending to regular or recurrent clients, with a view to being able to set aside 10% of income, or £100,000 a year for "proactivity". New opportunities, therefore, lie ahead. If the Pious Donors are monitoring progress from the next world, it is not unreasonable to hope that they feel that the objects of the relief of poverty, hardship and distress, and the improvement of the quality of life are still being attained, though in a very different way from a hundred years ago, and will continue to be attained in the years that lie ahead.

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