Chantal Richards

Community Life In Richmond's Almshouses

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This book is dedicated to Juliet and all the staff at The Richmond Charities.
Without their help and guidance, this book would not have been possible.
Forever thankful.

The entrance to Bishop Duppa's Almshouses

Introduction

The almshouse world is a special place in which to live and work. There are a large number of almshouses in Richmond because Richmond Palace (between the reigns of Richard II and Charles I) was a regular residence of the Kings and Queens of England. Those associated with a court in residence, such as nobility, clerics and wealthy commoners, were therefore drawn to Richmond. It is from these people that benefactions were often received to establish almshouses. The first almshouses in Richmond were established in 1600 and all the almshouses now run under the umbrella of The Richmond Charities (135 almshouses in total) continue to be used to house elderly people in housing need and financial need.

Many of these philanthropists and benefactors from centuries past were moved by the poverty and hardship of good and deserving people and found that the best way to meet their needs was to provide a roof over their heads and pensions of money, coal, clothing or other goods. For example, alms people at Queen Elizabeth's Almshouses received bread, cheese and beer money, whilst at Bishop Duppa's Almshouses they received a chicken and 1lb of bacon every Christmas. Michel's and Hickey's residents received between 1 and 2½ tons of coal each year and a great coat every 5 years.

Applicants for accommodation in the almshouses then, as now, had to have lived in Richmond for at least 5 years and to be of good character, although we don't any longer insist on the final stipulation which was that they had to be able to recite one or two prayers!

Once appointed, inmates, as they were then called, had to behave as required by the founder and failure to observe the rules resulted in fines or expulsion from the almshouse. Each almshouse estate had its rules and tables of fines and penalties. With the fines, almshouse residents were encouraged to tell on their neighbours. As fines were distributed amongst the alms people, I don't imagine that much encouragement was needed!

Houblon's Almshouses had the most comprehensive sets of Rules and Orders for Governance, which included:

1. Attending divine service every Sunday and holy day.
2. Not keeping a hog in any of the almshouses.
3. No tippling or drinking in any common alehouse or gin shop.
4. No begging, swearing, blaspheming, fighting, smashing glass windows, destroying the almshouse or giving away the gift of a gown.
5. And the final order stated that the alms people were not to spend their time in idleness but employ it in some useful work, in reading the Holy Bible and other good books, in prayer and giving thanks and praise to God.

Well, times have changed. Nowadays, we house residents, not inmates, and we don't give out pensions any longer – this stopped in the late 1940s with the creation of the Welfare State when Trustees felt that pensions were no longer needed. However, in line with the charity's governing document which states that the Trustees should use funds for 'such charitable purposes for the benefit of the residents as the Trustees decide', we now help and support our residents in other ways, such as organising and funding events, activities, outings and social occasions, in order to enable our residents to keep socially active, which we find helps with their physical, emotional and mental well-being in their later years. We pride ourselves on the fact that residents move into fully refurbished almshouses within thriving communities.

Although almshouse living is independent, we have staff support in place, Careline for emergencies and many residents have support from social services carers. Almshouses really are designed to be a home for life.

The Richmond Charities has been delighted to work with Chantal Richards and be one of the projects for her MA in Photojournalism & Documentary Photography. Chantal has really engaged with our residents and attended numerous events and activities, as well as holding one-to-one sessions with individual residents, hearing their stories and photographing them. Chantal has provided us with documentary evidence of what life is like in the almshouses in the 21st Century, which is very different from historical books about the life of residents in previous generations and centuries. Let's hope that in another 400 years' time, the almshouse communities are still thriving and that perhaps another documentary photographer records the lives of residents then to see how it compares to Chantal's record in 2017.

Juliet Ames-Lewis
Chief Executive
The Richmond Charities

Then and Now

Olive,1950s

Olive,1950s

Mr Tucker,1950s

Lily,1950s

Richmond Mayoress, 1972

Miss Lewe, 1950s

Leslie, 2017

Hickey's Almshouses, 2017

Maggie, 2017

Lorna, 2017

Richmond Deputy Mayor, 2017

Dorothy's kitchen, 2017

Then and Now
Hickey's Chapel, 1975

Then and Now
Hickey's Chapel, 2017

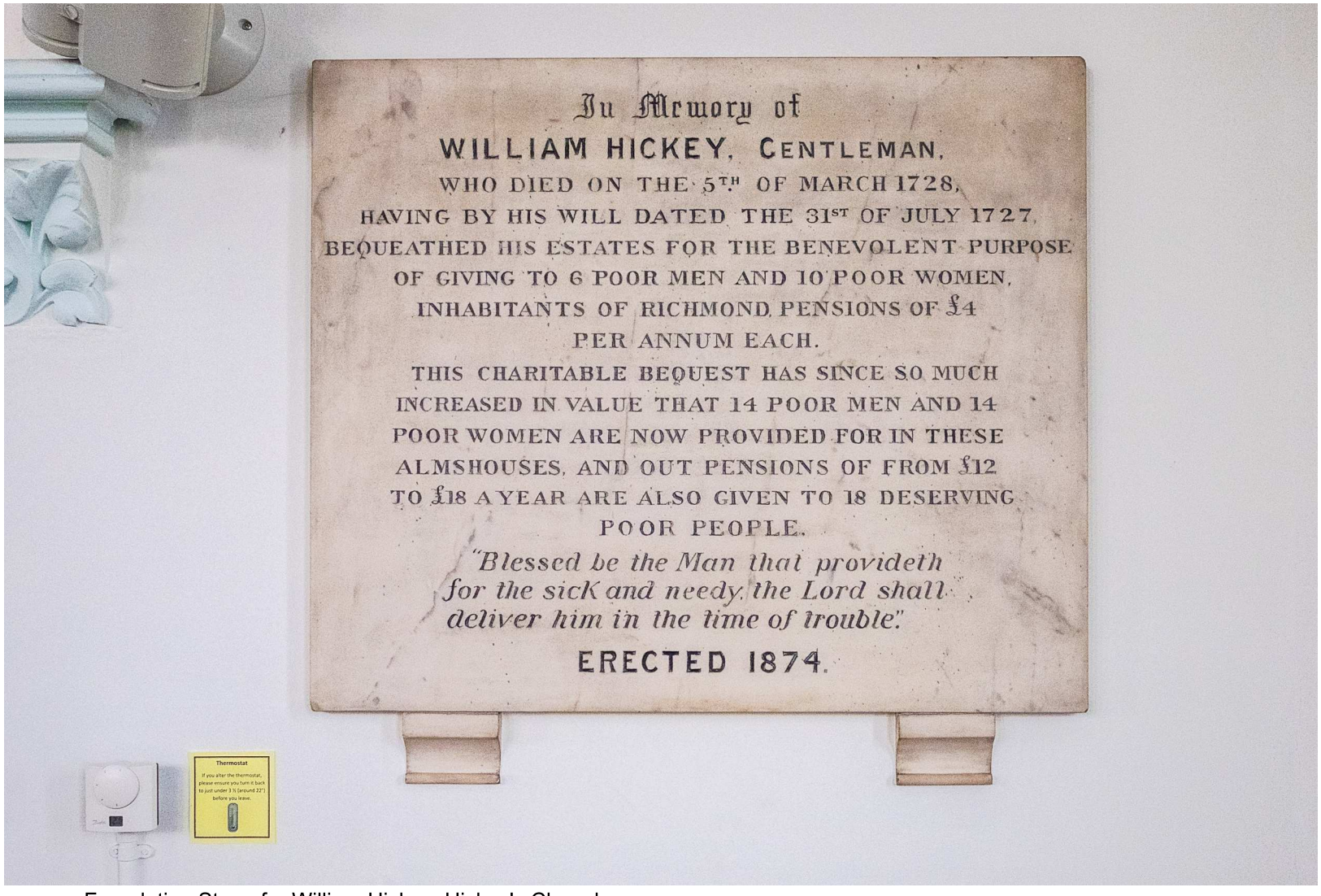
Hickey's Almshouses

The Almshouses

The Richmond Charities is an almshouse charity based in the London Borough of Richmond-upon-Thames, with its origins dating back to 1600. The aim of the charity is to provide housing for elderly local residents who are in need of an improvement in their living conditions.

The Charity provides affordable homes for people in housing need who are over the age of 65. There are 124 almshouses comprising mainly one-bedroom cottages and bungalows.

The Richmond Charities website 2017



Foundation Stone for William Hickey, Hickey's Chapel

Hickey's Almshouses

Entrance to Hickey's Almshouses

Hickey's Almshouses

The gardens of Church Estate Almshouses

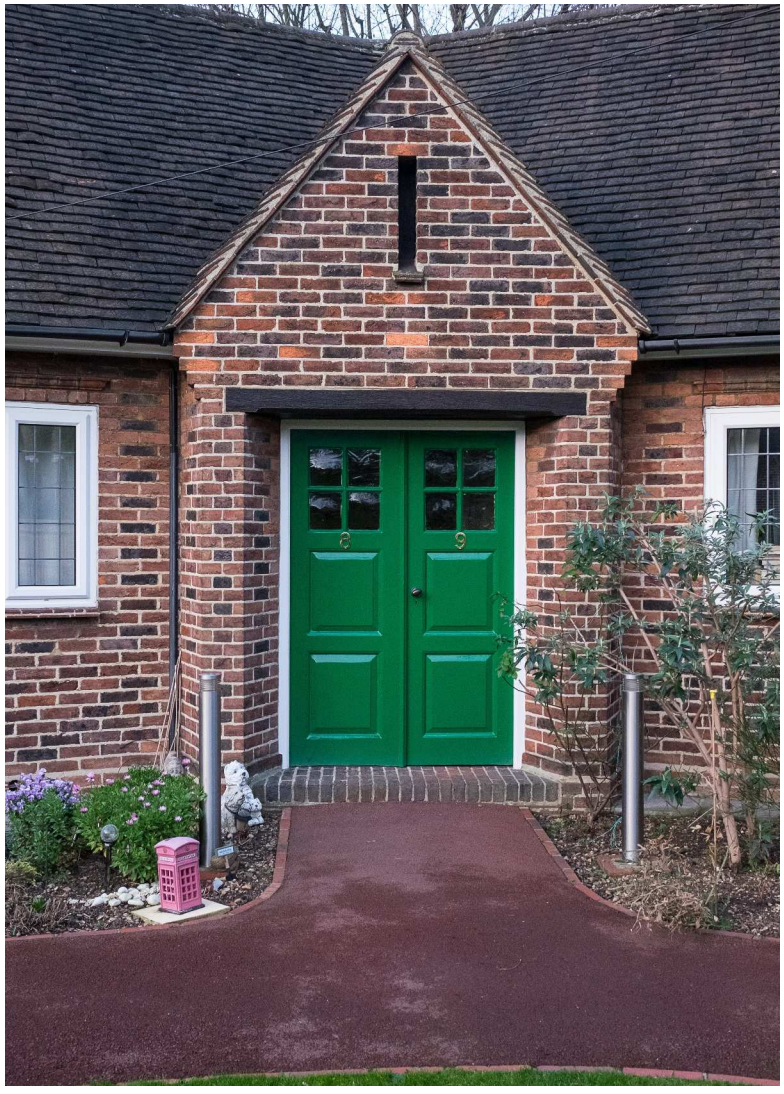
Church Estate Almshouses

Houblon's Almshouses

Bishop Duppa's Almshouses

Back doors at Michel's Almshouses

Michel's Almshouses

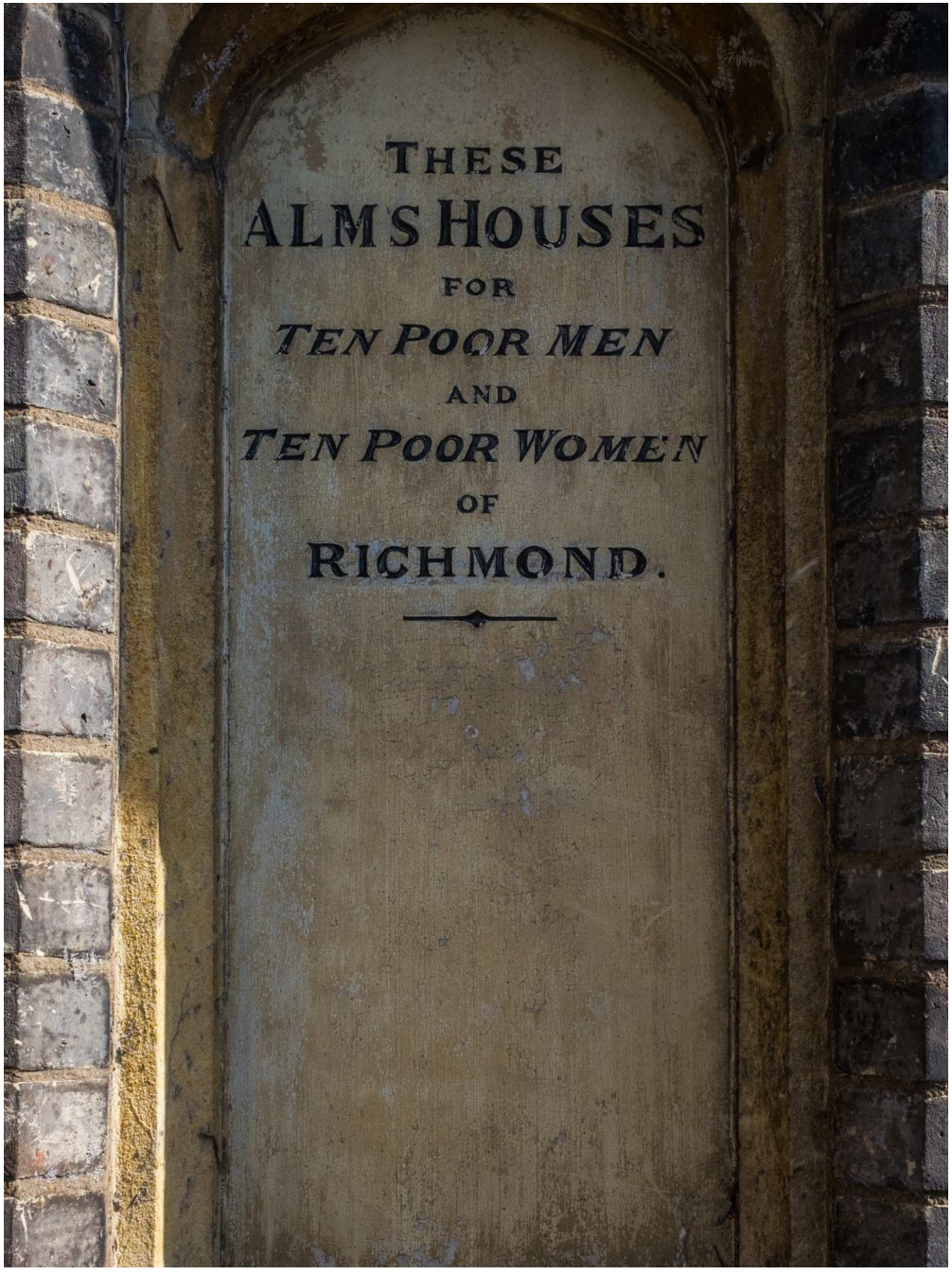


Candler Almshouses

Candler Almshouses

Benn's Walk Almshouses

Queen Elizabeth's Almshouses


THESE
ALMS HOUSES
FOR
TEN POOR MEN
AND
TEN POOR WOMEN
OF
RICHMOND.

The Residents

Mary

Mary was born in Blackpool in 1941 and attended a Sussex boarding school, at a convent, from the age of 8. Desperate to leave school at 16, Mary left and did a secretarial course. As her mother would say "you will always have something to fall back on". Soon after, she went travelling to Belgium, Italy and then to the USA for about 5 years. Eventually Mary came home, got married and had 2 sons, and lived in a lovely family house in Putney. Sadly, after a few years their marriage broke down.

Mary met someone else and had several years living in Acton, then Twickenham. When this relationship ended Mary took a mortgage to buy a studio flat in Richmond, where she was very happy. She embarked on a counselling course, using her typing skills to secure amazing jobs at the House of Commons and then for a writer who wrote screenplays. But she was typing from morning to night, and eventually got RSI in her wrists and shoulder. With no income, Mary couldn’t afford to keep up her mortgage. So she moved out of London and to the seaside at Eastbourne.

A few tough years lay ahead as Mary had to deal with several bereavements. Firstly her mother and then her eldest brother. Her greatest friend took her own life and then her dear dog died too. Coupled with Mary getting cancer, her home had terrible damp. She had to borrow thousands of pounds to have a wall rebuilt. This led to debt problems and Mary became clinically depressed. It was at this point, that Mary became curious about God. She wasn’t interested in going to church but she knew that a ‘higher power’ had helped pull her through the tough years.

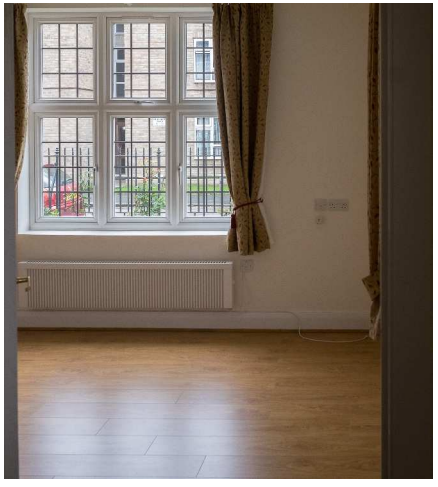
Mary's home in Surrey, where she lived before moving to the almshouse.

She knew she had to move home and be somewhere different. After watching the TV series called *The Monastery*, Mary became interested in what it was the monks had found, that kept them willing to live such and unusual way of life. She moved to a static mobile home park near to the abbey in the hope of finding a different way forward for herself.

While living in Sussex, Mary attended courses at Worth Abbey and in London, on spirituality and occasional visits to the church. Her latest and best course has been on Ignation Spirituality, Ignatius being the founder of the Jesuits. This has resulted in Mary qualifying as a spiritual director providing counselling with a spiritual focus.

Mary has been torn to leave her current home in its beautiful country surroundings but she had become allergic to the ambience and growth of mould in her home. Cataracts threatened her mobile independence in such a remote setting, and the mounting bills of home maintenance were a continual worry. After a two year wait, Mary finally secured an almshouse back in Richmond, once again able to live close to her family and old friends.

In the future, Mary will be looking to continue her work with the Mount Street Jesuit Centre. "I'm looking forward to being part of the almshouse community but also keep my independence" said Mary. "I think it's incredible and I feel incredibly lucky, and grateful also to William Hickey. I would like to give something back as I'm a trained counsellor, you never know, it might help somebody somehow".



Adelaide Road Almshouses, refurbished and ready for Mary to move into.

Dennis

Dennis was born in Ham, Surrey on 16 November 1920; he has just reached his 97th birthday. He has remained a bachelor all his life with no children. His family moved to Richmond where he went to St Elizabeth's School. His early years were progressive, passing all his exams and he also served as an altar boy. As an only boy, Dennis used to stay with his cousin Bonnie during the war. However he didn't like the communal bomb shelter in Richmond Park and preferred to stay behind in the Morrison shelter. It was like a cage with thick iron on the top, but he felt safe and comfortable on his own.

After leaving school, Dennis worked for a chemist shop on the Kew Road, Richmond, delivering medicines to people. One day he had an accident on his bicycle and spent a couple of days in hospital with concussion. When he recovered, his father insisted he worked elsewhere and so he ended up with a job in the Strand Electric Company factory. Dennis worked there until his father came back from his travels. He said "you don't want to stay here with the buzz bombs". Dennis avoided being 'called up' due to a perforated ear drum, and still needs a hearing aid today.

Dennis continued to work in factories until the end of the war when he became his father's driver. His father was part of a duo of cross talk comedians, *Murray and Mooney* who launched after the war in 1918. Dennis drove a Citroen chauffeuring the pair from venue to venue, keeping the car tidy and hanging about at the side of the stage until the performance was over, and then they ate and drank together in the evenings. *Murray and Mooney* appeared in two Royal Command performances in 1934 and 1938 for which Dennis still proudly owns the spectacular programmes, despite not being in attendance himself.

I asked Dennis why he didn't go to the Royal Command performances. He replied "It was never mentioned to me. When we were at home together we never discussed the theatre. My father was a very good golfer and he won many cups, a rose bowl and a morning tray that he won at the Vaudeville Golfing Society. He won that for about 7 years. But when he came back from the golf and he had won the cup or a silver bowl, he never went wild about it, just took it in his stride. But as far as business was concerned, it never came up. It was just an ordinary household. People would never think we were anything to do with the stage, only a few people that were close to my father. He knew a lot of people in Richmond, but he never went on about it."

With the slow demise of his father's fame, Dennis went on to a similar role with another act called *Nat Jackley*, which lasted ten years. In that time he travelled round theatres year in and year out, all around the British Isles and to South Africa and on a cruise ship. With the arrival of television, there was a demise in the travelling shows and eventually Dennis parted company and went to work in a betting shop. He worked for William Hill for 15 years until Dennis retired at 65. He received a treasured wristwatch when he left.

Dennis remained living with his parents until their deaths, his father in 1969 and his mother a year later. He lived alone for 24 years until someone told him about applying for an almshouse. Priority was given to Dennis since he was living alone in a house that had an outside toilet and no bathroom. "So when the trustees came round to see me, they put me on the priority list and I moved in two weeks later in 1974" said Dennis.

Everything in Dennis's house is the same as it was when he moved in. There has been no new decorating or modifications to the kitchen or bathroom. He is perfectly happy with that situation and has made his home adequate to his needs. The television is the centre of his happiness, despite

being partially deaf. Dennis explains "I watch the films with no sound, just subtitles. If I get a new hearing aid, I might try it with the TV. If I had the sound up it would be too loud for next door!". Programmes about animals or cars are his favourite, and films with a love story, but not with bombing or shooting. A carer shops and delivers Dennis's food which is mostly cooked in the oven, the simplest method.

Good health has stayed with Dennis until a recent leg ailment. He had to go into hospital for six weeks. After much bandaging and dressing, the leg pains are subsiding but it does keep him awake. His sleep is limited to 3-4 hours at a time, so he feels like a night owl. Dennis is not able to get out easily and his contact with the outside world is mainly through the Scheme Managers, Linda and Jackie, and through Iris, who lives next door. Thank goodness for their kindness and time.

Sheila

Sheila was born in Reading on 29 April 1941. She attended St Joseph's Convent until the age of 9, when she went to Hemdean House School, just outside of Reading. “I was very active and very sporty, I did a lot of tennis. My mum was a teacher there. It was a tiny school, there were only 91 of us. I absolutely loved it there”, remembers Sheila.

When she left school she wanted to be an actress, but she didn't tell her parents because there was no money. Instead, Sheila went to work for Barclays Bank and joined a good amateur theatre company, called St Laurence Players in Reading. Sheila got married in 1964, but they split after 4 years.

Sheila got her break from a cousin-in-law, who was producing and acting in a season at Colwyn Bay. Sheila took the job and never looked back. She took 2 weeks annual leave from the bank and was asked to stay for the rest of the season, but obviously couldn't. She did one more play and told the bank she was ill. She later resigned from the bank. Sheila got an acting agent and set off on her career.

Her first job was a schools tour of *Julius Caesar* and *Henry VI Part 1* in Northern Ireland, earning £12 per week. She played in repertory in many parts of the country, including summer seasons at the New Theatre, Hull and the Devonshire Park Theatre, Eastbourne. Sheila played these theatres again in many tours travelling the country. One of her favourite tours was *House Guest* by Francis Durbridge, which starred Simon Wars. Sheila and Simon became good friends and she was very sad when he died a few years ago.

Her memorable times in the West End were Agatha Christie's *Murder at the Vicarage*, at The Savoy and Fortune Theatre and *Make and Break* by Michael Frayn at the Haymarket Theatre with Prunella Scales and Leonard Rossiter. Sheila went on a tour of Brazil with a revue and a children's show for BBC English, "We went all over Brazil and even played at the famous opera house in Manaus, literally in the middle of the rainforest!". Sheila's most amazing job was on board a cruise ship around the Caribbean doing *Theatre at Sea*. "We went to many islands and I managed to catch up briefly with my niece, Gloria, who was then living in Antigua. It was wonderful" said Sheila. Another cruise that year was around Turkey, Greece, Russia, Romania and Italy. "Neither of these were very well paid, but it was like a holiday with lovely food and a great way to see the world".

In between acting jobs, Sheila had various barmaid jobs, (White Swan in Richmond and St Margaret's Hotel) and temporary jobs as an accounting assistant. In 1978, Sheila got into the ‘Voice Over’ business. A friend of hers had set up a company called Talkies, though she is now with Hobsons. Sheila has been the voice over for *Vileda* for 20 years; although that work is tailing off now, and Sheila recognises that well known or younger actors get the voice over work now. Today, Sheila goes to the theatre a lot, in particular the local Orange Tree Theatre in Richmond. She has a good friend called Gordon who is a Ruby Club member. “It’s interesting going to the theatre with Gordon because he’s blind. He has a retentive memory” says Sheila.

Sheila moved into Michel’s Almshouses in August 2010. Having lived in the same flat for the previous 25 years, Sheila had ended up in a position of harassment from her landlady. It was with great relief that Sheila secured a home at Michel’s. “I still can’t believe it actually. I have to pinch myself to think I’m in this beautiful place. This beautiful garden. All the lovely people. In the Vineyard on Richmond Hill. It is just so wonderful” said Sheila.

Sheila has a niece (more like a sister), who lives with her husband in St Maarten in the West Indies. Also, 3 nieces and a nephew living in Berkshire with their children. Sheila sees them occasionally, "we are close but they have their own lives", she comments. Sheila is a very independent lady and has found many of her neighbours in a similar position. Sheila's neighbours are very friendly and some meet up regularly in the garden in the summer, sometimes too in each others houses.

Sampi, Sheila’s cat died September 2016. “I miss her terribly, oh I can’t tell you how much I miss her. She was beautiful." remembers Sheila. After having had 3 cats, Sheila does miss the daily companionship but is unlikely now to get another one. As Sheila reflects on her life, she realises that it is most important to try and be kind and caring about everyone, especially when you are on your own. Sheila is a very kind and friendly person, with enormous love and respect for her home and neighbours.

Dorothy

Dorothy was born at Christmas in 1942, in Chesterfield, Derbyshire. Her childhood days were spent hiking with her family on the moors in the Peak District. She was heavily involved in sport at school, playing every sport, but excelling as a county representative in hockey and athletics. Consequently she trained as a physical education teacher at Birmingham University. Dorothy got married after completing her degree and moved to Northamptonshire where her husband worked as a scientist for Unilever Ltd.

Over the next five years, Dorothy pursued her teaching career and raised two beautiful daughters. However, her husband, being a liver specialist technician, was asked to go to New Zealand to work for the Government in animal research. New Zealand was having an epidemic of facial eczema in sheep, their strongest export, so her husband was needed to help to discover the liver toxins which were causing the sickness. The family took up the offer and travelled to New Zealand on a three-year contract. Dorothy worked at a Catholic girls college. After they completed their contract the family returned to the UK but within the year, they were called out again as the sickness had re-emerged in deer. A return was not so difficult as they had learned how to adjust to the lifestyle and homesickness. The girls settled back into schools and went on to the University of Auckland completing double degrees in law and business.

In between family life and teaching, Dorothy also found time to train as a Counsellor in postgraduate studies. She was invited to take a position as a University Lecturer in Education, training primary and secondary teachers in Physical Education, Dance and Arts. She completed a Master's degree and travelled worldwide presenting her work at conferences to keep at the cutting edge of her profession. Her two daughters married and very soon Dorothy was blessed with four gorgeous grandsons.

Then, ten years ago, everything changed. Dorothy lost her husband. He suffered a brain aneurysm at Christmas. "My world fell apart!" said Dorothy. “My family fell apart, the shock completely rocked our boat and we struggled for months with our loss. My four grandsons were only 6 and 5." Unable to cope without their father, her two daughters decided to make a career move and travelled overseas to give their children a wider view of the world just like they had received.

One family moved to live in Dubai and the other family moved to London. After six months of living on her own in New Zealand, Dorothy was struggling to live without her family so made the decision to join them. She gave up her job, house, and lifestyle and moved to London to live with her daughter and help with the children, doing the school runs and helping with the domestic side of the household. She tried to go to Dubai in the winter and Easter school holidays to see her other grandchildren.

Everything was going swimmingly as Dorothy lived with and contributed to her families’ lives. On the darker side though, Dorothy’s money was dwindling as she travelled and helped out her family, and she was getting anxious as to where she was going to live as her grandsons were hitting their teenage years, and growing very tall! Dorothy realised there was no need for her to help any more. The boys needed more space in the house and she felt she was becoming a burden. Her family encouraged her to think about her own life and what she wanted to do. They wanted her to have her own life back, but all her life she had been looking after someone and did not know where to start.

Dorothy was living in St. Margaret's and so applied for council housing, but she did not fit their ‘disability’ criteria to be eligible. She was too fit so could not collect any serious points to get a house. A friend at church told her about the The Richmond Charities. On enquiring Dorothy was delighted to discover

that they liked to have people who could look after themselves! However, Dorothy was very distressed as her money had been used over the last ten years to keep up with her family, but Alison put her mind at ease, explaining that she could apply for benefits.

Following the interview with Juliet there was the interview with the Trustees. Again they showed such enthusiasm and positivity that Dorothy's fears were beginning to ease. When one lady trustee said "You do realise this will be your LAST STOP, you will be here for the rest of your life, Dorothy." Dorothy panicked because she realised that because of her travelling every few months, all her life, they had found her weakness. Strangely enough though, it had the effect on her that she actually wanted to stop travelling! She was ready to shut the door on the overseas travel and address a new beginning.

Both Juliet and the Trustees were so positive in making her feel that she could possibly restart and begin again a different life, that her confidence began to return. Dorothy was quite overwhelmed when Alison showed Dorothy what a beautiful house she could have. She felt very humble and honoured to have this opportunity offered to her and she and her daughters were quite open with their tears of gratitude.

Dorothy moved into her new house but within the month she became anxious that she had put herself in a situation where there were times when she could not cope. She was lonely, having lived for the last ten years with children and family. With continued determination she made sure she went out everyday, climbing Richmond's hills, walking by the Thames, enjoying the coffee shops and supermarkets.

She had had a very full life and started questioning herself as to how she could help more in her community. Finally she began to attend the Sunday morning church services at Hickeys and found it to be very soothing. Stuart was very aware of the need to talk to his congregation drawing on

their life experiences and making them value their age, drawing on their strengths that their life's challenges had given them. Dorothy still attends her church in St. Margaret's with her family too.

In Dorothy's own words, "The society had done so much for me giving me my lovely home, so when Linda and Juliet asked me to take a dance class there was no hesitation. I felt I had to give back after I had been given so much. The class members are so much fun and we have together designed a class for exercise and movement that gives us all a chance to get fit."

As a resident, Dorothy feels cared for, and not on her own anymore. She knows that there is always someone she can call. The scheme managers are always on hand to help at any time. "No one interferes with our privacy, we come and go as we please. I play golf with the U3A (University of the Third Age) and take Tai Chi classes with Age UK", says Dorothy. She writes every day in her journals of prayers, thoughts and anxieties; she writes to all her friends and colleagues overseas; researches her work; still reads three books a week and has recently started her lifelong desire to sketch and paint with George and the sketch club.

Reflecting on her past, Dorothy has stepped back a long way from being 'a pillar of society, a University Lecturer.' She takes comfort from the fact that no one can take that away from her. As she says, "Its all in the golden memory boxes! When all is said and done, when your career is coming to an end, and you think you are going to be with your husband in your twilight years, destiny steps in and changes the rules. Nothing can be as bad as those days of loss but I now have another slice of heaven in my lovely home here. You have to shed the old skins though and let the new person come through. It's the only way to regain your balance. It's a metamorphosis into a more mature way of living, and it does take time. There is peace here, a calmness and acceptance of the fact that you did your best for your family, in your career and it's okay not to get up at 7 in the morning to go to work!".

Dorothy also points out that all the residents she meets are of the same opinion, that there is a great gratitude for the wonderful work being done by the staff and trustees of The Richmond Charities for being there for them in their hour of need and at their most vulnerable.

Lorna

Lorna was born in Bradford in Yorkshire in 1942, in the middle of WWII. In her thirties, Lorna moved to London and worked in a hotel until she retired. She absolutely loved her job, "sometimes I was a receptionist, cleaner, a night watchman, security, telephone and office work". Based in Bayswater, Lorna enjoyed an interesting life meeting people from all over the world. When it came to moving out of the hotel, Lorna knew someone who had moved to an almshouse in Richmond, and so she applied too. She was interviewed by Mrs Rumsey, then Clerk of the charity, and also wrote an essay on why she wanted to live in an almshouse. In 2005, Lorna moved into an almshouse at Hickey's.

Incredibly grateful for her home, Lorna doesn't feel isolated in the community. She is fond of cats, and is able to have her own cat for company. She added "the staff are lovely, Gail (Scheme Manager) is wonderful, they are all very caring; especially when I had a stroke 7 years ago." Lorna's maintenance rent is low and it includes the water bill and CareLine. CareLine is for emergencies and alerts the scheme managers if there is a problem. All the maintenance is taken care of, except that she has to pay the phone and electric bills.

If Lorna had not moved in here, she would have moved back up to Yorkshire to live with her brother; he's 78 years old. However, they are so happy that Lorna is living in an almshouse which gives her enormous security and happiness. "It's a relief for them because I'm a bit far away from them obviously, and there is someone to worry about me if something happens to me. You know, I wouldn't be lying here for days on end if I was unconscious or something!" The only negative issue of living in the almshouse community, that Lorna could think of, was that there are "people dying all around, friends and neighbours. It's a large age range from 65 to 102!"

Lorna, who has never married, has no trouble keeping busy. She is active with the Friends and Neighbours Group and helps Pat Platt with organising day trips. They recently had a day trip to Eastbourne and an excursion to the Museum of Childhood at Bethnal Green. Lorna's fridge is completely covered in fridge magnets of all the places she has visited in the last 12 years. Also within the community, Lorna goes to chapel on Sundays, helps with the teas at Film Club and looks after other people's cats when they go on holiday. External to the almshouses, Lorna is a member of Kew Gardens, the Wetlands in Barnes and is a regular visitor to Richmond Park.

On a more philosophical note, Lorna realised that the turning point in her life was coming to London. "I like it here, it's been my life and I prefer the climate too!" Although she did admit that her happiest days are when she is visiting her family up north in the countryside, spending time with her brothers and their children, nephews and nieces. Lorna's key to happiness has been 'to be content with what you have', and would like to be remembered as someone who cared about her friends, neighbours and pets.


SUGAR

Leslie

Leslie was born in Islington on New Year's Eve 1932. "So I only ever got one present – for Christmas and birthday!" An early childhood memory is of being evacuated at the age of 7. He was thankful for having good foster parents; however, he does remember waiting in the village hall to be collected by them. "I was left there at the end with one couple who looked very puzzled. Because my name is Leslie, they were expecting a little girl! They had bought me some very pretty pyjamas, but they didn't make me wear them!" Despite being homesick, Leslie enjoyed the freedom of exploring the surrounding countryside. He vividly recalls seeing from his bedroom window Witney parish church in flames one night, thanks to a hit from a German bomb. The smell of a burnt matchstick, as used to light a candle in the cupboard under the stairs whenever the air raid siren sounded, takes him back there. Even more vividly recalled is the memory of being machine-gunned on three occasions by *Luftwaffe* aircraft as they returned from bombing raids on nearby Stanton Harcourt airfield. They were rotten shots!

Leslie lived with his family until his twenties, apart from National Service in the Royal Artillery for two years, and moved to a flat in Earl's Court when his father sold the family home. Marriage resulted in a move to Maida Vale and, when a son was born, on to Palmers Green. Moves to Twickenham and Whitton then followed when a daughter was born. Leslie's wife returned to Ireland to look after her ailing mother and, due to circumstances, remains there. A mutually satisfactory arrangement, with frequent visits to each other.

Shortly before ending his career as a Chartered Secretary, Leslie had to undergo a triple heart bypass preceded by a period of bankruptcy due to a substantial loan not being repaid to him. But he came through. Again, “Someone was looking after me." Passing by St Mary Magdalene Church in Richmond, one day, he was attracted by the sound of the choir and decided that it was time to commit himself to giving thanks for being looked after so often. The rector, Canon Julian Reindorp, was a great help at this time and suggested that he put his name down for an almshouse.

So here he is, eternally thankful and aware of the many who, having had an honest and hard-working life, end up in a house that needs repairs and can’t afford to downsize or who are lonely or in ill health. Independent living suits Leslie well and he is still very active, with frequent visits to London’s art galleries and especially to the opera and ballet (he has seen *Giselle* 39 times!). Further afield, he visits his wife and daughter in Ireland, his son in Princes Risborough and his nephew in Tuscany. An interest in calligraphy fills in the rest of the time!

Leslie is very impressed with the new Chief Executive of The Richmond Charities, Juliet, who he finds to be dedicated and responsive to residents’ needs, as are the Scheme Managers Gail, Lorraine and Debbie. And Alison, the administrator ,“is a gem”. The new chaplain, Stuart, is also very committed and could not be more welcoming. Maintenance is looked after by Gerry and Mick, ever cheerfully ready to deal with any building problems.

Prior to retiring, Leslie completed a City & Guilds interior decoration course and used the knowledge gained in his almshouse to make it a warm and welcoming home. He is very content, with his wife as a good friend, two loving children and four grandchildren.

Maggie

Maggie was born in Ayrshire in Scotland near Ayr, in a little town called Stevenston, in June 1939. She went to a local primary and secondary school, and later to Glasgow University where she enjoyed studying French and German. After a further year of education at teacher training college, Maggie and her husband went to France for a year. Peter, her husband, taught at a boy's school and Maggie taught in a girl's school. On their return to London, Peter attended the Courtauld Institute of Art for a post graduate diploma which qualified him to become an art history teacher. Maggie, meanwhile, went to teach French at a secondary modern school in Brixton.

Peter's first job was at East Sussex College of Art as an art historian, running the art history department, in Worthing. The couple moved to Brighton and Maggie spent a year at a girls' boarding school. "What a contrast after Brixton!! Brixton was divided by colour and the school was mainly black but was beautifully run by a Swiss woman," remembers Maggie. Peter then decided he wanted to be an actor, so he found his way into the acting business. Maggie and Peter had both been in the amateur acting society at Glasgow University.

Maggie then went to work at Isleworth College of Further Education, as they had moved back up to Peckham, London in a road amusingly called "Asylum Road". Maggie stayed in further education and went on to work at Kingston Polytechnic, as a part time lecturer, teaching French and English for Business. To add to their interests, Peter and Maggie got involved in tour guiding and took the 'Blue Badge', a London Tourist Guide course. As Maggie explained, "You have to take a hefty examination and then spend 6 months doing coach tours. We did it for fun and stayed for nearly 20 years. I loved it, using my French and German".

At the same time as teaching and being a tourist guide, Maggie set up her own company called *Languages for Business Communication*. “And I took my business into the City of London and sold it all over the place, getting various cushy numbers. Classes started at 8am. I met an amazing range of people, secretaries and managing directors. It was so good to have met a large range of people”, remembers Maggie. But then, aged 68, Maggie had to have a knee operation and everything came to a grinding halt. She was no longer able to juggle all her work and tour guiding. At the same time, Peter became unwell and he was losing his eyesight.

With continuing ailments, Peter had to move into a care home. A friend of Maggie’s suggested applying for an almshouse as she was now alone. Maggie said “she had seen this place (Hickey’s Almshouses), but wasn’t sure if it was a school, or a madhouse or a palace!”. Luckily a home was available immediately, which was unusual. Eventually Peter and Maggie gave up their flat in Richmond, as Peter was not going to be ‘coming home’. So all of their teaching books and Peter’s artwork now resides in the cellar of the almshouse.

Maggie is absolutely delighted to be living at Hickey’s. She said “there is always someone around to help, I couldn’t be in a better place as I get older." Although she still likes her independence, Maggie is conscious to be part of the community. However, some of the day trips are getting harder for her with limited mobility. Maggie joins in with Film Club, and loves the company of Stuart, the Chaplain, although Maggie doesn’t really enjoy church and formal prayers. But she does attend services at Christmas, Good Friday and Thanksgiving. Looking forward, Maggie is excited for the new communal room to be finished, she thinks that will help bring together those that are lonely and can’t get out very far.

Reflecting on her past, Maggie has no regrets, apart from wanting to live in France for a longer period. She calls herself lucky for getting to understand two new languages and cultures. She tried everything she wanted to, although she too wanted to be an actress. “My mother was right though, I didn’t have the temperament for it. And when I see what Peter went through with so many rejections, I’m glad I didn’t do it” says Maggie. She did however participate in a few stage productions at Questors in Ealing, an amateur theatre company. Among the many stage shows she went to see, Maggie recalls a great little theatre company in Hampton Wick. This was run by Chantal Richards and her husband back in the 1990s.

Maggie admits that there were no secrets to her happy and long marriage, but said it had been an "interesting experiment"! Their instincts were not to have any children and Maggie feared that Peter wouldn’t have been able to handle little kids. The most important thing that she has learnt in life is "tolerance, and I do have potential for a bad temper. It’s still smouldering away. And a sense of humour, but when Peter was going through his depression, it wasn’t funny. It was destructive and horrible. One or two friends stood by me and knew it was horrible. It was so good when he came out of it. Now Peter has a permanent catheter and he has got prostate cancer. Every now and again he gets an infection and gets hallucinations. and that is scary. We just have to laugh now." Maggie asks that she be remembered as a jolly person.

Sadly Peter died in late 2017, after this interview. With the Chaplain's help, Maggie organised a wonderful service to celebrate Peter's life which was held in Hickey's Chapel.

Terry

Terry was born in 1936, his wife Megan in 1933. They were married for 53 years.

As a child Terry lived in the large flat above Short's wine house in George Street, Richmond. At the age of 7, his father became unwell with TB and later died. The family moved to a house within the Richmond Church Estate. The tenancy was passed from father to wife to son, so Terry remained living there until he retired. His school days were at St Elizabeth's in Parkshot, Richmond and later at Wimbledon College, a grammar school run by the Jesuits. Terry hated it there and finished his education at Kingston Technical College.

Whilst working as an office junior for a solicitors on Richmond Green, Terry found the love of his life. A young lady called Megan. Terry pursued her "like fury" for three years. He knew he wanted to marry her. They got married on 30 June, 1962. Terry said "I forgot what it was like to be single. She was a great rock". Their happiest memories would be the time that Terry treated her to a weekend in Venice for her 60th birthday. Megan absolutely loved it. After a decent pay rise, Terry saved up for a luxurious 3 weeks in Nice, upgrading their normal holiday accommodation in a gite to a grand villa.

Terry's last job was working for 20 years with NALGO (National Association of Local Government Officers). He loved his job which arose from his administration role working at the Open University. He admitted that he didn't have any burning ambitions in his working career but he did like to do a good job. With no higher education, Terry sought to find happiness in his every day life and didn't like being pressurised into situations.


FAIRY

When the couple retired, the rent on the house became too expensive for their state pensions and they were likely to have to apply to live on benefits from the state. They applied to The Richmond Charities to see if they could get an almshouse but in particular, a bungalow, as Megan had had operations on both her hips. They waited two and a half years and finally, aged 70, Terry and Megan moved onto the Hickey's estate. They didn't even need a van to move their belongings as they lived across the road.

They both fell in love with the bungalow and within a week it was as though they had never lived anywhere else. What's good about living here, says Terry, "is that we have a great team of camp guards, but we haven't found the tunnel yet!.. we are still digging". He laughed, his humour still shimmering. After 8 years in the almshouse, Terry said it felt like they had been here forever. "The friends and neighbours are not in each other's pockets, but if you needed something, they are there". Comfortable with the location, Terry admits the house is in a nice area because you are right near Richmond town centre; close to the shops, the trains and the public transport is very good.

Megan died two years ago. Terry said that his neighbours were fantastic and he would have doubted his sanity if they had not been there by his side. Megan woke up one morning in pain, she already had problems with her heart and knew that she needed to go to hospital. She was taken by ambulance to St George's in Tooting where she was given an MRI scan. However, Megan had suffered a massive stroke, where she lost her speech, half of her brain had died.

She was moved to West Middlesex Hospital and within two weeks she died. "It was terrible", said Terry. His heart was broken. His friends and neighbours were there for him, they kept him going and "kept his head from going over the brink". Terry said the "pain is softening now" but he is still clearly so sad and in mourning for the loss of his beloved wife.

Terry described Sunday afternoons when he wakes up from a snooze in his armchair. He still looks round and thinks "oh, she's gone to bed". Then he realises that she has gone, forever.

There is a beautiful portrait of Megan on his living room wall. High up and dominant, it is a copy from a photograph, painted by George who is the ‘artist in residence’ at Hickey’s Almshouses. It is thought that the photo was taken while Megan worked at the Royal Academy of Music. “Her eyes still follow you round the room though, ha ha!” said Terry.

When I asked Terry what his happiest memories were with Megan he replied “I think that *is* my happiest memory. All of it. With Megan”. As for himself, he would like to remembered as a good friend and neighbour.

Lena

Lena was born in Perivale, near Greenford in October, 1938. Born a year before WWII, Lena's overriding memories of childhood are about the war. In particular, she remembers there not being enough to eat. Mostly they ate vegetables that they could grow in the garden, carrots, swedes and potatoes. Nowadays she can't bear the thought of eating those vegetables, and for good reason.

Lena and her husband Doug previously lived locally in Hanworth. Together they had seven children, 4 boys and 3 girls. For "many, many years" they owned a builders yard in Walpole Way. Doug did a lot of maintenance work for The Richmond Charities. Their sons also worked in the business. In later life, Doug was diagnosed with cancer. Lena nursed him for as long as possible but the cancer was at such a late stage, they were unable to treat him. Lena misses him terribly.

After Doug's death, Lena was unable to keep up the payments on their family home and she was given a deadline to move out. She contacted the council who were not able to accommodate her anywhere in the borough and they told her "if you sit outside here long enough, you will get a place eventually". Dismayed, Lena thought to call The Richmond Charities. She was in luck as an almshouse had just come available and her desperate situation enabled her to move in within two weeks.

After 12 years at the Church Estate Almshouses, Lena is very happy and settled. She feels secure and safe. In case of emergency, Lena has a landline and a Careline call button attached to her wrist. The staff are "all very lovely, you can ask them anything". Currently Lena is sorting out her will and power of attorney with Debbie, the Deputy Scheme Manager.

Lena’s passion is cooking. When she moved in an extra kitchen work surface was put in and an eye-level oven, to save her bending down. In Lena’s bedroom there is a very large deep freezer, where Lena stores all her meals, ready for visits from children and grandchildren. In the Church Estate garden are plenty of fruit trees, and Lena makes the most of the annual harvest of apples and blackberries. Her fruit crumbles and jams are sold for charity at the annual Macmillan coffee morning held at Hickey’s Chapel.

Remembering her past, Lena says her happiest moments were "when I got married, because then I could leave home. And then my children, seven of them. So many happy times, christenings, and watching them grow up, busy times." Lena would like to be remembered as someone that would help any neighbour any time.

Rita

Rita was born in Staines in 1938, living in Twickenham throughout the war. Her father was in the RAF, a flight engineer and part of the Lancaster bomber squad. Rita's mother left when she was 3 years old and moved to Australia, so she had a Victorian upbringing by her grandmother who was very strict. Her memories of her childhood are hearing the planes going over. Rita thought that it was her dad in the plane and would run out and wave. "Get back in here!" her grandmother would shout. Rita was a keen dancer and attended the Daphne De Lisle dance school in Twickenham. She had lessons every week day and learnt ballet, tap, and acrobatics. Having successfully passed her 11+ exam, Rita went to Chiswick County Grammar but once there all she wanted to do was dance. The school told her she could leave when she was 15, with a letter of approval from her father. Luckily Rita's father was a little more lenient that her grandmother, and he finally gave her permission to leave school and pursue a career in show business. After a successful audition for a dance troupe in London, Rita left school and was on tour as a dancer just after the age of 15.

Rita toured all over England, Scotland and Ireland; appearing in dance shows and pantomimes until she secured a permanent job with the Television Toppers for the BBC. "There were 12 dancers, 6 blonde and 6 brunettes. We danced on all the TV shows in the 50s and 60s like Benny Hill, Billy Cotton and all those sorts of people. We also did a Royal Variety performance in 1962 with Cliff Richard and Bob Hope". Rita married an Italian man at the age of 21 and they lived in the East End. He ran restaurants across London, but he wasn't interested in Rita's show business career. When Rita became pregnant at 23, she had to leave her dancing career. The family moved to Twickenham for the schools and has stayed in the area ever since.

In later life, Rita and her husband were separated but remained close friends throughout his life. He died about 2 years ago. “We didn’t expect it. He was so full of life. Always the life and soul, full of energy. The grandchildren loved him so much. Suddenly he got one of those cancers, whoosh and he was gone. His funeral was unbelievable, it was in Mortlake but they came from all over London. He was one of those Italians that was in charge of everything, the place was packed with Italians, some of them I hadn’t seen for years. It was lovely.”

Before moving into the almshouse, Rita was living alone in a flat in Hampton. The neighbours were a mixed bunch, but she felt threatened by the amount of drug dealers living close by. She had read about the almshouses in the newspaper which gave her the thought to apply. “As a child, my sister and I used to love looking at these almshouses, little dolls houses we used to call them”, Rita recalls. Trustees came to interview her, and after a year or so, Rita came to view number 9, Church Estate. She fell in love with it instantly, one sunny morning in October 2013.

After four happy years in the almshouse community, Rita feels blessed to have met so many "really nice people". Both the front door and back door open out to beautiful gardens, and there is always plenty going on at the chapel. She does miss her car which gave her so much independence, but the local transport is very good and soon there will be a new communal coffee area where residents can meet up. Rita has been a regular member of the sketch club and continues to paint at home too.

As Rita reminisced about her happiest days, Rita decided that it was the birth of her children and grandchildren that gave her so much happiness. She also recalled days of working with Sammy Davis Junior, of performing on the *Black and White Minstrel Show*, the film *39 Steps* and of evenings

spent at Danny La Rue's nightclub. In recent years, all the dancers reunited at the Pope's Grotto in Twickenham, although over the years, not many are still alive now. Sadly, Rita reflects on losing her own brother and sister in the last year, saying "I feel like an orphan now."

Rita finishes our interview with these words. "I miss them both so much. I miss my sister because we used to talk about everything under the sun. I loved her to death…but I didn't go and see her when she had Alzheimer's because she had a really good husband, Chris, who took care of her. I said to him, I can't bear to see her like that. And he said, she understands. I'm sure she would feel the same about you. She was lying in bed at the end and I was just shocked and so upset. But there you are, that's life isn't it. Or death as the case may be. I do miss them both."

Community Events

Garden Parties

Summer Garden Party at Michel's Almshouses






Garden Parties

Summer Garden Party at Bishop Duppa's Almshouses











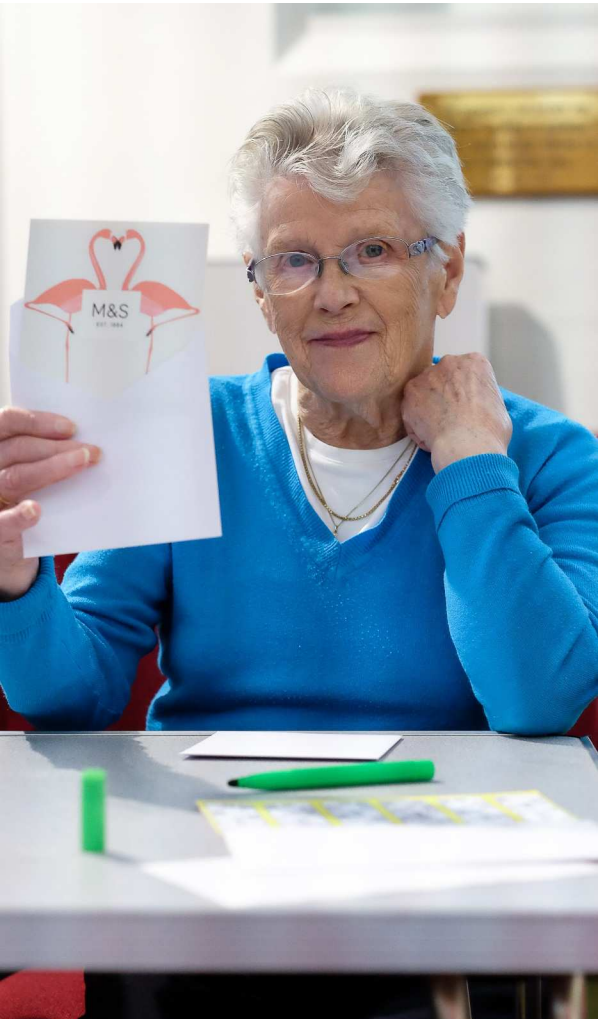
Garden Parties

Summer Garden Party at Hickey's Almshouses

Garden Parties

Inside the marquee at Hickey's Summer Garden Party

Bingo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Dance Class



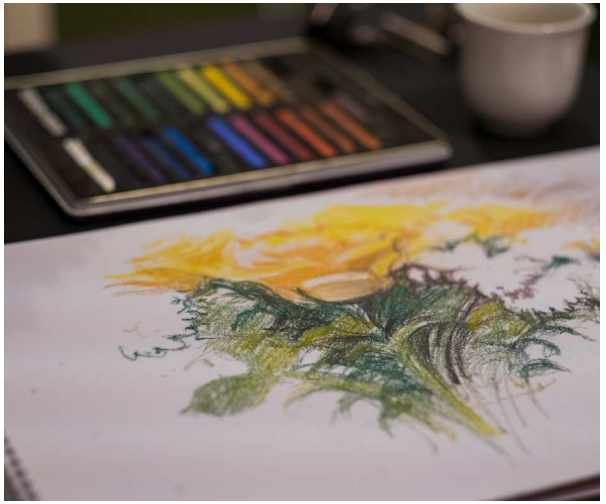





Sketch Club








Residents' Workshop

In September 2017, nine residents agreed to come together and talk about their time and experiences of living at the almshouses. We shared photos and images from the local archives. These are some of their reflections.

“Moving here is the best thing that's ever happened to me.”

“Sometimes I hear younger people refer to us as wrinklies. But there are some younger people here that are very caring.”

“My wife was never happier than when she was having people round for tea at our bungalow.”

“My one bedroom flat just became so expensive. I had no choice, I had nowhere I could afford to live. That’s why I was over the moon to get this almshouse. Now I just jump on the 371 bus to see my daughter, and I can get to central London on my free pass. I get milk round the corner. I am more than happy living here. I like my little house and I don’t have to ever move. Unless I win the lottery!”

“Some years ago, there was a memorial service in St Paul's Cathedral for all the almshouses around the country. This group came in and they were all dressed in red capes and hats. And I thought Harry Potter was going to come in! They were all from an almshouse in North Wales!” scriptures and wear gowns on Sunday afternoon. They were part of the Huguenot family, they were well connected, to the Governor of the Bank of England in fact.”

"We didn't want to move over because we were perfectly happy living at number 4. But our rent was going up and my pension wasn't going up at the same rate. We waited 2 and half years because we needed a bungalow, because Megan had had both her hips done. We had a trial separation for about 4 years, I was sleeping upstairs and she was sleeping downstairs!! Well, when we moved in here, that afternoon Megan said, I'm so glad we've come. I had lived in my old house since 1943. We didn't miss it at all. Then of course, 2 years ago, Megan had a terrible stroke. But the love that I've had from here has been wonderful from everyone. Otherwise the men in the white coats would have come and taken me away. I didn't want to come but I'm bloody glad we did. It is so lovely."

"The scheme managers are amazing. I had only been here just a year and I had a stroke. I was in Edinburgh with my family. My daughter managed to get me back here. I always remember Linda, as we drew up in the car, she was standing at the gate. And she took my hand and kissed it. It was so good. Oh my God, I thought, I'm home now. And my daughter said, oh my God, I'm going to put my name down for an almshouse too. She's only 43! Jackie was here all the time, checking I was OK and stopping to have a chat with me. But I could hardly speak. I don't know what would have happened to me if I had just been stuck in a house on my own. So now I walk round my little house and I think this is so lovely. I'm so happy. I sit in the garden and do my meditation, nobody bothers me at all. It's peace."

"Being here, it does help you to get used to the autumn years of your life. As someone once said to me 'if getting old is this much trouble, I wouldn't have become old!"

"Although it is like waiting for God.. it helps to be around other people."

Christmas at the Almshouses

Christmas Lunch

Held at Richmond Hill Hotel for all the residents, staff and trustees.




































Dachshund







Brian and Connie's Christmas Decorations

Christmas Window, Benn's Walk

Macmillan Coffee Morning

Zac Goldsmith, MP, meeting Lena and Lorna


TEA
Coffee
Cakes
in the
Chapel


MACMILLAN'S
OWN
COMPETITION


Pick a
Lucky Card
£2 a pick!


RAFFLE
5 tickets £1


HICKEY
HICKEY'S CHAPEL


JOY ADAMSON'S AFRICA
SONY

Dearly Departed

Maureen

Maureen lived at Michel's Almshouses in The Vineyard on Richmond Hill. She had lived there for 23 years.

Maureen died peacefully in her sleep on 31st May 2017.

These are the memories she left behind.


MACULAR SOC
NHS NO

Street view of Hickey's almshouses,
pencil drawing by William V H Cobbett, 1902

The History of Richmond's Almshouses

Founding Almshouses in Richmond upon Thames. Charity in the Past – Social Action in the Future?

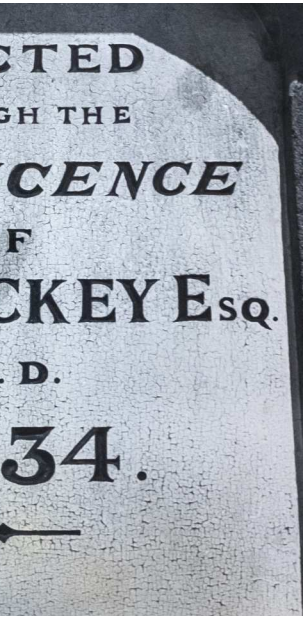
Founder's stone, Hickey's

Richmond is a London borough with a great deal of history. It grew around a major Tudor royal palace – the favourite seat of Elizabeth I – and developed into a well-to-do town whilst the old palace gradually disappeared. In the course of its history however, Richmond acquired six other complexes of palatial standing, veritable 'palaces for the poor': its six almshouses for the elderly. Nowadays three of them line the Vineyard – Michel's Almshouses, Bishop Duppa's Almshouses and Queen Elizabeth's Almshouses – and three others on Sheen Road – Houblon's Almshouses, Church Estate Almshouses and Hickey's Almshouses. Many historical cities and towns in Great Britain and the Low Countries boast equivalent buildings and institutions for the elderly. Almost universally they attract visitors and would be-residents, because of their historic beauty, their human scale and their greenness in an urban environment. Who built them and why? And are they only nostalgia-inducing relics of the past? Or is there a place for almshouses in the future?


Drawing of Bishop Duppa's almshouses, date and artist unknown

An ancient tradition

Founding almshouses was a venerable charitable tradition on both sides of the North Sea from the late Middle Ages until the early 20th century. The first almshouses set up specifically for the elderly were part of the late medieval drive for specialization of poor relief, necessitated by growing towns and subsequently growing numbers of people in need. The great medieval hospitals who looked after all kinds of poor often started specializing in certain forms of assistance, and in response separate hospitals arose, for people with contagious diseases or mental problems,



and for orphaned children. Some hospitals concentrated on looking after the elderly, but for the latter category also many small-scale institutions sprang up. They were a kind of charity which was much less expensive than founding a hospital, so accessible to a larger number of would be-benefactors. Moreover, there was no dearth of potential recipients, as most people worked with their hands and were often unable to save money for old age, and consequently were threatened by poverty when their bodies weakened.

The most important attraction of almshouses was its free, or cheap, housing, as the costs of housing – then as now – ate up much of the average household budget. Often almshouses also provided extra benefits, such as gifts of bread and coal and sometimes clothing, though certainly not all. Some almshouses offered a very decent old age, others offered not much more than housing security. Moreover, they provided company and assistance, as most inhabitants tended to be alone, either single or widowed. As almshouses were nearly all founded and funded with private money and as there were no fixed rules for founding an almshouse there could be great differences between almshouse benefits. Not until the 19th century did the English government establish a measure of oversight. The same applies to where almshouses were founded: it appears they mostly arose in areas where there was a strong elite presence and therefore a lot of money, so mostly towns and cities. In the countryside and in new, urbanized industrial areas almshouses were a much rarer sight. Moreover, there was usually greater demand than supply, and a place in an almshouse was hard to come by unless one had good connections with the people – almost exclusively men – running the churches and parishes. Despite this, almshouses for the elderly could be an important form of poor relief. This certainly applied to the four oldest almshouses of Richmond, founded at a time that the town was not as populous as it would become in the Victorian age.

The almshouse founders of Richmond

Richmond’s six almshouses were founded and funded with private money. Four of them were directly founded by an individual, one was built with money from a private benefactor more than a century after his death, and the sixth even three centuries after its putative benefactor.

The founding of the oldest, Queen Elizabeth’s Almshouses – in 1600 or 1606 – is attributed to Sir George Wright (1572-1623), squire and Member of Parliament (MP), although no deed has survived and little is known about Wright’s intentions.

Bishop Duppa’s Almshouses were founded in 1661 by Brian Duppa (1588-1662), Bishop of Winchester but resident of Richmond.

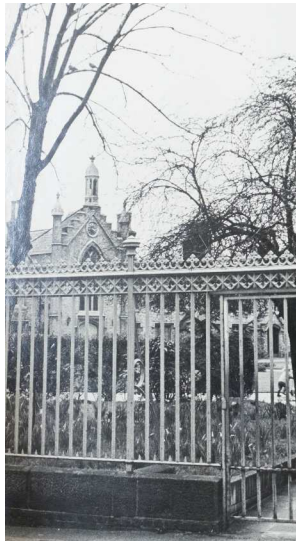
Michel’s Almshouses, founded in 1695, were the work of Humphrey Michel (1612-1696) and his nephew, MP John Michel (1660-1739), both Oxford educated landed gentlemen.

Houblon’s Almshouses were founded in 1757 by the sisters Rebecca (1684-1758) and Susanna (1688-1765) Houblon, daughters of the first Governor of the Bank of England.

Hickey’s Almshouses were founded in 1834 with money from the trust founded in 1727 by William Hickey († 1728), a wealthy Catholic widower of presumably Irish background.

Finally the Church Estate Almshouses were built in 1844 with money from a trust whose origins are obscure but supposedly goes back to 1375 making it the oldest charity in Richmond.

The remaining four almshouse founders and William Hickey had quite a lot in common with each other, but also with, for example, the almshouse founders of Leiden, an industrial town in the early modern Netherlands, with whom the Richmond founders will be compared here.



Side entrance to Hickey's, 1960s

Michel's almshouses, 1960s

First of all they were obviously all well-to-do members of the local and national elite, able to spend a great deal of money on building and funding their almshouses and the extra benefits for the almspeople in order to guarantee the longevity of their institutions. There could be great differences in the amount of wealth almshouse founders enjoyed, but that they were rich in general terms is certain. They also enjoyed great societal prestige, whether as landed gentry and members of Parliament (Wright and the Michels), bishop (Duppa), members of London's mercantile elite (Houblon) or just rich people in general (Hickey). They also all adhered to the Church of England, with the exception of Hickey, who was Catholic and whose gift to the parish was therefore all the more remarkable. The Houblon sisters were descendants of Huguenot refugees from northern France and baptised in the Walloon church of London. This Calvinist 'Stranger Church' was closely connected to the Church of England. Almshouse founders in Leiden were religiously more diverse, as the Netherlands did not have a state church such as England has, although in Leiden most founders adhered to the privileged Calvinist church.

Marriage was the norm in the past, and this also applies to the majority of Leiden's almshouse founders. In Richmond this was a bit more complicated: Wright, Duppa, Michel junior and Hickey were all married men, but Michel senior was a lifelong bachelor and the Houblon sisters never married either. Michel junior married only late in life and with a woman beyond child-bearing age. Like the majority of Leiden founders, however, most Richmond founders were childless, with the exception of Sir George Wright and William Hickey.
In Hickey's case his daughter and son-in-law were childless and presumably beyond child-bearing age when he made his will. Childlessness – or the expectation that children would die heirless soon – seems to have been a major factor in the reasons why almshouse founders donated a large amount of their capital to charity in both Leiden and Richmond.

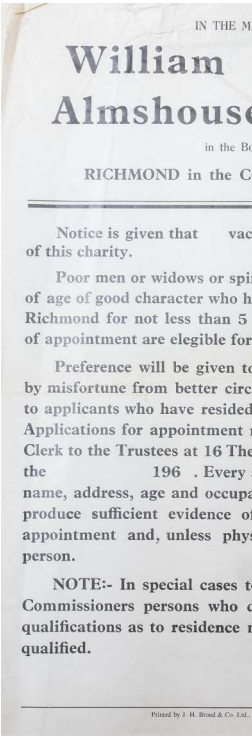
The exception to the rule was the first founder, Sir George Wright, who had at least seven children, and there may be a parallel here with early Leiden almshouses, who were also the work of elite men with natural heirs. Wright's reasons for his foundation remain obscure anyway. The motives which may be attributed to his later fellow founders may however well apply to him too.

Motives for founding almshouses

Almshouse founders rarely left detailed explanations of why they chose to establish their charity, and this also applies to the almshouse founders of Leiden and Richmond. But from all sorts of circumstantial evidence it is possible to distinguish three major motives in founding almshouses: faith, status and obligation. These motives also predominated in early modern Leiden.

In general, founding an almshouse was often deliberately placed in a religious frame. Charity was regarded as a Christian duty throughout Europe and everyone who could spare something for charity was expected to do so. Until deep in the 18th century, doing charity was thus primarily connected to faith – or in any case, public expressions of faith. In Richmond, such expressions can be found in the foundation deeds, the schedules of orders devised for the almshouses and inscriptions on the almshouse buildings. Biographical details supply additional evidence for the level of religiosity of the founders.

Thus Bishop Duppa was undeniably a pious Christian, greatly esteemed by both Charles I and II and a prolific writer on religious issues. He founded his almshouse in fulfilment of a vow to God to do so if King Charles II would be restored to the throne. In the schedule of orders he drew up for his almshouse he stipulated the almswomen were to be persons of good reputation, well versed in the essentials of the faith and devout and regular churchgoers. Similar rules were laid down in the schedules of orders devised by John Michel in 1723 and Rebecca Houblon in 1757,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William
Almshouse

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RICHMOND in the C

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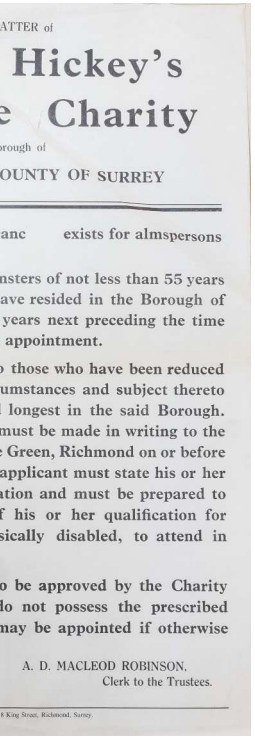
Printed by J. H. Broad & Co. Ltd.,

Vacancy notice for Hickey's, 1960s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A. D. MACLEOD ROBINSON,
Clerk to the Trustees.
8 King Street, Richmond, Surrey.

and fitted in the Pauline notion that charity should be shown to all, but in preference to the devout Christian poor. John Michel called the Michel's almshouse, in an inscription, a monument to his uncle's piety and dedicated it to the glory of God. The Houblon sisters were less vocal in connecting their charity with piety in inscriptions, but Rebecca's strict and detailed schedule of orders leaves no doubt about the importance the sisters attached to the personal devotion of their almswomen. Indeed, they stressed most, of all Richmond founders, the religious obligations their almswomen needed to fulfil.

The fact that acquisition and maintenance of status was also a major consideration, is rarely made explicit, but certainly implicit, in the manner in which founders made sure that they were remembered. This is apparent in the cases of Duppa and the Michels. In both cases elaborate inscriptions, flanked or crowned by sometimes richly coloured coats of arms, make sure that a passer-by will note who was responsible for these charitable monuments. Both Duppa and the Michels were also commemorated elsewhere, with elaborate memorials and lofty commemorative inscriptions placed over their graves in, respectively, Westminster Abbey and the parish church of Old Windsor, seat of the Michel family. Duppa asked literally, in an inscription which would be read by the passers-by of the family almshouse in Pembridge, Herefordshire, which he also endowed, to remember him. This appears to have been a fairly common relic of Catholic times. John Michel, finally, was also commemorated at his alma mater Queen's College, Oxford, which he had richly endowed with the so-called New Foundation. His portrait hung in the college hall and an elaborate Latin inscription placed in the college chapel.

Status may have been less of a concern for the Houblons and Hickey, but they too wished to be remembered. The Houblon sisters had a rather matter- of-fact and simple inscription in the almshouse façade to commemorate their charity. Hickey of course never intended to

build an almshouse, but had made it clear that the trustees of his charity were to remember him during their annual dinner. He contented himself with a modest but visible tomb in the churchyard of St. Mary Magdalene, in the parish of Richmond. A century later the trustees clearly felt that Hickey would have liked to be remembered, and placed a commemorative inscription on the almshouse walls. Finally, status obviously was a concern for Sir George Wright as well. He is remembered in St. Mary Magdalene with an elaborately carved and coloured funerary monument, although its primary focus was his wife.


Queen Elizabeth's, 1960s

All these monuments, and certainly the more elaborate, served either to enforce or acquire societal status, in death as well as in life. In some cases, the almshouse may well have served as a memorial to an extinct elite family, as was the case with the Michels and maybe the Houblon sisters.

It probably did not work that way with all almshouses: Queen Elizabeth's Almshouses, for example, did not perpetuate the Wright name, nor even originally the queen, as the almshouse was known as late as 1739 as the 'old or lower almshouse'. In contrast, John Michel, who was very conscious of being the last of his line, advertised his uncle's charity where he could, in Richmond, Old Windsor as well as Oxford. Even on the verge of extinction, one had a duty to perpetuate the glorious memory of one's family.

A sense of obligation may also have been a strong motive when it came to looking after one's nearest and dearest. In Leiden founders often stipulated that their poor relatives and domestics were to enjoy preference in obtaining a place in their almshouse. This fits in the early modern notion that someone well-placed in life had a duty to look after those in his or her environment who were less well-off – that is, one acted as patron to one's clients. Though this is not so explicitly stated in Richmond, Duppa, John Michel and Rebecca Houblon all stipulated in their schedule of orders that they reserved the right to select the almshouse people during their lifetime, which can mean hardly anything

else than that they too acted as patrons and gave preference to their clients, although conclusive evidence seems to be lacking. This was how early modern societies worked: early modern elites had multiple patronage relations to societal superiors, their equals and to a great number of clients from lower classes. These consisted of, for example, poor distant relatives, domestics, suppliers of goods and services. Everyone expected assistance from his or her patron – such as in obtaining poor relief. In return, patrons expected their clients to support them – from attending a sickbed to literally vote for a patron. Such patronage relations were often enduring, and could span lifetimes and even generations.

Founding an almshouse was then part of an obligation felt by patrons to their clients, offering for some of their poorer clients a way to avoid extreme poverty. It then also made sense to founders to have their almshouse built in their place of residence – as was the case with all Richmond founders and William Hickey – and to assign the future choice of residents to the parish wardens, as many of their clients would have lived in the parish of Richmond. However, it should be said that Richmond as a whole was fairly prosperous and that the number of poor may have been smaller than elsewhere.

Faith, status and obligation may not have been the only motives for founding an almshouse, though they seem to have been the most prominent ones. As always with human motivations, these three motives did not operate in isolation but will have been entangled, as it often seems to have been the case with the Richmond founders. In different ways, these major motives probably still apply: research in the Netherlands has, for example, shown that religious people are still more likely to donate to charity. Some benefactors still like to be remembered, though nowadays memorials are less ostentatious, without coats of arms or elaborate funerary monuments. A matter-of-fact inscription or portrait usually does the trick now. Many modern-day philanthropists moreover still voice a sense of obligation.

The decline of almshouse founding

Postcard of Hickey's Almshouses, date unknown

In Richmond the only two 19th-century almshouses were the fruit of two early modern trusts. Elsewhere in England – and also in the Low Countries – almshouses continued to be founded until the 20th century, though in ever diminishing numbers.

This development was for several reasons. First of all, in the 19th century grinding poverty and atrocious housing conditions became such a widespread problem that people felt individual charity was not going to be sufficient – if it ever had been – and that action was necessary on a grander scale. Individual almshouse foundations declined in number. Rather than individually building almshouses for just the elderly, elite philanthropists chose to join together in associations which built better housing for the working poor as a whole, thus founding the first housing corporations. Such ‘subscriber charities’, sometimes with a very definite purpose, were similar to limited companies with shareholders in the guise of donors and boards of directors who ran the charity and were held accountable by their donors. Some industrial magnates individually stamped whole towns out of the ground in order to offer their labourers decent accommodation. It should be said that the private housing corporations did not solve the housing problem either. Not until the state stepped in could the presence of slums be halted.

Secondly, the existence of poverty itself became increasingly regarded as a matter of policy rather than a fact of life, an expression of a highly unequal society which could however reform with the right political measures. Rather than trying to alleviate poverty, one wanted to eradicate poverty. Charity was no longer the solution: state measures were. This policy change led to the welfare state of the 20th century and found its expression in the rise of the council estate, with social housing provided by local governments.

Thirdly, the number of charitable causes notably increased in the 19th and 20th centuries, so there were a greater number of more diverse causes. As the need for traditional charity declined because the social care arrangements of the welfare state greatly alleviated poverty, benefactors were free to take up other causes, such as caring for sick or old animals, educating the deaf and the blind and assisting the poor in other countries. Supporting the arts and sciences also became a major philanthropic target.

Fourthly, almshouses became much more expensive to build, as rising standards of what good housing should consist of demanded that almshouses would supply their residents with larger living areas, their own access to water, toilets and sewers, modern heating, lighting and cooking systems. Both in England and the Netherlands older almshouses increasingly were in need of repairs to keep the monumental buildings in shape and became subject to modernization campaigns which made the life of the residents better but also decreased the number of places in an almshouse, as apartments were merged to give residents more space. This was certainly the case in Richmond.

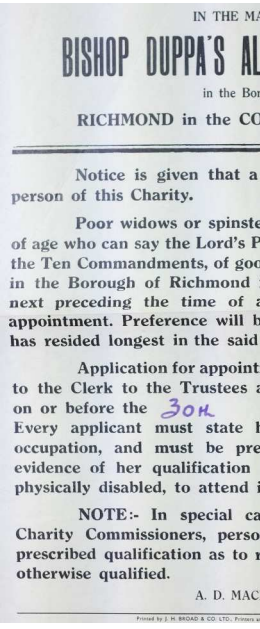
All in all, almshouses were seen increasingly as monumental and quaint relics of a benighted past, insufficient to house the rising number of elderly. Instead the elderly were housed in large, modern, efficient and comfortable care institutions.

Founding new almshouses: charity or social action?

Yet, in the second decade of the 21st century, this development has reversed, in the sense that since the 1980s English and Dutch governments have been backtracking from the welfare state model. The supply of social housing has been on the wane as governments have encouraged house ownership, large homes for the elderly have closed or are increasingly looking after those who need 24 hour care, and are indeed at death's door. Moreover, almshouses have not disappeared – indeed, life in an almshouse had regained attraction, as many elderly of limited means realize that the small but cosy almshouse apartments offer a great degree of independence

and freedom of the care which their larger houses and gardens required. Demand for almshouse places has risen greatly, whereas supply is rather static, for new almshouse foundations are rare, although some well-to-do almshouse charities occasionally build new almshouses – such as Benn's Walk in Richmond, built in 1983. At the same time, the number of people with sizeable capital has also ballooned, largely because of a relaxation of taxation regimes. The great financial centre that is London has resulted in a large number of new rich, whilst there is also a great influx of the rich from other countries, from Saudi sheiks to Russian tycoons. Some of these rich, new and old, have founded and funded philanthropic organisations themselves.

This has, however, not resulted so far in new, privately founded almshouses for the elderly. Why this is so, is difficult to say. It may be that the provision of affordable housing by a private individual is seen as a historical form of charity made redundant by modern housing developments, as often seems to be the case. For that reason it may also be less attractive to engage in this kind of traditional charity, as social housing is unlikely to be regarded as a major philanthropic cause. It might therefore lack the kind of appeal other philanthropic causes have right now, and engaging in building almshouses might not yield the same kind of attention other noble causes deliver. It seems that modern day philanthropists prefer a more 'activist' kind of philanthropy, supporting projects which aim at, for example, fighting crippling diseases, such as the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation or the Zuckerbergs, or supporting other charities, such as the Westminster Foundation of the Dukes of Westminster – who incidentally developed social housing in Belgravia and Mayfair in the late 19th century. Not just the moneyed moguls and their richly endowed charities, but also smaller scale philanthropists seem to prefer, for example, setting up schools in African villages, protecting wildlife or promoting gender equality over setting up almshouses for the elderly. Decent housing is no longer seen as a charitable cause.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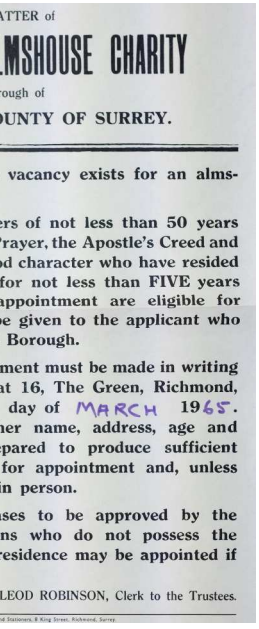
Vacancy notice for Bishop Duppa's, 1965



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LEOD ROBINSON, Clerk to the Trustees.

Maybe this will change, but perhaps founding almshouses by rich benefactors is not the only, or not even the best, solution to a dearth of almshouse places. Lately in the Netherlands new initiatives have been set up to build new almshouses for the elderly. Instead of a great amount of private money making up the starting and maintenance capital of an institution for the elderly poor, modern almshouses for the elderly seek a financial basis in a different manner. Two examples may suffice here.

In the village of Anna Paulowna, in the north of Holland, in the fall of 2018 the *Polderhofje* or Polder Almshouse will open, a project of local social entrepreneur Jennifer Hofmeijer. Struck by the high degree of loneliness amongst the local elderly, Hofmeijer sought inspiration in the many old Dutch almshouses and the sense of community they seem to instil in many residents. Her almshouse will be a mixture of social action and entrepreneurship. The complex will remain Hofmeijer's property, with the residents buying the interior of their spacious homes and paying a monthly fee for upkeep and services, incidentally also making the building of the almshouse possible. When residents leave or pass away, their home will be bought back by the almshouse, and sold again to another elderly couple or person, in order to maintain the almshouse as a provision for the elderly. There will be a meeting-place where people can meet and organize events, and a nurse will be in attendance in a nearby office for those who need assistance.

At the other side of the country, in Zwolle, the first modern almshouse of the *Knarrenhof*-movement is currently being built. The ideas underlying this initiative, organized by project developer Peter Prak, are basically the same as Hofmeijer's, but Prak works with associations of would be-residents, who together develop small-scale housing for the elderly, based on the old Dutch almshouse and its sense of community. By petitioning the local government for a suitable location and attracting building companies and housing corporations as investors, these

associations hope to create modern almshouses. The residents can meet each other in the common garden or meeting room. The Zwolle association was formed in 2011 and is now awaiting the completion of the Aahof, expected to open in the spring of 2018. It will contain 48 small houses, built in two quadrangles, each around its own courtyard. Fourteen of these houses will be social housing and the others will be sold on the private market. Eleven other Knarrenhof-initiatives are in progress in other Dutch places, another will also be opened in the town of Hardenberg in 2018.

It seems at the moment that such initiatives, mixing social action and pragmatic economic thinking, have a greater chance of success than waiting for philanthropists to take up the cause of affordable and decent housing again – much as that would help in building new almshouses, for which there certainly will be a demand. Indeed, existing almshouse charities in both the Netherlands and England have used surplus funds to build new almshouses, and may well continue to do so. This is unlikely to satisfy demand, but it may well keep the almshouse as an institution and model in the public eye.

Publish or perish?

One thing is certain in this age of relentless (self) promotion of all kinds of causes: if almshouses are to be a fixture of future housing as they were of housing in the past, their virtues will have to be publicized to as wide an audience as possible. Sad experience has taught the *Landelijk Hofjesberaad* – the National Almshouse Council of the Netherlands, founded in 1997 – that almshouses are too often overlooked by legislators and bureaucrats. A crippling tax meant to siphon off the large wealth of the huge housing corporations also struck the monumental almshouses, and it took a lobby of years and a great deal of money lost to taxes in order to reverse this quite unintended effect. Perhaps the older British Almshouse Association, going back to 1946, has managed to avert such blows, which were for a great extent attributable to ignorance. But even though almshouses for the elderly thrive in both countries, ages of tradition are not sufficient in themselves. Almshouses will need to engage with the public, to show what

they are worth and that their example can still be followed. In Haarlem an ancient almshouse is now working on a comic about its founder and about almshouses in general. This book may also serve as a reminder of the fulfilling lives almshouses for the elderly afford, and perhaps even incite imitation of those Richmond men and women who bequeathed their worldly goods for the good of humanity, and whose palatial almshouses are a constant reminder that not all of value can be measured in terms of money.

Written by
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With special thanks to Simon Fowler, Richmond historian; and Peter Warner, verger of Old Windsor.

Heroes

The staff at the almshouses work together seamlessly creating a safe and friendly community amongst the 125 residents.
Based at head office and at offices within Hickey's and Michel's, these staff provide house maintenance along with 24 hour care and support for all residents. Their dedication to the charity goes above and beyond.

Top Row, Left to Right:
Alison McAlear, Administrator
Gail Sullivan, Scheme Manager
Debbie Flaherty, Deputy Scheme Manager
Gerry Wilson, Caretaker

Middle Row:
Stuart Lee, Chaplain
Jackie Golding, Deputy Scheme Manager
Mick Tinson, Health, Safety & Security Officer

Bottom Row:
James Dorey, Property & Estates Manager
Lorraine Bradley, Scheme Manager
Linda Prendergast, Scheme Manager

The End