

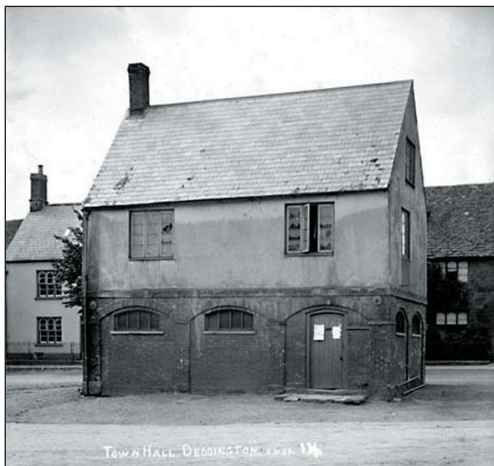
# The Deddington Feoffees

*Kristin Thompson*

According to the *Oxford English Reference Dictionary* (1933 edn) a feoffee is 'one of a board of trustees holding land for charitable or other public purposes'. There is a verb, 'feoff', in early Middle English, meaning to confer (a considerable heritage) on. The revised edition of 1996 lists only the word 'feofment'. However, if feoffees are extinct in the dictionary, they are still extant in Deddington.<sup>1</sup>

Deddington's feoffees came into being in 1612. They were local men of substance and are an example of the many charitable bodies developed over time to address the problems of poverty in England, problems that led to the Poor Laws, specifically the Law of 1752, and the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834. The twentieth century, of course, saw the development of the concept of the welfare state and the ideal of social security. But Deddington's feoffees continue to play a role in the village society to which they belong, owing no specified allegiance to either the state or church.

There are large gaps in the history of Deddington's feoffees. In 1611 the Commissioners of Charitable Uses had identified various tenements, pieces of land and minor charitable gifts in Deddington, Bloxham and Over Worton, probably owned by the Trinity Guild,<sup>2</sup> that had traditionally been used to pay the 'fifteenths' (a tax levied on property owners for the maintenance of the parish poor). Earlier (date uncertain), a two-storied Town House<sup>3</sup> had been built in Deddington, again initially owned by the town's Trinity Guild. The building's ground floor, as it were,



<sup>1</sup> See also 'Deddington Charity Estates' on Deddington OnLine.

<sup>2</sup> The Trinity Guild was a group of well set-up local residents who came together to do the work of the Trinity, so a group could be either religious or secular in origin, or a bit of both. The concept existed at least from the twelfth century. Their aim was charitable of course.

<sup>3</sup> Now the Town Hall.

was an open space where stall owners (usually butchers) could ply their trade, the rent for this privilege being used to augment the charity funds.

The Commissioners appear to have decided to streamline the administration of these various assets and appointed 12 freeholders or feoffees, to oversee them and present annual accounts to two Justices of the Peace. Notable among this original dozen was Richard Cartwright of Aynho.

After 1612 information about the feoffees becomes scant. The *Victoria County History – Wootton Hundred* records that by 1627 the feoffees had acquired ‘£17 stock by gifts of John Norwood and John and Richard Appletree (£5 each) and James Ary’. In 1642 Over Worton was enclosed and the feoffees were awarded ‘12 acres for their yardland there’ (yardland is an area of land, usually 30 acres, but with local variations). Precisely how the resultant funds were administered and who the recipients were is not recorded.

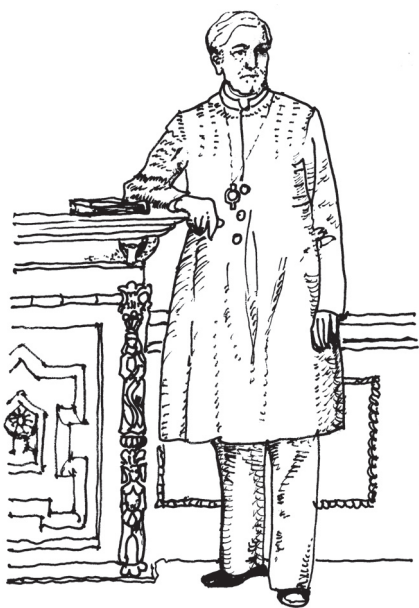
We know that the feoffees continued their work throughout the eighteenth century but no specific mention of them has been found until the beginning of the nineteenth century. Then we learn of further acquisitions of land when Bloxham in 1802 and Deddington in 1808 were also enclosed. By this time the feoffees owned property in Deddington and by 1818 they had ‘some small closes, 7 cottages, the Town Hall and 3 butchers’ stalls beneath it, the whole estate yielding a clear income of c. £140 a year’ according to the *VCH*. Little of this money appears to have gone directly to individuals. Most was handed over to the poor rates.

From this point there are more frequent (though not abundant) references to the feoffees’ work. In 1818 new feoffees were appointed. This new body appears to have been unhappy with the previous administration and began to use the funds under their control in a more accountable way. Land was bought in Church Street and the familiar Deddington Almshouses were built at a cost of £653 on the site of two existing cottages owned by the feoffees. The work was finished in 1822. The Commission on Charities Report of 1824 gives details of the benefits accruing to the eight inmates of the Almshouses: ‘for each of the [4] men a hat and great coat; for each of the [4] women a bonnet and cloak, of uniform colour’. Each Almshouses contained ‘two bedsteads, with flock beds, four chairs, one table, a grate and a set of fire irons’. Clothing and furnishings remained the property of the feoffees. The inmates had to be Deddington parishioners ‘of fair and honest name or fame’ and ‘regularly, decently and devoutly attend divine service at the church, and not elsewhere’.

On this same subject and jumping forward 32 years, the Court of Chantry document of 1856, relating to the management of the Deddington Charity Estates (to which the feoffees became affiliated), spells out the terms and conditions of Deddington Almshouses living: ‘The number of inmates of the Almshouses shall be eight of whom four shall be males and four females ... preference being always

given to those candidates who shall not within twelve months of their election have been an inmate of a workhouse or have been placed on the permanent List for outdoor relief'. Again: 'The Trustees [feoffees] shall out of ... the charity property pay to each of the men in the Almshouses the sum of Four shillings a week ... to women ... the sum of Three shillings a week'. A medical attendant was provided to supply treatment and medicine for a sum 'not exceeding Ten pounds per annum'. One is irresistibly reminded of Anthony Trollope and *The Warden*. The almspeople could be removed for 'immorality, drunkenness, quarrelsome behaviour, breach of rules'. The term 'inmate' to describe the almspeople seems well chosen. The feoffees faithfully reflected the mores of their time and there clings to their dictates the faint sense that poverty should be tolerated and alleviated but not condoned. (The Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834 enshrined the unsubtle moral dimension of poverty, by providing workhouses for the 'deserving poor' and houses of correction for the 'undeserving poor'.)

At the time of the Court of Chantry document and the 1856 Scheme, the feoffees are as follows: the Vicar and Churchwardens of the Parish of Deddington, *ex officio* Trustees, the Revd William Wilson (Clerk), Charles Faulkner, Charles Mitchell, Thomas Edoe Kinch, John Fortnam, John Scroggs, James Hopcraft,



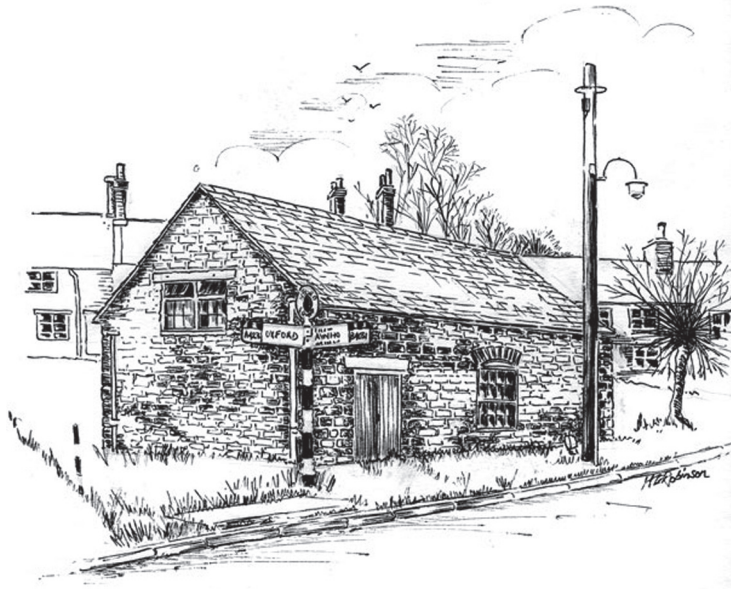
Henry Franklin, Gentleman. They join the existing feoffees: Samuel Field, John Churchill, Thomas Austin, Thomas William Turner and William Dean – 13 in all. Interestingly the descendants of several of the people on this list still live and work in Deddington or its environments.

A towering figure in nineteenth-century Deddington was the Reverend William Cotton Risley.<sup>4</sup>

His *Diaries* from 1836 to 1854 contain occasional references to the feoffees. On 14 November 1836, he dined with them and notes: 'the Feoffees agreed to allow a piece of [their]

land for an Engine House to be built, subject for a peppercorn rent'. The engine house is mentioned again in June 1837, where it was proposed that it should be sited 'under the Town Hall, adjoining the Cage'. Subsequently Deddington's fire engine was for a time accommodated under the Town Hall. In 1847 Risley suggests that the feoffees donate a narrow strip of land in the 'Sewer or Tewel' (presumably the current Tchure) as a site for a coal house to provide the parish with fuel. Again there are delays, but in 1849 Risley writes that 'Robert Franklin brought the plan and estimate for the new Parish coal house' and in February

<sup>1</sup> See the history index, 'Rev. William Cotton Risley'.



of that year, Sir Thomas Cartwright gives the parish 'a piece of ground to build a coal house<sup>5</sup> on Goose Green at the bottom' – his personal land, apparently, not that belonging to the feoffees.

Risley's diary entries give the impression that the feoffees are not always eager to accept his innovative additions to their charitable deeds. However, it must be

noted that, in addition to the Almshouses, they did administer Deddington's Pest House<sup>6</sup> for smallpox sufferers, situated in the valley to the left of the Milton Road and well clear of the centre of the village. The Pest House was still in use at the beginning of the twentieth century and was then used for scarlet fever sufferers.

By the middle of the nineteenth century, a scandal was developing over how the current feoffees administered their funds. The *VCH* notes that 'the maintenance of the Town Hall and Almshouses, with occasional contributions to the poor, left some surplus income which in 1850–51 the feoffees were accused of misappropriating, since no accounts had been published for many years'. Risley is reticent over the developing crisis but, on 10 January 1854, he writes that 'a Mr. Claybon, a London solicitor, had come down for the purpose of investigating the Management past and present of the Feoffee estates in this parish'. Risley proclaims in July 1854 that he never had 'or wished to have, anything to do with Feoffee matters'. Certainly he had attempted good offices from time to time, including the 'appointment of the Vicar of the Parish *in future* as a Feoffee *ex officio*'. But on 19 August, with investigations into past misappropriations well under way, Risley refuses to become a 'trustee for the future management of the Charity'.

One outcome of the 1854 investigation was that the Charity Commission referred the dispute to the Attorney General and a public meeting was held at the Unicorn Inn in February 1854. The *North Oxfordshire Monthly Times (NOMT)* of that year reports an acrimonious meeting, at which it was stated that the Charity yielded £100 a year. The Almshouses took up £72 16s of this and there was an occasional donation of £10 to a coal fund (presumably Risley's pet project). What had been done, and what was to be done with the surplus £17 4s? (This seems a miniscule sum today but when Charlotte Brontë wrote *Jane Eyre* in 1847 she gave Jane's salary as a governess as £15 per year.) Mr. Claybon, the solicitor mentioned by

<sup>5</sup> See the history index, 'Mortuary' (Coal House).

<sup>6</sup> And also 'Pest House'.

Risley, summed up the meeting saying that there should be 12 named feoffees, responsible for the 'repair and maintenance of the Almshouses, an annual publication of accounts and the surplus money should be divided between education and payments for the benefit of the poor'. He hoped this would give satisfaction to all parties. The *NOMT* notes that a voice intervened: 'It will give very great satisfaction if all the feoffees be turned out, and fresh ones put in'. This was received with 'great applause'. So new feoffees were chosen, among whom were: 'Messrs. John Hopcraft, C. Faulkner, C.D. Faulkner, Kinch, F. Gulliver, Samman, Margetts and R. Whetton'.

The result was that 'Pursuant to the order of the Court of Chancery' in 1856 a Scheme was drawn up 'for the management of the Deddington Charity Estates' (as described earlier) for which the feoffees became trustees. The scheme was amended in May 1873.

The *VCH* reports that by 1871 the income 'was being spent as directed, the Almshouses costing c. £77 and c. £44 being spent on coals and education'. The schools' quota had to be spent on the national schools, 'provided that the children of Dissenters were not excluded' – a liberal development compared with the insistence of attendance at 'one church' and 'not elsewhere' in 1822.

In 1895 the charity was reviewed again and officially named the Deddington Charity Estates (DCEs). Feoffees were still appointed from within the local community to administer the charity funds and its aims remained the same.

On to the twentieth century: the *VCH* reports that the feoffees sold two small strips of land in 1932 but the Charity still owned over 40 acres in 1970. And in the twenty-first century, responsibility for the maintenance of the Town Hall, rented by several village groups – including the Parish Council – for meetings, is of concern. Negotiations are under way with the current feoffees. They are now greatly reduced in number but they still exist and are a viable body.

I have not been able to find records of the Deddington Charity Estates meetings for the latter half of the nineteenth century, but the current feoffees hold a venerable minutes book, which records the meetings held between 12 January 1906 and March 1983. These are largely concerned with finance, repairs, maintenance and new tenants for the Almshouses, a frequent occurrence given the age of the tenants. It is interesting that in 1920, for example, the Charity's surplus income is still being divided between the 'National Schools [with] one half to Parishioners in coal'. Also in 1920, it was agreed that Mr Callow 'be allowed the necessary nails' to mend the Pest House fence and 'one half the cost of cutting and laying the fence'. In 1939 Mr Sidney Canning was asked if he would like to take over the tenancy of the Pest House fields for the term of the lease. Subsequently there was trouble over the non-payment of rent. The final reference to the Pest House comes in 1984 when Mr W. Fuller reports that 'the hovel in one

of the fields is very dilapidated' and suggests that it be demolished, the stone sold and the site cleared. This was agreed by the feoffees. (There is talk in Deddington of a large hollow stone, initially belonging to the Pest House, that was filled with water and into which, if necessary, people could throw their coins – an early attempt at decontamination before the coins went into general circulation?)

The nature of the DCE finances becomes more diverse and, in August 1940, there is reference to investments in War Stock. Coal tickets were still being issued in 1945 when it was suggested that they should be renamed 'fuel tickets'.

These twentieth-century minutes are outside the scope of this essay but should be the subject of future study. They provide a limited but fascinating mirror of the social and cultural changes that have taken place, with increasing speed, since the end of the Second World War.

*January 2007\**

*Notes:*

\* This essay was written as a course requirement of the Oxford University Department of Continuing Education. This account should be seen as 'work in progress'. There is almost certainly further research to be done into the history of Deddington's feoffees. *K.T*

*Acknowledgements:*

Leah Calcutt and the current feoffees for details of the 1856 and 1873 Scheme and order for Deddington Charity Estates; also for the loan of the minute book for 1906–83.

Linda Davis for passing over Charles Newey's papers, including his preliminary notes for a history of the feoffees and extracts from the *North Oxford Monthly Times*. (Charles was a feoffee at the time of his death in 2006.)

Buffy Heywood for the specific extracts from the *Diaries* of the Reverend Cotton Risley.

Mary and Colin Robinson for information and photograph of the Pest House.

*Bibliography:*

*Victoria History of the County of Oxford*, Vol. XI, ed. A. Crossley (London: Institute of Historical Research, 1983).

*Picture credits:*

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Coal House: H.E. Robinson, 1981.

Cotton Risley: Line drawing from a photograph in the Oxfordshire Photographic Archive, reproduced courtesy of Deddington Map Group.

*Layout:* Mary Robinson