

Deddington Charity Estates

The principal charity in the parish in the 1850s, as now, was the Deddington Charity Estates. The property vested in the trustees included:

Town Hall in Market Place

Almshouses in Church Street

14½ acres north of Deddington by the ruined Pest House

11¾ acres allotments for the poor adjoining

16½ acres at Bloxham

In 1850 the Feoffees (or trustees) were:

John Churchill

Henry Churchill

Thomas Austin

William Bygrave

William Dean

William Merry

Benj. Pritchett

Thos. Wm. Turner

The treasurer and solicitor to the Charity Estates was Samuel Field (46), the principal lawyer in the town.

Following an inquiry by the Charity Commissioners into a number of charities in the neighbourhood of Banbury in 1824, it was directed that its accounts be audited by 3 local J.P.s and the Overseers of the Poor in Easter week each year,¹ although this requirement had been repeatedly stipulated in various deeds since 1627. At the Charity Commissioners hearing in 1824, the Feoffees' representative stated that it had not been determined how the surplus income of the charity should be applied.

It appears that for many years the accounts of the Feoffees had been neither audited nor published, giving rise to increasing dissatisfaction over the lack of accountability and alleged accumulation of hidden funds.

In December 1850 the *North Oxfordshire Monthly Times* published a letter from 'Q', exposing the above state of affairs, and puzzling to know what was the annual income of the Feoffees, who were the recipients amongst the poor and what was the amount of any accumulated surplus.² The letter included a list of the Feoffees' properties and tenants, together with a conjectural statement of annual income and expenditure. 'Q' postulated that there must be a "nest of golden eggs" somewhere.

This was swiftly followed-up by a letter to the *Banbury Guardian* from 'A Friend of the Poor'. Amongst other things, this suggested that Henry Dean, who rented 16 acres

¹ Twelfth Report of the Commissioners for Inquiring concerning Charities in England and Wales, ordered, by the House of Commons, to be printed, 26 May 1825, Hundred of Wootton, Parish of Deddington, pp. 334-339. <https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=w7EUAAAAQAAJ&pg=RA1-PA334#v=onepage&q&f=false>

² A reprint of the letter may be found in the Coggins Scrapbooks, Volume 3, folio 74b. There is a transcript in https://www.deddingtonhistory.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0020/17471/2021cogginsScrapVol3.pdf

from the Feoffees, was really fronting for his father, William Dean, who was one of trustees. It also appeared that the tenants of the almshouses were expected to collect and to spend their weekly allowance (men 4/-, women 3/-) at the shop of another son of William Dean.

Several weeks later, in January 1851, the *Banbury Guardian* published a letter from 'Chapter' critical of the letter from 'Q', and defending the maligned William and Henry Dean. "Possibly the hypercritical author of this missile has suffered his zeal to outstep his discretion, if not his good manners."

In January 1851 the *North Oxfordshire Monthly Times* published a letter from 'Another "Chapter," but one of *Truth*', which was strongly critical of the hypocrisy of the above letter from 'Chapter' supporting the actions of the Feoffees despite admitting their lax integrity.³

Around the same time, Charles Faulkner, the Vicar's Churchwarden, had been enquiring into the affairs of the Charity Estates. His critical findings were published in a lengthy letter to the *Banbury Guardian*, also in January 1851. After noting that the annual accounts were supposed to be audited by three local J.P.s and the parish overseers in Easter week each year, he estimated that the charity had an annual rental income of £161 2s. 1d. against expenditure of £75 15s. 0d., leaving a surplus of £82 7s. 1d.

Faulkner accordingly questioned what might be the size of the accumulated surplus, which ought to have been distributed to the poor. How had this money been accounted for ?

He also observed that the Feoffees, several of whom had moved from Deddington, partook of annual dinners in November at the expense of the charity, which they had no right to. It further seemed that Henry Dean was renting land from the Feoffees at a lower rate than the rent charged to poorer tenants on the charity's allotments. The charity was managed by "two or three", while the majority of the trustees seemed unaware of proceedings.

Increasing concerns about the need to reform the management of charitable trusts generally had led to the establishment in 1849 of a special body of Commissioners to investigate defects and abuses.

The second report of the Commissioners in May 1851 examined the affairs of 13 charitable trusts, including the Deddington Charity Estates.⁴

That part of the report relating to the Deddington charity, including a lengthy recital of its history and governing documents, was reproduced *in extenso* in the *Banbury Guardian* in July 1852.

³ A press cutting may be found in the Coggins Scrapbooks, Volume 3, folios 72b-73a. There is a transcript in https://www.deddingtonhistory.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0020/17471/2021cogginsScrapVol3.pdf

⁴ Second Report of the Commissioners for Inquiring into those Cases which were Instigated by, and Reported upon by, the Charity Commissioners, but not Certified by the Attorney-General, 29 May 1851.

Although the Feoffees had incurred indebtedness of £163 4s. 2d. following the establishment of the almshouses in Church Street in 1822 at a cost of £653,⁵ allegedly precluding the expense of providing the inmates with clothing, the report observed that the debt ought long since to have been paid off out of the charity's surplus annual income, which must have been substantial.

The Charity Commissioners had received a number of complaints about the improper distribution of the funds of the charity and mismanagement, but the Feoffees had declined to furnish any information. No accounts were made public or submitted to the magistrates and overseers as required by the decree of 1627, and no clothing was provided for the almspeople. "There is a general feeling of dissatisfaction at the secrecy and mode of management adopted by the Feoffees."

Consequently, the Charity Commissioners had referred the case to the Attorney-General to institute appropriate proceedings to place the charity on a proper footing.

Whilst the affairs of the charity were being investigated by the Attorney-General, the *Banbury Guardian* published a letter from 'A Road-side Thistle', Great Barford, in January 1853 enquiring why there were no reports of charitable distributions by the Deddington Charity Feoffees compared with other charities in the neighbourhood, and posing further questions.

The Attorney-General's investigations resulted in a meeting at the Unicorn Inn in January 1854 under the aegis of the Charity Commission to consult the inhabitants on the future management of the Charity Estates. The *Banbury Guardian* carried a lengthy report occupying 2 columns, including a full transcript of the proceedings.

Suggestions were invited for applying the surplus income of the charity. The principal contributors were Charles Faulkner (56), Mr. C.D. Faulkner (27), Samuel Field, and the Rev. James Brogden. There was evident tension in the exchanges between Mr. C.D. Faulkner, solicitor, and Mr. Field, treasurer and solicitor to the Feoffees. Apart from the principal inhabitants, the attendees included "many of the working classes".

In conclusion, the Charity Commission representative outlined the likely future scheme, including the management and repairs of the almshouses (first charge), published annual accounts, the retention of the almshouses, and the division of any surplus between education and payments for the benefit of the poor.

The consequent Scheme for the Management of the Deddington Charity Estates was issued by the Charity Commissioners on 26 January 1856.⁶ The scheme directed that half of the surplus income should support a coal charity and that the other half be applied to the National Schools, provided that the children of Dissenters were not excluded.

⁵ According to a report in the *Banbury Guardian* on 20 February 1851, the almshouses were originally nicknamed "Brougham's Cottages" after Lord Brougham's bill for reforming the management of charities.

⁶ A copy of the Scheme may be found in the Percy Manning Miscellaneous Papers, Bodleian Library, G.A. Oxon c.317, Volume 8, folio 1/5. There is a summary in <https://www.deddingtonhistory.uk/manning,percy1870-1917-collection>