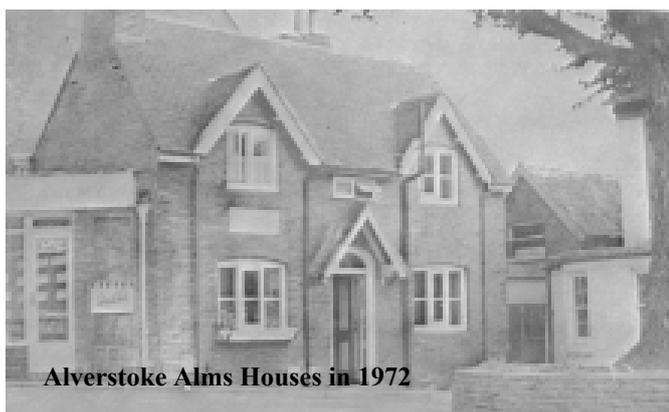


Alverstone Charities

by Godfrey Williams

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In the parish of Alverstone, as in many other ancient parishes, public-spirited persons occasionally left endowments to the parochial authorities for relieving poverty in various ways. Up to recent times these authorities tried to carry out the instructions of the testators, but changing social conditions made this increasingly difficult, and in 1969 the Charity Commission reorganised the endowments as the Alverstone Trust and the Jane Holmes Charity. The Trustees of these comprise the Rector ex-officio, two nominees of the Councillors for the Alverstone Ward and two "co-optative" trustees. This article deals, broadly, with the charities involved in this reorganisation; thus it does not cover charities primarily related to parts of the borough outside the present Alverstone, nor does it cover ecclesiastical endowments.



Apart from the gift of the property which became the almshouses, the six earliest endowments took the form of rent charges on land; i.e. the testator left land to his legatees, subject to the payment to the parish of an annual sum by them and by subsequent owners of the land. Of the six endowments concerned, those by Abraham Hewlett (will dated 1671), Jane Holmes (1711) and William Allen (1719) still take the form of rent charges; that of Charles Child (1750) was found to be invalid in law and therefore lapsed; and those of Capt. John Man (1660) and William Poore (1773) have been converted into lump sums and invested. The four later endowments, by James Staycock (about 1828), Thomas Paul (1878), F. J. Lowes (1884) and Thomas King (1907), took the form of investments from the start. By 1907 there was a District Council, and in consequence Thomas King's charity was administered by them and then the Borough Council, rather than by the church authorities, up to the time of the reorganisation.

Most of these endowments provided, broadly, money

for the poor; but the objects of three were more closely defined, and we now come to these.

In his will dated 1773, William Poore of Brockhurst left £5 a year to the church wardens for bread to be given to poor persons, preferably widows, after every Sunday morning's service. In 1826 and again in 1887 it was recorded that nine widows were each given a loaf each Sunday. In 1920 - 1940 five or six widows seem to have received bread each week. By the 1960's the bread was being supplied to the occupants of the almshouses. William Poore's headstone still stands close to the north-west corner of the church; it is beautifully carved, and five lines of verse from it are printed on page 18 of Gosport Records No. 1.



We now come to a charity which was originally intended to provide cash for poor widows but which developed in quite a different way. The will of Jane Holmes, which is now in the County Record Office, was made in 1711 and proved in 1712 in the 'peculiar' jurisdiction of the Rector of Alverstone; he was one of the few parochial clergy entitled to prove the wills of his parishioners. She left a rent charge of £2 on her two tenements in Stoake, on the site now known as 17, Church Road, to be distributed to poor widows on Christmas Eve. She left the little cottage at the west end of the said tenements, with the ground as it was then used, to the church wardens and overseers of the poor; this was to be let to sober, orderly tenants, who were not to annoy or disturb the neighbouring tenants, and the rent (after deduction of repairs) was to be distributed to poor widows.

By 1826 there were on the site at the west end what were described as two small old cottages, occupied rent-free by two poor widows nominated by the church wardens; the cottages were maintained by the church. It is not known at what date the property had ceased to be let as intended and had become almshouses; nor is it clear whether the original 'little cottage' had been rebuilt. The £2 rent-charge continued to be distributed in sums of 1s.

or ls. 6d. on Christmas Eve.

By 1849 the almshouses were again described as one cottage; they were then rebuilt in their present form for two widows by the church wardens, with the aid of two thank-offerings and other gifts. The tithe map of 1840 had shown the former building as not coming so far forward on the north side as the 1849 one does. To enable the 1849 building to be of sufficient size, the church made an informal exchange with the owner of the adjoining property: they acquired a strip of frontage land 15 ft. by 4 ft. and incidentally the site of the detached privy and a right of way to the latter; they gave up the almshouses garden, 15 ft. by 18 ft. which is now the left-hand part of the site of John Hunt's adjoining building.

In 1855 the adjoining property was to be sold, and the above exchange was put on a formal basis and approved by the Charity Commission.

The almshouses are practically at the centre of old Alverstoke but this has altered considerably since the 1850's. The church has been rebuilt; the stocks have disappeared ; three public houses have been closed and used for other purposes. Yet the almshouses themselves are little changed.



Plaque on the Alms Houses in 2011