

WELLS OLD ALMSHOUSE

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JEAN IMRAY

**WELLS & MENDIP MUSEUM
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This book is dedicated to the memory
of its author, the late
JEAN IMRAY



Jean Imray, standing by the moat at the Bishop's Palace, Wells.

© *Stella Taylor, Jean's niece.*

Foreword:

Jean Imray (Former Wells City Archivist) and this Book

Jean McRae Imray was born on 13 June 1926 and died on 23 April 2015. She was born in Wells and as a young child lived with her mother in Vicars' Close while her father was working in India. She was a schoolgirl in London and during the Second World War was evacuated to Cornwall. She entered the relatively new profession of archives and for much of her career worked in Ipswich. Becoming Archivist of the Mercers' Company brought her back to London until her retirement, which she chose to spend in Wells, arriving in the 1980s. Jean then became Wells City Archivist and carried out vital work in organising and listing the archives. Town Clerk Felicity White said in tribute to Jean when she died: "It was Jean who took in hand what was a disordered collection of papers, and created order from chaos, giving us the basis of the archives we have today. We are tremendously appreciative of her work and her invaluable contribution to the survival and accessibility of the records which contain much of the history of Wells."

On her return to Wells, Jean found Norman Cook, whom she had known in London, now installed as Curator of Wells Museum – as it then was. The Museum became her principal interest in her latter years: she served as a Trustee with particular oversight of the Library, approved the new name of "Wells & Mendip" for the Museum, contributed generously to its Millennium Appeal and played an active role in the Local History Workshop, which published the pamphlet series called *History Round Wells*. Meanwhile Jean obtained distinction in her City & Guilds course in Embroidery and Creative Studies at Strode College. She was a committed Quaker and chose a funeral in accordance with the traditions of the Society of Friends. She left a significant legacy to Wells & Mendip Museum.

For a number of years Jean had been researching the history of Wells Old Almshouse and at the time of her death she was close to completing it. A number of her former friends and colleagues felt that it would be a fitting tribute to her to ensure that the work was published. Accordingly, Frances Neale and Anne Crawford, both former archivists to Wells Cathedral, undertook to check and edit her typescript. As editors they found that most of Jean's chapters needed only light editing and standardisation of the footnotes. However, they took the decision to move her Chapter 3, a very detailed description of the title to the Melsbury estate which formed the main endowment of the Almshouse, to an appendix. The last chapter, which Jean had not completed at the time of her death, was a very long one; the first half, now Chapter 8, was more or less finished, but the second half, now Chapter 9, existed only in an early draft form and needed much heavier editing. Most of it was based on the Almshouse minute books and without duplicating Jean's research it was not possible to supply footnoted sources to any material she had used beyond these. All her research notes have been deposited in Wells City Archives and are available to the public.

Where Jean refers to former colleagues and contributors, the attribution remains as she wrote it and no updating has been attempted. However, the document references in the footnotes have been given the new references following a re-cataloguing. As regards place-names, modern versions have been given in the text where possible. If an original place-name is used, it appears within quotation marks. Field-names have been given in the text as spelt in the original document but not in quotation marks.

Frances Neale and Anne Crawford have compiled a table of contents, list of abbreviations and list of works cited. The Introduction was written by Anne Crawford. The compilation of illustrations and the copy editing, formatting and preparing for print have been done by Julia Wood, Wells City Archivist.

This book is being released in two formats: a limited number of printed deposit copies accompanied by a PDF release. The bound deposit copies are being donated to eight libraries and archives and to the City of Wells Almshouses. The PDF is being made available for download for free from Wells & Mendip Museum's website (<https://www.wellsmuseum.org.uk/>). In this way Jean Imray's text and research are being made freely available. The eight libraries and archives to whom the book is being donated are the British Library, the Bodleian Library, Cambridge University Library, the Somerset Studies Library (at Somerset Heritage Centre, Taunton), Wells City Library, Wells & Mendip Museum Library, Wells City Archives and Wells Cathedral Archives.

Frances Neale, Anne Crawford and Julia Wood

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The editors, Frances Neale, Anne Crawford and Julia Wood, are grateful to the following for their help and support in the production of this book: the late Barry Lane (Honorary Curator, Wells & Mendip Museum), David Walker (Honorary Curator, Wells & Mendip Museum), Stuart Andrews (Honorary Librarian, Wells & Mendip Museum), Joseph White (Trustee, Wells & Mendip Museum), Veronica Howe (Archivist, Wells Cathedral), Caroline Tollworthy (Scheme Manager, City of Wells Almshouses), Jeffrey Allen, Oliver Trueman, Steve Tofts and Andrew Haymes.

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Grateful acknowledgement is also made to those bodies and individuals who allowed us to use images of documents held in their collections or photographs which they had taken: Wells & Mendip Museum, Wells City Council Archives, the Dean and Chapter of Wells Cathedral, the Somerset Archaeological and Natural History Society and the South West Heritage Trust, Wells Old Almshouse, Harris & Harris, Lafayette Photography, Jerry Sampson and Meredith Roberts.

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Jean Imray, standing by the moat at the Bishop's Palace, Wells. © *Stella Taylor, Jean's niece.*

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28. Richard Granville Harris, Governor and Steward of Wells Old Almshouse, 1922-52. © *Lafayette Photography*.

List of Abbreviations

AH/	All manuscript references are to the Almshouse archive at Wells Cathedral Archives unless otherwise indicated and are prefaced by the reference AH/
<i>D & C</i> , Vols. 1, 2	<i>Calendar of Manuscripts of the Dean and Chapter of Wells</i> , 2 vols. (HMC, 1907, 1914)
D&CA	Dean & Chapter Archives, Wells Cathedral
<i>DNB</i>	<i>Dictionary of National Biography</i>
HMC	Historical Manuscripts Commission
SHC	Somerset Heritage Centre
SRO	Somerset Record Office at Somerset Heritage Centre, Taunton
SRS	Somerset Record Society
TNA	The National Archives, London
WCA	Wells City Archives
<i>WCCMB</i>	Wells City Council Minute Book

Introduction: Wells Old Almshouse

Most towns and cities across England had almshouses to provide shelter and sustenance for elderly residents who were no longer able to support themselves properly. The first almshouse in the small cathedral city of Wells in Somerset was founded under the will of Bishop Nicholas Bubwith (d. 1424) in 1436 for twenty four residents, that number augmented in 1615 by six under the will of Bishop John Still (d. 1608) and a further four under the will of Bishop Edward Willes in 1777. These together formed what is known as Wells Old Almshouse. One corner of its site was occupied by Brick's Almshouse, with four residents, established under the will of Walter Brick in 1639 and funded by the artisans of Wells; the administration of Brick's was kept independent from that of the main foundation. Later almshouses founded by Harper, Llewellyn and Charles always remained separate and known by the name of their founders. It was not until 2004 that all the almshouses were brought together to form the City of Wells Almshouses.

Bishop Bubwith's medieval Almshouse building with its chapel is still in existence though naturally heavily altered. The Wells Almshouse was slightly unusual in that it was jointly administered by the Cathedral Dean and Chapter and the City Corporation (from the mid 19th century, the City Council). The whole enterprise, including upkeep and improvements to the buildings was funded by income from land and property either bequeathed for the purpose or purchased by money left in bequests. When vacancies occurred, the Corporation had the right to nominate two candidates for every one by the Dean and Chapter. The day-to-day running of the Almshouse was under the supervision of a Governor, usually a Chaplain or Curate of the City parish church of St. Cuthbert's close by, who lived in. The overall management of the Almshouse under the Trustees was in the care of a Governor or Steward, who was very often also the Chapter Clerk and usually a lawyer. It was he who oversaw the running of the estates, which were gradually sold off and the money invested in funds, dealt with the maintenance of the buildings, and managed the improvements to the buildings.

When founded, the Almshouse residents had to be citizens of Wells, free of contagious disease and of good and honest behaviour. Having been nominated to a vacancy, each resident received the use of a room, official clothing and meals. Naturally over the centuries there were changes to the management as well as to the buildings. From 1812 the day to day cleaning of the communal areas and care of the residents was undertaken by a Matron and the Chaplain no longer resided there. By 1842 an Assistant Matron was employed and both she and the Matron had rooms, free fuel and a weekly wage. The daily meal for the almspeople had been replaced by a weekly allowance and most importantly, there were women residents. Initially this was because the Trustees saw no reason to exclude respectable married couples in need and this was later extended to widows until by the mid 19th century approximately half the residents were women with their own separate apartments. Life in the Almshouse a century or so later is illuminated by documents surviving

among its records held by Wells Cathedral Archives: (a) a list of the duties of the Matron and Assistant Matron, (b) rules for the inmates, (c) a list of the contents of the Under Matron's accommodation; see Appendices 2, 3 and 4.

Anne Crawford

The Life and Death of Nicholas Bubwith

Nicholas Bubwith was a Yorkshireman, born about 1355 at Menthorpe in the East Riding. Nothing is known for certain about his immediate family, but he may have been the son of Thomas Bubwith who, in 1343, married Isabel de Brighton at Menthorpe. He may also have had two brothers, Thomas, Chancellor of Wells Cathedral, and Henry, appointed King's Sergeant at Arms in 1389.¹

Although born in Menthorpe, Nicholas was brought up in the adjoining parish of Bubwith. He may have furthered his education at Oxford, as bequests to that institution suggest, but if so, it was without leaving any trace in the records.

Natural ability and inborn ambition led the young Nicholas, as it did so many young men of his time, to enter the church. He soon attracted offers of preferment sufficient to provide him with a good income. By March 1403 these were said to be worth over £800 a year. His promotion in the church was steady if not spectacular. By July 1400 he was Archdeacon of Dorset and in 1401-02 he served as Archdeacon of Richmond for a short time. Next came an astonishing series of episcopal appointments. In 1406 he was appointed Bishop of London and a year later he was moved to the diocese of Salisbury; a few months after this he was transferred to Bath and Wells. Henry IV was displeased by Pope Gregory's appointment of Robert Hallum as Archbishop of York in 1406, and in 1407 he managed to persuade the Pope to offer Hallum Salisbury instead. Henry Bowet, Bishop of Bath and Wells, was promoted to become Archbishop of York, and Nicholas was translated from Salisbury to take his place. These changes were all made by the King.

As well as a successful career in the church Bishop Bubwith had a parallel career as a public servant and statesman; the two almost invariably went hand in hand, since church appointments were used to reward royal servants in public administration. This other career started in Chancery where he may have been a clerk as early as 1379. He became a King's Clerk in 1387 and continued in Chancery throughout the 1390s. In 1399 he was made a Master in Chancery. The revolution of that year, which saw the deposition of Richard II and the accession of Henry IV, did him no harm and in 1402 he became the King's Secretary for a brief period. On 24 September that year he returned to Chancery as Keeper of the Rolls, that is, of the government records. He appeared in Parliament as a proctor on behalf of prelates and religious institutions, and in March he was nominated to serve on the King's Council. He did not attend, however, until a year later when he was made Keeper of the Privy Seal. In 1408 he was further promoted, being appointed Lord Treasurer of England. He virtually retired from the King's Council soon after his translation to the see of Bath and Wells. According to the *Dictionary of National Biography* he remained a member of the Council but rarely left his diocese "where he was proving a conscientious diocesan, predictably of a brisk and administrative turn of mind".²

This all changed in October 1414 when Bishop Bubwith was called upon to join the delegation representing both King Henry V and the English church at the Council of Constance, convened to resolve the problem of a split papacy and to introduce a number of reforms. Bubwith took with him a number of men from Wells: three canons, John Welles, John Shirforde and Henry Many, and two priests, Michael Carrebone and John Reynold.³ Reynold later became a canon and eventually Sub-Dean of the Cathedral and was to prove the most important of Bubwith's executors. John Welles and John Shirforde both died at Constance, Welles in 1417 and Shirforde in 1419. The English delegation was led by Robert Hallum, the charismatic Bishop of Salisbury, whose appointment to that see had resulted in Bubwith's translation to Bath and Wells. Hallum too died at Constance, on 17 September 1417, and it seems that, in effect, Bishop Bubwith then took on the leadership of the delegation.⁴ In 1417 Henry Beaufort, Bishop of Winchester and Chancellor of England, also attended the Council of Constance which had reached an impasse. It was divided between the English and German delegates, who wanted to give priority to reform, and the Latin delegates, who wanted to see first the election of a new pope. Beaufort was successful in producing a compromise which pledged reform after the election of a pope. Martin V expressed his gratitude by making Beaufort a Cardinal.⁵

Nicholas Bubwith would have been comfortable with men like Hallum and Beaufort, and indeed he later appointed Beaufort one of the overseers of his will. They were three of a group of senior clerics who held similar views about the church. They were anxious to stamp out the dangers of heresy posed by the Lollards, and it is worth noting that one of Bishop Bubwith's earliest acts following his appointment to Bath and Wells was to rally the clergy of the diocese against heretical preachers.⁶ The group also wanted to promote a common form of worship which would restore confidence in the church, unsettled both by Wyclif and the Lollards and by the growth of independent private religious initiatives. Many of these men were trained in the law and they all held royal as well as ecclesiastical offices. Their views coincided with those of Henry V and together they made a formidable partnership. Less concerned with philosophical controversy than with reforming and elaborating the rites of the church so as to accommodate the religious needs of the laity, they largely succeeded in steadying the English church for the next century.

When Bishop Bubwith returned to England in 1418 he no longer held any office of state, so he was able to turn his whole attention to the affairs of his diocese. He came armed with a papal faculty to make statutes and ordinances for the reform of hospitals, chantries and other benefices and offices within his diocese.⁷ By 1422 his health had begun to fail and early in October 1424 he realised that "the danger of death" threatened him. Lying ill at his manor house at Wookey he drew up his will on 5 October. Six days later it was sealed in the presence of four priests, William Skelton and John Stone, canons of Wells Cathedral, Richard Mason, rector of Loxton, and John Dralans, rector of Kingweston (Kinwardeston); two gentlemen, John Austell and Thomas Greneham, and four grooms of the chamber, Thomas Fermor, John Whitle, Robert Gunnery and Roger Fold.⁸ This deathbed scene reminds us how

circumscribed was the personal life of an eminent man like Bubwith, surrounded at all times by men of the church and his male servants, with no close family to provide comfort or support.

Nicholas Bubwith died on 27 October 1424 and was buried in the chantry chapel he had built on the north side of the nave of Wells Cathedral. When he drew up his will on 5 October, he declared that he was "sound in mind – the Almighty be praised – although sick in body". A sound mind was important at this juncture because as yet no proper provision had been made for the servicing of this chantry chapel, nor of the chantry chapel he had built in Bath Abbey. On 16 October the Bishop granted to the Dean and Chapter of Wells the advowson of the church of Buckland Abbas and on the following day the Dean and Chapter entered into a bond with Bubwith in the sum of £1,000 to secure an annual payment of £20 "to certain persons to be named by the bishop or his executors for certain purposes in the cathedral and in the parish of Buckland Abbas".⁹ We can guess that the Cathedral purposes included the provision of priests to celebrate masses in his chantry chapel at Wells. Bubwith had previously given to Bath Abbey 320 marks to build houses and precious vestments worth £200, and on 16 October 1424 the Prior, Chapter and Convent of Bath covenanted to provide priests to celebrate daily masses at his chantry chapel there for "bisshop Nichol and for his fader and moder saulez and all his good doers saulez and all ye goode doers saulez of this church".¹⁰ The provision of these two chantry chapels is probably the reason why his will contained no reference to the welfare of his soul.

Instead we are faced with the "conscientious diocesan, predictably of a brisk and administrative frame of mind". Most of his bequests provided practical help where he felt it was needed: for building work at Wells and elsewhere, in gifts for the poor, even for the repair of roads.¹¹ His first bequest, however, concerned the disposal of some of the trappings of his office. To the high altar of Wells Cathedral he left "the best suit of ecclesiastical vestments which I have among all my vestments". These comprised one cassock, two tunics, three copes with amices, stoles, maniples and other things appertaining. The bequest also included one fair frontal and one super-frontal "well and beautifully worked" with pearls or gems and one cross, "the best that I have and one pyx stand, the best". What might these "best" vestments have been like? Bubwith and his executors made a number of gifts of vestments, but an indication of the splendour of the bequest to the high altar of the Cathedral may be found in the description of the vestments he had given to Bath Abbey. They comprised a chasuble and two tunics with their furniture of crimson velvet with orfreys powdered with pearls, three copes of cloth of gold of one suit, two orfreys woven with the twelve Apostles and clasps set with pearls rose fashion, the third with an orfrey with figures in two rows and other ornaments, gifts and favours.¹² If these were only second best, then the bequest to Wells must have been lavish indeed.

Following the disposal of his vestments Nicholas Bubwith left 1,000 marks "to be distributed for all those souls for whom I am in anywise bound to pray and from whom I have received any benefit". One mark equalled 13s. 4d. sterling. Two hundred and fifty marks (£166 13s. 4d.) of the thousand were for unbeneficed or

meanly beneficed priests teaching in the University of Oxford and another two hundred and fifty for the brethren of the four orders of "Preachers, Minors, Augustines and Carmelites in London, Ilchester, Bridgwater and Bristol in that order". One hundred pounds (or 150 marks) were to provide vestments for the parish church of Olney, Bucks, according to the order of the rector and the executors of John Grant, the former rector. The remaining 350 marks (£233 6s. 8d.) were to be distributed in works of charity. A second bequest of 1,000 marks was for the repair of unsafe and muddy roads in the County of Somerset. In travelling round his diocese, had the Bishop too often fallen victim to the Somerset mud?

Another 1,000 marks were for two major building projects at Wells Cathedral. The first was a library "to be newly erected on the eastern part of the cloister, between the south door of the church next to the chamber of the Escheator and the gate which leads directly from the church by the cloister to the episcopal palace". Until this point the Cathedral's collection of books had been stored in chests, in the west aisle of the north transept with the more valuable in the treasury under the chapter house. The provision of a more suitable home for the Cathedral's books would have been in keeping with the concern of Bishop Bubwith and those clerics who shared his views, that the clergy must be properly educated. Ready access to books would have been part of that concern. No doubt Bubwith would have appreciated the gift by Richard Drayton, canon, in 1415 of four books of canon law and a lectern to display one on the north side of the quire.¹³ Canon law was regarded by the reforming group of senior bishops to which Bubwith belonged as one of the mainstays of the fight against heresy.

Once the library had been completed work should begin at once on the second project, a "bell tower or northern tower at the west end of the church ... and there be perfected in a resemblance as far as possible to the southern tower there called Harwell's Tower". The new tower would bear Bubwith's name. In addition to the bequest of 1,000 marks the Bishop insisted that the Dean and Chapter should contribute 300 marks (£200) granted by them to him out of fines (entry fees) for the next three canons residentiary upon their appointment.¹⁴

Nicholas Bubwith did not forget his Yorkshire origins. He left 20 marks (£13 6s. 8d.) to the poor parishioners of Menthorpe and Hemingbrough "but especially to Menethorpe where I was born". He was particularly generous to the adjoining parish of Bubwith, where he was brought up. As well as 20 marks for poor parishioners he provided 250 marks (£166 13s. 4d.), in addition to 100 marks (£66 13s. 4d.) he had already spent, for the parish church to complete the tower begun at the west end, to provide new bells and to raise the walls on both sides of the church, above the columns, with three or four windows on each side. A stone pyx stand of suitable height was to be made in one of the walls.

Finally, 40 marks (£26 13s. 4d.) were to be spent on vestments and ornaments for the church of the Priory of Loders in Dorset. Only this bequest, apart from the residuary clause which will be dealt with separately, mentions the health of the Bishop's soul.

The absence of such concern can to some extent be explained by his separate provisions for his chantry chapels. Nevertheless it is unusual in a will of this period. Even more surprising is the lack of any clear indication that he intended to found an almshouse in Wells. How, then, did it come about?

Notes

- ¹ The printed sources for the life of Nicholas Bubwith are:
Rev. T. S. Holmes, Introduction to *Bishop Bubwith's Register 1407-1424*, SRS, Vols. 29 and 30 (1914); *Dictionary of National Biography: Missing Persons*, ed. C. S. Nicholls (1993); and J. Otway Ruthven, *The King's Secretary and the Signet Office in the Fifteenth Century* (1939), Appendix D.
Thomas Bubwith was installed as a canon at Wells on 8 March 1410; see SRS, Vol. 29, *op. cit.*, Nos. 16, 729 and 852.
- ² *DNB: Missing Persons*, *op. cit.*
- ³ *Somerset Medieval Wills: 1383-1500*, ed. F. W. Weaver, SRS, Vol. 16 (1901), p. 206, Nicholas Bubwith; p. 85, will of John Shirforde, 25 October 1419 (the witnesses were Henry Many, canon, and Michael Carrebone and John Reynold, priests); p. 87, will of John Welles, 9 November 1417.
- ⁴ *DNB*.
- ⁵ *Ibid.*
- ⁶ Jeremy Catto, 'Religious Change under Henry V' in *The Practice of Kingship*, ed. G. Harriss (1985).
- ⁷ Holmes, *op. cit.*
- ⁸ *Register of Archbishop Chichele, 1414*, ed. H. G. Hewlett (1854), Vol. 1, fo. 378d; D&CA, AH/CF/552.
- ⁹ *D & C*, Vol. 2, pp. 666 and 667, Charters nos. 574 and 578.
- ¹⁰ *Ibid.*, Charter no. 576.
- ¹¹ Bubwith's will, see *Somerset Medieval Wills*, *op. cit.*
- ¹² *D & C*, Vol. 2, pp. 666 and 667, Charter no. 576. See also *Cartulary of the Priory of St. Peter, Bath*, ed. William Hunt, SRS, Vol. 7 (1893), p. 158.
- ¹³ Sir Robert Birley, 'The Cathedral Library' in *Wells Cathedral: A History*, ed. L. S. Colchester (1982).
- ¹⁴ Bubwith's will, see *Somerset Medieval Wills*, *op. cit.*

The Founding of the Almshouse

The establishment of Bishop Bubwith's Almshouse depended on the residuary clause of his will. This was couched in very general terms, the Bishop relying on verbal instructions given to his executors to carry out his wishes. After all his debts had been paid and his other benefactions dealt with, everything remaining was left to his executors "that they may order and dispose of them as to Sir Thomas Shelford I have by word of mouth declared and hereafter intend to declare my will in this behalf as before God and their good consciences they shall see to be best for the health of my soul and to be most useful and expedient and as my executors before me personally appearing touching the Holy Evangelists of God have promised and sworn to do".¹

A similar residuary clause in Richard Whittington's will of 1421 was the means by which his executors were able to found an almshouse and a college of priests in the City of London and to carry out a number of other charitable works.² It is possible that Nicholas Bubwith got to know Whittington when the Bishop was a commissioner appointed to raise money for the Crown. To the Crown's appeals Whittington responded with generous loans.³ It is tempting to think that, if they did meet, they may have discussed new ideas for dealing with the problem of poverty which was a matter of considerable concern at the time (see below).

Residuary clauses could only be put into operation once all other instructions in a will had been carried out. This inevitably meant some delay. In Whittington's case the delay was short but in Bubwith's there was a gap of twelve years before we have any positive evidence that the executors had begun to plan the building of an almshouse.⁴ The delay may have been due in part to the nature of Bubwith's other bequests, many of them involving time-consuming building projects or dealing with strangers in faraway places. We have no idea exactly what instructions Bubwith gave to Thomas Shelford and the other executors, nor do we know how much the residue of his estate was worth. The subsequent endowment of the Almshouse suggests that the money required to build it was not readily forthcoming. Over the twelve years after 1424 the role of the executors was crucial and, even here, there were problems. Three, and possibly four, of the executors died before the residuary clause could be acted upon.

Who were these executors and to what extent did their training and experience qualify them for the task they were given? There were eight in all, six of them canons of Wells Cathedral: Thomas Shelford, John Roland, John Knight, John Storthwayt, John Codeford and John Reynold, and two laymen, Sir John Juin, Kt., and John Stourton the elder. The canons, and four of them in particular, were men in whom Bubwith would have had great faith. Shelford, Storthwayt and Reynold all had legal training. Shelford's will reveals that he was a Chancery clerk as well as a canon.⁵ Storthwayt had degrees in both canon and civil law.⁶ Reynold began his career as a notary in the diocese of Salisbury.⁷ Three of these four had already proved their worth by running

the affairs of the diocese during Bubwith's absence abroad at the Council of Constance.

Just before the Bishop's departure in November 1414 Thomas Shelford was appointed the Bishop's Commissary with power to confer all benefices in the Bishop's gift during his absence.⁸ The Bishop gave Shelford a list of names, written in his own hand, presumably the names of men he wanted to see preferred as and when the opportunity arose. On 6 December 1414 John Roland was made Vicar General of the diocese, and it was he who compiled the Bishop's Register during the next three and a half years.⁹ At the same time John Storthwayt was made President of the Bishop's Consistory Court.¹⁰ His name may have been on the schedule given to Shelford as he was installed as a canon by Shelford in 1417.¹¹ John Reynold may have gone to Constance with Bishop Bubwith as he was a witness to the will of John Shirforde, who died there.¹² Reynold was not made a canon until after Bubwith's return in 1418, when he was described as a priest and Bishop's Registrar.¹³ On 16 October 1424, as Bubwith lay dying at Wookey, Reynold was appointed Sub-Dean of the Cathedral, following the death of Nicholas Mockyng.¹⁴ Reynold had first appeared in the diocese as rector of Kingweston from 1410 to 1413; he was subsequently appointed rector of Egforton alias Fayroke, near Berkley, Frome, on 22 September 1414, and of Berkley itself on 23 December 1416.¹⁵ This was one of the last institutions made by John Roland as Vicar General. Reynold continued to act as a notary public and he assisted Bubwith on a number of important occasions. On 19 March 1413 he witnessed the resignation of John Bryce from the benefice of Huish with the chapel of Langport, in the chapel of the Bishop's London Inn.¹⁶ On 5 January 1422 he was present in Bubwith's principal chamber at Wookey when Walter Felter was ordained and appointed the Bishop's Chancellor, one of the earliest appointments of its kind.¹⁷ All this time, as rector of Barford St. Martin in Wiltshire, he had retained his link with the diocese of Salisbury but on 10 January 1422 he resigned that benefice and was instituted rector of Portishead.¹⁸ Reynold was to prove the most important of Bubwith's executors and was only outlived by John Storthwayt.

The other two canons who acted as executors, John Knight and John Codeford, do not seem to have played such important roles in Bishop Bubwith's administration. Nevertheless John Knight was one of four, the others being Shelford, Storthwayt and Reynold, who were given special powers under Bubwith's will.¹⁹ None of the executors were to acquit anyone of debts owed to the Bishop's estate without the consent of at least two of the four. John Codeford, like Reynold and Storthwayt, assisted Bubwith on important occasions.²⁰ All three of them were present at the confirmation of the election of Nicholas Frome as Abbot of Glastonbury in September 1421.²¹ Codeford was also a witness to the appointment of Walter Felter as Bishop's Chancellor in 1422, and in April 1424 Codeford and Reynold witnessed the sealing by Bishop Bubwith of a release of lands enfeoffed to him by the Earl of Warwick.²²

John Knight died soon after Bubwith in 1424-25.²³ John Codeford died in 1433-34.²⁴ John Roland, too, may have died at an early date, because the latest appearance of his name in the records is in 1425 when he was party to a lease of some property in

Wells.²⁵ The greatest blow must have been the death of Thomas Shelford in 1426. Bubwith probably intended Shelford to be his principal executor, and it is possible that he may have been a protégé or pupil of the Bishop. In his will Shelford asked for masses to be said for himself and Nicholas Bubwith whom he described as "my lord and creator".²⁶ It is worth noting that Shelford appointed John Codeford and John Reynold as his executors, in addition to his brother John.

These deaths meant that the implementation of the residuary clause rested on the shoulders of Storthwayt, Reynold and the two lay executors, Sir John Juin and John Stourton the elder. There is little evidence to suggest that Nicholas Bubwith knew either of these men well, but he was probably aware that they were parties to a number of charters concerning property which came eventually into the hands of the Dean and Chapter of Wells. These included, in 1423, several deeds relating to the Hundred of Exton and one third of the manors of Exton and Newton Plecy which William Gascoigne of Brockley inherited from his uncle, William Gascoigne of Bridgwater.²⁷ After Bubwith's death, between 1425 and 1430, Sir John Juin and John Stourton together with John Reynold and John Codeford, as excutors of Bubwith's will, were parties to deeds conferring the manor of Bicknoller on the Dean and Chapter "for certain pious uses", but this property did not form part of the Almshouse endowment.²⁸

As well as the eight executors Nicholas Bubwith also appointed two overseers of his will. Their duty was to superintend the execution of the will and to defend the executors against any persons who unjustly opposed them. One overseer was Henry Beaufort, Bishop of Winchester and Chancellor of England, to whom Bubwith left his best breviary and pontifical. The other was Sir Walter Hungerford, who was to be rewarded with £20 and a horse to be chosen by him from the Bishop's stable. Both men were powerful public figures. Sir Walter served all three Henrys, IV, V and VI, especially during the military campaigns in France, and Henry VI appointed him Steward of his Household and Treasurer of the Exchequer.²⁹ The family seat was at Farleigh Hungerford and, during his lifetime, he founded two chantries in the chapel there. The Hungerfords were patrons of a number of benefices in the diocese of Bath and Wells and Bubwith's Register shows that presentations were made to some of these during the Bishop's years in office.³⁰ These may have provided opportunities for Bubwith to take the measure of his future overseer.

His links with Henry Beaufort were more obvious. The two men had met at Constance in 1417 when the Council was struggling after the death of Richard Hallum. Much later, following Bubwith's death, Beaufort was responsible for securing, with considerable haste, the appointment of John Stafford to succeed him as Bishop.³¹ It is possible that Beaufort may have been behind earlier moves to promote Stafford in which Bubwith was also involved. Stafford had been a presence in the diocese since he was made a canon on 11 November 1413 and installed on 7 April following.³² This was, however, insignificant compared with his many other ecclesiastical preferments and the many public offices he held.³³ In 1423 the Dean of Wells, Walter Medford, died and on 8 July Bubwith granted licence for the Chapter to

elect a successor from among their number.³⁴ They chose Stafford but on 9 September the Bishop was obliged to hear objections from Walter Felter, his diocesan Chancellor. These were answered by John Storthwayt, and the Bishop "out of reverence for God and the King" (Stafford was Chancellor of England) confirmed his election and decreed that he should be installed. A mandate was issued to four canons, Thomas Bubwith, Thomas Shelford, Walter Felter and Richard Harewell, to induct Stafford.³⁵ Some members of the Chapter, however, thought that only the President of the Chapter had that right. Bubwith insisted that he could instruct whomsoever he pleased to carry out the installation and induction. He called the four canons before him and commanded them to obey his mandate.³⁶ Did some of the Chapter object to Stafford's legal background and his involvement in public affairs? He would probably not have had much time to spare for Wells. Did Bubwith's insistence on Stafford's installation stem from a fear of upsetting Beaufort or possibly even the King?

That Bubwith was able to call on two such powerful men to act as overseers of his will is a clear indication of his place among that group of clerics and others who, with royal approval, were anxious to see reforms in the English church and to foster its unity. He lacked the family connections and legal training of many of them, but was accepted by them.

The possible influence of John Stafford on the implementation of the residuary clause of Bubwith's will should also be considered. He served as Dean for only a year, and was then elevated to the bishopric in 1424. In 1443 he was made Archbishop of Canterbury following the death of Chichele, who had recommended his appointment.³⁷ The years between 1424 and 1443 were precisely those during which the plans for the Almshouse were being formulated. It is inconceivable that he should have taken no interest in what those plans were, even though he was often away from the diocese. In fact he played a part both in initiating the process necessary to secure a reasonable endowment for the Almshouse and in drawing up the ordinances for its government.³⁸

The first evidence that the executors had not been idle since Bubwith's death is an agreement dated 29 September 1436 between Sir John Juin, John Stourton the elder, John Storthwayt and John Reynold, executors, and John Forrest, the Dean, on the one part; and John Colles, Master of the City and all the Commonalty of the City of Wells on the other.³⁹ By this agreement the City granted licence to the executors to build an Almshouse on the common soil of the City lying between St. Cuthbert's churchyard on the south and Beggar Street, now Chamberlain Street, on the north. The plot was 160ft. long, 94ft. wide at the west end and 118ft. wide at the east end. On this plot the executors were to build one or more houses to provide separate habitations for twenty four poor men and women. All the residents were to be either burgesses of the City or tenants either of the Bishop or of the Dean and Chapter. They would be chosen by the City and the Dean and Chapter in turn, the City nominating two out of every three residents. Both the City and the Dean and Chapter would be jointly responsible for drawing up ordinances for the conduct of the residents. The agreement also made

clear that the City would be responsible for maintaining and repairing the buildings, and would meet any charges relating to the ground on which they had been erected. The City undertook not to challenge the Dean and Chapter's right to nominate every third resident, and they entered into a bond of £200 to perform their part of the bargain.

What does this document tell us about Bubwith's intentions, or at least the perception of those intentions as interpreted by his executors? Neither the records of the Dean and Chapter nor of the City throw any light on the discussions which presumably preceded the drawing up of this agreement. One of its more striking aspects is the important part to be played by the City. The involvement of the civic authority in the management of the Almshouse was not unique to Wells. It was a growing trend at this time. So were the strict rules governing the type of people it would accommodate.

Attitudes towards the relief of the poor were changing in the fifteenth century. Traditionally individual acts of charity were regarded as a religious duty conferring great benefit on the donor during his lifetime and even more after his death. In Wells both the Cathedral and St. Cuthbert's Church were well endowed with chantries and obits associated with the distribution of money or food. For instance, Thomas Tanner, a burgess of Wells, made provision in his will for 60s. worth of bread to be distributed at St. Cuthbert's every year on St. Catherine's day. Professor Shaw in his study of poverty in medieval Wells points out that such distributions were intermittent, indiscriminate and inefficient.⁴⁰ Tanner's bequest would have provided more bread than was needed for the poor of Wells and inevitably such distributions would attract itinerant poor to the City. By the fifteenth century vagrancy was viewed with alarm both in this country and abroad. Carole Rawcliffe, in her book *Medicine for the Soul*, an account of the Hospital of St. Giles in Norwich, says "the itinerant poor were seen as dangerous subversives rather than objects of compassion".⁴¹

The other traditional form of help for the poor, the needy and especially the sick, was the medieval hospital, like St. Giles in Norwich. Wells too had its Hospital of St. John founded in 1206 but little is known of its subsequent history.⁴² Such hospitals were religious institutions run by men or women in holy orders, whose duty was as much to observe the daily ritual of prayer and supplication laid down by the church, as to provide for the poor. By the fifteenth century there was widespread disillusionment with the efficacy of these hospitals in solving the problem of poverty. The Lollards had condemned the emphasis on prayers for the dead which characterised many of them, to the detriment of other duties. The issue was eventually raised in Parliament and reform seemed to have royal approval, but no action followed.⁴³ Carole Rawcliffe suggests that, instead of continuing to agitate for reform, those concerned adopted the pragmatic approach of founding almshouses less dependent on the church for support. Townspeople everywhere tried to establish a more direct and controllable means of supporting the worthy poor. This certainly seems to have been the thinking behind the agreement of September 1436. It would have seemed that Bishop Bubwith's final wishes were at last being fulfilled, but it was to be

another ten years before the Almshouse finally opened its doors to the first residents.

Notes

- ¹ Bubwith's will, see *Somerset Medieval Wills*, *op. cit.*
- ² Jean Imray, *The Charity of Richard Whittington* (1968), pp. 6-15.
- ³ *Ibid.*, p. 25; see also Caroline Barron, 'Richard Whittington: The Man Behind the Myth' in *Studies in London History: Presented to Philip Edmund Jones* (1969).
- ⁴ Imray, *op. cit.*, pp. 16-23.
- ⁵ *Somerset Medieval Wills*, *op. cit.*, pp. 117, 118; will proved 17 September 1426.
- ⁶ *Bishop Bubwith's Register 1407-1424*, 2 vols., ed. Rev. T. S. Holmes, SRS, Vol. 29 (1914), *Part I*, Nos. 44, 252 and 512.
- ⁷ *Ibid.*, No. 248: October 1410.
- ⁸ *Ibid.*, No. 514: 16 November 1414.
- ⁹ *Ibid.*, Nos. 515 and 516: 16 December 1414. Roland too may have had legal training: see note 3 on p. 585 of *ibid.*, Vol. 30 (1914), *Part 2*.
- ¹⁰ *Ibid.*, Vol. 29 (1914), *Part I*, No. 512: November 1414.
- ¹¹ *Ibid.*, No. 708: 9 July 1417.
- ¹² See Chapter 1, footnote 3.
- ¹³ *Bishop Bubwith's Register 1407-1424*, 2 vols., ed. Rev. T. S. Holmes, SRS, Vol. 30 (1914), No. 805: 2 November 1418. See also *D & C*, Vol. 2, p. 55, Communar's account, 1417-18.
- ¹⁴ *Ibid.*, No. 1263: 16 October 1424. See also No. 1264 on p. 615 which refers to the ratification of his appointment by the Crown.
- ¹⁵ *Bishop Bubwith's Register*, Vol. 29, *op. cit.*, No. 49: 9 November 1410; No. 260; No. 426: 14 August 1413; No. 507: 22 September 1414; No. 678: 23 December 1416.
- ¹⁶ *Ibid.*, No. 403.
- ¹⁷ *Bishop Bubwith's Register*, Vol. 30, *op. cit.*, No. 1068.
- ¹⁸ *Ibid.*, No. 1150.
- ¹⁹ Bubwith's will, see *Somerset Medieval Wills*, *op. cit.*
- ²⁰ John Codeford was installed as a canon in 1417-18. *D & C*, Vol. 2, p. 55, Communar's account: Foreign Expenses.
- ²¹ *Bishop Bubwith's Register*, Vol. 30, *op. cit.*, No. 1278.
- ²² *Ibid.*, No. 1223.
- ²³ *D & C*, Vol. 2, pp. 63 and 64, Escheator's account, 1424-25.
- ²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 67, Escheator's account, 1433-34.
- ²⁵ *Ibid.*, Charter no. 582, p. 667.
- ²⁶ *Somerset Medieval Wills*, *op. cit.*, pp. 117-18.
- ²⁷ *D & C*, Vol. 2, Charters nos. 570, 571, 572, 573, pp. 665 and 666.
- ²⁸ *Ibid.*, Charters nos. 584, 588, 589, 590, 593, pp. 668 and 669.
- ²⁹ J. Collinson, *History & Antiquities of Somerset*, Vol. 3 (1791), pp. 353-55. See also *Bishop Bubwith's Register*, Vol. 29, *op. cit.*, Nos. 317 and 402.
- ³⁰ For example, *Bishop Bubwith's Register*, Vol. 30, *op. cit.*, No. 1065.
- ³¹ *DNB*. See also *Register of Bishop Stafford*, ed. T. S. Holmes, SRS, Vol. 31 (1915), *Part 1*, Introduction.
- ³² *Bishop Bubwith's Register*, Vol. 30, *op. cit.*, No. 457; *Register of Bishop Stafford*, *op. cit.*, No. 1319.
- ³³ *DNB*: Doctor of Civil Law, 1413; Dean of the Court of Arches, 1419; Keeper of the Privy Seal, 1421 and 1428; Treasurer of England, 1422-26 and 1432; Chancellor, 1432-50.
- ³⁴ *Bishop Bubwith's Register*, Vol. 30, *op. cit.*, No. 237.
- ³⁵ *Ibid.*, No. 237.
- ³⁶ *Ibid.*, No. 237d.
- ³⁷ *Register of Bishop Stafford*, *op. cit.*, Introduction.
- ³⁸ D&CA, AH/AF/552.
- ³⁹ *Ibid.*, AH/AF/178.

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- ⁴⁰ David Gary Shaw, *The Creation of a Community: The City of Wells in the Middle Ages* (1993), Ch. 7, 'The Social World Completed: Poverty and the Scope of Poverty', pp. 227-48.
- ⁴¹ Carole Rawcliffe, *Medicine for the Soul: The Life, Death and Resurrection of an English Medieval Hospital* (1999).
- ⁴² For a comprehensive account of such institutions see Nicholas Orme and Margaret Webster, *The English Hospital, 1070-1570* (1995). St. John's Hospital disappeared in 1539, following the 1536 Act to dissolve religious houses with an annual income of less than £200 per annum. See *A History of the County of Somerset [Victoria County History – Somerset]: Volume 2*, ed. William Page (1911), p. 158; *Somerset Medieval Wills, op. cit.*, p. 157: will of William Stevens, proved 31 July 1447; and *Bishop Bubwith's Register*, Vols. 29 and 30, *op. cit.*, Nos. 210, 1044, 1247, 1270.
- ⁴³ Orme and Webster, *op. cit.*, Ch. 7, 'The Later Middle Ages: First Calls for Reform'. See also Rawcliffe, *op. cit.*, Ch. 7, 'Dissolution'.

In the Beginning: The First Fifty Years

During the years between 1436 and 1446 the executors had two concerns, to get the Almshouse built and to secure sufficient income for its upkeep and day-to-day running. The gift of a site by the City relieved the executors of at least part of the first of these concerns. Unfortunately there are no records of the building of the Almshouse, neither of the workmen employed nor of the cost. By the time that the regular series of accounts begins in 1497 we know that it consisted of a chapel, a hall and rooms or chambers for twenty-four people.

Nicholas Orme and Margaret Webster, in their book *The English Hospital, 1070-1570*, included a projected plan of Wells Almshouse which is correct in its east-west alignment, with the chapel at the east end and the hall at the west, with accommodation for the residents in between.¹ However, it implies that the accommodation was on one floor only and in open cubicles, rather like St. Mary's Hospital at Chichester, but it is unlikely that this was the case at Wells. This had been the pattern in the earlier medieval hospitals but by the 15th century there was general concern about the growing numbers of poor, particularly of itinerant poor. Men like Bishop Bubwith and Richard Whittington were looking for better ways to deal with what they saw as the deserving poor, particularly those who had been respectable members of their community but had fallen on hard times. This was certainly the intention behind the new Almshouse to be built in Wells. The 1436 agreement with the City stated that the 24 residents were to be burgesses of Wells or tenants of the Dean and Chapter, or their wives, and each was to have a separate habitation. The early accounts show that each room had a door and that the inmate had his own key to that door. The 1446 ordinances also stipulated that burgesses of Wells should be allocated superior rooms. In the 16th century small fees were charged when new residents were admitted: 12d. for an ordinary room, 20d. for a superior room. Residents of ordinary rooms could upgrade their accommodation by paying the extra 8d. when an upper room became available.

Even before the agreement with the City in 1436 which settled the site of the Almshouse, the executors had begun to look for a property to purchase which might then provide an income for the Almshouse. In 1432 they became interested in an estate at Melsbury, 2½ miles south of Wells. This embroiled them in a dispute over its legal title for a number of years, details of which can be found in Appendix 1. Without a secure source of funding, the executors would presumably have been wary of opening the new Almshouse to residents. So when did Bubwith's Almshouse first open its doors to receive the first inmates? By 1445 the Almshouse must have been nearing completion and on 27 September that year it received an important gift which must have done much to relieve any anxiety still lingering over the title to the Melsbury estate.

The donor of this gift was William Gascoigne, a burgess of Wells, admitted in 1444.² He had come from Brockley³ and, when young, had probably had some legal training. In 1421-22 he was paid 6s. 8d., a year's fee for acting as attorney for the Dean and Chapter, apparently assisting his uncle, William Gascoigne, who received £1.⁴ His uncle, a burgess of Bridgwater, owned a third part of the manor of Newton Plecý. When he died in 1423 it passed to his brother, Thomas, probably the father of William the younger.⁵ Thomas outlived his brother by only a year or so, and the share of the manor of Newton Plecý passed to young William. By the time of his admission as a Wells burgess he was described as a gentleman, and a few years later he had acquired an interest in a property in Chamberlain Street.⁶ In 1447 he held the office of Master of the City.⁷ As both a burgess and a servant of the Dean and Chapter he would have been well aware of the needs of the new Almshouse and on 27 September 1445 he granted to "God and the church of Blessed Andrew in Wells and to John Forrest, Dean, and the Chapter", an annual payment of 10 marks (£6 13s. 4d.) from the income of Newton Plecý "in pure and perpetual alms for the maintenance of a chaplain to celebrate masses and other divine offices in the chapel of the almshouse ... and for the perpetual relief of twenty four paupers".⁸

Gascoigne attached a number of specific conditions to his grant. Payment was to be made to the Dean and Chapter in the Cathedral in four instalments: 5 marks (£3 6s. 8d.) or half the annual payment at Michaelmas, £1 at Lady Day, £1 6s. 8d. at Easter and £1 at Midsummer. If full payment was not received within four weeks of the appointed day, the Dean and Chapter could exercise power of distraint. If payment was not made within eight weeks there would be a fine of 20s. in addition to the distraint.

The only instruction which Gascoigne gave as to the use of this money was that 6s. 8d. should be set aside each year for the celebration of a special anniversary either on 3 April or Easter Day or on some other convenient festival day each year. It was to be held not in the Almshouse chapel but in St. Cuthbert's Church. The 6s. 8d. which was to pay for this special anniversary was to be distributed as follows:

- 4d. to the Vicar of St. Cuthbert's
- 2d. to each Chaplain and clerk of that church
- 8d. to the Chaplain of the Almshouse
- 8d. to the Master (presumably the Master of the City) for superintending the anniversary service
- The remaining 4s. 2d. was to be spent on extra Commons for the Almshouse residents.

Gascoigne also stipulated that a special prayer should be offered at this service. The Chaplain was to say in English, "Ye shall pray for the good estate of the King, the peace and prosperity of this Realm, William Gascoigne of Wells and Joan his wife, Hugh Keen and Anneis his wife, the Dean and Chapter of Wells, the Master and Commonalty of Wells, John Reynold, John Storthwayt and Richard Chocke; and for the souls of Nicholas Bubwith, Bishop, founder of this place, Richard Bruton and

William Gascoigne of Bridgwater, founder of this mass, Thomas Gascoigne, Richard Penyfader, William Poulett, Robert Burgh, their fathers' and mothers' souls, brethren's and sisters' souls and all the good doers' souls of this place and all Christian souls: Pater Noster and Ave Maria".

During his lifetime Gascoigne retained the right to nominate the Almshouse Chaplain prior to his admission to that office by the Dean and Chapter, who were also given power to remove the Chaplain from office should any misconduct warrant it. After Gascoigne's death the appointment of the Chaplain would rest entirely with the Dean and Chapter.

It seems most likely that the first residents were admitted soon after this and certainly before 1452. In 1445-46 Walter Hale was paid £5 6s. 8d. by the Communar of the Cathedral for celebrating divine service at the Almshouse.⁹ In accordance with the terms of the gift he would have been nominated as Chaplain by Gascoigne himself, but there is no mention of the 26s. 8d. he should have received for the running of the Almshouse. The Convocation Book of the City reveals that on 2 November 1452 Thomas Horewode and John Attewater were appointed to take charge of the goods of the poor in the new Almshouse in accordance with the ordinances for its government.¹⁰ It seems likely that Thomas Horewode and John Attewater were also, in effect, stewards of at least some of the Almshouse income. In February 1460, for instance, they brought a complaint against John Hembury for a debt of 16s. 0d. due for rent owing to the Almshouse.¹¹

The qualifications for admission to the Almshouse and the necessary selection procedure had been enshrined in the deed by which the City made available a site for the Almshouse.¹² The residents were to be of two kinds. Twelve were to be poor burgesses or their widows, poor tenants of the Bishop or Dean and Chapter, or the more indigent of the City who, because of poverty, were unable to house themselves. The other twelve were to be either poor burgesses, tenants or others who "had fallen to such decrepitude or need" that they could only live by begging or seeking alms from the charitably minded, or were so infirm that they could not even beg from door to door. These criteria made plain that the Almshouse was intended for local men and women whose circumstances would be well known to those in authority. They also recognised the particular need for housing for those who had fallen on hard times.

The first residents were to be chosen by the Master of the City and six good men nominated by him, with the consent of the surviving executors. Should all the executors be dead by the time the Almshouse was ready for inmates, then the Dean and six canons residentiary chosen by him must consent to the City's nominees. Thereafter, when any vacancy occurred, the first nomination would belong to the Dean and his advisers and the next two to the Master of the City and his advisers, thus confirming the partnership between the Cathedral and the City in the administration of the Almshouse. In return for their greater say in the choice of residents the Master and Commonalty undertook not to molest or hinder the Dean in the nomination of every third resident. If a resident should withdraw from the Almshouse without

consent and absent himself for a month, or if a resident should be expelled by common consent of the Master and the Dean “his deserts requiring it”, then another would be nominated in his place by whoever had nominated the offender.

In November 1446, a year after William Gascoigne had added his contribution to its endowment, detailed ordinances for the administration and day-to-day running of the Almshouse were drawn up by John Stafford, Archbishop of Canterbury, formerly Bishop of Bath and Wells, together with John Reynolds and John Storthwayt, the two surviving executors of Bishop Bubwith’s will.¹³ One of these ordinances stated that a register of admissions was to be kept, but no such registers have survived and it is doubtful whether any special admission registers ever existed before the 19th century. Instead we have to rely for information about admission on the annual accounts, which do not start until 1496-97. However Professor Gary Shaw, when carrying out research for his book on medieval Wells, discovered in the second Convocation Book of the Corporation a number of entries relating to nominations of new almspeople by the City.¹⁴ The earliest example he cites is John Haylesden in 1461, and it follows an order, subsequently cancelled, that in future no-one should be selected for admission to the Almshouse when it was in the City’s gift except at a full meeting of Convocation. Between 1461 and 1496 Professor Shaw identified fourteen residents admitted to the Almshouse, ten men and four women. The first seven of these were John Haylesden in 1461, Juliana Hanham in 1463, Richard Baker and John Norman in 1465, John Lovyn, Joanna Summell and John Plower in 1466.

Professor Shaw also found an entry recording the first expulsion of a resident, that of John Grene in December 1475, for his failure to submit to the Almshouse rules. Grene was an innkeeper and a former burgess who had held the office of Street Warden in 1458. His disgrace was short lived as in the following February, at the special request of the Master, Walter Baker, he was re-admitted to “the society of paupers in the almshouse” on payment of 40s. “to the use and profit of the said paupers”. 20s. was to be paid in hand, the other 20s. was to be placed in the chest with Grene’s other goods and chattels. Grene promised that none of these goods would be removed during his lifetime without the consent of the Master of the City and the Chaplain of the Almshouse.¹⁵

By this time a place in the Almshouse seems to have become highly desirable, as the next five nominations recorded in the Convocation Book were in effect promises of future places following gifts made to the Almshouse or to the City. On 14 August 1478 John Salmon was granted “with the assent of the whole hall and commonalty” the next vacancy in the Almshouse, for which he paid 10s. to the fabric of the parish church and 40s. to the Almshouse. It was further agreed that his wife, Joan, should have the next vacant place after that. John had been made a burgess in 1467 but he never held any civic office. He was a man of considerable means, because the first Almshouse account reveals that he died there in 1496-97 and his mazer and six silver spoons were sold for 23s. 10d., thus benefiting the Almshouse further.¹⁶ Whether or not his wife Joan ever entered the Almshouse we do not know.

In 1482 John Wyx, weaver and burgess, granted to the City his holding in two closes of pasture in Mere Mead. In return he was promised the next vacant room in the Almshouse together with an annual rent of 4s. 0d. until he was admitted. Whether or not he actually became an inmate cannot be confirmed, but he may have died before 1496. Three years later, on 4 May 1485, John Bevys surrendered to the City all his estate in a tenement in Wells High Street, for which he too was granted an annual rent of 4s. 0d. There was no mention in this grant of John himself being promised a place in the Almshouse but, after his death, his wife Joan was to receive the annual rent of 4s. 0d. until she was admitted to the Almshouse. Payment of the rent to her would then cease but would pass to the City. Again we do not know whether or not Joan ever entered the Almshouse.

There was one other case to which Professor Shaw refers, but here the evidence comes from the first surviving Almshouse account of 1496-97. John Payn was already installed in the Almshouse by that time. He was described as a pauper but he had made a gift to the Almshouse of an annual sum of 6s. 8d. By 1496-97 he was in arrears for the previous nine years but 20s. had already been paid to the previous Chaplain, John Teell. Payn was a master mason, never a burgess, who rented property from the City as early as 1465. His annual payments to the Almshouse continued until 1499. In April 1500 he died and was buried at a cost of 5s. 0d., which was paid by the Almshouse. In the following year the Almshouse paid 8d. for a requiem mass for him, but after Payn had died 63s. 8d. had been found in his purse so the Almshouse could well afford the 8d. for this mass.¹⁷

Professor Shaw admits that these cases suggest that admission to the Almshouse was not always fair, but he draws the line at calling them “corrodies”¹⁸ as the sums of money involved were, on the whole, too small to support anyone for as much as a single year. Instead he regards them as a prudent form of insurance by comparatively humble citizens, to provide for themselves and their wives in their declining years. On the whole the evidence concerning these early residents suggests that the Corporation was following the criteria laid down in the 1436 agreement as to the qualifications for admissions.

The ordinances drawn up in 1446 included other rules about the choice of inmates and what was expected of them. It was important that they should be of good health and well behaved. No leper or person with a contagious or incurable disease, nor anyone of a notoriously vicious life was to be received. If any inmate developed a contagious disease he would be removed but maintained at the expense of the Hospital. In that case other inmates could, if they wished, withdraw from the Hospital and have their goods restored to them. Great emphasis was laid on the fact that, on admission, all the possessions of residents, and any debts they owed, became the property of the Almshouse. An inventory and valuation was to be made by two trustworthy men and a statement verified by oath. Any money owing to the new inmate was to be collected and brought to the Hospital within a fitting time. The goods were then at the disposal of the Chaplain during the lifetime of the resident as long as he remained in the Hospital.

The ordinances allowed the almspeople to seek work, but “to discourage avarice and self-seeking” any wages earned were to be converted to the use of the Hospital or to be laid out in purchasing provisions. In fact, in order to increase the “benefit” of the Hospital, both the Chaplain and the inmates were given licence to seek alms. Any goods or money collected by them were to be notified immediately to the Chaplain and, if perishable, faithfully distributed among them. All the almspeople should respect and obey the Chaplain as a father. They should behave themselves at table and in all other parts of the Hospital, keep peace and agree with one another, avoid and cast away all strifes, contentions, quarrels, foul speaking, scoldings and slanders. If any dared to offend they would be expelled.

These obligations were encapsulated in the oath which a new inmate made on his admission. The following is a transcript of a beautiful copy of the oath on paper, still in pristine condition, suggesting that it was seldom actually used. The transcript was made by the late Linzee Colchester:

“I wilbe trewe lowly And obedient to yow And your successors Gouverners of this place / And trewly do to my power to ye profite of this place whiles my lyffe lastith / And trewly certefie yow of all my goodes and dettes / And to brynge them in to this place at all comawndmentes / And I shall neuer geue noon of my goodes awaye from this place while I am here abydyng / butt truly kepe them / And all other goodes of this place / And to geve all my company councell to do ye same / And if I may knowe who do the contrary I shalle show it unto yow or your successors / I will also kepe peace love and charite among my felyshepe / And abeye all ye ordinances of this place / So helpe me god and all sayntes.

Prohibiantur

Rixas contenciones lites turpiloquia scurrilitas et detracciones fugas et detracciones fugas et dimittantur hoc sub pena amotionis”.

There is another version of the oath probably written about the same time. This one is on vellum, unfortunately stained in one or two places, which means there are a few gaps in the transcript which follows. It is the only writing on this particular page which takes its place among the 15th-century documents rescued by Thomas Serel in the 19th century. It is longer than the above version and the wording is less formal, but it has a naivety which is very appealing:

“... trewe lowly & obedient to yo [& to] your successours & prestes of this place and trewly [W]ayte & doo by my powre the profite & worshippe of this place while my life lastith and trewly certefye you of all my goodes ... when yo wol byd me and doe my dewe businesse to brynge them into this place at yo’r biddynge and when they be brought yn I shall never doe them awaye while I am her[e a]bidyng but truly kepe [them] and all oder goodes of this place by my power to the comen profite of this place and stirre oder men of my felewshippe to do the same and if I may know whoo doth the contrarye I shall anoon

discover hym to you or to your aftercomers I wol also kepe peace, love & charytee among my felowshippe and all the ordynaunces of this place as longeth me to doe so god me help and these holy gospels”.

It concludes with a similar list, in Latin, of the misdemeanours which would incur punishment. The handwriting of both is of a similar date and it may be that the second version was a rough draft for the more formal version on paper. Some of the wording is very like the wording of the ordinances, particularly with regard to the behaviour of residents, and it seems reasonable to suppose that the oath might have been introduced when the Almshouse was ready to accept its first inmates. Both versions could well have been written about this time.¹⁹

The ordinances concerning the Chaplain were equally demanding but, on the whole, seem to have been better observed. It was not a job to be taken lightly, requiring a man of considerable ability and strength of character. As the ordinances stated, a fit Chaplain should be "of commendable life and manners and competent learning, circumspect and expert in spiritual and temporal things and free from all temporal vice". During his lifetime Gascoigne had retained the right to nominate a suitable candidate for the office, to be vetted by the Dean and Chapter. After Gascoigne's death the Dean and Chapter were to fill any vacancy within one month. The Chaplain was to be present at the Almshouse every day and at night he was expected to sleep in the chamber allotted to him on the western side of the house.

Any Chaplain who failed in his duties or, even more reprehensibly, was convicted of incontinence with a woman or credibly accused of frequenting suspected women, could be deprived of his office by the Dean and Chapter on their receiving proof of his offence. On the other hand, if he performed his duties competently, he was to be paid annually from the 10 marks (one mark = 13s. 4d.) allocated to the Almshouse by Gascoigne from the rents of his manor of Newton Plecy: £4 for celebrating mass and other divine offices, 6s. 8d. for bread and wine and washing and keeping in good order the altar cloths, chalices and other ornaments of the Almshouse chapel, and 6s. 8d. for the obit endowed by Gascoigne. In addition he would be allowed 26s. 8d. a year by the auditors of the Almshouse account for his trouble in collecting the rents from the Almshouse properties and generally looking after the Almshouse finances.

Who were the men appointed to carry out these duties? What do we know about them and how well did they perform their duties?

The very first Chaplain, Walter Hale, appointed in 1445-46, had left the Almshouse by 1455-56 to become librarian of the church registry,²⁰ and was succeeded by Henry Hayne. In 1455-56 the Communar's account for the Cathedral records a sum of £4 13s. 4d. paid to Hayne "the chaplain celebrating in the almshouse".²¹ Of this sum £4 was for celebrating mass, 6s. 8d. for bread, wine and the repair of vestments and 6s. 8d. for Gascoigne's obit. Hayne does not appear to have received the additional allowance for managing the affairs of the Almshouse. In 1461 the City's Convocation Book has the first and only mention, apart from the accounts themselves, of the

annual audit of an Almshouse account. Hayne presented his account on 4 August 1461 before John Attewater, then Master of the City, and John Pedal, the Communar of the Cathedral.²² Unfortunately the details of the account are not recorded, but it showed that Hayne had £58 11s. 4d. in hand. Of this sum, £38 11s. 4d. was delivered to the Dean in money and pledges, to be placed in the chest of Thomas Chase, the sub-Treasurer of the Cathedral under the seal of the Dean and the Master of the City. This procedure followed closely what had been laid down in the 1446 ordinances, and it continued for the accounts after 1496-97. This same entry in the Convocation Book also refers to a sum of £24 set aside for repairs to the Almshouse, which, under the 1436 agreement, was the responsibility of the Corporation. There are no further references to Hayne as Chaplain of the Almshouse. After 1461, and until 1496-97, we have to rely on a few entries in the records of the Dean and Chapter, supplemented by headings of court rolls for the manor of Melsbury, for the names of some of the men who were responsible for running the Almshouse.

In 1465, 1466 and 1468 John Smyth's name appears at the head of the manorial court rolls for the Melsbury estate.²³ In 1475 from the same source we learn that John Buyssh was in charge,²⁴ and in 1482 William Childe.²⁵ One other name can be added to the list of early Chaplains, but he does not fit neatly into the sequence. Among the Almshouse records is an undated extract from the will of John Riche, late canon residentiary, also said to have been Warden of the Almshouse.²⁶ Linzee Colchester assigned a date of c. 1475 to this extract. It concerned the obits that Riche wanted to be observed annually in the Almshouse chapel. By 1489-90 Riche was dead. On 13 January the Communar was instructed to pay to John Blackdon, administrator of Riche's goods, and to William Childe, his executor, the sum of £30 due to Riche on a bond from the Dean and Chapter.²⁷ Riche could therefore have been Chaplain of the Almshouse between 1468 and 1475 or between 1482 and 1487.

In 1487 we have the first actual record of the appointment of a Chaplain by the Dean and Chapter. On 27 April William Corbet was nominated by William Chock and approved by the Dean and Chapter, who instructed Andrew Grantham, Vicar Choral, and Thomas Wade, clerk of the Chapter acts, to induct him.²⁸ Corbet served for just over a year and was succeeded by John Tele, who was appointed on 14 July 1488.²⁹ He was still holding that office in February 1490 when his name appears at the head of a court roll.³⁰ On 16 October 1494 Thomas Crosse was appointed to the chaplaincy, and it is his name which heads the earliest surviving account roll covering 1496-97.³¹ By the following year Crosse had been succeeded by Eugene Dale, who was appointed Chaplain on 13 October 1497.³²

From the start there seems to have been some uncertainty about the nature of Bubwith's foundation, which is reflected in the variety of names given to it. In the early documents concerning its foundation, for example, the agreement with the City in 1436, and Gascoigne's deed of gift in 1445, it is called simply the Almshouse. The 1446 ordinances refer to the inmates as paupers and the Almshouse as a hospital. The appointments of Chaplains by the Dean and Chapter in 1487, 1488 and 1497 all refer to the Almshouse as the Hospital of St. Saviour, the Blessed Virgin Mary and All

Saints near St. Cuthbert's Church.³³ Eugene Dale, in his first annual account, described himself as Chaplain of Holy Trinity Almshouse, and in 1498-99 he acknowledged receipt of the payment for celebrating in the chapel of the Holy Trinity at the Almshouse – but it was only the chapel which was dedicated to the Trinity, not the Almshouse itself.³⁴ Even as late as 1532 a deed appointing a collector of rents in Wells alludes to the house or hospital for poor people founded and built in honour of St. Saviour, our Blessed Lady and St. Edward, king and martyr.³⁵

Almost all the custodians so far identified were described as Chaplains of the Almshouse. Only John Byssh and William Childe used the title “Provost” instead. In 1466 and 1468 John Smyth added the title “Warden” to his name and John Riche was also referred to as Warden. There is no doubt that during these early years the Chaplain and his religious duties as laid down by the 1446 ordinances were felt to be of paramount importance, if only because Gascoigne had made it plain that his annual grant of £6 13s. 4d. was to provide a Chaplain for the Almshouse, as well as helping to support the twenty four residents. Of this annual grant, 6s. 8d. was to pay for his own obit, but he gave no indication how much the Chaplain should be paid for carrying out his religious duties. This decision was left to the compilers of the 1446 ordinances, who stipulated that he should receive £4 a year for reciting daily the office for the dead according to the use of Sarum, and for celebrating mass every Sunday, and every other day during Christmas, Easter and Whitsun weeks. He was to receive this payment even if he were ill or unable to carry out his duties for some other reason. An allowance of 6s. 8d. was made for the provision of bread and wine and to maintain the chapel ornaments, thus leaving £2 of Gascoigne’s gift towards the support of the residents.

The ordinances did not lay down any rules about the attendance of inmates at these services. They merely said that the Chaplain should “see that the paupers pray for the souls of all benefactors to the Hospital at his discretion”. This was very different from other similar foundations of the period, such as Richard Whittington’s college in London. Whittington’s statutes prescribed not only the services which both residents and priests or Wardens were expected to attend, but also the prayers which were to be said day by day, even hour by hour. If Whittington’s almspeople found themselves with an odd spare minute they were encouraged to pray.³⁶ It seems that they were seldom off their knees.

As well as the annual obit for Gascoigne there were other obits linked to the Almshouse. An extract from the will of John Riche, former Warden of the Almshouse, thought to date from c. 1475, referred to his grant of an annual payment of 7s. from rents of unidentified property in Glastonbury, for obits to be observed annually in the Almshouse chapel on 23 August for the souls of himself and his parents and on 27 November for himself and his sisters.³⁷ When the account rolls begin in 1496-97 there is no mention of this obit, though others appear regularly from then on under the heading of “Obits”. They include an obit for Nicholas Bubwith on 27 November and for his executor John Reynold on 31 January. There was also an obit for John and Isabel Thomas and their children on 14 February. Each of these was

a charge on the Almshouse of 16d.

At one time in the 15th century the Almshouse employed a pardoner, William Martyn, who could issue pardons or indulgences to those who had previously confessed their sins and received forgiveness in return for payments of money. Unfortunately we do not know when Martyn was appointed to the Almshouse but by the time the account rolls begin there were problems. In 1496-97 Thomas Crosse, the Chaplain, claimed as part of his expenses 16d. for procuring two citations against Martyn.³⁸ Martyn had been paying an annual rent of 45s. to the Almshouse for the right to grant pardons and indulgences, but by 1497-98 he was two years in arrears.³⁹ The pardons and indulgences were suspended, and it seems that the Chaplain then heard confessions. In 1497 Eugene Dale claimed 2s. for having heard six confessions on the Feast of King Edward, king and martyr. He made a similar claim in 1502-03.⁴⁰ William Martyn's name still appears among the Almshouse debtors in this last account, but by the time of the next surviving account for 1520-21 he has disappeared. It is doubtful whether he ever paid his debt.

Quite apart from the formal religious duties carried out by the Chaplains the surviving records of these early years show that they tried to improve the annual income of the Almshouse in a number of ways. Originally there was an offertory box at the Almshouse which brought in a small amount of money: 15s. 4d. in 1497-98.⁴¹ The 1446 ordinances had given both the Chaplain and the residents licence to seek alms. The annual accounts show this system in action. From the citizens of Wells a sum in the region of £4 was collected each year. In 1497-98 John Reve and Thomas Boteler were paid 12d. for collecting alms from the burgesses of the City.⁴² Eventually the Almshouse appointed inmates as official collectors of alms for both the City and the country. Collections from the country were often in the form of provisions such as bread, grain, cheese and wool, rather than money: two stones of cheese were given in 1496-97.⁴³

The Almshouse also had a garden for which plants and seeds were purchased: two pennyworth of beans were bought in 1499-1500, and beer and bread were provided for almsmen working there. Some of the produce was apparently sold, as in 1501-02 the garden brought in 3s. and in 1502-03, 18d. In both years these sums are followed by the words "labore capellani" suggesting that the Chaplain may also have helped in the garden.⁴⁴

In addition to this self-help, between 1445 and 1500 the Almshouse acquired a number of properties, mostly in Wells, but also in Westbury-sub-Mendip, Cheddar and Glastonbury which helped to boost the annual income.

The first of the Wells properties was acquired on 12 September 1445 when John Beof and Edith, his wife, conveyed to the Dean and Chapter a toft and garden to the south west of St. Cuthbert's churchyard for the support of the newly built Almshouse.⁴⁵ It had been held by John Mylys in 1403⁴⁶ and was subsequently known as Mylysplace or Milesplace. It has been identified as one of three properties in St. Cuthbert Street

granted to the Almshouse and it corresponded approximately to the modern Nos. 7 and 9.⁴⁷ John Beof was Steward to the Dean and Chapter, and in 1421-22 he had received payment along with William Gascoigne, the elder, and his nephew, William, the benefactor of the Almshouse, for services performed for the Chapter. He would, therefore, have been well aware of, if not actively involved in, the endeavours to provide the Almshouse with a viable income. This property eventually brought in an annual rent of 10s.⁴⁸

The property to the east of Mylysplace, corresponding approximately to the modern Nos. 3 and 5 St. Cuthbert Street, was, until c. 1400, the principal residence of the Churchowse family. After the family died out it passed through various hands until on 3 December 1449 it was acquired by John Reynold, Richard Huchon, a Vicar Choral (afterwards Reynold's executor) and Henry Hayne, Chaplain of the Almshouse, for the use of the Chaplain and the twenty four poor people in the Almshouse.⁴⁹ On 5 October 1451 Huchon and Hayne granted it to the Dean and Chapter for the Almshouse.⁵⁰ From the 16th century the annual rent from this property was also 10s.⁵¹

A third property in St. Cuthbert Street, identified as the modern No. 2, also became part of the Almshouse endowment. A document of c. 1300 by which Richard de Quenington granted to William and Alice, his brother and sister, a messuage immediately to the west of the churchyard, for two marks, survives in the City Archives. It, too, paid an annual rent of 10s. by the end of the 16th century.⁵²

In 1451 the Almshouse acquired another Wells property on the east side of New Street, towards its northern end, together with parcels of land and meadow elsewhere. On 25 July 1449 William Chaundler and Margaret, his wife, released this property to John Reynold and Henry Hayne.⁵³ On 10 August following it was leased back to the Chaunders for the term of their lives at an annual rent of 4d.⁵⁴ By early 1451 both William and Margaret had died, as had John Reynold, and on 4 May that year the property was granted by Richard Huchon and Henry Hayne to the Dean and Chapter for the Almshouse.⁵⁵ On 4 May 1452 a quitclaim to the property was made by Thomas Chaundler, clerk, presumably a relative.⁵⁶

The exact extent and location of the Chaundler properties is unclear. The actual document of 25 July 1449 has not survived, only the entry in the catalogue of the Almshouse archives, which gives no detailed description of the property. The lease of 10 August 1449 refers to the New Street plot and to unspecified lands, tenements, meadows, grazings, pastures, closes and rents. The earliest full description of all the former Chaundler property appears in a later annual account, that of Daniel Cony, Governor of the Almshouse, for the year 1522-23 which lists all the assize rents due.⁵⁷ It records a payment by John Crymer of 13s. 4d. for a toft in New Street, land and meadow in Wellsfield and 1 acre of meadow in Polsham, the gift of William and Margaret Chaundler, all previously held by John Sylcok. It records another rent of 12d. for one acre of meadow in Long String, also the gift of the Chaunders. This had lately been held by Florence Sylcok but was now granted to Robert Everard.⁵⁸ She

had held this meadow land as early as 1498-99, as a rental for that year records her payment of the 12d. rent.⁵⁹

A similar arrangement of a grant and lease back, as used for the Chaundler properties, was also adopted in the case of the next property acquired by the Almshouse, this time in Tor Street. The property, described as a cottage and curtilage, has been identified from the abutments described in the deeds as No. 10.⁶⁰ By 1452 it was in the hands of Stephen Merston, a burgess of Wells and on 1 April 1452 he granted it to the Dean and Chapter for the use of the Almshouse.⁶¹ On 7 April it was leased back to Merston and his wife, Agnes, for the term of their lives at an annual rent of 1d.⁶² In 1522-23 it paid an annual rent of 6s.⁶³ It seems likely, therefore, that it passed to the Dean and Chapter on her death.

The very low rents paid by the Chaundlers and Merstons must have been token rents only, to secure their lifelong interest, and on the understanding that the properties would eventually pass to the Almshouse. In neither case was there any suggestion that the gifts of their properties were linked to a claim for admission as residents of the Almshouse. They are, however, not unlike the earlier gifts to the Almshouse discovered by Professor Shaw in the Convocation books.

The last Wells property acquired by the Almshouse in its early years, for which the grant survives, was a toft on the west side of West Street. On 29 June 1454 Alice, widow of John Colston, granted to the Dean and Chapter an annual rent of 12d. and the reversion of this property following the deaths of Richard Welyknawe, Matilda, his wife, and John, their eldest son.⁶⁴ The deeds concerning this grant were witnessed by John Attewater, as Master of the City, and it appears that he too donated property to the Almshouse although no record of his gift survives. The 1522-23 Almshouse account records that two market stalls, said to be the gift of John Attewater, paid rents of 3s. each.⁶⁵ These were probably the two stalls in the Middle Row in the High Street which figure in later accounts.

In 1454 the Almshouse also received its first grant of property outside Wells. On 1 May 1454 Richard Wryghte, dyer and burgess of Wells, granted to the Dean and Chapter in perpetuity, for the use of the Chaplain and poor people in the Almshouse, all his tenement called Elleswellesplace in the town and fields of Westbury which he had acquired from William Wylmot of Bristol.⁶⁶ With the tenement went lands, meadows, grazing and pastures both in the moors and the hills, as well as rents, services, reversions and escheats with all their appurtenances. In the 14th century John de Elleswelle had acquired a number of properties in Westbury.⁶⁷ What became known as Elleswellesplace was probably present day Knyfton Farm. Some of the land and pasture included in the grant may have been in Cheddar as later rentals show a rent of 11s. 8d. being paid for all the Almshouse properties in Westbury and Cheddar.⁶⁸

Later in the 15th century the Almshouse also acquired property in Glastonbury. It consisted of a number of tenements in High Street and Chilkwell Street, but their

precise location has not been identified. In addition there was land in the common fields of Glastonbury. From 1361 to 1475 the history of these properties can be traced through the Almshouse deeds.⁶⁹ In 1475 they had all come into the hands of John Riche, a canon of Wells Cathedral. The deeds by which these properties were conveyed to Riche were attested by the Master of the City, John Attewater.⁷⁰ None of these deeds mentions the Almshouse but the involvement of a member of the Cathedral Chapter and the Master of the City must be significant. John Riche died in 1490 and his will revealed that he had served as Warden of the Almshouse.⁷¹ He asked that 7s. of the annual rent from the Glastonbury properties should be used for the two obits he wanted to be observed in the Almshouse chapel. Rent from the Glastonbury properties amounting to 16s. 2d. first appears in the Almshouse account for 1498-99.⁷² From this sum 12d. had to be paid by way of rent to the Abbot of Glastonbury for two of the tenements owned by the Abbey and another 8d. in lieu of suit of court, but the latter was later excused.⁷³

As well as acquiring these properties in Glastonbury the Almshouse also benefited from an annual sum of 20s. paid from property in Glastonbury owned by John Grobham of Taunton. In 1483 he had acquired a garden called “Cokysgardyn” on the east side of Lambroke land and an acre of land in the North Field of Glastonbury.⁷⁴ In the same year, by a series of transactions, he granted to John Riche an annual payment of 20s. and to the Dean and Chapter of Wells 4s. a year for a period of 60 years. As surety for these payments he offered other property in Somerset.⁷⁵ From 1498-99 onwards the sum of 20s. also appears in the Almshouse accounts, and sometimes the number of years it had been received is also recorded. This was the first grant to the Almshouse of an annual rent from property which they did not own, and it was for a limited period only.

Later the Almshouse received gifts of annual rents in perpetuity. The first of these was a bequest from Dean John Gunthope who died in 1498.⁷⁶ The Almshouse was to receive 20s. a year from the manor of Allerton (Alverton). This figure of 20s. was disputed in the 17th century.⁷⁷ It was reduced to 10s., but it continued to provide extra money for the almspeople at Christmas, either spent on “Refectations” or later handed out to them in cash.⁷⁸

Some of the 15th-century accounts show that the Almshouse also had property in Kingsbury, Galhampton and East Lambrook, but no deeds have survived to show how the Almshouse acquired them.⁷⁹ Over the next three centuries the Almshouse acquired more property and additions to its income. All was still owned by the Almshouse when, in 1820, the Charity Commission produced its report.

Notes

¹ Orme and Webster, *op. cit.*

² *Wells City Charters*, ed. Dorothy Shilton and Richard Holworthy, SRS, Vol. 46 (1932), p. 146, 16 June 1423.

³ *D & C*, Vol. 2, Charter no. 570.

⁴ *Wells City Charters*, *op. cit.*, p. 60, Communar’s account, 1461-62.

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- ⁵ *Bridgwater Borough Archives: 1400-1445*, ed. T. B. Dilks, SRS, Vol. 58 (1943) and *Bridgwater Borough Archives: 1377-1400*, SRS, Vol. 53 (1938), No. 609, 4 September 1423.
- ⁶ *D & C*, Vol. 2, Charter no. 642.
- ⁷ D&CA, AH/AF/201: A notarial instrument dated 20 March 1447, to which Gascoigne, as Master, was a witness, now missing.
- ⁸ D&CA, AH/AF/193 and AH/AF/552: Gascoigne's gift was enshrined in a tripartite indenture, one sealed by Gascoigne and given to the Dean and Chapter: two sealed by the Dean and Chapter, one for Gascoigne and the other for the Almshouse: AH/AF/193 is presumably the Almshouse copy. AH/AF/552 includes a contemporary copy together with other documents concerning the Almshouse.
- ⁹ *D & C*, Vol. 2, p. 73. Two essential sources for the study of the almshouse history are unpublished volumes edited by L. S. Colchester: *Communar's Accounts of Wells Cathedral, 1327-1600* and *Escheator's Accounts of Wells Cathedral, 1480-1600*.
- ¹⁰ *Wells Convocation Acts Books: 1589-1665*, 2 vols, ed. Anthony Nott and Joan Hasler, SRS, Vol. 91 (2004), Part 2: 1629-44; 1662-65. [This is the reference cited by Jean Imray, but is much too late; she probably meant to refer to the unpublished *Wells Convocation Act Books*, which are held in *Wells City Archives*.]
- ¹¹ *Ibid.*
- ¹² D&CA, AH/AF/178.
- ¹³ D&CA, AH/AF/552.
- ¹⁴ All the information concerning these early residents has been taken from David Gary Shaw, *The Creation of a Community: The City of Wells in the Middle Ages* (1993).
- ¹⁵ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁶ D&CA, AH/AF/275.
- ¹⁷ *Ibid.* and D&CA, AH/AF/267, 268, 269.
- ¹⁸ Favours done for a gift of money.
- ¹⁹ D&CA, AH/AF/281 and AH/AF/552. The 15th-century transcript in the latter is less easy to read because of staining but it is longer and the wording more interesting.
- ²⁰ *D & C*, Vol. 2, p. 82.
- ²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 81.
- ²² *Wells Convocation Acts Books*, Vol. 91, *op. cit.* See note 10.
- ²³ D&CA, AH/AF/239, 243, 247.
- ²⁴ D&CA, AH/AF/239, 243, 247.
- ²⁵ D&CA, AH/AF/264.
- ²⁶ *Ibid.*
- ²⁷ *Ibid.*
- ²⁸ *Ibid.*
- ²⁹ *Ibid.*
- ³⁰ D&CA, AH/AF/273a.
- ³¹ *D & C*, Vol. 2, p. 137; D&CA, AH/AF/275.
- ³² *D & C*, Vol. 2, p. 148.
- ³³ *Ibid.*, pp. 104, 112, 148.
- ³⁴ D&CA, AH/AF/276, 277.
- ³⁵ D&CA, AH/AF/310.
- ³⁶ Imray, *op. cit.*, p. 115.
- ³⁷ D&CA, AH/AF/279.
- ³⁸ D&CA, AH/AF/275.
- ³⁹ D&CA, AH/AF/276.
- ⁴⁰ *Ibid.*; D&CA, AH/AF/290.
- ⁴¹ D&CA, AH/AF/276.
- ⁴² D&CA, AH/AF/376.
- ⁴³ D&CA, AH/AF/275.
- ⁴⁴ D&CA, AH/AF/278, 289, 290.
- ⁴⁵ *D & C*, Vol. 2, p. 674, Charter no. 621.
- ⁴⁶ D&CA, AH/AF/110, 111.

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- ⁴⁷ I am greatly indebted to Tony Scrase of the University of the West of England for much information about the Wells properties of the Almshouse. A more complete history of these properties by him appears in 'Bubwith's Almshouse, Wells', *Notes and Queries for Somerset and Dorset*, Vol. xxxv (March 2003), pp. 216-27.
- ⁴⁸ *D & C*, Vol. 2, pp. 60-61, Communar's account, 1421-22.
- ⁴⁹ D&CA, AH/AF/356, rental 1592.
- ⁵⁰ D&CA, AH/AF/212, 213.
- ⁵¹ D&CA, AH/AF/217, 218.
- ⁵² D&CA, AH/AF/356, rental 1592.
- ⁵³ *Wells City Charters*, *op. cit.*, p. 23.
- ⁵⁴ D&CA, AH/AF/204, catalogued by de Gray Birch but now missing.
- ⁵⁵ D&CA, AH/AF/210.
- ⁵⁶ D&CA, AH/AF/215, 216.
- ⁵⁷ D&CA, AH/AF/225.
- ⁵⁸ D&CA, AH/AF/303.
- ⁵⁹ *Ibid.*
- ⁶⁰ For example, D&CA, AH/AF/90.
- ⁶¹ D&CA, AH/AF/220.
- ⁶² D&CA, AH/AF/223, 224.
- ⁶³ D&CA, AH/AF/303.
- ⁶⁴ D&CA, AH/AF/232 and (AH/AF/214): according to de Gray Birch the missing deed, dated 6 February 1450, gave power of attorney to Richard Weliknawe, burgess, to deliver seisin to William Gascoigne and others of a tenement on the west side of Tucker Street. Nothing more is known about this property but it was presumably another of Gascoigne's investments after he had become a Wells burgess.
- ⁶⁵ D&CA, AH/AF/303.
- ⁶⁶ D&CA, AH/AF/226, 227 and 228. The history of Elleswellesplace from 1361 onwards was studied in detail by Barry Lane, a member of the former Wells Local History Workshop. I am grateful to him for making the results of his research available to me.
- ⁶⁷ D&CA, AH/AF/13, 29, 31, 33, 35, 42, 75, 76, 77, 78, 82, 114, 122, 123, 148, 149, 227, 228.
- ⁶⁸ For example, D&CA, AH/AF/303.
- ⁶⁹ D&CA, AH/AF/65, 68, 103, 137, 138, 163, 174, 181, 244. The Glastonbury properties of the Almshouse were studied by Lawrie Hale, another member of the former Wells Local History Workshop. He has given me all his notes for which I am very grateful.
- ⁷⁰ D&CA, AH/AF/250, 251, 252, 253, 254, 256.
- ⁷¹ D&CA, AH/AF/279.
- ⁷² D&CA, AH/AF/277.
- ⁷³ *Ibid.*
- ⁷⁴ D&CA, AH/AF/233, 260, 263, 265.
- ⁷⁵ D&CA, AH/AF/266, 267, 268.
- ⁷⁶ *D & C*, Vol. 2, p. 151.
- ⁷⁷ See Chapter 5.
- ⁷⁸ Refections were the extra food, especially meat, provided at Christmas, Easter, Whitsun, and on some saints' days.
- ⁷⁹ D&CA, AH/AF/286 is an undated summary of some of the Almshouse property, including East Lambrook. The first complete list of property does not appear until 1522-23, in the account of Dom David Cony, Chaplain, D&CA, AH/AF/303.

Consolidation and Reformation, 1502-1612:

The Almshouse in the 16th Century

The man who guided the Almshouse from the 15th into the 16th century was Eugene Dale, collated to the office of Chaplain to the Hospital of St. Saviour, Blessed Mary and All Saints by the Dean and Chapter on 13 October 1497.¹ He remained in office until at least 1517 and possibly until 1520. The only records of his chaplaincy are, as usual, the annual accounts. While de Gray Birch catalogued fourteen of them, unfortunately only five have survived. They suggest that Dale was a very competent manager of the Almshouse finances. He was especially adept at supplementing the annual income by increasing sales from the garden, and by encouraging the gathering of alms, both in cash and kind, by the almspeople themselves.

As well as growing vegetables in the garden, the Almshouse also kept two hives of bees. In 1498-99 the two hives, presumably simple skeps, had cost just 7d. In 1501-02 the stone on which the skeps rested was repaired at a cost of 4s. 10d.² The Almshouse kept a store of honey for the use of the residents, particularly for any who were ill. In 1501-02 the annual account recorded that during the year 1 gallon of honey had been removed from store and given to the sick.³ Any honey or wax surplus to their own requirements was sold. Income from the bees grew from 20d. for an unspecified amount of honey and wax in 1497-98, to 4s. for 8 lbs. of wax and 3s. 8d. for 2¾ gallons of honey in 1502-03.⁴

Dale's accounts show that he made use of the ordinance sanctioning the collection of alms by appointing official collectors from among the residents, who were paid for their efforts. For the first two years of his governorship 12d. was paid to the two collectors for the town, and 3s. to collectors for the country. In 1501-02 the town payment was raised to 2s. 8d. because it included Croscombe. The following year the collection of alms was put out to farm at a cost of 26s. 8d. The inmates continued to collect money for the Almshouse, and Dale paid them 5s. 8d. in 1501-02 for their contribution.⁵ The lack of any more accounts from Dale means that we cannot track the institutionalisation of the collection of alms, but it was certainly a feature of later 16th-century accounts.

Collection of alms from the country is much more difficult to quantify because so much of it was in the form of produce. In 1501-02, for example, the collections from the country made by almspeople comprised a quantity of white and dark bread, 13 stones of cheese, 3½ measures of mixed grain, ½ measure of oatmeal and 1½ lbs of wool.⁶ This was not all. In the same year Dale seems to have persuaded some of the Almshouse tenants to make gifts of food and drink in addition to paying their rent. The list of these goods is formidable. It included:

13 servings of fresh fish, 9 gallons of good ale and a gallon of wine from Nicholas Trapp.
 3 gallons of best ale and 2 white loaves with a large cheese from William Sothmaister.
 2s. 2d., 2 dry hakes and 15 white herrings from Edmund Mille.
 1 wet hake from J. Walshot and John Cole.
 1 serving of salt fish from W. (Wever).
 1 salmon and 3 dark loaves from the bailiff of the market.⁷
 14 herrings from John Luggwode.
 "Gros sel" from Thomas Newman.
 1 gallon of milk from M. Tyler.
 60 faggots from Agnes Cuth.
 A waggon load of faggots from John Hancok.
 2 gallons of ale and 2 cheeses from John Staynor.
 3 gallons of ale and 3 white loaves from William Chamber.
 20 more gallons of ale from eleven other donors.

The preponderance of fish suggests that these were supplies for Lent. It was customary to provide an alternative to meat for the almspeople during Lent, but so much detail is unique to Eugene Dale. A similar list was drawn up in 1502-03. It does not record the names of the donors but, in addition to fish, bread, cheese, ale and milk it also included meat (bull's meat and a calf's head), figs and curds.⁸ There can be little doubt that residents of the Almshouse fared better than many of their contemporaries outside, and this is reflected in the number of them who lived on into their 70s and 80s, and sometimes even longer.

The 1502-03 account shows that the Almshouse finances were sound. Dale ended the year with a balance in hand of £24 18s. 6½d. Of this, £18 was placed in the "common chest" in the Cathedral treasury, to add to the £8 there "ex antique", leaving £6 18s. 6½d. "in the hands of the accountant for future years".⁹

Dale's successor as Chaplain was David Cony; only two of his accounts, for 1520-21 and 1522-23, have survived.¹⁰ Between 1523 and 1532 there are no records to tell us who was in charge of the Almshouse. By 1532 "Syr Henry Spark" had been appointed "keper or gouverner of the Howse or hospitall of powre people edified & founded in the honour of Seynt Savyor our blessed ladye and Seynt Edward Kyng & Martyr in Wellys". No accounts survive from his governorship, but his name appears in a deed appointing John Apowell, a tailor of Wells, as collector of Almshouse rents within the City.¹¹

David Cony's account for 1522-23 is invaluable because it contains the first detailed record of all the regular income due to the Almshouse. Under the heading of "Rents of Assize" Cony listed all the property then owned by the Almshouse and when the rents were to be paid, either quarterly or twice a year. The manor of Melsbury brought in £3 16s. 8d. a year, the Wells properties in St. Cuthbert Street, Tor Lane and New Street, two market stalls in the High Street and land in Long String, Marleymead

and Wells Field together yielded £3 15s. 7d. The Glastonbury properties and land in Wykefield produced 16s. 4½d., Cheddar and Westbury 11s. 7d., Wookey Hole £2 9s. 1d. including 1s. 4d. for a fulling mill, Wookey 6s. 9d., Kingsbury £1 6s. 4d. and Galhampton 9s. 4d.

To these Cony added Gascoigne's gift from the manor of Newton Plecy. The wording of his entry shows that the money was now managed by the Vicars Choral and was split between the Chaplain of the Almshouse and the Dean and Chapter. Translated, the entry reads: "£4 13s. 4d. received from the Principal of the New Hall of Vicars Choral for the Manor of Newton Plecy otherwise North Newton for the annuity granted by the Venerable William Gascoigne late Dean of Wells for the use of the Chaplain of the Almshouse and his successors from the 10th part of the Manor of Newton Plecy over and above 40s. 0d. paid to the Dean and Chapter". This 40s. had been intended by Gascoigne for the benefit of the almspeople, but Cony does not make this clear. Quite apart from the fact that Gascoigne was never Dean of Wells it does seem that, with the passing of time, Gascoigne's true intentions may not have been clearly understood. This was to cause serious trouble later on. Cony also recorded the £1 annuity from the manor of Allerton (Alverton), granted by Dean Gunthorpe, another 4d. annuity granted by John Draper and £1 4s. 5d. rent under the agreement made with John Grobham. The total income which could be expected from these sources was £16 6s. 5½d.

All the properties listed by Cony had been acquired during the previous century. The 16th century saw some new additions to the Almshouse's annual income and to its property. In 1541 Bishop William Knight had granted to the Almshouse an annual rent of £13 6s. 8d. from property on his Parkhill estate, which he had let to John Mawdeley, gentleman, and John Jones for 21 years. The grant has not survived but it is referred to in John Fenne's first account as Governor in 1548-49.¹² It appears under the heading of New Rents. In 1554, before the term of 21 years had expired, this grant was rescinded and replaced by two deeds drawn up on 15 and 22 October, by which Bishop Gilbert Bourne granted to the Dean and Chapter for the use of the Almshouse an annual rent of £10 from properties on his Parkhill estate for a term of 60 years. At the same time these properties were leased to John Mawdeley and John Fenn for a similar term, on payment of a fine to the Almshouse of £100.¹³ Fines charged on the grant of a new lease were to become an important source of income for the Almshouse. Most of their leases were granted for relatively long terms, based on lives, and the annual rents were fixed for the term of the lease. By the 1550s the fines were often paid in instalments recorded under the heading of "Supers" in the annual accounts.

On 3 June 1554 William Vowel of North "Oreke" (Creak), Norfolk, son and heir of William Vowel of Long Ashton, both described as gentlemen, granted to the Almshouse four cottages and two gardens opposite the Almshouse in Beggar Street, now Chamberlain Street. Tony Scrase has identified the Vowels as among the more successful merchants of late medieval Wells, who then moved into the country to set themselves as country gentry.¹⁴ This gift was their last link with the City. The group

was re-organised to form five properties, three let at 6s. 8d. a year, one at 8s. 0d. and one at 3s. 8d.; the two gardens were amalgamated to one and let for 8d.¹⁵

The Almshouse had another substantial property in East Wells, possibly in St. Thomas Street, but virtually nothing is known about it, neither its exact location nor its acquisition by the Almshouse. In a rental of 1592 it appears under the heading of East Wells, when it was held by Nicholas Lane at an annual rent of 13s. 4d.¹⁶

For most of the 16th century the Almshouse income proved just about sufficient for its needs. What were those needs, and how was the Almshouse income spent? Every year there were some payments required under the terms of gifts, such as the 20s. a year granted by Dean Gunthorpe towards providing extra food for the residents. Certain salaries had to be paid, for instance to the Governor; £4 for celebrating in the Almshouse chapel, together with 6s. 8d. for bread and wine, 26s. 8d. for the supervision of the Almshouse, and 6s. 8d. for the cost of collecting rents. From the earliest days the Almshouse employed a barber at an annual wage of 6s. 8d., a launderer at the same annual wage and a cook paid 5s. 4d. a year. The clerk who wrote the annual account received 2s. 0d., and the steward who held the manorial court 16d. There were also small quit-rents charged on a few of the Almshouse properties: 9d. to the manor of Wookey for two cottages, and 6d. to the manor of Wells for a toft in St. Cuthbert Street next to the vicarage, for example. There were payments for obits, and for the burial of residents who had no-one able to perform this service for them. These figures are taken from the account for 1539-40.¹⁷ Obviously the amounts fluctuated from time to time, and tracking them through the years is not always easy as the headings under which particular payments occur are not consistent. Sometimes headings were combined and at other times individual payments migrated from one part of the account to another.

What is certain is that most of the Almshouse income went on providing the residents with their daily meal. Its content did not change at all over the years. It comprised bread, flour or grain, oatmeal, meat, fish or peas (in Lent), ale, milk and salt. What did change was the price of these commodities, and the increase in the Almshouse income was barely sufficient to meet the higher costs. In 1522-23 when Cony was still Governor the total bill for food and drink excluding milk was £15 3s. 7½d.¹⁸ By the time that John Dyble was in charge, in 1536-37, the cost had risen a little to £17 18s. 0½d., including 10s. 2½d. for milk.¹⁹ It was Walter Celie, who was Governor by 1588-89, who first introduced more detailed information about expenditure on food. In his account for that year he gave quarterly totals for each of the commodities: corn, cates (meat), ale, salt, oatmeal, and milk amounting in all to £29 9s. 0½d. for the whole year. In the following year he gave the weekly prices of corn, and in 1590-91 he did the same thing for all the commodities.²⁰ The practice of recording weekly expenditure was also adopted by his successor, Thomas Merest, during his long governorship.

This enables us to see fluctuations in prices throughout the year, particularly in grain just before and after the harvest, and the introduction of cheaper grains such as barley

and rye when the price of wheat and corn for whatever reason became prohibitive. The accounts from 1595-98 demonstrate how volatile prices of grain could be. By 1595-96 the Almshouse paid a total of £22 8s. 0d. for grain, half wheat and half barley, with the fourth quarter from June to September as usual costing the most. In 1596-97 the total soared to £38 6s. 0d. In the first, second and fourth quarters the cost was similar to the fourth quarter of the previous year, at well over £7; but in the third quarter between April and June the Almshouse had to pay £15 13s. 8d. for a mix of rye, barley and wheat, suggesting a serious shortage of grain. By 1597-98 supplies had improved and the total bill, now back to a mix of wheat and barley, was £21 6s. 1d.²¹

The other cost which had to be met from the annual income was the upkeep of the Almshouse, its contents, fittings and furnishings. Major repairs or alterations were the responsibility of the City Corporation under the terms of the 1436 agreement but nearly every year there were minor repairs to doors, windows, chimneys and tiling which had to be paid for from income. Occasionally the accounts also include payments for repairs to some of the smaller properties belonging to the Almshouse. Thus in 1561-62, 52s. 6½d. spent on repairs included mending the kitchen chimney and windows in the chapel and elsewhere, and tiling for the Almshouse hall, but also thatching the houses in Beggar Street.²² The scale of the work carried out ranged from mending the wheat loft to stop the holes against rats, which cost 3d. in 1566-67,²³ to installing a new bell in 1581-82²⁴ and making alterations to the hall and porch in 1583-84.²⁵ The accounts usually include details of the materials used and their cost, as well as payments to the workmen. At times materials were bought in bulk and stored at the Almshouse for future use. In 1567-68, for example, the following entry occurs:

“Purchases in store: ½ hundred of corn reed: 5s.
 1000 of forest lathes: 10s. 10d.
 6000 tile pins: 2s.
 3 doz. crests: 5s. 5d.
 For hewing 2 elms: 2s. and for sawing the same in boards and rafters 18d. the 100:
 in toto: 11s. 4d.
 2 loads of slate or tile at 11s. a load: 22s.
 For the wayne men’s drinking: 6d.
 For bringing or carrying the said boards & timber home to Almshouse for store: 12d.”²⁶

It was not only the buildings which required repairs. Kitchen fittings and utensils also needed mending from time to time. If they were beyond repair they had to be replaced: brooms or besoms very often, meat hooks, sieves, cleavers and skimmers occasionally. The kitchen fire was very important. This meant sweeping the chimney and providing shovels, tongs and bellows. Purchases of fuel, both wood and coal, candles and oil for lamps also appear alongside payments for repairs and replacements. Fabric and thread were sometimes needed: canvas to make wallets,

bags to carry grain to the mill,²⁷ and board or tablecloths.²⁸ In 1568-69 20 yards of “mattes” were bought for seats for the almspeople at a cost of 5s. 0d.²⁹ Other necessities were paper and books for the keeping of records. A quire of paper for a register book cost 4d. in 1569-70.³⁰ Seeds, mostly onions and leeks, were regularly bought for the garden, as were spades, and bread and drink was provided for any almsmen working there.

Taking care of the Almshouse money placed a great responsibility on all the Governors but it was nothing compared with the problems they had to face in the 16th century following the religious upheavals of Henry VIII and his successors. The Governor who had to bear the brunt of the earliest of these changes was John Dyble. His name first appears in the surviving records in 1536-37, but de Gray Birch’s catalogue lists an account dated 1534-35.³¹ In all the fourteen surviving accounts he describes himself as either clerk, or Warden. He never uses the earlier title of Chaplain. Unfortunately there are no surviving records of the Dean and Chapter which might have told us more about him. De Gray Birch’s catalogue entry for the missing account of 1534-35 suggests that, as well as being a priest, he may also have had a legal background as the letters “B. Ll.” are attached to his name. If he was trained as a lawyer this would have stood him in good stead during the difficult years of his governorship.

In 1533 Henry VIII had broken from Rome, and by 1534 contention about religious practice was rife. In Bristol there had been disturbances sufficiently serious to attract the wrath of Thomas Cromwell. In 1535 Henry began his campaign against religious houses with a visitation of smaller monasteries, and in 1536 an Act of Parliament condemned all religious houses worth less than £200 a year. There was just such a religious house in Wells, the Hospital of St. John, which was dissolved in 1539. The people of Wells might be forgiven for thinking that their only Almshouse, with its chapel and priest, might suffer the same fate.

On 1 October 1537 Thomas Cromwell was made Dean of Wells. This may have allayed fears that not only the Almshouse but perhaps the Cathedral itself might be under threat. By this time the dissolution of the greater monasteries was under way, and events at Glastonbury cannot have been reassuring. John Dyble would have been well aware of what was going on there. The Almshouse had property in Glastonbury, and we know that he was there in 1538-39 to inspect the chimney of a house.³² He may well have been in Glastonbury at other times. The trial of Abbot Whiting at the Bishop’s Palace in Wells, his execution on Glastonbury Tor in November 1539, and the subsequent public display of part of his corpse in Wells would have struck terror in the hearts of all the inhabitants.

That the Almshouse did survive was almost certainly due in part to the fact that the City Corporation shared in its management, and so it was not seen as a purely religious establishment. It is unrealistic to suppose that Thomas Cromwell paid any major part in its survival but as Dean he was, nominally at least, responsible for the Almshouse together with the Chapter and the City. In 1537 Bishop John Clerk had

expressed his pleasure at Cromwell's appointment, seeing him as a protector of Wells.³³ Although his pleasure may have been more politic than sincere, it is just possible that Cromwell may have had a hand in obtaining royal confirmation of the Almshouse's privileges in 1537-38. John Dyble's account for that year records a payment of 5s. to Richard Cupper for the sealing of such a confirmation by the king.³⁴ No such document now exists among the Almshouse archives, nor is there any trace of it in the *Calendar of Letters and Papers* of Henry VIII.

There are other entries in the same account which may or may not be linked to this royal grant of confirmation. John Smyth, clerk, was paid 2s. for writing two obligations for the use of the house, and Andrew Thorn was paid 4d. for writing a testimonial. There are further entries in the account for 1544-45 which indicate that there may still have been some uncertainty about the status of the Almshouse.³⁵ Roger Kynsey, described as an auditor, was paid 4d. and his servants 20d. for the examination and writing of the foundation of the Almshouse. This seems to have been done at the instigation of Master Deynton, a commissioner who, together with Kynsey, was rewarded with four pennyworth of wine. Cuthbert Lyghtfote, the Bishop's apparitor, was also paid 4d. for his labour at Kynsey's request. Whatever lay behind these entries, they must have been concerned with the future of the Almshouse, and Dyble's legal training may well have been an asset.

That training did not prevent Dyble from nearly running into serious personal trouble. In May 1541 Amy Pitty, a widow living in the Almshouse, accused him of having a woman in his room.³⁶ The woman's presence was confirmed by John Turnour, who had found Dyble with his clothes in disarray. Dyble's defence was that he was ill and had sought the woman's help. If found guilty he could have incurred instant dismissal in accordance with the ordinances, but apparently no formal charges were brought against him. He was probably suspended for a year as the account for 1541-42 was presented by John Ente, acting as Dyble's deputy.³⁷ On the other hand he may have been ill as he alleged. By the following year Dyble was back in charge, and he continued to present the accounts until Christmas 1545 when he suddenly and inexplicably disappears from the scene.³⁸

We do not know whether John Dyble had ever held any appointment in the Cathedral before he was made Governor of the Almshouse, but from 1548-49, the date of the next surviving account, until 1612, all Wardens of the Almshouse had previous connections with the Cathedral. For the three years following 1548-49 the Almshouse had two custodians, Richard Brampston and John Fenne. Both had been Vicars Choral.³⁹ From 1551-65 John Fenne continued to act as Warden and in 1566-67 his place was taken by Robert Fanner, another Vicar Choral who had also helped to audit the Cathedral Escheator's accounts for 1559-60 and 1560-61.⁴⁰ Matthew Naylor, who followed Fanner in 1581-82, had been Keeper of the Organs in 1559-60 and Escheator in 1566-67 and 1579-80.⁴¹ He remained Warden until 1585.⁴² John Spark, a former tabular, then put in a brief appearance, presenting just one account in 1585-86.⁴³ The account for 1587-88 was presented, not by a Warden, but by Alexander Towse, clerk of the courts for the Dean and Chapter, presumably filling the gap while the Dean and

Chapter were looking for a successor to Spark.⁴⁴ By 1588-89 Walter Celye, a former Vicar Choral and Escheator, was Warden. He survived only until 1592-93,⁴⁵ and again Towse filled the ensuing gap. Finally, on 1 October 1593 Thomas Merest was appointed Warden and the account for the following year was presented jointly by Merest and Towse.⁴⁶ Merest was a married man and he remained Warden until his death nearly twenty years later, on 14 May 1612.⁴⁷

Dyble had managed to secure the future of the Almshouse, but all these men had to cope with the changes brought about by succeeding monarchs. What effect did these changes have on the Almshouse itself? First, there were the effects on the Almshouse chapel and the Governor's religious duties. During Dyble's governorship money was spent on chapel furnishings which hint at a continuation of some of the old practices. In 1538-39 6d. was spent on work on the Lenten cloth.⁴⁸ There are two versions of the account for that year: one recorded that 6d. was paid to John Stayner for lengthening the cloth, the other states that 6d. was paid to "John Clerk, stainer, for painting and mending of the cloth called Lent cloth". In the same year 1d. was spent on mending "a book of missals". In 1544-45 Henry Norlet received 8d. for binding and covering a breviary given to the Almshouse by John Ryse.⁴⁹ Perhaps more significant was the fact that in 1539-40 Dyble was refused an allowance for the 3d. he had paid for mending the "Holy Water Sprynkyl".⁵⁰

The accounts of Governors following Dyble show alterations as well as repairs to the chapel. Some certainly reflect the changes in religious practices. In 1550-51 the Almshouse sold an altar cloth of "old sarsanett" for 4s. and in 1567-68 it cost 12d. to take down the altar and "mend up the same where it stood".⁵¹ Much later Thomas Merest paid 2s. 6d. "for a writing in memory of Sir Nicholas Bubwith, Bishop, as appears on the wall of the chapel". By then the interior of the chapel was lime-washed. In 1606-07, the year before Merest's gift, it had cost 20d. to renew the wash.⁵² The chapel bell had always needed regular attention, if only to renew the bell rope, but in 1581-82 the old bell was replaced thanks to a gift from the Bishop. The details were recorded in Matthew Naylor's account for that year: "Pd. To a carpenter for 6 days work at 10d. the day for making a new stock for the Almshouse bell and for hanging up of the bell that My Lord had in the Palace and other necessities about the bell: 5s. 0d.". There were other payments: 20d. to a mason for stonework where the bell hung and 4s. to John Levett for making new clappers for the bell, 14d. for a new rope and small sums for nails, resin and tallow. All in all, the new bell cost 17s. 5d.⁵³

More important than the physical changes in the chapel were the effects of both the religious and the political upheavals of the century upon Almshouse income. A few sources of income dried up altogether as a result of the Reformation. In the early 16th century Richard Pomeroy, Vicar Choral and Principal of New Close, had granted the Almshouse an annual rent of 3s. 4d. from the College of Monterey for 40 years.⁵⁴ Following the dissolution of the College this money was no longer available, although it continued to appear in the accounts as a debt for some time afterwards. The 1543-44 account recorded it as 3s. 4d. from the New College of Montroy, the gift of Richard Pomeroy, Chaplain, deceased, for 40 years, this being the 35th year. The

Governor, then John Dyble, was made a special allowance of 30s., representing 12 years' rent, because the charge could no longer be levied.⁵⁵

There was also the gradual fading away of obits [payments made to have prayers said for named deceased persons]. Payments for Gascoigne's obit in St. Cuthbert's Church appear in all the accounts from 1496 to 1545 but at times the sum spent fell below the prescribed sum of 6s. 8d. In 1497-98 the amount spent was 4s., in 1501-02 3s. 8d. and in 1522-23 6s. 7d. By 1540-41 it had been restored to the full 6s. 8d.⁵⁶ In the 1550s the payments for this obit began to disappear and there are none after the end of Mary's reign.

During Dyble's governorship the obits in the Almshouse chapel actually increased. To the names of Bubwith, Reynold and Thomas were added Thomas Champneys and Joan his wife on 1 March 1537, and Thomas Myddelton on 16 October 1544.⁵⁷ The annual list of the payments for these obits varied from year to year. Some names disappear for a few years only to reappear later. Rather than vanishing altogether the money received for obits was gradually transformed. In 1558-59 the sum spent on each obit was reduced from 16d. to 12d.⁵⁸ In 1566-67 the payments appear, not under the heading of obits, but as a distribution of 5s. among the almspeople on the customary days of the obits.⁵⁹ In 1581-82 the 5s. is recorded alongside the costs of food as "Expenses among the paupers by gift of benefactors".⁶⁰

As late as 1570 an annual grant of money was made to the Almshouse on condition that prayers were to be said for the donor and his family. On 14 August that year John Ailworth, Esq., who had acquired some of the property of St. John's Hospital at its dissolution, and his wife Elizabeth, granted an annual rent of four marks (£2 13s. 4d.) to the Almshouse, to be paid quarterly by their bailiff or other officer.⁶¹ This was on condition that every one of the poor men and women, once every day in the morning at the time of common prayer in the Almshouse, should make supplication in the following words: "Almighty god and most merciful father I beseech the mooste instantly for thye dere Soune Jhus Christs sake graciously to prosper the lyfes and healthes of John ailworthe esquire and Elizabethe his wife and ther Children and geve every of them grace still to follow the truthe of thye most holye worde to thyne honor & glorye and ther most comforte: Amen". These prayers were to continue during the lives of John and Elizabeth and of the longer-lived of them. The wording is reminiscent of earlier times, but it provides evidence that daily services were still taking place in the Almshouse chapel in accordance with the 1446 ordinances.

Much more serious than any of these changes would have been the loss of some of the money from the manor of Newton Pley on which Gascoigne's gift depended. In 1553-54, when John Fenne was the Governor, there is a note in the annual account of a decrease in the rent from Newton Pley because the manor was in the hands of the King, Edward VI.⁶² In the following year £6 13s. 4d. was paid to John Mawdeley, gentleman, and Andrew Thorne for recovering this annual payment from the Crown.⁶³ As Cony's record had shown, this sum of £6 13s. 4d. was divided between the Governor of the Almshouse and the Dean and Chapter: £4 13s. 4d. to pay the

Governor for his duties as Chaplain, and £2 which Gascoigne had intended the Dean and Chapter, as Trustees for the Almshouse, to use for the care of the residents. Cony did not say what the Dean and Chapter were to do with this £2 but, in view of what happened after the confiscation of Newton Plecy by Edward VI, it seems likely that it was used as Gascoigne intended until then, but was afterwards overlooked.

What John Mawdeley and Andrew Thorne evidently achieved in 1553-54 was to persuade the Crown that it had a duty to support the Almshouse following its seizure of the manor of Newton Plecy. That duty fell to Queen Mary in the first instance. On 16 February 1555, as part of Letters Patent addressed to the City Corporation, she granted “to the use of the almshouse of the poor being founded in the parish of St. Cuthbert unto the master and burgesses that whole yearly rent or annual pension of £4 13s. 4d. issuing out of the lands and possessions appertaining to the vicars of the cathedral church of St. Andrew of Wells, to the master and burgesses for ever freely and quietly without any service and without any thing therefore to be yielded, paid or done: to the use of the poor men and women within the almshouse”. This grant was confirmed by Queen Elizabeth in her charter of 19 July 1589.⁶⁴ The sum of £4 13s. 4d. matched Gascoigne’s original gift intended to support a Chaplain for the Almshouse, but clearly this new grant was intended to provide for the needs of the inmates and was the responsibility of the Corporation rather than the Dean and Chapter.

In 1555 Queen Mary had also granted the City two annuities of £7 6s. 8d. and 16d. due to her from Corporation property, which had previously supported a presbyter and anniversary in the parish church of St. Cuthbert “for ever freely and quietly without any service ... and without any account”. This grant too was confirmed by Queen Elizabeth, but she stipulated that out of this money the Corporation must find and pay “a fit presbyter to celebrate divinity in the parochial church of St. Cuthbert in Wells to the aid of the vicar there for the time being”.

At the time of these changes John Fenne was Governor of the Almshouse, and he continued to include the sum of £4 13s. 4d. in the list of Assize Rents (the fixed rents due each year) as though it were coming from the manor of Newton Plecy. The same practice was also adopted by his successors as Governors. What is clear is that, in all these changes, there is no mention of the £2 granted by Gascoigne to the Dean and Chapter for the support of the almspeople. This omission was not discovered until the next century.

Throughout the 16th century the accounts include information about admissions to the Almshouse, and to some extent it is possible to see how far they followed the conditions laid down by the 1436 agreement and the 1446 ordinances. Both the agreement and the ordinances emphasised the rights of burgesses to a place in the Almshouse. From this it might be supposed that a fair proportion of the male inmates would have been burgesses, but by checking the names of residents against the grants of freedom in the Convocation books it appears that the number of burgesses was surprisingly small. Between 1446 and 1613, of the 164 known male residents, only

thirty appear to have been burgesses.

What the Convocation books do sometimes reveal are the circumstances which led to the admission of a burgess. For instance, Anthony Player was made a burgess in September 1577, for which he paid a fine of 42s., but he was never a man of great means. A month after he had been admitted to the freedom he obtained one of the two year loans of £10 available to burgesses under various charitable bequests. A further loan was made to him in 1580 but two years later his freedom was taken away because he had failed to repay this second loan. By 1588-89 he was in the Almshouse buying two old flock beds and an old blanket for 3s. 1d. He probably died in 1590-91 because in that year the Almshouse paid off a sum of 2s. which he still owed.⁶⁵

Anthony Player may have come into the poorer category of burgesses eligible for admission to the Almshouse. By contrast Anthony Wylkoxe, a tailor, was certainly one of the superior class of burgesses. He was admitted to the freedom in 1558 having married Eleanor, daughter of Richard Anmere, another burgess. Wylkoxe made the customary gifts to the Corporation of gloves and wax and, in the succeeding years, held a number of civic offices: Shambles Warden in 1569, Churchwarden in 1571 and Collector of Common Rents in 1575. In September 1577 he was elevated to the ruling Twenty Four of the Corporation, and this led to more important civic offices: General Receiver in 1578, Constable in 1579 and Collector of the 15th for the High Street in 1587. Wylkoxe also made use of the loans available to burgesses, borrowing money in 1570, 1574, 1578, 1582, 1587 and 1591. On two of these occasions his application for a loan was supported by the Dean and Chapter who, as in the case of admission to the Almshouse, shared the right to nominate suitable candidates for loans.

Old age gradually rendered Wylkoxe incapable of carrying out his civic duties, and in March 1593 he resigned from the Twenty Four as he was no longer able to attend meetings. In August 1593 he was admitted to the Almshouse on the nomination of the Sub-Dean. He may not have been as destitute as Anthony Player, but he seems to have lacked family or friends to help him in his final years. Soon after his admission he spent 9s. on buying bedding and clothing which had belonged to a former inmate, Isabel Downe. A year later he was dead and his goods were sold, producing 19s. for the Almshouse funds, less 3d., the cost of digging his grave.⁶⁶

The last Governor of the 16th century was Thomas Merest, erstwhile Master of the Cathedral school following the dismissal of John Gilbert in July 1585.⁶⁷ He was appointed Governor of the Almshouse by the Dean and Chapter on 1 October 1593 and remained in office for eighteen years.⁶⁸ For the years 1598 to 1606 we have the inventory of residents' goods which he drew up in accordance with the 1446 ordinances, the only such inventory to have survived.⁶⁹ The goods range from the modest flock bed, coverlet, blanket, bolster, coffer, two shirts, a doublet, a waistcoat, two pairs of breeches, two pairs of stockings and a platter belonging to John Shepperd, listed on 23 December 1601, to the abundant possessions of Richard Corfield, a tailor and a former burgess, listed on 19 September 1606:

“Richard Corfylde had in his chamber in the Almes house in Welles, A fetherbedd price 6s. 8d., 2 shetes, 1 coverlett, a pellow, 1 blanket & a noggen sheete 6s. 3d., 1 gowne, 2 cloakes, 1 dublett, 2 shyrtes, 3 breches, 2 stockyns, 1 knightcap, 1 ferryde cappe & 1 hatt, xs., 1 bason, 1 platter, 1 sarzer, 1 pewter pott, 1 saltseller, 1 dossen of trenchers, 1 pewter dyshe, a pepper corne, 1 crocke, 1 kettell lytle, 1 slyse [a kind of coal shovel], 1 payre of tongues, 1 chayre, 1 halfe pecke, 3 [erased], 2 coffers with lockes & keyes, 1 cheste without a locke & keye vs.: he oweth this daye x li.”⁷⁰

Likewise, some of the women included in the inventory could not be described as destitute. On 28 July 1601 Elizabeth Hurman’s goods comprised:

“A flocke Bedd, a Bolster of flockes, a paire of Blankettes, a Coverlett of Tapistri, Seaven petticotes, six smockes, v kerchers, fyve partlettes, fyve Aprons, two coofers wth lockes & keyes, two little platters & a Candlesticke of Brasse, a Skillet, & a wodden Bole”.

During the eighteen years of Merest’s governorship 43 new residents were admitted to the Almshouse, 29 men and 14 women. The first was Anthony Wylkoxe, admitted at the same time as Merest was appointed Governor. From such information as survives about these people, and this varies greatly, it seems that the appointments did adhere to the rules laid down in 1446. The Mayor and the Dean and Chapter took it in turn to fill vacancies, the Mayor having twice as many turns as the Dean and Chapter. Looked at in their entirety, the impression is that these new residents all came within the category of burgesses or their wives and tenants of the Dean and Chapter or their wives. There is nothing to suggest that any of them came from the lowest category, that is, so destitute that they had to live by begging from door to door. Among the men there were four burgesses. In addition to Anthony Wylkoxe and Richard Corfield, already mentioned, there were William Lucocke, made free in 1565 and admitted in 1596-97, and Augustine Bullman, made free in 1581 and admitted in 1603-04.⁷¹ Neither were residents for very long. Lucocke died in the year that he was admitted and Bullman one year after his admission. The date of Lucocke’s death is revealed by the sale of his clothes “which were very old” for 4s. This suggests that Lucocke and Bullman, like Wylkoxe and Corfield, were allotted a place in the Almshouse when they could not carry out their duties as burgesses either because of infirmity or because they could no longer bear the costs involved.

So far as the other men are concerned there are indications that many of them were probably tradesmen, used to handling money if only in small amounts. In the early years of Merest’s governorship some of them were appointed collectors of alms for both town and country: men like Thomas Benett, admitted in 1594-95 after nomination by William Wyllyams, the Mayor, who held this office four times, in 1595-96, 1596-97, 1597-98, and 1601-02.⁷² Another hint that some of them were tradesmen is the payment of debts, both owing to and owed by residents at the time of their deaths. This was a duty laid on the Almshouse by the 1446 ordinances. Thus in

1597-98, when Richard Borde died, the following sums of money owing to him were received: 3s. 4d. from Richard Atwell, 10s. each from Thomas Gregory and William Gorwaye, and 4s. from Richard Edwards.⁷³ Of these, Gorwaye was a highly respected member of the Corporation, a shoemaker and cordwainer, entrusted with compiling a survey of Tucker Street; he resigned from the project in 1613 because he could no longer afford the costs involved. Even so he was felt to be “a good member of the town” and, although he never became an almsman, in 1618-19 the Corporation granted him 40s. because “he was grown into poverty and age”.⁷⁴ By contrast, also in 1597-98, Richard Atwell died leaving a number of debts unpaid. In addition to the 3s. 4d. due to Richard Borde, he owed 6d. to Ellen Perryman, 3d. to the laundress, 20d. to Thomas Gregory and an un-named sum to John Stroude for cheese.⁷⁵ Thomas Gregory himself became a resident of the Almshouse, nominated by the Dean and Chapter in 1589-90, and he remained there until his death in 1604-05. He was hardly in dire straits as soon after his admission he was able to spend 14s. on buying a bed, bolster and coverlet, the goods of one deceased resident, and 4s. for a gown previously belonging to another. His own goods fetched only 4s. after his death, but in the same year he had made a gift of 51s. to the Almshouse.⁷⁶

These links between individual almsmen are further strengthened by looking at the surnames which constantly appear in the Convocation books of the period, names like Atwell, Bowerman, Morse, Purchase, Towse. They also crop up among the Almshouse residents which suggests a close-knit community with the ability to look after its own deserving poor. Virtually all the residents whose deaths are recorded left goods worth selling when they died. The only exception was “old Father Light” – William Light, admitted in 1602-03 on the nomination of the Sub-Dean, who died in the following year, when the Almshouse paid 4d. for the making of his grave.⁷⁷ Even Robert Case, who was nominated by the Dean and admitted in 1606-07, remained in the Almshouse until his death in July 1625, when his clothes were found to be full of lice and were “cast away”; he nonetheless left a mat, a bed and a gown which sold for 6s.⁷⁸

It is less easy to judge the status of the women admitted to the Almshouse during this period. They cannot necessarily be linked to citizens of Wells, and the only other criteria by which they can be judged is the value of their goods when sold following their deaths. Elizabeth or Isabel Sudall, admitted in 1594-95 on the recommendation of the Sub-Dean, James Bysse, died on 6 January 1620/21 and her unspecified goods were sold for no less than £10 4s. 6d. Merest had also found £9 14s. 0d. in her chest during her last illness, “she being in a dead palsy and not able to speak”. This was divided among the other residents at the time of her funeral. The funeral was certainly more lavish than was normal for Almshouse inmates, including 8d. for a knell from the great bell, 14d. to the ringers, 2s. for two peals with all the bells, plus 8d. to the church.⁷⁹

Ellen or Eleanor Morgan, admitted in 1599-1600 after nomination by Mayor Leonard Crosse, was described as a widow. She could have been the wife of Edward Morgan, made a burgess in 1581, but so could a possible relative, Elizabeth Morgan. Morgan

was then a common surname in Wells. Ellen Morgan had a fairly lavish funeral in 1617-18 and left money amounting to £1 1s. 3d.⁸⁰ Elizabeth Morgan died in 1613, leaving an estate worth £5 11s. 0d. Of this, £4 11s. 0d. came from the sale of her goods, and the other £1 was a debt owed to her by Anne Dugdale, probably the widow of Thomas Dugdale, the short-lived successor to Merest. Elizabeth's instruction was that this sum should not be considered as Almshouse income but should be distributed among the poor residents as a legacy.⁸¹ Clearly these three women were not destitute, and this can also be said of the other eleven women admitted while Merest was Governor. All had goods worth selling when they died, though the sums brought to the Almshouse were in shillings rather than pounds.

Towards the end of his regime Merest had to cope with a serious shortage of money. The problem arose not because of mismanagement on his part, even though by then he was probably an old man, but because of a decision taken at the annual audit in 1603.⁸² At that audit there was a surplus of £51 14s. 0d. and it was agreed that £36 of this surplus should be entrusted to Benjamin Heydon, the Dean, leaving £15 14s. 0d. in the hands of the Governor. The arrangement was approved by the other auditor Thomas Baron, then Mayor, and the money was transferred by two bills dated 26 December 1603.⁸³ These stipulated that the money was to be used only for the poor inmates of the Almshouse. It is significant that this was the only year during Merest's governorship that Dean Heydon acted as auditor. From 1593-94, the year that Merest was appointed, to 1601-02, it was James Bissell the Sub-Dean who represented the Dean and Chapter at the audits, and from 1602-03 to 1605-06, it was Philip Bisse, the President of the Chapter.

Dean Benjamin Heydon died in 1607 and was succeeded on 21 November by Richard Meredeth.⁸⁴ It appears that Dean Meredeth was in no hurry to involve himself in the affairs of the Almshouse. None of the accounts from 1607-08 to 1611-12 were audited until 1612 when, over a period of months, the backlog was cleared. It was during these years that Merest was short of money, mainly because it proved difficult to get access to the £36 which had been entrusted to Dean Heydon. In September 1609 the problem became acute and Merest had to look to the City for help. At a meeting of Convocation held on 7 September it was agreed that five marks in the hands of Leonard Crosse, intended for the poor, should be lent to the Almshouse which was then "in great want". The loan should "be repaid to the use of the poor of the city as conveniently as possible".⁸⁵

In the following November Merest managed to recover £16 of the £36 belonging to the Almshouse. He drew up a memorandum to record that £9 was placed in the Almshouse chest in the presence of four witnesses, and that he had kept the other £7 in hand.⁸⁶ On 15 September 1610 Merest added a note to this memorandum recording that he "with Consent and in the presence of Alexander Towse now Mayor" had "receyved and taken out of the chest above menconed the said ix li. to thuse of the said howse, whereof iij li. formerly borrowed of the Towne was presentlie paid over again unto the said Mayor in discharge of the iij li. borrowed". When, after Merest's death, his widow presented an account for the first three months of the financial year

1611-12, she reported that her late husband had deposited a third memorandum “in the great chest in the Almshouse” recording the receipt of a further £7 of the money entrusted to Dean Heydon.⁸⁷ This left £20 still outstanding.

The account for the last quarter of 1611-12 was drawn up and submitted by Alexander Towse, who had managed to wrest another £1 from the Dean and Chapter on 12 September.⁸⁸ By the following July Merest’s successor, Thomas Dugdale, clerk, had been appointed Governor. No record of his Almshouse appointment has survived, but on 17 July Convocation elected him Curate of St. Cuthbert’s and granted him the stipend of £7 a year, established by Queen Elizabeth, “for performing such laudable services as Thomas Merest and his predecessors have done”.⁸⁹ Dugdale also managed to obtain a further payment of £1 from the Dean and Chapter and a promise that they would do their best to recover the £18 which was still owed to the Almshouse.⁹⁰

By June 1613 Dugdale too was dead and it fell to his successor, Richard Deane, appointed on 4 August 1613,⁹¹ finally to obtain the rest of the money entrusted to Dean Heydon. On 18 January a memorandum was drawn up stating that the £18 had been placed in the Almshouse chest, the three keys of which were now in the hands of James Godwyn the Mayor, William Powell the Communar and Richard Deane the Governor of the Almshouse.⁹² It was signed by the three keyholders and by Alexander Towse, Bartholomew Cox the Town Clerk, and Robert Wrighte a canon of the Cathedral, who at this time held the office of auditor.

Notes

¹ D & C, Vol. 2, p. 148.

² D&CA, AH/AF/277 and 289.

³ D&CA, AH/AF/289.

⁴ D&CA, AH/AF/276 and 290.

⁵ D&CA, AH/AF/276, 277, 289 and 290.

⁶ D&CA, AH/AF/289.

⁷ Presumably the Bishop’s bailiff as it was the Bishop who held the market rights in Wells at this time.

⁸ D&CA, AH/AF/290.

⁹ The 1446 ordinances had prescribed a chest of its own for the Almshouse but this entry suggests that such a chest had not yet been acquired.

¹⁰ D&CA, AH/AF/320 and 303.

¹¹ D&CA, AH/AF/310.

¹² D&CA, AH/AF/353.

¹³ D&CA, AH/AF/364 and 365.

¹⁴ D&CA, AH/AF/362 and see Anthony Scrase, *op. cit.*

¹⁵ D&CA, AH/AF/402.

¹⁶ D&CA, AH/AF/401.

¹⁷ D&CA, AH/AF/329.

¹⁸ D&CA, AH/AF/303.

¹⁹ D&CA, AH/AF/318.

²⁰ D&CA, AH/AF/397 and 400.

²¹ D&CA, AH/AF/405, 407 and 408.

²² D&CA, AH/AF/376.

²³ D&CA, AH/AF/381.

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- ²⁴ D&CA, AH/AF/391.
²⁵ *Ibid.*
²⁶ D&CA, AH/AF/382.
²⁷ D&CA, AH/AF/278.
²⁸ D&CA, AH/AF/382.
²⁹ D&CA, AH/AF/383.
³⁰ D&CA, AH/AF/384.
³¹ D&CA, AH/AF/318.
³² D&CA, AH/AF/325.
³³ *D & C*, Vol. 2, p. 247.
³⁴ D&CA, AH/AF/319.
³⁵ D&CA, AH/AF/346.
³⁶ D&CA, AH/AF/332.
³⁷ D&CA, AH/AF/340.
³⁸ D&CA, AH/AF/348.
³⁹ *D & C*, Vol. 2, pp. 200, 205, 207, 215, 220 and 272 (Richard Brampston); Charter no.784 (John Fenne).
⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 288 and 290.
⁴¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 291, 299 and 301.
⁴² D&CA, AH/AF/391.
⁴³ *D & C*, Vol. 2, pp. 308 and 310; D&CA, AH/AF/392.
⁴⁴ D&CA, AH/AF/394.
⁴⁵ *D & C*, Vol. 2, p. 300 and Charter nos. 798 and 799; D&CA, AH/AF/397.
⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 327; D&CA, AH/AF/346.
⁴⁷ D&CA, AH/AF/423.
⁴⁸ D&CA, AH/AF/324 and 325.
⁴⁹ *Ibid.* and D&CA, AH/AF/346.
⁵⁰ D&CA, AH/AF/331.
⁵¹ D&CA, AH/AF/354 and 382.
⁵² D&CA, AH/AF/415 and 416.
⁵³ D&CA, AH/AF/391.
⁵⁴ D&CA, AH/AF/344.
⁵⁵ *Ibid.*
⁵⁶ D&CA, AH/AF/331.
⁵⁷ D&CA, AH/AF/318 and 344.
⁵⁸ D&CA, AH/AF/373.
⁵⁹ D&CA, AH/AF/381.
⁶⁰ D&CA, AH/AF/391.
⁶¹ D&CA, AH/AF/385.
⁶² D&CA, AH/AF/361.
⁶³ D&CA, AH/AF/363.
⁶⁴ *Wells Convocation Acts Books, 1589-1665*, 2 vols, ed. Anthony Nott and Joan Hasler, SRS, Vol. 90 (2004), *Part 1: 1589-1629*, p. 43.
⁶⁵ D&CA, AH/AF/397 and *Wells City Charters*, *op. cit.*
⁶⁶ D&CA, AH/AF/397, 403, 404 and *Wells Convocation Acts Books*, Vol. 91, *op. cit.*, p. 1022.
⁶⁷ L. S. Colchester, *Wells Cathedral School* (1985), additional notes and corrections.
⁶⁸ *D & C*, Vol. 2, p. 327.
⁶⁹ D&CA, AH/AF/410.
⁷⁰ D&CA, AH/AF/415 and 416; *Wells Convocation Acts Books*, Vol. 91, *op. cit.*, p. 959.
⁷¹ D&CA, AH/AF/407 and *Wells City Charters*, *op. cit.*, p. 182 (Lucocke) and p. 188 (Bullman); D&CA, AH/AF/415.
⁷² D&CA, AH/AF/404.
⁷³ D&CA, AH/AF/407 and 409.
⁷⁴ *Wells Convocation Acts Books*, Vol. 91, *op. cit.*, p. 973.
⁷⁵ D&CA, AH/AF/408.

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- ⁷⁶ D&CA, AH/AF/397, 408.
- ⁷⁷ D&CA, AH/AF/415.
- ⁷⁸ *Ibid.*
- ⁷⁹ D&CA, AH/AF/404, 448. Elizabeth or Isabel Sudall (or her sponsor) paid only 12d. for her room, so she did not qualify for a superior one.
- ⁸⁰ D&CA, AH/AF/411 and 442.
- ⁸¹ D&CA, AH/AF/427.
- ⁸² D&CA, AH/AF/415.
- ⁸³ *Ibid.*
- ⁸⁴ *D & C*, Vol. 2, p. 354.
- ⁸⁵ *Wells Convocation Acts Books*, Vol. 90, *op. cit.*, p. 243.
- ⁸⁶ D&CA, AH/AF/420.
- ⁸⁷ D&CA, AH/AF/423.
- ⁸⁸ D&CA, AH/AF/425.
- ⁸⁹ *Wells Convocation Acts Books*, Vol. 90, *op. cit.*, p. 243.
- ⁹⁰ D&CA, AH/AF/426.
- ⁹¹ *D & C*, Vol. 2, p. 366.
- ⁹² D&CA, AH/AF/427.

The Almshouse in the 17th Century: Before, During and After the Interregnum

The 17th century began well for the Almshouse. Bishop Still's bequest increased the number of almspeople and improved the annual income. Richard Deane, who became Governor in 1613, overhauled all the Almshouse finances and dealt well with the integration of Still's and Bubwith's foundations but towards the end of his governorship he began to have trouble with making ends meet. The Interregnum, involving the removal of the Bishop and the Dean and Chapter, made nonsense of the Almshouse finances for a time but Francis Standish, Governor during these difficult years, did what he could to restore normality. He largely succeeded but Monmouth's rebellion again caused trouble for the Almshouse and the then Governor, Robert Taylor.

John Still was appointed Bishop of Bath & Wells in January 1593 and enthroned a month later, just before Thomas Merest was made Governor of the Almshouse.¹ The Bishop died in February 1607/08, four years before Merest, so that much of Merest's governorship coincided with Still's reign as Bishop.² Is it possible that Merest may have persuaded his Bishop to remember the poor of the city in his will? The will is dated 4 February 1607/08, just over three weeks before Still's death. It is an impressive, detailed document, occupying fifteen pages in the Register of the Prerogative Court of Canterbury.³

Unlike the original founder of the Almshouse, Nicholas Bubwith, John Still was married and at the time of his death had six surviving children and several grandchildren. He was also a very wealthy man owning property in both Suffolk and Somerset.⁴ The greater part of the will concerns his bequests to his family, friends and servants. The only substantial charitable bequest was to Wells Almshouse and his instructions concerning the bequest cover two of the fifteen pages in the Register. The will was dictated to his secretary, Thomas Coleson, probably over a period longer than the three weeks prior to his death.⁵ There are occasional gaps in the text which were never filled and at times there is evidence that the Bishop found it difficult to make up his mind. This is particularly true of his bequest to the Almshouse. Sometimes he appears to be thinking aloud as he dictates. Still begins by expressing his regret that he would not live to see the renewal of the lease of the Parkhill property in the Manor of Wells, due to expire within the next few years.⁶ The Almshouse already benefitted from an annuity from this property and the renewal of the lease could mean that that annuity might be increased. The renewal might also produce a substantial lump sum by way of a fine.

The Bishop proposed three possible uses for his bequest. If the additional money from the Park Hill property had been available he would have liked "to have founded

and erected a new Almshouse here for the yet better relief of the aged and impotent poor of this town of Wells". Alternatively, he would like to add "some more special people" to the existing Almshouse "to be named and chosen by my successors only, the Bishops of this See". A third option would be to increase the weekly allowance for the maintenance of the existing almspeople. He had been "credibly informed that weekly allowance for the provision of flesh for the now number of four and twenty people of the Almshouse in Wells is only three shillings tenpence weekly, which is far too little even for necessary sustenance only".

He accepted that the first option was unrealistic since his bequest was to be only £300 which would "come far short to found and erect a new Almshouse". He went on "yet I am doubtful whether upon ripe and mature deliberation it shall and will be found better and fitter both for the more good of the poor of this place as also for the continuance of the lawful memory hereof, to increase some such special number of Almsfolk herewith as this will maintain (being laid out in land) and the same to be named as of my gift, and to be for ever chosen by my successors only, the Bishop of this See. Or only to have the same to increase the weekly maintenance of these four and twenty almsfolk already placed". The decision as to which option should be adopted was to be made by his executor and the supervisors of his will with the advice of the Dean and Chapter "whom I do very earnestly desire in the Lord to yield their best counsel and direction herein.....and whom I do very specially request and repose in them great trust and confidence for their furtherance of this good and charitable act".

As always, Bishop Still gave precise instructions for the management of the money which would be available to the Almshouse, particularly if the option to increase the weekly allowance for meat was adopted. Responsibility for this money would rest with "the chief governors of the said almshouse" but he seemed surprisingly vague as to who they were. He thought they were "the dean and chapter of the Cathedral Church of St. Andrew in Wells, or the Mayor of Wells and some other of that company joined unto them, or both of them". The Governors were to give some legal assurance, like a bond, that they would pay the extra allowance weekly and record the payments in both the weekly accounts of the Almshouse "in one line or lines by itself by the (.....) of my gift unto them" and in the annual accounts.

As for the purchase of land, whichever option was chosen, he first asked that this should take place within three months of his death, but he subsequently extended this to nine months. If a suitable property could not be found by then the three hundred pounds were to be delivered within twenty days by his executor to the safe custody of the Dean and Chapter who should again provide some legal assurance that the money was held in trust for the poor people of the Almshouse.

Still was constantly concerned that every part of his will should be legally sound but he confessed that his knowledge of the law was limited. In the case of the Almshouse money, any assurance would "be made with good advice and counsel in the laws (as namely if it may be by virtue of a law made in the later times of Queen Elizabeth for

the founding of hospitals) that so by any other good way or other there may be made and passed a good and indefensible state in fee simple for ever to the charitable use aforesaid the which myself for want of understanding in the laws cannot now particularly express and set down".⁷

At this point in the will two memoranda were inserted. The first asked how many rooms could be added to the existing Almshouse and their occupants maintained for the sum of £300. The second memorandum was to remind the Bishop to consult his son-in-law, Robert Eyre, and Mr. Hughes and Dr. James Howe before making a final decision about the Almshouse.⁸ The two memoranda are followed by a signed schedule dated 5 February 1607/08 confirming the bequest of £300 to "the use of the poor almshouse folk in Wells for ever" but adding a further £200 to the bequest, making £500 in all. The schedule made it clear that the full sum of £500 was to be laid out and settled in lands, the income from which was to be used "in such manner and form as in my said will is more particularly advised and directed and not otherwise". The schedule was witnessed by John Saier, his steward, John Still, his son, and Thomas Coleson, his secretary. This late addition to the will suggests that most of the instructions regarding the Almshouse bequest were dictated before 5 February and that the advice he was given was to confirm the whole bequest in simple terms.

The person responsible for carrying out Bishop Still's wishes was his eldest son, Nathaniel, who was made the sole executor. The Bishop also appointed as supervisors of the will, his son-in-law, Robert Eyre, and his Receiver General, Francis James, Ll. D., but, under the terms of the will, their powers were strictly limited. To fulfil all the instructions laid down in the will was a formidable task for one man but as far as the Almshouse was concerned, Nathaniel lost no time in fulfilling his father's first wishes.

The will had stated that within three months of the Bishop's death the money given to the Almshouse, finally £500, should be invested in property which would provide sufficient income to enable either of the two options, the enlargement of the existing Almshouse, or an increase in the weekly allowance for the residents, to be maintained. On 20 May 1608 Nathaniel purchased from Robert Bridges, gent., of Scampton, Lincs., a property in Wedmore comprising 101 acres of land, formerly woods or woody ground, called Bagley Wood and Old Wood, which had been converted to arable lands, meadow or pasture. It was divided into several closes then in the possession of diverse lessees and was once part of the manor of Mudgley.⁹ The conveyance included all the houses, rents and rights of way in Bagley Wood and Old Wood. The deed was signed, sealed and delivered on 23 May. In 1990/91 Hazel Hudson and Frances Neale investigated these properties and came to the conclusion that the two hamlets were planned developments, originally the work of the Clyfton family in the late 16th century.¹⁰

The purchase price was £750, £250 more than the bequest to the Almshouse and later Nathaniel made it clear that the extra money had come from his own pocket.¹¹ He

had been exemplary in fulfilling his father's wishes with regard to the timing of the purchase and a document dated 1 March 1609/10 suggests that Nathaniel did intend this property for the Almshouse.¹² This was a licence of alienation granted to Richard Bridges to convey, by fine or recovery, fourteen cottages, fourteen gardens, 40 acres of arable land, 50 acres of meadow and 40 acres of pasture in Mudgley and Wedmore to James Montague, Bishop of Bath and Wells, Richard Meredith, the Dean, Dr. Francis James, Nathaniel Still, Robert Eyre and John Still. There is no mention of the Almshouse in the licence but all these men, with the exception of Nathaniel himself, were among the Trustees eventually appointed in 1614 to manage the property on behalf of the Almshouse.¹³

Nothing more is heard about the implementation of the Almshouse bequest until 1612. There may have been several reasons for the delay. Perhaps Nathaniel was too preoccupied with all the other tasks his father had laid upon him as sole executor of the will. Perhaps he had not fully made up his mind to give this property to the Almshouse, especially as it had cost him so much of his own money. Did Nathaniel think that this property was capable of further development and that he might be able to recoup some of the money he had had to find for its purchase? During the next few years, beginning in December 1609 Nathaniel granted a number of leases to old and new tenants of the Wedmore properties.¹⁴ The last new lease granted by him was in 1613. Each new lease, with one exception, carried with it a fine. Together they brought a total of £64 16s. 8d. by way of fines. The leases were all for terms of 99 years or for two or three lives, as were the previous leases. Between 1609 and 1613 Nathaniel would have been able to judge whether or not the property could produce sufficient income to carry out his father's wishes or, alternatively, whether or not he might develop the property further to his own advantage.

There was one other reason why Nathaniel could not take action with regard to the Almshouse. He had to be sure that there were no other claims on the property he had bought. There was at least one. On 14 May 1610 John Cottington, gent., of Oxford, released any claim he or his heirs had to the property in favour of Richard Bridges or Nathaniel Still whoever was the owner or seised of Bagley Wood and Old Wood. This was in consideration of a payment by Nathaniel of an undisclosed sum of money.¹⁵

By 1612 the Dean and Chapter were becoming impatient. Bishop Still had stipulated that if a suitable property to provide an endowment for the Almshouse had not been found within the given time then the money should be handed over to the Dean and Chapter. On 1 July 1612 the Chapter ordered that a letter should be written to Nathaniel Still moving him "with all conveniency to perform his father's will: or else the dean and chapter, intending to undertake the trust in this behalf by his said father in his said testament to them committed, purpose to call hym therto by such meanes as the lawe shall permit".¹⁶

The letter certainly galvanized Nathaniel into action, but it was not the action which might have been expected. At the meeting of the City Convocation on 17 July¹⁷ the

members present were asked for their opinions "concerning a book that Mr. Nathaniel Still as executor of John Still late bishop has delivered to the mayor for the setting up of an Almshouse upon the house which Mr. Thomas Leighe late deceased gave to a poor burgess".¹⁸ Convocation had no hesitation in dismissing the proposal. They thought the book was "not answerable to the will of the said John Still late bishop deceased: and that the said house which was given by Mr. Leighe will be more benefit to a burgess than the house which is to be new erected: therefore the said book is by most part of the said persons here present disallowed". The house in question was in Priest Row and had been leased to William Chambers, a poor burgess, in 1608, at an annual rent of 4d., provided he lived in the house himself and kept it in good repair. It does seem an unlikely choice for the enlargement of the existing Almshouse.¹⁹

The City soon made clear what they wanted from the Bishop's bequest. On 13 October, having conferred with Richard Eyre and examined John Still's will, they "agreed that if it shall please the executors of the said bishop the money or the lands therewith purchased shall be employed towards the relief of the poor in the now almshouse and of six other people to be added of new: and new rooms to be made within the said house".²⁰ They had understood Still's wishes perfectly.

On 7 December that year Convocation agreed that the Mayor, William Bull, should meet two representatives of the Dean and Chapter, Dr. Philip Bisse and Dr. William Powell, at the Almshouse that very afternoon to confer about the state of the Almshouse and, no doubt, about the impending changes.²¹ At this time the Governor was Thomas Dugdale, who had been appointed by Convocation in the previous July.²² He died after only twelve months in office and was succeeded in August 1613 by Richard Deane, clerk. Deane's appointment, unlike Dugdale's, was made, as had been customary in accordance with the 1446 ordinances, by the Dean and Chapter. They referred to Deane as the new Master, Keeper and Chaplain of the Almshouse.²³ In spite of this return to former practices, the Corporation continued to play an active role in the implementation of Bishop Still's bequest to the Almshouse.

On 18 September 1613 an indenture was drawn up by which Nathaniel Still conveyed the Wedmore property to Dr. Francis James, Robert Eyre, Esq., Thomas and Henry Southworth, Esqs., William Bull, linen-draper, Andrew Bowerman, gent., Thomas Coward, gent., Thomas Maycocke, gent., Thomas Baron, mercer, Bartholomew Cox, gent., William Bower, gent., and Hugh Meade, pewterer.²⁴ With the exception of Francis James and Robert Eyre, these were all citizens, most of whom had held civic office. The Bishop, James Montague, the Dean, Richard Meredith, and the Mayor, Masters and Burgesses of Wells were also parties to the deed. They were to be "feoffees in trust", to be responsible for ensuring that the annual income from the property, £33 13s. 4d. "or thereabouts" was used for the better relief of the existing twenty four men and women in the Almshouse and for the relief of six other "poor, distressed men who by reason of poverty cannot hire their own houses". The deed bore the signatures and seals of Nathaniel Still and Bishop Montague and the seal of the Mayor. This third seal, in its bag is, in Linzee Colchester's words, "in smithereens", but the document is almost certainly the indenture sealed on behalf of

the Corporation at a Convocation held on 24 September.²⁵

The preamble to the deed states that Nathaniel Still had purchased the property with the £500 bequeathed by his father and with £269 17s. 0d. "more of his own goods". In the years since Nathaniel had bought the property he had received only £518 7s. 8d. by way of rents and fines. "And yet the saide Nathaniel Still is well contente and pleased that for the more speedier and better reliife of the saide poore distressed people and for the encreasinge of his said father's gift" all future income from the property should be devoted to the poor in the Almshouse "and to none other use, intende or purpose whatsoever".

The indenture also laid down some basic rules governing the choice of the six new residents and for the management of the Wedmore property and its income. The new almsmen must be burgesses of Wells, but "if there are not that number of decayed burgesses" then the number could be made up from other men who had lived in Wells for at least seven years. "They must all, during the past seven years, have been of good behaviour, honest conversation and not contentious persons, well affected in the true religion of the time being established in ye Church of England." They must not be "drunkards, incontinent or idle, nor infected with leprosy or any other infectious or contagious disease, and not under the age of 50 years". An inventory of their goods was to be made when they entered the Almshouse and if they were paid for any work they might do, the money should be paid into the common fund for the benefit of all. Failure to do this would result in their dismissal from the Almshouse. They must attend divine service or prayers daily and on 27 December, the Feast of St. John the Evangelist, they were to go to St. Cuthbert's Church to hear a sermon preached by the Vicar for which he was to be paid 10s. annually. These regulations bear a close resemblance to the 1446 ordinances for Bubwith's Almshouse and perhaps they emanated from the meeting at the Almshouse the previous year.

The indenture named the first six new residents as John Nalplatt alias Baylie, John Foorde, William Gunninge, William Babye, Thomas Parsons and William Shergoll. There is no mention of the Bishop's role in appointing the new residents of the Almshouse, which had been stressed by the Bishop in his will, but it is evident that, from the first, a procedure was adopted allowing the City to nominate suitable candidates and for the Bishop to make the final choice. So, when William Babye died in 1616, Convocation nominated four men, Dosset, Feare, Chepper and Harden, "all poor men such as have inhabited within the town seven years, which poor men are to be certified to my lord and he at his pleasure to elect one of them".²⁶

The increases in the money to be spent on food for all thirty almspeople were also confirmed. The weekly allowance of 3s. 4d. for "fleshe and fishe" was increased by 4s. 8d. a week. The Governor's annual fee was increased from four marks (£2 13s. 4d.) to £4. It was calculated that these increases would bring the total annual cost to £15 10s. 8d. to be paid out of the income from Wedmore. This should leave a surplus of £4 13s. 4d. to be placed in the Almshouse chest along with any money from fines. The leases of the Wedmore property should be for three lives or 99 years and the old

rents of 6s. 8d. an acre preserved. The leases were to be kept in one of the six new lodgings in a chest with three keys, one to be held by the Mayor and the other two by two of the feoffees living in Wells.

Four copies of this indenture were made, one for the Bishop's Palace, one for the Dean and Chapter, one for the Almshouse and one for the Mayor, Masters and Burgesses of the City. The Almshouse copy is the only one to have survived. The rules laid down in 1613 were superseded just over a year later when the new accommodation had been built and occupied and Still's bequest fully implemented. Building began in October 1613. By then responsibility for Still's additions and his property had been taken over by Henry Southworth, Thomas' more popular brother. In December 1615 he presented a detailed account of all the money which had passed through his hands between October 1613 and Michaelmas 1615.²⁷ The account was audited by the Mayor, Henry Baron, and six of the Wells citizens who were feoffees. Francis James acted on behalf of the Bishop. Part of the account gives precise details of the money spent on the new building to accommodate six additional poor men.

Still's house was joined to the old building by a gallery. It had its own well and a special room for the Governors and feoffees. Henry Southworth presented the Almshouse with a very fine chest which has survived to the present day. Bishop Still's coat of arms and inscriptions remembering his bequest were placed on the new building.²⁸ Inevitably some alterations had to be made to the old building. These included some additional windows for the "Poor's Kitchen". The building work was supervised by William Garman, who was paid 43s. 6d. for 87 days spent at the site. The total cost was £125 9s. 5d. Other payments in the account included the extra money for food provided under the terms of the Bishop's will. The income during these two years, comprising rent, fines, perquisites of courts and casual gifts, including another £20 from Nathaniel Still, amounted to £167 16s. 8d. Southworth still had money in hand at Michaelmas 1615, so it seemed that Nathaniel Still's investment in the Wedmore property would provide sufficient income to carry out his father's wishes.

When the six new residents entered the Almshouse in December 1614 it was thought expedient to clarify a number of matters. A new trust deed was drawn up confirming the conveyance of the Wedmore property to the feoffees named in the earlier document but it cancelled all the ordinances previously made.²⁹ The new ordinances were much more detailed and specific than those in the earlier document. In future, the thirty poor people and their Chaplain or Governor would be subject to the ordinances and statutes already made by Bishop Stafford, John Storthwaite and John Reynold in 1446 "so far as they are not contrary to God's word nor repugnant to the lawes and statutes of this realm of England". The poor men of Bishop Still's foundation were to enjoy common use of the chapel, hall or kitchen, as well as common fires, gardens, outlets, ways and passages, easements and commodities belonging to the old Almshouse. Similarly, the existing twenty four poor men and women of Bubwith's Almshouse should share equally in the income from Still's foundation. Any surplus money was to be placed in the common Almshouse chest.

This second deed of trust reaffirmed the increased allowances for food and the improvement in the Governor's salary. It also repeated the qualifications for entry to Still's foundation and the procedure for election. If a vacancy occurred during the absence of a bishop, the Dean and Chapter and the Mayor, Masters and Burgesses were to take turn and turn about in filling the vacancy.³⁰ Daily attendance at divine service and prayers was again required of Still's almsmen and also at St. Cuthbert's Church on 26 December in the afternoon to hear a sermon preached by the Vicar or "some other learned honest preacher thereunto appointed in which mention shall be made of this pious and charitable gift of Bishop Still as well as of the first foundation of the said Almshouse by Bishop Bubwith, the said preacher being paid 10s".³¹

Richard Deane was appointed Governor and Chaplain of the Almshouse by the Dean and Chapter on 4 August 1613.³² It was clear from the outset that one of his aims would be to improve the income of the Almshouse. Still's bequest was not enough. Too much money had been lost by failure to make sure that the Almshouse received what was its rightful due. He lost no time in taking action. In his first annual account for 1613-14 he recorded a payment of 7s. from Stephen Spelt "for one bushel of wheat that was due to the poor four or five years since, as it appeared under the hand of the late Thomas Merest, late Governor".³³ Deane had apparently been studying the original ordinances for the Almshouse and had discovered a much more serious failure. His annual stipend was 53s. 4d. but according to the 1446 ordinances it should have been £4. He reported this at the audit of the account held on 19 December 1614. The auditors were Thomas Baron, the Mayor, and Thomas Coward, representing the City, with John Bourne, acting for the Dean, and Robert Wright, the Cathedral Treasurer. They supported Deane's claim and agreed that in 1445 William Gascoigne had indeed granted an annuity of 10 marks (£6 13s. 4d.) from his Newton Plecy property. 40s. of this sum was to provide the Almshouse with a Chaplain, the rest was for the maintenance of the almspeople. The Newton Plecy property had been confiscated by the Crown in 1553-54 but was restored in the following year.³⁴ Ever since then the annuity had been paid to the Dean and Chapter but they had failed to pass on any of it to the Almshouse.

It was agreed then and there "that the now Governor shall during the pleasure of the auditors for the time being and no longer, receive his fee of iiij li. yearly". The apparent readiness of the auditors to accept Deane's claim may have stemmed from the fact that the Dean and Chapter were already aware of the problem. On 1 October 1612 Dr. Wright, one of the Cathedral auditors, and Dr. Powell, the Communar, were given permission to go to London "about the business of the Dean and Chapter" without losing their days of residence.³⁵ The object of this visit was not mentioned, but they returned with a Commission under the Great Seal dated 19 November. The Commission was issued under the Statute of Charitable Uses following an Inquisition dated 18 September. Such a Commission required a response and the Dean and Chapter made it clear that they had not sought it "with th'intent to be found themselves faulty upon the Statute of Charitable Uses by oath". Instead, they set about finding another solution, acceptable to all parties. On 15 October 1613 the

Mayor reported to Convocation that Dr. Powell, on behalf of the Dean and Chapter, wanted to know if the Corporation were intending to go to law to recover the money due to the Almshouse or whether they would be willing to accept a compromise. It was agreed that the Mayor and four of the Masters should meet the Dean and Chapter to discover what alternative they were proposing and to report back to Convocation "whereby a charitable course may be taken for the good of the poor without further suit of law". As a result, in order not to be humiliated and "that blemish and breach of trust" might not be recorded, the Dean and Chapter "agreed ever after to pay the 40s. 0d. and £4 more per annum" until they had paid off the debt incurred over the previous sixty years.³⁶

The solution of the problem was recorded in a document drawn up by Deane at Michaelmas 1620.³⁷ It was in addition to his normal annual account of the same date. Styling himself as "the Souveraigne" of the Hospital he described the document as the "state" of both the old and the new houses and it demonstrated his resolve to make sure that both Almshouses, Bubwith's and Still's, received what was due to them. He began with an estimate of their combined annual income: Bubwith's foundation was £260, roughly half of which was owed in arrears, fines and loans, and £33 15s. 0d. from Still's foundation, making a total of £293 15s. 0d. He then referred to the 1446 ordinances and noted, "Things to be observed in the revenues aforesaid that the poor may be recompensed towards their losses in regard of neglect of some payments all things which yet are unsettled". This is followed by six matters which required attention.

1. The money owed by the Dean and Chapter as a result of their failure to honour Gascoigne's bequest.
2. The property which had been purchased by John Reynold, Bubwith's executor, and the deed which had transferred this property to the Dean and Chapter for the use of the Hospital.
3. The annuity granted by Dean Gunthorpe, at present 10s. a year paid by the Communar "and it is supposed that 20s. per annum ought to be paid".
4. There was 48s. 0d. each year from John May, out of property formerly belonging to the Priory of St. John. The account for that year showed that this sum, which was dedicated to the 24 residents of Bubwith's house, had been received from his bailiff but May was refusing to pay it any more.³⁸
5. The court rolls of the Hospital lands should be placed in the Almshouse chest "that the customs may be known and the estates that the tenants have in the same lands and that no new custom be brought in to prejudice the said house. This done because no court roll hath been brought in this 40 years".³⁹
6. Fines for leases of Almshouse lands should be "in some reasonable measure to the valuable worth".

This list was followed by statements concerning some more recent gifts and bequests together with the dates of the relevant documents.

- a. Bishop Bourne's gift of £10 a year from the rents of Parkhill for the term of his lease of 60 years, which had now expired. (This was the lease which Bishop Still had hoped he would be able to renew before he died.)
- b. Bishop Montague's subsequent grant of £15 a year from the rents of Polsham and Forelease for the term of his lease for three lives.
- c. Bishop Still's annuity of £12 2s. 8d. to Bubwith's house from the Wedmore property.
- d. John Godwin's bequest of £3 6s. 8d. to the poor of both houses. Deane was emphatic that both houses should benefit from this bequest but was concerned that "the house hath nothing to show how settled".⁴⁰

Having completed his list of the outstanding issues Deane gave an account of the current year's income and expenditure. It is very difficult to follow his calculations. The clear yearly rents of the old house he reckoned as £63 14s. 6d., including Bishop Still's bounty of £12 2s. 8d. There were, however, a few abatements which had to be made. These included the extra 10s. a year he thought should come from Dean Gunthorpe's bequest. The abatements amounted to £2 3s. 9d. leaving a total of £61 10s. 9d. income for the old house.

The annual receipts for the new house comprised £33 13s. 4d. which had to be handed over to the old house and £12 10s. 8d. for the new house. The certain yearly revenues of both houses was, for Bubwith's, without Still's addition, £49 8s. 1d. and for Still's £33 13s. 4d., making a total of £83 10s. 5d. This did not take into account any income from alms or other charitable donations.

Deane calculated that the annual expenditure for both houses was about £130. The allowance for bread amounted to £42 9s. 8d. each year. Expenditure on meat was 15s. a week and on drink 2s. a week. The remainder of the £130 was made up with "other allowances for the necessities of the said poor and the chaplain in the said houses ... And so the said houses do exceed in the allowances above the old rents £36 18s. 7d". The deficit, he noted, "hath been borne of the fines of the lands of the old house".

Deane had made it clear in his "state" that his estimate of the income did not include money received as alms or other charitable donations. This was because income of this kind was not used to maintain the Almshouse or to provide the residents with their daily food but was shared among the poor people themselves. Casual donations from well-wishers had long formed part of the Almshouse income and indeed the 1446 ordinances had encouraged the residents themselves to gather alms. In the final

years of Merest's governorship very little money was raised in this way. In the last of Merest's accounts, for 1610-11,⁴¹ the Casual Receipts were only 8s. 6d., comprising four donations of 2s. 2d., 2s. 3d., 2s. 1d. and 2s. 0d. from the Vicars Choral.

Richard Deane quickly set about increasing this income. In 1613-14, gifts and small legacies amounted to £7.⁴² Some gifts were in kind. Bartholomew Cox, for instance, gave a load of faggots. Other benefactors specified how their money should be spent. £2 paid by Edward Bisse Esq., on behalf of George Upton, Esq., was to buy coal for the poor people. Deane must also have encouraged the gathering of alms in the City. Two entries in this part of the account are described as "Charity of the Town". Deane was successful in improving this form of income throughout most of his term as Governor. In 1633⁴³ it reached a maximum of £14 12s. 3d. but this total included the value of gifts in kind such as beef, bread, wheat, peas and beans. It also included 5s. from Dean Warburton "for when the people carried him a dish of strawberries". Other small amounts of income, such as money derived from the sale of deceased almspeople's goods and fees paid at the admission of new residents, were also distributed among the poor themselves.

While Deane was endeavouring to improve the income of the Almshouse he also had to deal with problems resulting from the acquisition of Still's foundation. There were differences between the two foundations, the method of choosing new residents, for instance. Other difficulties arose which had not been foreseen. To what extent should Still's almsmen share in benefits already enjoyed by Bubwith's almspeople? Should Still's foundation contribute money towards customary payments made by Bubwith? How should he account for the extra money? The problems are evident in the accounts. In 1614-15 he started to enter the income from the Wedmore property under the heading "Rents of Assize", realised this was not appropriate and erased what had been written.⁴⁴ The entry was replaced by a memorandum appended at the end of the account concerning the money he had received from Henry Southworth who continued to present a separate account for the Wedmore estate until 1620.⁴⁵

For 1615-16 Deane himself produced a separate paper account book for Still's foundation.⁴⁶ In this he began to address the problem of sharing benefits with Bubwith's almspeople. Money was set aside to match existing benefits such as Dean Gunthorpe's annual gift. This was a fairly cumbersome solution to the problem and in the 1616-17 account⁴⁷ the auditors, the Dean, the Mayor and three of Still's feoffees, agreed that the "six poor of the new addition shall have a fifth part of all benevolences with the other twenty four". They also agreed that Still's foundation should pay a fifth part of all charges incumbent on Bubwith's. Even then there was not complete equality. In the same year new gowns were made for Bubwith's almspeople but there was no mention of gowns for Still's almsmen. It was not until 1619-20, the next time that new gowns were provided, that all thirty residents received gowns.⁴⁸

During the early years of Deane's governorship it seems that the Almshouse income was more than sufficient for its needs. The account for 1613-14 shows a healthy sum of £13 in the Almshouse chest.⁴⁹ In the following year this had been reduced to £8,⁵⁰

but in 1615-16 it was increased to £14, possibly as the result of a bequest of £6 from Dr. Powell to buy coal for the house.⁵¹ At the same time Deane also had £16 18s. 10d. in hand to cover the cost of new gowns and other necessary expenses. With the money from Still's foundation, Deane's success in reinstating traditional sources of income and a number of gifts and bequests, new uses were found for the spare cash.

Some of the additional income was used to increase further the residents' Commons, that is the weekly allowance of meat or fish. In this Deane may have been encouraged by Bartholomew Cox, the Town Clerk, who had been enrolled to help draw up and engross the annual accounts, for which he was paid a fee of 10s. a year.⁵² In 1617-18 Deane's account was preceded by "A note how the Commons have increased from time to time by the relation of Bartholomew Cox".⁵³ Starting with Thomas Merest's governorship, Cox stated that the weekly allowance for Commons had then been 3s. 4d. Since then there had been four increases. Bishop Montague had increased the weekly Commons by 2s., Bishop Still by 4s. 8d. Another 2s. 6d. a week came from Still's foundation for the six extra residents and the Dean and Chapter had provided another 1s. 10d. a week. The total amount for Commons each week was now 14s. 4d., eleven shillings more than in Merest's time. This large increase in money spent on Commons was to cause trouble for Deane later on.

Another use made of surplus cash was to lend money secured by "obligations" or bonds, the interest or "increments" providing additional income. The practice may have been adopted following a bequest made in 1613. On 1 October that year it was reported to Convocation that Henry Joice, "late of Wells" had, by his will dated 17 January 1610/11, bequeathed £10 to the City.⁵⁴ The money was to be delivered within two years of his death and was "to remain in a stock to be employed to the use of the poor of the town as it should seem good to the dean and chapter and the mayor of the town". The money was handed over by John Yard, acting on behalf of Robert Joice, Henry's executor, and at the Convocation held on 29 October Joice was promised an acquittance under the common seal of the City.⁵⁵

By this time Philip Bisse, who had apparently been acting in this matter on behalf of the Dean and Chapter, was dead and the Mayor therefore took on the responsibility for disposing of the money. Convocation approved the loan of the money to "some honest sufficient man" who would provide security by two sureties that the £10 would be repaid in the event of his death and that he would provide three bushels of wheat yearly, one at Christmas, one at Easter and one at Whitsun, for the poor. At the same meeting it was made clear that Henry Joice had intended his bequest to be used for the benefit of the residents of the Almshouse. By December Convocation had changed its mind and it simplified the rules made in October. The £10 was to be lent out as before but it must be repaid at the end of three years. Instead of providing wheat the borrower was to pay interest of 16s. a year to the Almshouse, 8s. on 20 June and 8s. on 20 December.⁵⁶

The City was well used to lending money in this way but it was new for the Almshouse. Did Bartholomew Cox as Town Clerk, encourage the Almshouse to

adopt this practice whenever there was surplus income? Whoever was responsible for the decision, capital and "incrementes" secured by bonds gradually became a regular feature of the Almshouse account, often recorded alongside fines for new leases, usually paid by instalments. In 1617-18 five loans in addition to the £10 from Joice's bequest were recorded.⁵⁷ By 1620-21 the number of loans had risen to eleven.⁵⁸

A few loans consisted of livestock, presumably from Almshouse property, instead of money. In 1618-19, for instance, Thomas Merefield borrowed ten sheep, for which he paid 5s. increments.⁵⁹ In the same year Richard Bourne borrowed £10 with interest of 16s. Unusually, this account records exactly where the money came from: £6 was from Dr. Powell's gift to buy coal, the other £4 from the stock of the house, in other words, from the Almshouse chest. Bonds might be placed in the Almshouse chest but, unlike cash, they could not be used to make good any shortfall in the income. Richard Bourne continued to borrow money from the Almshouse but he proved unreliable when it came to repayment. On 2 November 1623 Bourne, together with Thomas Browne, renewed Bourne's original bond and in the same year Bourne and Richard Oliver borrowed a further £5 also secured by a bond.⁶⁰ In 1625-26 Bartholomew Cox was instructed to take proceedings against all three men for repayment of the loans for which he charged £3 0s. 11d.⁶¹ It was evident that neither the interest on loans nor their repayment could be relied on, but loans remained a feature of the Almshouse accounts for the remainder of the 17th century and on into the 18th century. Gifts and bequests of money were often invested in this way.

The loans and fines for leases were recorded in the accounts each year under the heading of "Supers". The total amount of the loan or fine was set down together with any payments of interest in the case of loans, or instalments in the case of fines. The remainder still due to the Almshouse was then added up and the sum written down. In 1625-26, the year when Bourne was prosecuted for failing to repay his loans, the "Supers" totalled £160 5s. 3d. A year later this figure had risen to £238 6s. 11d;⁶² by 1636-37 it had been reduced to £74 5s. 9d.⁶³ Only seldom was the income from these sources sufficient for some money to be set aside in the Almshouse chest. In 1628-29 £21, comprising two annual instalments of John Dirrick's fine of £101, was placed in the chest, but it did not stay there for very long.⁶⁴ In 1630-31 £20 was removed with the consent of two of the auditors, Richard Addams and Bartholomew Cox, leaving just 20s. in the chest.⁶⁵

This was the situation in 1633-34 when the first sign of real trouble emerged.⁶⁶ In the fourth quarter of that year there was one week when no Commons were provided for want of money. The account for 1636-37 revealed more serious problems.⁶⁷ At Christmas 1636 Gerard Wood, the Archdeacon of Wells and Steward to the Cathedral, was informed that the combined weekly allowance for wheat and Commons, calculated at an average of 30s. a week, had been reduced to 20s. "because the money would not be sufficient to pay them weekly their old allowance as formerly it had been done. And thus it continued at 20s. per week till the 7th of August following. At which time my Lord Bishop Pierce (upon the petition of the poor people) commanded me to give them weekly for wheat and commons until the account day

30s., from Christmas to the 7 August is 2 & 30 weeks at 20s. per week: £32. And from 7th August to 23 September 1637 is 7 weeks at 30s. per week is £10.10s.". Under the allowances for oatmeal for the Christmas quarter there was a note that "Mr. Dr. Wood allowing the people weekly but 20s. for bread and commons to increase their oatmeal half a bushel a month which was allowed until the Bishop allowed them 30s. per week and so continued till September following". On Shrove Tuesday, because Commons were so short an extra 20d. was allowed them to buy some meat.

The next account to survive and the last of Richard Deane himself is for 1638-39.⁶⁸ It is difficult to read because of "bleeding" from one page to another but it again emphasises the problems Deane was having. A memorandum at the end points out that expenditure for the year had exceeded the income from Assize Rents "certainly paid" by £31 7s. 3d. and three Cathedral dignatories, Gerard Wood, Paul Godwyn and Robert Creyghton, all of whom were concerned with Cathedral finances, "did admonish him (Richard Deane) not to exceed their maintenance hereafter and hath therefore set the said exceeding of £31 7s. 3d. upon the Accountant's head until the same could be raised by fines or otherwise". Pinned to the last page of the account is a note of fines made at a manorial court held on 23 December 1639.⁶⁹ These totalled £61 and 5 bushels of wheat, but only £10 10s. and the wheat were immediately forthcoming. The remainder was to be paid in instalments.

By this time Richard Deane must have been an elderly man. He had been responsible for Bubwith's and Still's foundations for twenty six years and the difficulties with money must have been a bitter disappointment after his earlier efforts to improve the Almshouses' income. Deane died in November 1641 and the account for 1640/41 was presented by his widow, Margaret.⁷⁰

During the last few years of his life Deane had had to cope with the building of four more houses for the poor on part of the Almshouse garden, though he was never directly responsible for them. This was the foundation of Walter Brick, a woollen draper, who was Mayor in 1634-35.⁷¹ His name first appears in the Almshouse accounts in 1630/31⁷² when he made a donation of 2s. from the Master Tailors of the City. In his civic capacity he had acted as Overseer of the new workhouse in 1621/22 and in 1630/31 he was appointed to survey all the charitable bequests to the town and how they were used.⁷³ By 1636 he was planning to found an almshouse of his own. He wanted to link it with Bubwith's and Still's houses and on 29 November 1636 he presented his proposals to Convocation.⁷⁴ The new houses would be built on part of the garden of the old, that is, Bubwith's Almshouse. He required a plot 60ft. x 20ft. inside the churchyard wall and wanted his almspeople to share some of the facilities of the other two Almshouses – the house of easement and the right "to lay the coal ashes where the poor people do lay their soil". He also hoped that they might join in prayer with the other residents.

Convocation said that the ground must first be viewed before any grant could be made. On 10 April they set out the terms on which they would be willing to lease the ground for the new building.⁷⁵ They referred to the original establishment of

Bubwith's Almshouse and pointed out that Bubwith's executors had been granted only a licence to build. In return for the grant of this licence the Corporation was given the right to nominate some of the almspeople. They suggested that Brick should be granted a similar licence and that, after his death, the Corporation should have the right to nominate new residents. It should also be laid down how long candidates for admission should have been residents of Wells.

On 2 May 1637 Convocation again considered Brick's proposals.⁷⁶ He had already obtained the approval of the Bishop and the Dean and Chapter and he now sought approval from the Corporation and the residue of the feoffees of Still's foundation. There was some prevarication on the part of one or two members but eventually approval was given on the understanding that the Dean and Chapter would first seal the necessary documents. On 14 September 1637 a lease of the ground for 1,000 years was sealed at a meeting of Convocation, despite the fact that the Dean and Chapter did not seal the lease until 1 October.⁷⁷ In return Walter Brick agreed to pay £2 a year to Bubwith's Almshouse, 10s. for the Governor and 30s. for the twenty four almspeople. The first payment was recorded in the account for 1638/39.⁷⁸ The building of the four new houses must have caused Deane some stress. Did he live long enough to see the new houses completed and to benefit from the addition to his stipend? When his widow drew up the account for 1640-41 the £2 was treated as a straightforward rent.⁷⁹

The years following the death of Richard Deane were some of the most traumatic and difficult in the history of the Almshouse. The changes which followed the disappearance of the monarchy and the subsequent abolition of the ecclesiastical establishment and the sequestration of its property caused serious problems for the Almshouse, especially for Bubwith's foundation. The man who had to deal with these problems was Francis Standish, appointed Governor by Convocation on 23 March 1642/43.⁸⁰

Richard Deane's immediate successor was Daniel Buckley, clerk, but he died after less than a year in office. There is no record of his appointment as Governor of the Almshouse but on 16 May 1642 Convocation appointed him Chaplain to the Vicar of St. Cuthbert's under the terms of Queen Mary's grant of 1554, confirmed by Queen Elizabeth, which stated that the office of Chaplain was to be given to the Governor of the Almshouse.⁸¹ The only record of his governorship is his signature to a memorandum added at the end of Margaret Deane's account for 1640-44.⁸² Convocation recorded Buckley's death on 23 March 1642/43 and the entry confirms that he had held both the offices of Governor and of Chaplain.⁸³

Francis Standish's appointment as Governor was made at this same meeting of Convocation. The entry is significant as a harbinger of what was to come. It stated that the Dean and Chapter had already nominated a Governor for the Almshouse in accordance with the ordinances but the entry does not mention his name. By now members of the Chapter were "elsewhere inhabiting by reason of the dangerousness of the times". Convocation therefore took it upon themselves to appoint Francis

Standish, clerk and Vicar Choral, “to supply the place of a governor in the hospital until the dean and chapter shall otherwise dispose of it” and to assist the Vicar of St. Cuthbert’s under the terms of Mary’s grant. Perhaps Standish was not the man originally nominated by the Dean and Chapter.

Francis Standish had been appointed a Vicar Choral by the Dean and Chapter on 25 October 1634 but little is known about him in the years before 1642.⁸⁴ The heading which precedes the record of his appointment as Governor contains an erased error which reveals that Francis may have had the support of an influential kinsman. The heading reads, “The election of Mr. John (erased) Francis Standish, clerk, to be chaplain in St. Cuthbert and to have that stipend”. John Standish was a London lawyer who came to Wells and was eventually made Town Clerk. He also represented the Corporation in its legal battle with Cornelius Burges.⁸⁵ He became involved with the Almshouse himself both as steward to the manorial court which dealt with much of the Almshouse property and as a feoffee of Still’s foundation.⁸⁶ He continued to support the Almshouse until his death in 1673.⁸⁷

It is unfortunate that for the first ten years after Francis Standish’s appointment as Governor there are no surviving accounts of the income and expenditure of the Almshouse. There are rent rolls dated 1644-45, 1647-48, 1650-51 and 1652-53, but these only record money due to the Almshouse, not whether it was received or how it was spent.⁸⁸ The heading of the 1647-48 rent roll states, “No Deane nor Chapter of the Cathedral Church of St. Andrew in Wells” thus revealing the cause of the most serious problem facing the Almshouse in the ensuing years, the shortage of money accruing to Bubwith’s foundation. The abolition of the Dean and Chapter, the removal of the Bishop and the dispersal of their properties significantly reduced Bubwith’s income. Moreover, the confusion which arose as to the new ownership of these properties made it difficult to grant new leases which would bring with them valuable fines. “A difficulty as to the making of estates to the Hospital arising from the Great Rebellion” is how it was described.⁸⁹

The lack of any annual accounts from the Governor of the Almshouse for ten years after his appointment may simply reflect the turbulence of these years, but there is also the fact that Standish may have been imprisoned in 1646 following the murder of Dean Raleigh while he was in the custody of David Barrett. The problem is that there were two members of the Standish family called Francis at this time, one who died in 1668 and the other, the Governor of the Almshouse who did not die until 1671.⁹⁰ There is also conflicting evidence concerning the Governor’s presence at the Almshouse during these years. Following the death of Daniel Buckley, Standish’s predecessor, his widow, Martha, had in hand £24 13s. 10d. of Almshouse money. This came to light when her accounts were determined on 12 April 1643 and on 15 April Francis Standish received £4 13s. 10d. of this money. The other £20 remained in the hands of Thomas Westley, the Vicar of St. Cuthbert’s, who had borrowed the money from Buckley. By 1655 the £20 had been paid by the Vicar in four instalments dated 1643-44, 1644-45, 1653-54 and 1654-55. Why was no instalment paid between 1644-45 and 1653-54 if the Vicar had the money in hand? Was it

because Francis Standish was not available to receive it? On the other hand, the accounts for Brick's Almshouse show that the annual rent of £2 due to Bubwith's foundation was paid each year to "Mr. Standish", the Governor, without any break between 1649 and 1670.⁹¹

By the 1650s records survive which show that the Corporation was accepting more responsibility for the Almshouse and was trying to recover some of its lost income. Among some of the miscellaneous Almshouse records are drafts of three petitions intended for the central government.⁹² None of them are dated and they vary in their contents but the message is always the same. They are in the name of "the poor people of the Almshouse called Bubwith's in Wells" who are "very aged and impotent ... in great misery and like to perish". All three refer to the origins of the Almshouse and the income settled on it by William Gascoigne, Dean Gunthorpe and Bishops Bourne and Montague and the responsibility of the former Dean and Chapter with regard to the income. They ask that the relevant properties may be settled "on some trustees in or near the said town according to the Founders' intentions". Only one of the draft petitions reveals its intended destination as "... the Parliament of England, Scotland and Ireland" and this draft suggests that the properties should be settled on the Mayor, Masters and Burgesses of Wells "that your petitioners may receive the benefit thereof through their care according to the first donations and institutions".

There is no means of knowing if these were three drafts of a single petition or of three separate petitions. As none of them are dated we do not know when, or indeed if, any petition was actually sent to London, but in 1651 there was proof that London was not unmindful of the claims of Bubwith's Almshouse. Among its miscellaneous records are two letters, one dated 10 July, the other 27 September 1651.⁹³ The first, signed by Owen Rowe, was a warrant to the Treasurers for the Lands of Deans and Chapters to pay "out of the rent reprinted out and reserved upon the manor of Newton Plecy in the Co. of Somerset (late belonging to the Vicars Choral of the Cathedral in Wells) for or towards the maintenance of poor people in the Almshouse founded by Bishop Bubwith in the City of Wells ... unto Mr. Francis Standish, the present Governor of the said Almshouse, the sum of £13 6s. 8d. to the use of the said poor people for two years payment due 25 March 1651 of their allowance or stipend of £6 13s. 4d. per annum payable unto them by ancient foundation". The second letter, signed simply "Nathaniel", was "To his loving friend, Mr. Edward May, Receiver of the Deanery of Wells" enclosing the warrant and directing May to make payment and to take "the receipt of the sd. Mr. Standish on the back of yr. warrant" so that he "shall have allowance thereof" upon his account.

Is it just coincidence that the first surviving account of Francis Standish is dated 1652-53? It is one of a series of accounts covering the period 1652-53 to 1657-58 entered in a book, which also contains some later material.⁹⁴ The accounts are meagre, giving few details of income and expenditure, and the first two, "taken", that is examined and approved on 4 May 1655, do not state by whom. At the audit on 13 June 1656 those present were named but they did not append their signatures. After this, until

1657-58, the accounts were audited each December. All three of them were signed by the Mayor and a small number of citizens. Nine of the signatories held the office of Mayor, either during these years or at some other time, so they would all have been Masters, rather than mere burgesses.⁹⁵ The last three accounts were also signed by John Standish, the Town Clerk. At this time the affairs of the Almshouse were clearly being looked after by a relatively small group of senior members of the Corporation. The omissions in the earliest of the series and their gradual being made good could suggest that the Corporation needed time fully to realise their responsibility for the Almshouse in its changed circumstances.

In 1654-55 we have the first full detailed account compiled by Francis Standish.⁹⁶ It reveals more about the problems which had to be faced as a result of “the Great Rebellion”. The account does not start, as earlier accounts had done, with the Charge, that is, the income that was expected for the current year. Instead it starts with a statement concerning fines. In all ten fines are recorded. Each entry states when and where the original grant of the property had been made, usually at a manorial court held at the Almshouse,⁹⁷ the amount of the fine agreed and the nature of the grant,⁹⁸ the number of annual instalments and the amount actually paid to the Governor that year. In 1654-55 Standish received a total of £37 7s. 6d.

The prominence given to fines in this account is significant. The undated drafts of petitions intended for Parliament had stressed the problems which had arisen because of the difficulty in granting new leases as a result of the dispersal of property which had belonged to the Bishop and the Dean and Chapter. No new leases meant no income from fines. This was not the case with property managed by the Almshouse itself, so the money received by Standish in 1654-55 was particularly important.

Tacked on to the list of fines was a payment of 12s., the interest due from John Collins, a parchment maker of Dulcote, on his loan of £10. Later in the account Standish confirms that this was a loan from the Corporation under the terms of Henry Boyce’s bequest. The original loan had been made in December 1640, secured by a bond in the custody of the Corporation “for the use of the poor”. The bond was renewed in 1641 and again in 1652 showing that the Corporation evidently had no difficulty in carrying out this particular responsibility in spite of the troubled times.

After the fines Standish entered rents “from tenants belonging to the Hospital as appears by his rent roll ending at Michaelmas 1655”. These follow exactly the pattern of the earlier rent rolls of 1644-45 and 1652-53 and relate only to Bubwith’s foundation. The total due from these properties was £18 14s. and in 1654-55 the traditional method of recording payments of quarterly instalments by the tenants, a series of upright lines (| | | |) against the tenants’ names, was also used. According to these only one tenant, John Hotkinns “of Ore or Wookey” paid less than the full amount, only two instalments of one shilling and four pence halfpenny. However, the very last entry in this long and detailed account reveals that Standish did eventually receive all that was owed by Hotkinns. Two other entries made at the same time show that four Glastonbury tenants and one Westbury tenant were also in arrears with

their rents, thus casting doubt on the reliability of this rent roll. Standish probably did not receive the full sum of £18 14s. from the Bubwith properties but this was not uncommon and may have had little to do with the Great Rebellion.

The Bubwith rents were followed by other income due to the Almshouse and here the situation was very different. The £31 due from Still's foundation was paid promptly by the Steward, Richard Hicks, in two instalments, £16 on 21 December 1654 and £15 on 25 June 1655. The series of accounts for Still's foundation from 1630 to 1660 show that these payments never failed but the situation with regard to other income is unclear. Standish may well have received the £2 rent due from Brick's foundation but what about the £15 from the Bishop's Parkhill properties? The amounts due from each tenant were recorded but it is doubtful whether the Almshouse received any of the money in 1654-55.

There is no doubt that it was the loss of income from the Dean and Chapter which proved the most damaging and which was difficult to recover. Standish's accounts of 1654-55 and later show just how difficult.⁹⁹ The Standing Committee of the County, presumably acting under directions from London, similar to those issued in 1651, did order payment of this money but by 1655 there were still arrears. The Sequestrator for Wells, Benjamin Hill, had been ordered by the Committee to pay Dean Gunthorpe's annual gift of 10s. but at Michaelmas 1655 he had not done so. The same was true of the £2 previously contributed each year by the Dean and Chapter from their own property and the £4 16s. paid each year in accordance with the agreement made with Richard Deane for arrears from Newton Plecy. None of this money had been forthcoming in spite of the Standing Committee's orders addressed to Benjamin Hill and to Edward Colthirst, the Sequestrator for Newton Plecy.

William Gascoigne's gift of £4 13s. 4d. a year from his third of the Manor of Newton Plecy caused the most problems for Standish. By the 17th century the Vicars Choral, who had also received a gift from Gascoigne, were responsible for collecting both gifts and transferring the appropriate amount to the Almshouse. After the dissolution of the Vicars Choral, the Corporation took responsibility for collecting the money. On 8 January 1646 the Standing Committee at Bridgwater had ordered that this annual payment should continue but the Act of Parliament of 1650 made the order non-effective.¹⁰⁰ In 1649-50 the Manor of Newton Plecy had been acquired by Sir Thomas Wroth, kt., of Petherton Park, and he maintained that he had paid the half year's rent due at the time of his purchase and the rents due for 1651 and 1652 to Edward May, the Receiver of the Deanery of Wells, presumably as the result of the orders issued in 1651. The money had not been passed on to the Almshouse and by 1655 May was no longer the Receiver. Wroth was a difficult man to deal with and he flatly refused to have anything more to do with these earlier payments.

So far as the payments due at Michaelmas 1653 and 1654 were concerned, these were made directly to Standish, Sir Thomas insisting that the Governor should sign proper receipts for them and threatening that, if he did not, "he would pay the poor people no money at all". The non-payment of the arrears continued to rankle. Standish refers to

them again in 1658-59 and as late as 1664-65.¹⁰¹ In the latter year he reported that Wroth now owed in addition the half year's payment due at Lady Day 1665 which he refused to pay "so that he may have a general acquittance for the two and a half years alleged to be behind". Standish repeated the fear first voiced in 1658-59 that the poor people were likely to lose this money "without the help of feoffees or some other charitable minded gentleman to move Sir Thomas Wroth to a charitable conclusion". There is no evidence that the Almshouse ever received the money.

Standish's account of expenditure in 1654-55 reveals more of his difficulties. He set out the weekly allowance of 20s. for wheat and Commons for the thirty residents of the two foundations, totalling £52 for the year. In addition, he spent £5 0s. 6d. on beer provided by Goody Horlor "and other places when she had not been able to serve the poor people",¹⁰² £3 5s. on oatmeal and 17s. 4d. on salt. Wood and coal cost £7 9s. 10d. He then recorded what was spent on "Augmentations of Commons", such as 20d. a week for the provision of milk porridge rather than pease porridge on Tuesdays and Fridays and £3 1s. for the extra meat provided on special occasions such as Christmas, Lady Day, Easter, Whitsun and certain Saints' days. He then added the following note: "I look for nothing but as my Predecessors had before me and I hope it will not be denied me more than it was considering the time is poorer with me than it was with them".

How did the Almshouse manage, given the shortfall in income from Bubwith's foundation? Occasionally the Corporation came to the rescue. In 1658-59 the Mayor, Masters and Corporation, at the instigation of David Barret, agreed to pay the cost of the Augmentations for meat, but it appears to have been for one year only.¹⁰³ In 1653-54 the Corporation carried out a number of minor repairs to the Almshouse.¹⁰⁴ It was Still's foundation which provided most help. There is a fine set of accounts drawn up by succeeding Stewards of Still's foundation covering the years 1630-31 to 1672-73 which show that not only did Still's foundation pay its annual subscription of £31 to the Governor of the Almshouse without fail during the years of shortage but from 1634-35 onwards the feoffees made extra donations from time to time.¹⁰⁵ In 1653-54 they paid the cost of providing gowns for all thirty residents of the Almshouse and they went on doing so every few years. Soon after the restoration of the monarchy, John Standish was ousted as Town Clerk and he became Steward to Still's foundation. In 1662-63 he began a regular payment of £13 a year to provide a meal of meat every Thursday instead of the customary pease or milk porridge. It must have gladdened the hearts of his kinsman, Francis, and of the almspeople also.

Why was Still's foundation able to be so generous? The properties which formed its endowment were managed very well and they prospered. None of them were affected by the upheavals in the church which caused so much trouble in the case of Bubwith's foundation. The feoffees sometimes had money in hand which they were willing to lend and in 1640-41 they lent £150 to Sir Charles Berkeley of Bruton and to Arthur Hopton acting on his behalf. They were to pay interest of £4 a year and the loan was secured by two bonds deposited in Still's chest. The bonds have not survived but it seems that property owned by Sir Charles in Norwood Park near Glastonbury also

formed part of the security. It was not long before there were problems with the interest and by 1651-52 Sir Charles owed Still's foundation £63. The feoffees evidently decided that they would be better off if they acquired the Norwood Park property for themselves. They agreed to pay Sir Charles £475. They were able to find £325 from their own resources. The other £150 they borrowed. The loan was eventually paid off by John Standish. Sir Charles had let the Norwood Park property to one Thomas Rood of Glastonbury and in 1655-56 the feoffees granted Rood a new twenty-one year lease. Originally he was to pay £14 a year for the first fourteen years and £20 a year for the last seven years, but in fact he paid £18 a year from 1656-57.

There is not another Almshouse account until 1664-65.¹⁰⁶ By this time the Dean and Chapter had been restored and they began to fulfil again their role as Trustees of the Almshouse. The 1664-65 account shows that very soon they were keeping a close eye on the Almshouse money. Francis Standish recorded that he had received of "the Rt. Wo.[rshipful] Robert Creyghton, Dean, Tristram Towse, Mayor, Dr. Wm. Peirce, Dr. John Sellick, both canons, Geo. Walrond, Justice in Wells, Wm. Baron, one of the feoffees, the sum of £10 out of the canvas bag in Bishop Still's chest in the Audit Chamber",¹⁰⁷ and "my receipt is in the canvas bag: which £10 was delivered for the help of 30 poor people's wants and necessities their living. Received 13 February 1664/6: £10.0.0". He went on to say that he had received "from the same gentlemen out of the old purse in Bishop Bubwith's chest divided amongst them 0.9.0" and that he had received from John Standish "for the augmentations of commons for the poor people's Thurs. dinners from Mich. 1664 to Mich. 1665 £13 & laid it out every week in their augmentation of commons in Thurs. dinners as followeth: £13.0.0".

Other signs suggest that the restored Dean and Chapter were not always confident about the proper procedures. On 5 February 1665/66 Francis Symons resigned as Steward of the Old Almshouse, that is to say of Bubwith's foundation. The Dean and Chapter appointed Samuel Heath in his place, but only on condition that he acknowledged that the right to make this appointment was vested in the Dean and Chapter and that the appointment did not contravene the original statutes of the Almshouse.¹⁰⁸

By 1667/68 confidence had returned. In that year seven residents of the Almshouse died and the proper procedure for nominating new residents was followed precisely.¹⁰⁹ Four were nominated by the Mayor and two by the Dean and Chapter. The seventh nomination was for Still's Almshouse and was made, as prescribed, by the Bishop.

Francis Standish died in 1670-71 leaving a widow, Frances.¹¹⁰ His kinsman John outlived him by two years. Since July 1661 John Standish had acted as Steward of Still's foundation, the last in a line of Stewards who had drawn up very detailed accounts between 1630 and 1673.¹¹¹ John died some time before January 1672, also leaving a widow, Katherine, who subsequently re-married. From this time no separate accounts for Still's foundation appear to have been drawn up. Francis Standish had been succeeded by James Wilmot as Governor of the Almshouse and Wilmot appended a

note at the end of Standish's last account for Still's foundation to the effect that his own first account for 1673-74 was "passed and entered in the Book of Accounts belonging to Bishop Bubwith's Almshouse on 28 January 1674/5". It marked the end of any separate, detailed accounts for Still's foundation. Wilmot's only other account covered the year 1674-75 but it is incomplete. It has no proper heading and it starts part way through the list of rents due. By December 1675 Wilmot was dead.¹¹²

Wilmot was succeeded by Thomas Davidge. On 23 December 1675 a note recorded at the end of the book of accounts for Still's foundation states that Richard Rocke, who had married John Standish's widow, paid Thomas Davidge, Governor of the Almshouse, £9 which was owing from the former Mrs. Standish. The only other mention of Davidge as Governor of the Almshouse is in the Acts of the Dean and Chapter. On 5 August 1684 they record the assignment of a bond which had been given to the Dean and Chapter for "the faithful behaviour of Thomas Davidge in the Mastership of the Old Almshouse". No accounts compiled by Davidge have survived.¹¹³

There are no other accounts until September 1683. The account which begins then is made up of five folios covering the period September 1683 to April 1685 and was drawn up by John Davis. He was not the Governor but may already have been Steward to the Almshouse, a post he certainly held by April 1685. He was a lawyer, a burgess who served as Mayor in 1689.¹¹⁴ He also acted on behalf of the Dean and Chapter from time to time.¹¹⁵ He may well have been holding the fort until a new Governor had been appointed.

That appointment was made by the Dean and Chapter on 6 July 1684 and the man chosen was Robert Taylor.¹¹⁶ The record of the appointment in the Acts of the Dean and Chapter provides no information about him, describing him simply as "Mr. Robert Taylor". John Davis' account which covers the months immediately following Taylor's appointment records that in April 1685 he was "Allowed Mr. Taylor for looking after the house, reading the prayers, etc. to Our Lady Day last for 18 months then before ... £10.10.0d.". He must, therefore, have been a cleric and presumably also served as Curate to the Vicar of St. Cuthbert. Although the records have relatively little to say about Robert Taylor at the time of his appointment his first account covering the period 8 April 1685 to 27 March 1686 reveals that he was a man of some importance.

In July 1685, Monmouth's rebels desecrated the Cathedral and extorted money from Mrs. Creighton, wife of Dr. Robert Creighton, the Dean.¹¹⁷ Robert Taylor's first account also tells us what happened to the Almshouse, which suffered at the hands of the rebels too.¹¹⁸ The account itself follows the normal pattern but on 15 October 1685 Taylor added the following note: "I was credibly informed that one Joane House of this City did in the time of the late Rebellion cause our Almshouse to be broken up and the rebels searched the poor people's coffers and broke up likewise their chests of accounts with a great deal of more mischief but as soon as I came home from the King's service I caused her to be apprehended and was carried to prison for her

offence and at the next Quarter Sessions of the Peace held for this town was there fined 40s (of) which the poor people had only half a crown: she begged being poor". The surviving Quarter Sessions records make no mention of the case and the fine imposed seems to have been intended as compensation for those residents who had suffered any loss. There were few supporters of Monmouth in Wells and perhaps Joane's encouragement of the rebels stemmed from a grudge against the Almshouse. Being herself so poor perhaps she thought she deserved a place there herself.

Robert Taylor remained Governor of the Almshouse until his death, probably in 1691-92 and there are accounts for each of the years he was in office. Outside events continued to cause problems for him. The account for 1687-88 was not audited until 6 February 1689/90 because it "could not by reason of the troubles which were then".¹¹⁹ This is probably a reference to the interregnum between the departure of James II in December 1688 and the arrival of Prince William and Princess Mary in February 1688/89. There is no evidence that these events caused any serious trouble in Wells. The Dean and Chapter, who had welcomed the accession of James with a particularly effusive letter, made no record of the change of sovereign in 1688.¹²⁰ The Corporation on the other hand eagerly appointed two burgesses to attend "the Free Parliament for the preservation of the Protestant religion" which met in January 1688/89 and they noted the proclamation of William and Mary as King and Queen in the following February.¹²¹ At the same time they deplored "the great charge of His late Majesty's new charter graciously granted to the City". In spite of the different opinions held by the Cathedral and the Corporation regarding these events there is no suggestion of any interruption in the normal running of local affairs. Why then was there a delay in auditing the Almshouse accounts? Is it possible that Robert Taylor was again absent in "the King's service"?

Robert Taylor's accounts show that money was sometimes in short supply. In 1688/89 he had to borrow £10 from the Cathedral Communar to pay for gowns supplied to the almspeople.¹²² The accounts also show how important fines were in supplementing the Almshouse income from time to time. In 1689/90 Thomas George of Croscombe and Hugh Brooke paid fines of £21 and £20 for new leases.¹²³ With this money Taylor repaid a sum of £13 1s. he owed to Dr. Creighton, the Dean, and £10 he owed the Dean and Chapter, perhaps the money he borrowed for gowns. The remainder he retained in order to repay money he owed to the executors or administrators of James Wilmot, his predecessor as Governor. Whether or not this chronic shortage of money had any serious effect on the Almshouse, such as a reduction in the number of residents, it is impossible to tell. The accounts do not record deaths of inmates, nor payments for new admissions. The Acts of the Dean and Chapter name two new residents nominated by them in 1683 and 1684¹²⁴ but there are no Convocation Act Books of the Corporation until 1687 and no records of nominations by the Mayor.

It was Robert Taylor's successor, William Paris, who was to take the Almshouse into the next century and it was then that insufficient income really affected the Almshouse, so much so, that the good intentions of Nicholas Bubwith and John Still

could not always be fulfilled in their entirety.

Notes

- ¹ *D & C*, Vol. 2, pp. 325-27.
- ² See Stephen Hyde Cassan, *Lives of the Bishops of Bath & Wells* (1829), pp. 19 and 20, for details of Still's family and of his death and burial.
- ³ TNA, PROB/11/111/337. This is the date given at the end of the will in a final ratification of all that had gone before. Characteristically Still then went on to say that he might yet increase some of the legacies to members of his family. He had already inserted two memoranda dated 5 February earlier in the will.
- ⁴ Phyllis Hembry, *Lives of the Bishops of Bath & Wells, 1540-1640* (1967). The author explains the extent of Still's wealth.
- ⁵ TNA, PROB/11/111/337, p. 4.
- ⁶ In 1554 Bishop Bourne had made a gift of £10 a year to the Almshouse from the rents of Parkhill for the term of his lease of 60 years (see Chapter 4). It was this lease which Bishop Still had hoped to renew.
- ⁷ Act of 39 Elizabeth (1598), allowing benefactors to found almshouses without obtaining royal charters or Letters Patent.
- ⁸ Cassan, *op. cit.* Robert Eyre, barrister of Wells, had married John Still's second daughter, Ann. Francis James, LL. D., was appointed the Bishop's Receiver General on 4 July 1559, *D & C*, Vol. 2, p. 339. Mr. Hughes was probably Thomas Hughes, retained as counsel for the City on 17 October 1606, *Wells Convocation Acts Books*, Vol. 90, *op. cit.*, p. 191.
- ⁹ D&CA, AH/AF/1314.
- ¹⁰ Hazel Hudson, 'Wedmore, Bagley Wood, ST 4545' and 'Wedmore, Oldwood, ST 4546', *Proceedings of the Somerset Archaeological & Natural History Society*, Vol. 135 (1991), pp. 162-63.
- ¹¹ D&CA, AH/E/1631.
- ¹² D&CA, AH/AF/418.
- ¹³ D&CA, AH/AF/435.
- ¹⁴ D&CA, AH/E/1327, 1328, 1330, 1331, 1332, 1333, 1335, 1336.
- ¹⁵ D&CA, AH/E/1316.
- ¹⁶ *D & C*, Vol. 2, p. 364.
- ¹⁷ *Wells Convocation Acts Books*, Vol. 90, *op. cit.*, pp. 342, 343.
- ¹⁸ *Wells Convocation Acts Books*, Vol. 91, *op. cit.*, p. 985.
- ¹⁹ *Wells Corporation Properties*, ed. Anthony Scrase and Joan Hasler, SRS, Vol. 87 (2002), p. 321.
- ²⁰ *Wells Convocation Acts Books*, Vol. 90, *op. cit.*, p. 246.
- ²¹ *D & C*, Vol. 2, p. 365. Philip Bisse was Baron of the Cathedral Exchequer, William Powell, Communar and Surveyor of Houses.
- ²² *Wells Convocation Acts Books*, Vol. 90, *op. cit.*, p. 243.
- ²³ *D & C*, Vol. 2, p. 366.
- ²⁴ D&CA, AH/E/1631.
- ²⁵ *Wells Convocation Acts Books*, Vol. 90, *op. cit.*, p. 253.
- ²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 280.
- ²⁷ D&CA, AH/AF/430.
- ²⁸ In the 19th century these plaques were placed on the outside of the new building which replaced the original Still's Almshouse.
- ²⁹ D&CA, AH/AF/435.
- ³⁰ This differed from Bubwith's residents, who were nominated turn and turn about by the Dean and Chapter and the City Corporation, the latter having the right to nominate two out of every three residents.
- ³¹ Presumably all thirty residents would have been expected to attend St. Cuthbert's Church on 26 December each year. Bubwith's residents also had to attend Gascoigne's commemorative service at Easter.

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- 32 *D & C*, Vol. 2, p. 366.
- 33 D&CA, AH/AF/428.
- 34 D&CA, AH/AF/361 and 363.
- 35 *D & C*, Vol. 2, p. 365.
- 36 SRS, Vol. 90, p. 255.
- 37 D&CA, AH/E/1358.
- 38 D&CA, AH/AF/445.
- 39 No court rolls for these years have survived.
- 40 John Godwin's will dated 7 April 1610.
- 41 D&CA, AH/AF/421.
- 42 D&CA, AH/AF/428.
- 43 D&CA, AH/AF/461.
- 44 D&CA, AH/AF/431.
- 45 D&CA, AH/AF/430 (1614-15), AH/AF/441 (1616-17), AH/AF/443 (1617-18 and 1618-19), AH/AF/447 (1619-20).
- 46 D&CA, AH/AF/438.
- 47 D&CA, AH/AF/440.
- 48 D&CA, AH/AF/445.
- 49 D&CA, AH/AF/428.
- 50 D&CA, AH/AF/431.
- 51 D&CA, AH/AF/437.
- 52 D&CA, AH/AF/431.
- 53 D&CA, AH/AF/442.
- 54 *Wells Convocation Acts Books*, Vol. 90, *op. cit.*, p. 254.
- 55 *Ibid.*, p. 256.
- 56 *Ibid.*, p. 257.
- 57 D&CA, AH/AF/442.
- 58 D&CA, AH/AF/447.
- 59 D&CA, AH/AF/444.
- 60 D&CA, AH/AF/451.
- 61 D&CA, AH/AF/452.
- 62 D&CA, AH/AF/453.
- 63 D&CA, AH/AF/467.
- 64 D&CA, AH/AF/454.
- 65 D&CA, AH/AF/456.
- 66 D&CA, AH/AF/461.
- 67 D&CA, AH/AF/467.
- 68 D&CA, AH/AF/468.
- 69 *Ibid.*
- 70 SRO, St. Cuthbert's Parish Register, D/P/W/St.C 2/1-5, and D&CA, AH/AF/472.
- 71 *Wells Convocation Acts Books*, Vol. 91, *op. cit.*, p. 949.
- 72 D&CA, AH/AF/456.
- 73 *Wells Convocation Acts Books*, Vol. 91, *op. cit.*, p. 949.
- 74 *Ibid.*, p.707.
- 75 *Ibid.*
- 76 *Ibid.*, p. 708.
- 77 *Ibid.*, p. 719.
- 78 D&CA, AH/AF/468.
- 79 D&CA, AH/AF/472.
- 80 *Wells Convocation Acts Books*, Vol. 91, *op. cit.*, p. 847.
- 81 *Wells Convocation Acts Books*, Vol. 90, *op. cit.*, pp. 45 and 46.
- 82 D&CA, AH/AF/472.
- 83 *Wells Convocation Acts Books*, Vol. 91, *op. cit.*, p. 847.
- 84 *D & C*, Vol. 2, p. 410.
- 85 *Wells Convocation Acts Books*, Vol. 91, *op. cit.*, p. 1010; WCA, Wells Corporation Receiver's

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- Book, 1653-1682. See also David Underdown, 'A Case Concerning Bishop's Lands: Cornelius Burges and the Corporation of Wells', *English Historical Review*, Vol. LXXVIII, no. cccvi (January 1963).
- ⁸⁶ D&CA, AH/AF/457 and 480.
- ⁸⁷ *Wells Convocation Acts Books*, Vol. 91, *op. cit.*, pp. 882, 884, 886 and 1010; WCA, Wells Corporation Receiver's Book, 1653-1682; D&CA, AH/AF/457.
- ⁸⁸ D&CA, AH/AF/475, 476, 477 and 478.
- ⁸⁹ D&CA, AH/E/1559(j).
- ⁹⁰ *Wells Convocation Acts Books*, Vol. 91, *op. cit.*, p. 1009.
- ⁹¹ Martha Buckley's account has not survived but the information concerning this money appears in Standish's accounts for 1654-55; see D&CA, AH/AF/472, 480; D&CA, BAH/ADM/1, Brick's Minute/Account Book 1649-1807.
- ⁹² D&CA, AH/AF/488 and AH/E/1559 (c) and (j).
- ⁹³ D&CA, AH/E/1559 (e) and (f). There is also a contemporary copy of another warrant similar to that of 10 July 1651, dated 17 July 1652. It authorises the payment of £13 to the Mayor and Overseers of the Poor for the City of Wells. This sum was for one and a half years' stipend due from the Dean and Chapter but there is no evidence that this was intended for the Almshouse.
- ⁹⁴ D&CA, AH/AF/479.
- ⁹⁵ The names of those signing these accounts were William Baron, clothier, Richard Casebeard, shoemaker, James Clutterbeere, Thomas Coward, Joseph Gallington, gent., Stephen Hasket, Richard Hicks, clothier, Thomas Meade, Thomas Salmon, William Smyth, Valentine Trym, gent., and William Whiting, clothier.
- ⁹⁶ D&CA, AH/AF/480.
- ⁹⁷ This account includes the minutes of two manorial courts held at the Almshouse by the Steward, John Francis, one on 5 December 1654 and the second on 25 February following. The minutes include the names of the homage and copyholders present. Both courts concerned the surrender and grant of a new lease of a property in Tucker Street, Wells.
- ⁹⁸ Fines were imposed not only on the grant of a new lease but also when the terms of a lease were changed, for example, in the case of leases for lives, as most Almshouse leases were, when names were changed or additional names were added.
- ⁹⁹ D&CA, AH/AF/480, 482 and 483.
- ¹⁰⁰ David Underdown, *op. cit.*
- ¹⁰¹ D&CA, AH/AF/482 and 483.
- ¹⁰² D&CA, AH/AF/480.
- ¹⁰³ D&CA, AH/AF/482.
- ¹⁰⁴ WCA, Wells Corporation Receiver's Book, 1653-82.
- ¹⁰⁵ D&CA, AH/AF/457.
- ¹⁰⁶ D&CA, AH/AF/483.
- ¹⁰⁷ Another entry in this account concerns the payment of part of a fine following a bargain made in December 1658 in the Audit Chamber in the new Almshouse of Bishop Still.
- ¹⁰⁸ D&CA, DC/CF6/8, Act Book, 1664-6.
- ¹⁰⁹ There is something a little odd about these deaths. There were seldom so many deaths in one year and all seven residents were buried, not at the cost of the Almshouse but "at their friends' charge". The account gives no dates for their deaths but perhaps they were related: possibly the victims of a common accident or affliction with which the Almshouse could not cope. Given the date of 1667/68, could it have been the plague?
- ¹¹⁰ D&CA, AH/AF/479.
- ¹¹¹ John Standish was appointed Steward at an audit of Still's accounts held on 9 July 1661, D&CA, AH/AF/457.
- ¹¹² D&CA, AH/AF/486 and 487. Very little is known about James Wilmot apart from these two accounts and the entries in Still's account, D&CA, AH/AF/457. He described himself as Chaplain and Master so presumably he was appointed by the Dean and Chapter and acted as Curate to the Vicar of St. Cuthbert's like his predecessors.
- ¹¹³ D&CA, AH/AF/457 and D&CA, DC/CF6/10, Act Book, 1683-1705.
- ¹¹⁴ D&CA, AH/AF/489.

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- ¹¹⁵ *D & C*, Vol. 2, pp. 461, 462, 475. He died in 1700-01; *ibid.*, p. 482.
- ¹¹⁶ D&CA, DC/CF6/10, Act Book, 1683-1705.
- ¹¹⁷ *D & C*, Vol. 2, p. 460.
- ¹¹⁸ D&CA, AH/AF/490.
- ¹¹⁹ D&CA, AH/AF/493.
- ¹²⁰ *D & C*, Vol. 2, p.456.
- ¹²¹ WCA, Wells Convocation Act Book, January 1688-89.
- ¹²² D&CA, AH/AF/493.
- ¹²³ D&CA, AH/AF/494.
- ¹²⁴ D&CA, DC/CF6/10, Act Book, 1683-1705.

The End of an Era: The Almshouse 1700 to 1840

These years saw the last of Wells Old Almshouse in the form it had followed since the 15th century.¹ By 1840 the Municipal Corporation Act of 1836 had swept away the City Corporation and replaced it with an elected City Council. Early in the 18th century there had been serious financial problems and for nearly ten years after 1732 there is a gap in the series of annual accounts. The Report of the Charity Commissioners on the state of Wells Old Almshouse, published in 1820, reveals how little had changed over the preceding centuries. After 1840 things would be very different.

In 1700 the Governor was William Paris who had succeeded Robert Taylor by 1692-93.² He remained in office for twenty years, presenting his annual accounts in the customary medieval form of “Charge” and “Discharge”. Paris also followed the practice adopted by his predecessors by adding after the main account a list of gifts of money made to the Almshouse during the year by “Good gentlemen” (but also by women) which was equally divided among the residents or occasionally used to buy special food. It was never regarded as part of the Governor’s official “Charge”.

The details of the accounts inevitably varied from year to year. The amount spent on “Commons”, for instance, fluctuated as the prices of basic commodities such as grain went up or down according to the season. In addition, in a year when there were few repairs needed, the quarterly payments might be quite small. On the other hand, if more extensive repairs were needed in a year when new gowns were required, then the quarterly payments rose considerably. Rents, on the whole, remained steady but there were occasions when a lease expired and the property remained without a tenant so that there was no income until a new lease had been granted.

This was the case in 1692-93 when Paris became Governor.³ Two of the five properties in Beggar Street opposite the Almshouse, previously let to Widow Clarke and Widow Graye for 6s. 8d. each, were empty and remained so until 1696-97. They were then demolished and William White and Lawrence Wing were paid 11s. for five and a half days’ work carrying away the stones and timber of these two houses and for repairing the two side boundary walls.⁴ In 1697-98 some of the materials from the houses were sold.⁵ Elm boards were bought by Richard Sheapard, Robert Taylor and Mrs. Guch, a neighbour, for a total of 9s. 6d., Simon Playster bought three old doors for 6s. and Thomas Marchant paid £2 11s. for some of the timber and stones. The front wall of the plot then fell into the street and White and Wing were paid a further 4s. for repairing it. In the following year a new front wall was built by Samuel Alexander and another wall had to be repaired because it adjoined a chimney which had been “damnified” by the old houses.⁶ In the same year the remaining timber was

transferred across the street to the Almshouse in order to keep it secure. There were still a lot of stones on the site of the former cottages and these were dug up and thrown into the street to be loaded up and carried away into St. Cuthbert's churchyard to build a new wall between the Almshouse garden and the churchyard.

The site of the demolished houses was then let as a garden. In his account for 1698-99 Paris asked allowance for the rent of 13s. 4d. previously paid for the two demolished houses and he continued to do so in succeeding accounts.⁷ The 10s. rent for the plot now turned into a garden first appears in the "Charge" in the 1699-1700 account.⁸ It appears that the tenant until 1705-06 was William Wing who, when he surrendered his lease, was allowed 10s. for the two pigsties which he had built at his own cost and proposed to leave there.⁹ The Almshouse accepted responsibility for them and paid for them to be re-thatched with reeds from time to time. The tenant who followed Wing has not been identified but he gave up the lease in 1709-10 and it was not until Lady Day 1712 that a new lessee, Anne Sandal, was in place. Her rent had been reduced to 8s. but she became insolvent and quitted the garden in 1719-20.¹⁰

Any reduction in rent could mean less cash in hand for the Governor and it was cash which he needed to pay for food and the day-to-day expenses of running the Almshouse. The income from rents just about matched the expenditure on "Commons" which was normally somewhere between £95 and £100 a year. To meet the other quarterly expenses, the only other sources of cash would have been payments of instalments of fines for leases or interest on money lent. Full payment of a fine or repayment of a loan might not have been in cash.

A rent roll drawn up for the half year from Michaelmas 1710 to Lady Day 1711 shows that there were few problems in collecting the relatively small sums due from tenants by way of rents.¹¹ The roll also records interest paid on capital which had been invested. In 1704 the Almshouse received two bequests of £50 from Dean Ralph Bathurst. It seems that one of the bequests was originally entrusted to Edwin Sandys, the Archdeacon of Wells, but he died in 1705 and the Almshouse account for 1705-06 shows that his widow paid £1 for four months' interest on the money between 29 September 1705 and 29 January 1706.¹² The £50 was then paid in full to Mr. Davis, presumably Peter Davis, the then Steward, and put out again on 2 February to Samuel Reade of Wells on a mortgage of land. At that time Samuel Reade already had the other £50 and the account records that he paid the £3 interest due. By the time of the 1710-11 rent roll Samuel Reade had died and his widow had reached an agreement with the Almshouse feoffees that in future the interest on the two sums of £50 should be reduced from £6 to £5 10s.¹³

In 1708 the Cathedral Treasurer, Ralph Barker, died leaving a legacy of £50 to provide fresh linen for the almspeople. At first this money was in the hands of Richard Healy, the Communar and Receiver General, and in the account for 1708-09 Paris stated that he had received two years' interest amounting to £6 from Healy. He went on: "accordingly I have bought a linen change for each man and woman which cost £5. Now remains £1 which I charge myself".¹⁴ The rent roll of 1710-11 records

that the £50 was put out to John Baker of Ashcott on 26 January 1709 on land security, presumably at the same rate of interest. The compiler of the rent roll, either Paris himself or perhaps more likely Peter Davis, the Steward, added, "Memo: it was Mr. Bartholomew Moss brought me Baker's interest quarterly at the Bell". Presumably the payment would have been in cash but its use was dictated by the terms of the will.¹⁵ The annual interest was insufficient to provide new linen every year and in his annual account for 1709-10 Paris made it clear that the interest due on 26 January "must remain in the accountant's hand till there is another year become due at which time the 2 yrs. interest, which will be £5, must be laid out in linen for the poor people" according to the will.¹⁶

Small loans, such as those granted under the terms of Henry Joice's will, were protected by bonds which were placed in the Almshouse chest. Larger loans or investments of capital would have been covered by formal legal documents but, as we have seen in the case of Bathurst's bequest, such money was often transferred from one borrower to another. Keeping track of the interest due and receiving it on time could not always be relied upon. Borrowers were sometimes themselves short of cash.

Such was the case of Robert Alford of Priddy in 1706-07. Paris' first account of 1692-93 shows that Alford's loan of £100 with annual interest of £6 was already in place.¹⁷ By 1706-07 he was in difficulties. The account for that year records that he paid the interest for the first half year on 17 April 1707 but that the other half due on 17 October "he has not paid, neither can he, (as he says) till his estate be sold and the principle money paid in".¹⁸ In the following year he paid the interest he owed together with additional interest to 25 March 1708. At the same time, he repaid the capital to Mr. Davis, the Steward, who put it out again to Mrs. Jane Hill, a widow of Cheddar, on 24 April 1708 at the same rate of interest.¹⁹

Jane Hill repaid the loan on 22 January 1710, together with the interest due amounting to £4 10s. The £100 then seems to have passed into the hands of Canon Thomas Lessey, though it was the Communar, Richard Healey, who made himself responsible for the annual interest due on 22 January 1711. The account for 1709-10 showed, for the first time, a deficit at the annual audit, expenditure exceeding income by £13 15s. 8³/₄d. The shortfall was made up when the account was audited on 21 January 1712. Lessey handed over the £100 and £80 of this sum was entrusted to Healey. The other £20 was given to Paris to make up the overspend with the instruction that he was to be allowed the same amount in the following year, "the better to pay the poor people's commons". As soon as £20 could be raised by fines it should be added to the £80 entrusted to Healey and again put out to interest for the benefit of the poor. This was precisely the procedure followed in 1712-13 when £20 was taken out of a fine agreed with a lessee named Buxton, added to the £80 held by Healey and put out to interest to Charles Baron on a mortgage again paying interest of six per cent.²⁰

The frequent moving of capital and keeping track of the payment of interest must have made accounting more difficult and perhaps it should be no wonder that in some

years there was a shortage of cash. On these occasions other benefactors sometimes came to the rescue. In 1709-10, for instance, Peter Davis, the Steward, made a gift of £7 representing his salary for the past ten years which he said he “was pleased generously to give for the good of the poor”. From then on he continued to allocate his annual salary of 14s. to the use of the Almshouse.²¹

By 1712-13 it seems that Paris was beginning to lose his grip on the finances. The account for 1712-13 appears to be complete but there is no record of an audit.²² In the next account there is no “Charge” and a note has been added to the effect that “there being no rents received” the balance in hand from 1712-13, £21 6s. 5¼d., should be deducted from the “Discharge” for 1713-14, leaving a deficit of £50 6s. 11¾d. for which the accountant, that is, the Governor, would be held responsible.²³ By this time William Paris would have been an elderly man and his health was failing. He died early in 1714 and for the next few months his daughter and executor, Mrs. Rebecca Wood, was in charge of the Almshouse.

Before handing over to her successor she drew up an account covering the period between 13 March and 15 May 1714.²⁴ It begins with the amount of money spent on the Almshouse since her father’s death comprising “Commons” and quarterly payments totalling £18 7s. 8d. To this she added the deficit of £50 6s. 11¾d. from the previous account making a total of £68 14s. 7¾d. She also set about recovering the uncollected rents and had a new rent roll drawn up for which she paid another 2s. 6d. to a Mr. Brock. In all she collected £39 13s. 10½d. using both the old and the new rent rolls but there was still a shortfall of £29 3s. 3¼d.

John Pope took over responsibility for the Almshouse in May 1714 and he presented his first account at Michaelmas that year.²⁵ He made it clear in the heading of the account that for the first six months of the year the auditors should rely on Rebecca’s account. There is no record of his appointment as Governor by the Dean and Chapter but almost certainly he was brought in to try to sort out the Almshouse finances and to deal with the chronic shortage of money to cover the day-to-day running costs of the house.

His governorship was unique in several respects. He had been admitted as a Vicar Choral in 1690 and progressed to become, first, the Vicar of Dulverton and in 1704, Vicar of St. Cuthbert’s in Wells.²⁶ He is the only Governor who was also Vicar of that parish. Pope’s governorship was comparatively short, lasting only till 1719. In 1716, while still Governor, Pope was appointed Vicar General and after his resignation he became Chancellor of the diocese. Obviously he was regarded as a man of merit by his superiors, well qualified to sort out the problems of the Almshouse.²⁷ None of Pope’s accounts appear to have been audited with the exception of the final account for 1719-20, just before he handed over to William Marchant.²⁸ The Dean and Chapter, as Trustees of the Almshouse, had apparently given him free reign to do what was necessary to remedy the situation.

Pope’s first account demonstrates only too well that there was a shortage of cash. The

“Charge” includes a gift of £20 from Dr. Robert Creyghton specifically for the better payment of the poor people’s Commons. It was to be charged and allowed yearly on the Governor’s account. Peter Davis also continued to forfeit his annual wage of 14s. as Steward for the benefit of the Almshouse. Even more telling was the fact that Pope had to borrow an additional £20 from Davis and another £20 from the Chancellor, Marshall Brydges, which, as he said, he was “obliged to pay out of rents and fines as they shall arise”.²⁹

The solution Pope adopted to reduce the running costs of the Almshouse was simple but somewhat brutal. He gradually reduced the number of inmates by resolutely refusing to replace any inmate who died. The process began in 1715-16 and its greatest effect was on the cost of “Commons”. In this first year three residents died, Samuel Warren, Thomas Govey and Thomas Read. A fourth resident, Francis Bernard, was transferred to Harper’s Almshouse.³⁰ The amount spent on “Commons” was reduced immediately on the departure of each resident and the number of vacancies thus resulting was noted with satisfaction. At the end of this first year the “Charge” still exceeded the “Discharge” by £27 16s. 8½d. but by the following year equilibrium had been achieved and from then on there was always a surplus remaining in the Governor’s hands at the end of each financial year. By then the number of vacant places had risen to ten, leaving only twenty residents in the Almshouse. Pope triumphantly recorded: “Widow Stride dead so that now the number of the poor being twenty housekeeping will be reduced to 2/3rds”.³¹ Pope’s accounts make no distinction between Bubwith’s and Still’s almspeople, nor do they indicate whether it was the Mayor, the Dean and Chapter or the Bishop who would have had the right to fill any of these vacancies.

As well as the reduction in the number of almspeople there were other ways in which the gap between income and expenditure was reduced during Pope’s governorship. In 1715-16 there was a profitable new grant of a lease of 4½ acres of land at Melsborough, previously held by Edmund Irish, at an annual rent of 4s. 6d. The new tenant was William Salmon of Wells who agreed to pay an annual rent of £1 5s.³² In the same year John Bisse offered to pay 2s. 6d. for the use of the Almshouse hall as a store for his wool, a payment which he made for a number of years after this. Also in 1715-16 Philip Hodges of Wells, gent., made an outright gift of £30 “to reduce the debts and to begin a fund for the more certain maintenance of the complete number of poor”.³³

During Pope’s first year 5s. was given “by a private hand on account of coal being so very dear” and five yards of unwanted cloth were sold to Mr. Salmon for 10s. In the following year Salmon bought another four yards for 8s. The gowns of two deceased residents, Warren and Govey, were sold for 5s. and 4s. respectively, thus reviving a practice which seems to have been abandoned for some time previously.³⁴ Two more gowns were sold in this way in 1717-18, again raising 9s.³⁵ It is interesting that these two gowns were sold by two almsmen to two almswomen thus indicating that men and women wore similar gowns. Thirty new gowns had been made during the first few months after Pope had taken charge of the Almshouse and, with his proposed

reduction in the number of residents over the coming years, the cloth in store would not be needed to make more new gowns. The gowns of deceased residents could be handed down or, better still, sold to new inmates.

It would be unfair to suggest that John Pope was not himself prepared to make a few sacrifices for the sake of the Almshouse. In 1716-17 he relinquished the fees due to him as Governor “for the benefit of the house” and his name appears from time to time among the gifts made to the almspeople themselves: 15s. regularly at Christmas, for instance.³⁶ Of course, unlike other Governors, as Vicar of St. Cuthbert’s, Pope would not have had to rely solely on the Almshouse fees for his livelihood. It may be that it was as Vicar of St. Cuthbert’s, rather than as Governor of the Almshouse, that in 1713-14 Pope was made responsible for carrying out what he described in his account as “Private Charities to Thomas Read”.³⁷ The entry is unique. It appears after the list of gifts and it reads:

“Mr. Clinton gave him 2 new shirts, a new waistcoat & breeches & a good hat.
His nephew Mr. T. Read sent me 20s. to be disposed of to his benefit:
I bought him a new case for his bed: 5s.0d)
2 pillow clothes: 2s. 3½d:)
pr. of shoes: 4s. 0d:) 13s. 7½d: In my hand: 6s. 4½d.
pr. of stockings: 1s. 4d:) Which I have since pd. or
laid out for him
Gave him in his weakness: 1s. 0d:”)

There is no mention of any protest from the surviving residents at finding one third of the Almshouse empty but perhaps this was because they gradually benefited from Pope’s reforms. He, like his predecessors, recorded at the end of his accounts what were described as “Gifts”, that is, donations from well-wishers to be divided among the almspeople. They had always included regular, ongoing donations, such as John Godwin’s bequest of £3 6s. 8d. per annum.³⁸ In addition were the two payments of 5s. a year from the Dean and Chapter and 6 pecks of peas from Norwood at Christmas. Pope managed to increase both the number of donors and the size of their donations.

In 1714 fourteen donors subscribed £9 15s. 8d.³⁹ In 1717-18 twenty four donors subscribed £19 4s. 2d.⁴⁰ By this time the Dean and Chapter had increased their gifts to four payments of 5s. a year. The swearing-in of each new Mayor regularly produced 2s. 6d. and the admission of a new burgess also attracted a donation, but the amount varied according to the whim of the donor. In 1716-17 the “Gifts” included 5s. from William Bragg when he became a burgess but in that same year £4 12s. was collected by the then Mayor, Robert Taylor, at the Exchequer “when several gentlemen were met together, when Mr. Bragg, Dr. Morris (presumably Claver Morris) and others were made burgesses”.⁴¹ This last donation was recorded not among the “Gifts” but in the “Charge” so it would not have been divided among the residents, but it demonstrates Pope’s ability in attracting extra income. His lists of “Gifts” also noted the number of vacancies each year. The fewer the inmates the greater each individual’s share of this money presumably, so perhaps it is not

surprising that there were no complaints from the surviving residents.

In 1716-17 Pope recorded a sum of £13 1s. 6d. in hand at the end of the financial year and in the following year he was able to report that he had repaid the money borrowed from Peter Davis and Marshall Bridges. He could also report that this year he had £36 10s. 3d. in hand.⁴² Clearly his programme to reduce costs had proved successful and he could begin to think of handing over the governorship to someone else so that he could further his own career.

The handover took place in March 1720 when William Marchant was appointed Governor by the Dean and Chapter “to perform all duties belonging to the Master of the old Almshouse and receive all rents belonging to the same, he giving security as in that behalf is usual, during the pleasure of the Dean and Chapter”.⁴³ For the year from Michaelmas 1719 to Michaelmas 1720 there are two accounts surviving which bear the names of both Pope and Marchant. The first covers the months from September 1719 to February 1720 at which time Pope had a surplus of £7 7s. 11d. to be handed over to his successor. For the first time in his governorship Pope’s account was examined and allowed on 26 February 1720 by auditors representing both the Dean and Chapter and the Corporation, as had been prescribed by the ordinances. The second account covered the whole financial year and was in the names of both Pope and Marchant. It showed a surplus of £81 1s. 9½d. and on 20 February 1721 it too was audited and approved.⁴⁴

As well as handing over the governorship of the Almshouse in 1719-20 Pope also resigned as Vicar of St. Cuthbert’s. By 17 July 1720 he had been made Chancellor of the diocese and was granted a forty-year lease of two tenements in the New Works.⁴⁵ Following his death in 1730-31 the property was passed to his widow, Margaret.⁴⁶

The records tell us nothing about William Marchant but the cover of his account for 1725-26 suggests that he may have had connections with Easton. The cover had been made from part of a lease of lands in Easton to an earlier William Marchant and his son, Thomas, in 1690.⁴⁷ The covers of several of Marchant’s accounts were also made from obsolete deeds, including one to which John Pope was party.⁴⁸ His governorship lasted for over thirty years until his death in 1752 so he must have been relatively young when he was appointed. There are indications that Pope continued to take an interest in the Almshouse from time to time. Early in 1722, for instance, Marchant paid John Salmon 12s. 0d. for curing the leg of an inmate, John Jones, “by order of Mr. Pope”.⁴⁹ Perhaps the young William Marchant was a protégé of his predecessor.

What is evident from all Marchant’s accounts is that he continued the tight control on spending which John Pope had introduced. By the time of his death the number of residents had risen to twenty two but although there were sometimes considerable surpluses at the end of the financial year, Marchant was cautious about increasing expenditure. On the other hand, the Trustees made sure that if any of the residents died they were now replaced without undue delay. On 5 October 1728 Marchant

reported that no fewer than six residents had died. At the Court held in the following February he was ordered to fill all the vacancies and the money to be spent on “Commons” would be adjusted accordingly.⁵⁰

Exactly what was happening to “Commons” at this time is not clear but it is possible that there was no longer a communal daily meal. Instead the customary weekly provisions of bread, meat, oatmeal, milk and beer may have been purchased and divided among the residents to make their own meals. In addition to this food, the almspeople were also receiving a small weekly payment in cash which would have enabled them to buy extra food. The money may have come from the “Gifts” but the accounts do not make this clear. The earliest mention of these payments occurs in what amounts to minutes of a meeting held on 7 February 1726 to audit the accounts for the previous financial year and the decisions taken at this time may have been the first steps in abandoning the weekly purchases of food altogether in favour of making cash payments to each of the residents instead.⁵¹

The first minute stated:

“That whereas the twenty Poor Persons now in the sd. Almshouse are allowed each but eleven pence a week for their commons for the future the Master to allow them each twelve pence”.

The second and third minutes ordered an increase in the weekly allowance for meat and oatmeal, two of the items included in the customary “Commons”: an extra 1s. 8d. for meat and 2s. 0d. more for oatmeal.

In addition to these three minutes, a fourth recorded that the floors of the rooms in which the persons in the Almshouse lodged were very defective and the Governor was ordered to floor these rooms with oak planks and to floor his kitchen at the same time. It was another sign that the financial situation was improving but the repairs carried out were surely less than the Trustees intended. Very soon after the order had been made Robert Balch was paid 5s. 9d. for stone and labour mending the kitchen floor but it was not until the autumn of 1728 that Ralph Werein received 3s. 10d. for mending two floors and plastering two rooms and George Hopkins was paid 6s. 9d. for pins and work about the doors and floors.⁵² In the summer of 1729, 2s. 0d. was spent on sand for some of the rooms and Robert Balch and his men were paid 13s. 6d. for making floors and “about the chimneys”, but there is never any mention of oak planks.⁵³

Throughout the years between 1720 and 1732 there was a steady rise in the balance at the end of each financial year and on three occasions some money was lent on bond or mortgage: £40 to John Watts on 15 March 1724, £50 to John Morgan of Glastonbury on 19 March 1727, and £30 to Henry Clothier of Burnham and £40 to George Morse of Glastonbury in 1729-30.⁵⁴

After 1732 there is a gap in the Almshouse accounts until 1749-50. Marchant was

still Governor and remained so until his death two years later. So what happened to his accounts? The loss of these documents could have occurred at any time between the 18th century and the present day, but they may have disappeared quite soon after they had been compiled. On 9 October 1719 John Paine, a notary public, was appointed Chapter Clerk following the death of William Westley and, as such, he would have been aware of the responsibilities of the Dean and Chapter with regard to the Almshouse.⁵⁵ During Marchant's governorship an even closer link between Paine and the Almshouse was forged. On 8 August 1735 Marchant appeared before the Dean and Chapter and informed them that Peter Davis, the Steward of the Almshouse, "told him that he should have nothing more to do with the almshouse". The reason for Davis' disaffection is not given but the Dean and Chapter immediately nominated their Chapter Clerk to be Steward in Davis' place.⁵⁶ As Steward Paine would have had a personal interest in the annual accounts and would have helped to compile them. He died in 1741 and was succeeded as Chapter Clerk by Charles Prowse and as Steward of the Almshouse by Thomas Hughes, of Wells, gentleman.⁵⁷

At this time the Dean and Chapter were again having problems with their records and complained that it was "Very inconvenient for the Registry and Records belonging to the Dean and Chapter to be kept in private houses" and they ordered that "for safe keeping of records for the future ... the ground room in the cloisters near the door at the entrance up to the audit room to be fitted up and made convenient for that purpose at the expense of the Chapter". Were Marchant's accounts the victim of records kept in private houses? If so, was it the Chapter Clerk or the Steward who was to blame?

What should be borne in mind is that in the 18th century pluralism was common, some citizens holding more than one office at any given time. For instance, William Keate was typical of such men. He was a burgess who was elected Mayor in 1757. As a representative of the Corporation he was a regular attender at the annual audit of the Almshouse accounts and in 1757 he was one of a special committee appointed by the parish of St. Cuthbert to introduce a new plan to deal with the poor of the City. For men with such diverse interests and responsibilities it might well have been more convenient to take some documents home but it also meant that they were more vulnerable.

In 1732 the Overseers of St. Cuthbert's took advantage of an Act of Parliament passed ten years earlier enabling parishes to hire a house to lodge the poor and put them to work. Whole families could be accommodated, provided the adults were willing to work, and the children could be made apprentices. On 13 September 1732 the Overseers reported that they had chosen a property in St. Cuthbert Street adjoining the churchyard.⁵⁸ By this time it was known as Nutley's house but in 1616-17 it had belonged to John Godwin who had settled it on trustees in order to provide an annual sum of £10 to be divided equally between the Almshouse, the Churchwardens and Overseers of St. Cuthbert's and the poor householders of the City at large.⁵⁹

The property was now conveyed to Charles Baron and Dodington Sherston with the intention of converting it into a workhouse, on the understanding that it should be

transferred to the Churchwardens and Overseers for 500 years subject to an annual payment of £3 6s. 8d. to the Almshouse, that is, its share of Godwin's gift. The Churchwardens and Overseers accepted these terms and at this same meeting it was agreed that the parish officers should visit Shepton Mallet or other places maintaining a workhouse to study their methods. Rather less than a month later, on 5 October, the Overseers decreed that there would be no more monthly payments to the poor outside the workhouse and that a list should be drawn up "of such poor people as intend to take the benefit of the workhouse".⁶⁰ James Jeale was appointed the first Master and builders were consulted about the cost of any alterations to Nutley's house. One improvement made in June 1733 was the removal of the "inconvenient necessary" to be placed over the common sewer "where it formerly stood near the almshouse walls against the churchyard".⁶¹

In the long term the workhouse was not a success. It seems that the poor of Wells preferred out-relief to the strict rules of the workhouse. On 17 April 1753 at a special meeting of the vestry it was ordered that "for better reducing the exorbitant rates" the workhouse should "be again erected" and no poor after 29 April relieved outside the house.⁶² For the next year the workhouse struggled on, apparently under the management of a woman, but clearly the parish was not happy with the situation.⁶³ At a meeting on 5 December 1754 the Overseers met to choose "a proper person" to be Governor but were unable to do so because they had given insufficient notice. They suggested that if the Churchwardens and Overseers had any cause for complaint with the present management they should call a special meeting.⁶⁴ This they did on 22 July 1755 when at a public meeting at the workhouse it was agreed that the workhouse should be suppressed after 28 July and the poor of the parish relieved by the Overseers according to the law.⁶⁵ It did not happen at once.

Throughout 1756 the Overseers continued to meet at the workhouse and to admit new residents. In October that year it was decided to appoint a committee to consider a proposed plan for better regulating the poor of the parish but this was not done until May 1757.⁶⁶ The first meeting of the committee was held at the Common Council House of the City on 30 October when it was agreed that the workhouse should be abolished and all the poor put out. The children should either be housed with people willing to support them and put them to school or apprenticed in lots to buyers who were willing to pay £60 or £80 for them according to the nature of their business. The attitude of this committee, which had been granted the same powers as the vestry, was harsh.

At the same meeting it was decreed that no able-bodied poor should be relieved without employment, the parents of bastard children were to be punished and anyone receiving relief must attend church twice every Sunday or else forfeit their benefit.⁶⁷ On 2 November it was ordered that all the poor should leave the house on the following Saturday, 5 November, lodgings having been found for them.⁶⁸ Women with children were given beds, presumably those they had been using in the workhouse. On 10 November the vestry met to consider the allocation of lots for apprentices. 42 bids for lots had been received raising a total of £58. The lots were

drawn and awarded on 29 December and the apprentices bound to their masters.⁶⁹

The workhouse had probably never impinged on the Almshouse so long as it continued to function. The accounts of the Overseers for the parish show that every year between 1732 and 1749, the years of the missing Almshouse accounts, they had faithfully paid the sum of £3 6s. 8d. from Godwin's gift to the Governor of the Almshouse and they continued to do so after 1749. It was the closing of the workhouse that did have some effect on the Almshouse. In 1806 Nutley's house was sold and the garden behind was acquired by the parish to extend the churchyard to its present size.⁷⁰ It must have greatly improved the light at the western end of the Almshouse buildings.

Eventually the parish was to have an even closer connection with the Almshouse. The workhouse had become the meeting place for both the vestry and the Overseers but after 1806 it was no longer available to them. By this time the hall of the Almshouse no longer functioned as the City's Guildhall, as it had done since the 15th century. The Corporation had moved out following the building of the Town Hall on the south side of the Market Place. According to the Report of the Charity Commissioners in 1820 this had taken place thirty five years earlier and since then it had been used by the Churchwardens and Overseers of the parish for their vestry meetings and other parish business.

When the Almshouse accounts reappear in 1749 a number of changes had taken place in their layout. Most important was the inclusion every year of a list of the men and women then residing in the Almshouse. The first of these lists actually records the number of the room occupied by each of the 16 then residents of Bubwith's Almshouse.⁷¹ These numbers run from 4-12, 14-18 plus 21 and 23. There is no means of knowing the exact location of these rooms. Some would have been on the ground floor, others would have been upper rooms. The gaps in the series of numbers may have been rooms occupied by the Matron and possibly the cook who appear regularly in the accounts of this period. The six inmates of Still's house, all men, are listed separately but no room numbers are given. Unfortunately none of the lists in these accounts indicate who had nominated a particular resident for Bubwith's Almshouse, whether, in accordance with the 1446 ordinances, it was the Mayor or the Dean and Chapter. Towards the end of the 18th century and in the early 19th century the Dean and Chapter Act Books occasionally record nominations, but the Corporation Act Books are silent on the subject.

Marchant died in 1752 and was succeeded by two fairly short-lived Governors. The first was Jacob Nicholl who had played the organ and taught the choir boys during the vacancy caused by the death of the Cathedral organist, William Evans.⁷² By 1756 he too was dead.⁷³ He was followed by Charles Taylor who was Governor only until 1759. The accounts he produced for the annual audit were minimal compared to those of his predecessors but to some extent these omissions are made good by a journal he kept covering the years 1757-59.⁷⁴

In spite of the healthy balances shown in the audited accounts, well over £300 each year, and the fact that money, nearly £200, was made available to new borrowers, the journal reveals that Taylor sometimes had to dip into his own pocket to pay tradesmen, like John Young, the collier, paid three guineas on 3 October 1757. In 1758 he lent small sums of money to the Almshouse cook, and in September, at the end of the financial year, he complained that she had repaid none of it. By December, however, the debt had been repaid in full. In the meantime, in July and August 1758 he noted that he had put a total of 14 guineas of his own money into the Almshouse bag. These entries may simply reflect the chronic shortage of cash in hand which had always plagued the Almshouse, even when its finances, on paper at least, were healthy. By the end of the financial year 1758-59 Taylor was no longer Governor but there is no mention of his death, nor of any money owed to him, so it may be that the fourteen guineas was actually a farewell gift to the Almshouse on his impending departure.

Charles Taylor was succeeded first by Simon Witherell, who was Governor from 1760 to 1780, then by James Penny from 1780-89, Benjamin Andrews from 1789-1804, George Penny from 1804-23 and William Melliar from 1823-40. The "Charge" for the account for 1803-04 records the receipt by the new Governor, George Penny, of £240 "in cash and other payments in part of the balance due on his late uncle's account". Assuming that this refers to Benjamin Andrews, this would mean that between 1804 and 1823 the governorship of the Almshouse was in the hands of just one family.⁷⁵

Throughout the whole of the period from 1751 to 1840 the accounts followed the same pattern but changes were gradually taking place both in the sources of the Almshouse income and the way in which the money was managed. There had always been occasional small bequests and gifts to the Almshouse, like the £10 bequeathed by Mrs. Rebecca Taylor of Aldermaston in 1757, £5 of which was distributed in bread to the poor of the City at large and the other £5 shared among the almspeople.⁷⁶ In 1776-77 the Almshouse received a gift of £306 from Peter Davis which probably made up most of the £320 "put out" that year to borrowers in the form of loans secured by bonds or mortgages of property.⁷⁷ For two years in 1790 and 1791 some money, £500 in all, was placed in the Bath and Wells Bank, but this is the only time the Almshouse appears to have made use of a bank to invest money.⁷⁸ The loans and mortgages remained the main form of investment until 1840 and its scale is revealed on three occasions between 1808 and 1813 when George Penny recorded the total capital invested in this way: £3,425 divided among 19 borrowers in 1808-09, £3,775 among 18 borrowers in 1810-11 and £3,860 among 16 borrowers in 1812-13.⁷⁹

In 1777 and again in 1815 the Almshouse received two important gifts of a different kind. On 16 January 1777 Edward Willes, the son of Bishop Edward Willes who had died in 1771, transferred to Peter Davis and four other representatives of the Corporation and to the Dean and three canons residentiary, £1,200 old South Sea stock and the dividends thereon.⁸⁰ The deed by which the transfer was made stated that it had been the Bishop's intention to make such a settlement but he had died

before he had been able to carry out that intention. His son was “desirous of accomplishing the charitable intention of his father” and covenanted with the trustees named in the deed to transfer the money on the understanding that the £1,200 should be continued at interest upon government or some other good security. The interest was to be used for the better support of the Almshouse, in the first place for the relief and support of four more poor and impotent persons to be added to the twenty four inmates of Bubwith’s and the six of Still’s foundations. Any surplus which arose should be accumulated and placed at interest until it reached the sum of £160 or some other amount, the interest from which would support another additional resident in either of the two houses. Such accumulation and application was to be continued with power to invest in stock or to purchase real estate or some other property for a long term of years.

The response of the Almshouse was immediate. Four new rooms were made available at a cost of £110 7s. 9d. under the supervision of Thomas Huntington.⁸¹ Presumably the additional rooms were fitted in to the existing buildings, but where is not recorded. At the time of this gift there were in fact only twenty four residents in Bubwith’s and Still’s Almshouses, twelve men and twelve women in all. By the time of the account for 1777-78 the number of residents had risen to twenty nine, fifteen men and fourteen women, and by 1779-80 to thirty, seventeen men and thirteen women. Whether or not these increases were the direct result of Edward Willes’ gift or a general improvement in the Almshouse finances is unclear and it has to be said that the interest from Willes’ money was not always forthcoming when it was due, sometimes being in arrears for two years.⁸²

In 1815 Clement Tudway, in a codicil to his will, left to Bubwith’s Almshouse as much money as would purchase £500 stock, also in old South Sea annuities, for the further support of the poor men and women there. At the time the annual dividend was £15.⁸³ The two gifts from Edward Willes and Clement Tudway were the Almshouse’s first experiences of dealing with stock and shares, which in the future, particularly after 1840, would play an important role in their finances.

The annual accounts from 1751-1840 are recorded in three books, the first containing the accounts from 1751 to 1771, the second the accounts from 1772 to 1824 and the third the accounts from 1823 to 1840. They all follow the same pattern, are beautifully written and handsomely bound.⁸⁴ Suddenly between 1814 and 1819 they fall apart. They are incomplete, muddled, sometimes scrappy and written by different hands. The Governor during these years was still George Penny but it suggests that he was not entirely in control of affairs during these years. The surprise is that such poor records should have been entered in a book which is otherwise immaculate in its presentation. The years 1814-19 immediately precede the report of the Charity Commissioners on the state of Bubwith’s, Still’s and Willes’ foundations. Is it possible that during the preceding years George Penny had to provide the Commissioners with so much information about the Almshouse and its finances that he had neither the time nor, perhaps, the necessary figures at hand to enter the accounts in the normal way?

The report drawn up by the Commissioners gives us a useful insight into all aspects of the three foundations, their property, finances and day-to-day management just before the changes which took place following the passing of the Municipal Corporations Act.⁸⁵ It begins with a statement that according to a tablet in the chapel the twenty four residents of Bubwith's should come frequently to services and prayers. Bubwith's will could not be found and the Commissioners had used the 15th-century transcript later rescued by Thomas Serel for their understanding of his foundation.⁸⁶ This is followed by an account of the properties owned by Bubwith's foundation, which shows that these properties had, with few exceptions, remained in the foundation's ownership ever since they were first acquired. The only major changes were those brought about by enclosure. For much of the information about the Bubwith properties they relied on the Steward, Benjamin Tuthill, who had held that office for 40 years and because, as they said, "the lands were well known to him" because in 1809-10 he had carried out a number of surveys and plans at the Trustees' request.⁸⁷ The properties comprised:

"2 tenements, a garden and Knowl Mead: 2ac. old inclosure.
Melsbury: 56a. 27p.: all old inclosure.
Wookey Hole: paper mill and other buildings: 143a. old inclosure and 23½ac. allotment in Knowl Moor.
Cheddar: 22a: 5a. old inclosure: remainder: 12a. on Mendip and 4c. in Moor.
Westbury: messuage and 36a.: formerly 22a. except blacksmith's shop occupying 1r: has been inclosure here which added allotments of 15a.
Wells: 14a. New Street toft: 9p.
Polsham: nothing: 1a. exchanged under general inclosure by deed dated 28 Sept. 1795:
Mr. Tudway gave piece of land: ½a. in Marley Mead.
Torr Lane: messuage & garden 60' x 20'.
St. Cuthbert St: 3 tenements and gardens.
Tucker St: messuage and garden.
3 cottages exchanged with John Moss 3 Feb. 1764 for land in Tanners' Close: 2a. on north side of Wells.
1½a. in Long String.
High St: a house in the middle of the street adj. The Shambles: "6/- rent: pulled down & site given up to public for which compensation seems to have been paid at the time".
Glastonbury: 13a. 2r. 7p. old inclosure and 8a. new inclosure".

The Commissioners then added the following to the list of Bubwith's Glastonbury properties: "2 fields Great Norwood Park and Little Norwood Park in Glastonbury now belonging to the almshouse. No mention in old survey nor any trace of this property as distinct from land bequeathed by Bubwith but accounts show this land long in possession of almshouse". Of course these fields could not be traced among the Bubwith properties. They belonged to Still's foundation. The Commissioners had failed to discover that in 1651-52 Still's Trustees had purchased these two fields from

Sir Charles Berkeley of Bruton.⁸⁸

The report on Bubwith's foundation also included the annuities amounting to £15 a year received from tenants of properties on the Bishop's Parkhill estate but the Commissioners referred only to the grant of increased annuities made by Bishop Montague in 1611 and did not mention that these annuities were first granted to the Almshouse by Bishop Knight in 1541 and were confirmed by Bishop Bourne in 1554.⁸⁹ They also recorded the payments due from the Vicars Choral for Gascoigne's gift from the manor of Newton Plecy and the extra payment from them under the agreement reached in 1613/14.⁹⁰

By contrast the Commissioners gave a very detailed account of the acquisition of the Still property, quoting in full the deed of 23 December 1614 setting up the trust. They said that the lands which had been bought with Bishop Still's £500 and Nathaniel Still's £269 comprised 85a. 1r. 26p. in several parcels, now pasture, in Bagley Wood and Old Wood in Wedmore. They also referred to a map and survey of this property drawn up by Richard Bayly in 1785 and remarked that there was "probable ground for thinking that the whole property is still entire. The fields lie compactly together, have the same denominations and are bounded by ancient public ways".⁹¹

The report went on to explain the nature of the leases granted by both foundations. With the exception of Knowl Mead in Wookey which was let to a yearly tenant, George Parsons, for an annual rent of £4, all the Bubwith properties were let on leases for lives, on leases for years determinable with lives or for ancient rents with fines. The total rent for all these Bubwith properties was £44 6s. 6d. a year. Still's properties were let for fines on leases for terms of years determinable with lives paying accustomed and ancient rents amounting to £33 13s. 8d. The Norwood Park properties, still treated by the Commissioners as part of Bubwith's foundation, were let to John Roe as a yearly tenant paying £42. Such a profitable investment was important to either Almshouse. Equally important were the fines paid on the grant of a lease and the Commissioners listed, year by year from 1808-09 to 1817-18, all the money received by way of fines from any of the Almshouse properties and how it was invested. By 1818 the total invested was £1,294 18s. 0d.

There then follow details of the two gifts made by Edward Willes on behalf of his father, Bishop Edward Willes, in 1777 and by Clement Tudway in 1815 in the form of South Sea stock. The current dividend on Willes' gift was £36 a year and on Tudway's, £15. They also listed a number of small gifts which had been secured by mortgages and bonds and which were carried to the general account:

- 1772: Francis Day: £50.
Peter Davis: £360 and interest.
- 1775: Mrs. Day: £50.
- 1816: Mrs. Frances Parfitt: £50.
Dr. Ralph Bathurst: 2 gifts of £50.
Dr. Selleck, Archdeacon of Bath: £50.

Dr. Richard Busby: £50.
Dr. Robert Creighton: £41.

The Commissioners did not approve of Dr. Creighton's gift being dealt with in this way. They pointed out that it was given in order that the Governor should have cash in hand to make advances for Commons before annual rents came in. It ought to have been kept "unblended" and not mixed in with the general account.

They calculated that the total annual income for all three foundations for the current year was £409 1s. 2d. and they then proceeded to examine the expenditure for the year, probably the year ending at Michaelmas 1818. They did not give a date for this account themselves but the figures do seem to correspond with what was recorded in the account book for this year.⁹² It helps to paint an interesting picture of life in the Almshouse at this time. For instance, there is no mention at all of "Commons". Instead each resident received a weekly payment of 5s. 0d. during the six winter months, reduced to 4s. 6d. during the summer. Small additional payments amounting to £1 5s. 0d. were paid to residents who were sick. The Almshouse no longer employed a cook or a laundress but the Matron was paid at the same rate as the residents and she had an assistant who was paid 1s. 0d. a week. An apothecary was contracted for 10 guineas a year and a barber for 4 guineas. Coal and, interestingly, turf cost £24 12s. 0d.

The spiritual welfare of the inmates was not overlooked as a book of homilies and a large bible were also purchased. It was an expensive year for the Almshouse as new coats and hats were provided for the men and new gowns and bonnets for the women. Altogether the cost of the materials and the making of the garments amounted to £44 12s. 6d. for the men and £5 6s. 8d. for the women.⁹³ It was also a year in which repairs were required and payments had to be made to a tiler and plasterer, a carpenter, a glazier, a painter and tiler amounting to £16 3s. 4d. as well as £1 15s. 0d. for interior work done by one of the almsmen. Expenditure had exceeded income by £109 4s. 2d. but the Commissioners pointed out that new coats and gowns were provided only every two years and it was unlikely that more repairs would be needed in the near future. They were surprisingly optimistic about the Almshouse finances. They also felt that income was perpetually growing because of the fines imposed when new leases were granted and they thought that the Trustees were well able to cope with any increases in expenditure. The accounts kept were regular and clear.

The report then deals with the Almshouse residents and the benefits they received. At the time the report was written there were only twenty eight residents, eighteen supported by Bubwith's foundation, six by Still's foundation, and four by Willes'. Still's and Willes' residents were all men, Bubwith's both men and women. The Commissioners noted that, according to his will, there should be twenty four residents in Bubwith's house, but the income of his foundation could not, at present, support more than eighteen almspeople, thus casting some doubt on the Commissioners' optimism. The ordinances for the nomination of new residents to each foundation had been scrupulously followed, according to the Commissioners.

This was in spite of a letter received from Francis Drake, extracts of which they included in the report.⁹⁴ He complained that there had been some irregularity in the admissions of some poor people. He was reluctant to name individuals as he feared it might mean their dismissal from the Almshouse. They would “thus be turned adrift upon the world at an advanced age and labouring under bodily infirmities”. He did not think they were undeserving “but that they were not proper and legitimate objects of this particular charity”. He was however prepared to name these persons, on oath, provided he was given assurance that they would not be turned out of the Almshouse. He could ignore past transactions but thought it necessary “to induce [? introduce] a stricter attention in future to the directions of the founders and contributors to this charity”.

From the lists of residents in the annual Almshouse accounts it is possible to identify the men and women who were most likely residents at the time of the Commissioners’ report. So far as the men are concerned it is not possible to say in which Almshouse they were located, with one exception. Ambrose Mead, aged 62, was admitted to Still’s Almshouse in 1818. He remained there for 27 years until his death in 1845, aged 91. The only other male resident about whom there is any information other than the date of his admission, his age and the date of his death is Baron Giles, the hatmaker to the Almshouse. He was admitted at some time between 1817 and 1820 and died there in 1842 at the age of 80. This means that he would have been only 58 at the time of the report, a relatively early age for an almsman. None of the other men resident in 1820 were less than 60 years old at the time of their admission, and eight of them were over 70. Nine of them lived until their 80s, eight died in their 70s, and only one, James Wotley or Wolley, died as young as 68.

All thirteen women residents must have been in Bubwith’s Almshouse. Like the men, they were all in their 60s or 70s when they were admitted. There was one exception, Sally Bowell, who was admitted in 1814 at the age of 57. It is possible she was related to John Bowell, a burgess, which may have given her an advantage. On the other hand, she died in 1823 at the relatively early age of 66 so perhaps she was just frail. One female resident, Miriam Hawkins, admitted in 1813, aged 70, lived to be 91. All but one of the other thirteen women lived until their 80s, the exception being Elizabeth Boulton, admitted in 1817 aged 61, who died in 1831 aged 74. Unfortunately, the surviving records are insufficient to enable us to decide whether or not Francis Drake’s complaint was justified.

What benefits did the residents receive once they were in the Almshouse? The Commissioners reported that each person had a separate apartment. The only furniture provided was a bed. “Other conveniences were brought in by the inmates.” In theory these goods should have become the property of the Almshouse and would have been sold when the inmate died but the report stated that following a death the relations and friends of the deceased took away the goods. Originally these apartments had no fireplaces but now, according to the report, some did. There was a common kitchen with a fireplace and each resident had an annual allowance of six

quarters eight bushels of coal. The men spent most of their time in the kitchen for the benefit of the fire but the Commissioners emphasised that women had equal use of the kitchen and an equal allowance of fuel. "They are, in other respects, all upon an equality." As the Almshouse had long abandoned a daily, shared meal and had replaced the later "Commons" with a weekly cash payment, presumably all the cooking was done by the inmates themselves in the common kitchen. This may be the reason why the Commissioners insisted that women should have equal rights with the men who spent so much of their time in front of the common fire in the kitchen.

As well as the common kitchen, the residents also had access to the common pumps and offices and to a small part of the cultivated garden. As we have seen the residents were provided with good clothing every two years. In addition there was an annual distribution of linen every Christmas under the terms of Ralph Barker's bequest. The account for 1817-18 contained in the report also shows that if a resident fell ill he might be given extra money. In 1817-18 this amounted to 25s. 0d. There was also a Matron, her assistant and, if need be, an apothecary at hand to treat the sick. Even major surgery was available if necessary. Only small amounts made up the sum for 1817-18 but a few years earlier, in 1795, the Almshouse had paid £6 15s. 11d. for Thomas Joyce to have his leg amputated. He had been admitted ten years earlier at the age of 58 and was probably still alive when the Commissioners began their inspection of the Almshouse. He died on 16 May 1819 aged 93. The Almshouse also paid for the costs of burials, including the provision of a coffin, payments to the sexton and a small sum given to each surviving resident. There is no indication that in the early 19th-century arrangements for burials were ever carried out by the families or friends of the residents.

Finally, the Commissioners dealt with the use of some of the Almshouse buildings not occupied by the residents. The report is not entirely clear on this point. They refer to two rooms which they describe as "much more modern than the original building". This might perhaps refer to Still's Almshouse but could not refer to the former Guildhall used by the Corporation. According to the building accounts, Still's Almshouse was joined to the main building by a gallery, which might perhaps have had the "inner roof" of these buildings "appropriated for other purposes" as described by the Commissioners.⁹⁵ They were quite clear that the Mayor and Corporation had used one room, presumably the old Guildhall, until 35 years previously when the new Town Hall had been built. At present, that is in 1820, this room was now used by the Churchwardens and Overseers of St. Cuthbert's parish. Neither the Corporation nor the parish paid any rent for the room and, since it had been abandoned by the Corporation, it was the parish who should pay for any repairs to the roof.

All responsibility for repairs by the Corporation as laid down in the agreement of 1436 appears to have been overlooked. An old workman whose father had been involved in repairs at the Almshouse said that the Corporation had paid for these repairs until the parish had superseded the Corporation as occupiers of the hall. This statement is borne out by the accounts covering the years from 1820 to 1840 and the Receiver's accounts for the Corporation. In 1831-32 a surveyor named Wainwright

was commissioned to survey Bubwith's Almshouse in order to discover what repairs were necessary, but neither in the Almshouse accounts nor the Receiver's accounts are there any indications that repairs were actually carried out.⁹⁶ The question of responsibility for repairs to the Almshouse was to become a serious source of contention following the dissolution of the Corporation a few years later.

By 1823 George Penny was no longer Governor. He was succeeded by William Mellior who held that office until his death in 1840. William had been admitted a burgess in 1799 and he was a lawyer, like his father, also William, who had acted for the Dean and Chapter in the matter of some land at Burnham which they owned and which was wanted for the building of a lighthouse.⁹⁷

The accounts for the years of Mellior's governorship of the Almshouse fill the third of the three immaculate books already referred to.⁹⁸ They reveal no great changes in the affairs of the Almshouse but the appointment of a lawyer as Governor suggests that the Almshouse was aware that changes might soon be coming. The annual balances were more than satisfactory rising to over £1,000 in Mellior's latter years so the Charity Commissioners' optimism was vindicated. Much money was put out on loan: £630 in 1826-27 and £820 in 1833-34, for instance.

The sale of timber from some of the Almshouse properties also brought in additional income from time to time. In 1824-25 £38 14s. 10d. came from the sale of timber, apparently mostly from windfalls.⁹⁹ Ten years later a sum of £73 14s. 6d. was raised from timber. Nearly half of this sum came from the sale of trees in Bagley Wood and Old Wood at Wedmore.¹⁰⁰ The sale was attended by Wainwright, the surveyor, who was asked also to survey all the Almshouse properties, that is, Still's properties, in Wedmore.¹⁰¹ In the same year some elm trees at Wookey Hole were felled and an oak tree at Hay and a fine of £5 was imposed on John Robert Lax for cutting down several ash trees on White's Close, a copyhold close of two acres above East Wells, without permission.¹⁰¹ The sum received for timber in 1834-35 was far outstripped in 1836-37 when no less than £268 3s. 8d. was realised from this source. Much of it comprised balances due from the sale of Wedmore timber in 1834-35 but it also included elm trees cut down and sold, three at Hay and six at Glastonbury.¹⁰²

In all the Almshouse accounts the income expected from rents as recorded in the Charge remained stable, only changing when a lease expired and a new lease was granted. For the first ten years of Mellior's governorship his accounts record an income of £149 17s. 2d. from rents. By 1833-34, however, property in Glastonbury had fallen in hand following the death of the tenant, Mrs. Ann White in May 1833. No new lease was granted and a survey of the Glastonbury properties was commissioned. In 1834-35 the account showed that the Glastonbury properties were in the hands of individual tenants who paid rack rents. For the next year or so the figure for rents in the "Charge" fluctuated considerably, eventually settling down to about £175.¹⁰³

The surveys of Almshouse properties which were commissioned during these years

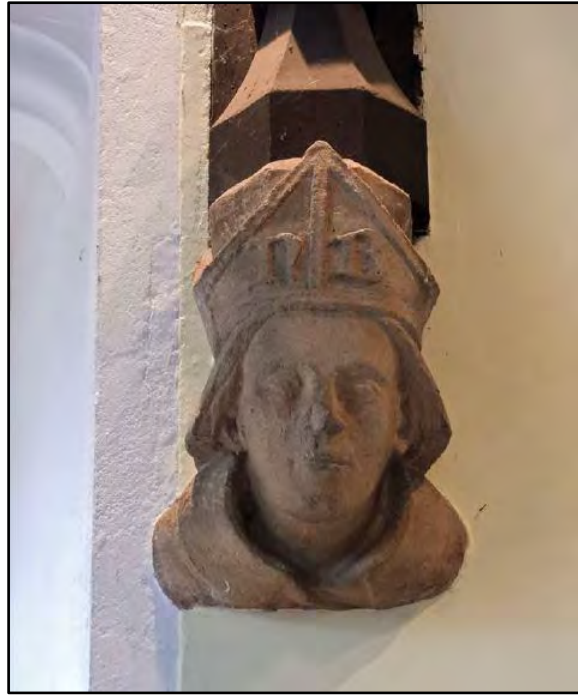
and the apparent reluctance to enter into a new long-term lease does suggest that the Trustees were biding their time until they knew what the future held for them. The passing of the Municipal Corporations Act in 1834 meant that the City Corporation was going to be abolished. What effect would this have on the Almshouse? During Mellior's remaining years no great changes were made to the management of the Almshouse. He died in 1840 and his executor was J. L. Lovell, another lawyer, who became his successor as Governor. It was he who had to steer the Almshouse through the uncharted waters of the next few years.

Notes

- ¹ The singular form is used at all times when referring to the joint three foundations: Bubwith's, Still's and, after 1773, Willes'. If referring to only one of the foundations, its name is given.
- ² D&CA, AH/AF/498.
- ³ *Ibid.*
- ⁴ *Ibid.*
- ⁵ D&CA, AH/AF/499.
- ⁶ D&CA, AH/AF/503.
- ⁷ *Ibid.*
- ⁸ D&CA, AH/AF/505.
- ⁹ D&CA, AH/AF/510.
- ¹⁰ D&CA, AH/AF/522, 523 and 531.
- ¹¹ D&CA, AH/AF/521.
- ¹² D&CA, AH/AF/511.
- ¹³ D&CA, AH/AF/521.
- ¹⁴ D&CA, AH/AF/515.
- ¹⁵ D&CA, AH/AF/521.
- ¹⁶ D&CA, AH/AF/518.
- ¹⁷ D&CA, AH/AF/498.
- ¹⁸ D&CA, AH/AF/512.
- ¹⁹ D&CA, AH/AF/514.
- ²⁰ D&CA, AH/AF/522 and 524.
- ²¹ D&CA, AH/AF/522.
- ²² D&CA, AH/AF/524.
- ²³ D&CA, AH/AF/525(a).
- ²⁴ D&CA, AH/AF/526.
- ²⁵ D&CA, AH/AF/525(b).
- ²⁶ *D & C*, Vol. 2, pp. 466, 481, 483.
- ²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 498, 513, 517.
- ²⁸ D&CA, AH/AF/531.
- ²⁹ D&CA, AH/AF/525(b).
- ³⁰ D&CA, AH/AF/527(b).
- ³¹ D&CA, AH/AF/530.
- ³² D&CA, AH/AF/527(b).
- ³³ D&CA, AH/AF/527(c).
- ³⁴ D&CA, AH/AF/527(b).
- ³⁵ D&CA, AH/AF/529.
- ³⁶ D&CA, AH/AF/527(c).
- ³⁷ D&CA, AH/AF/525(b).
- ³⁸ See Chapter 5, note 40.
- ³⁹ D&CA, AH/AF/527(a).
- ⁴⁰ D&CA, AH/AF/529.
- ⁴¹ D&CA, AH/AF/527(c).

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- 42 *Ibid.*, and D&CA, AH/AF/529.
- 43 D&CA, DC/CF/6/11, Chapter Act Book, 1705-25, fo.150v.
- 44 D&CA, AH/AF/531.
- 45 D&CA, DC/CF/6/11, Chapter Act Book, 1705-25, fo. 152.
- 46 *D & C*, Vol. 2, pp. 521 and 526.
- 47 D&CA, AH/AF/536.
- 48 D&CA, AH/AF/539(a).
- 49 D&CA, AH/AF/532.
- 50 D&CA, AH/AF/539(b).
- 51 D&CA, AH/AF/535.
- 52 D&CA, AH/AF/539(b).
- 53 *Ibid.*
- 54 D&CA, AH/AF/532, 543(b), 534, 538, 539(c).
- 55 *D & C*, Vol. 2, p. 503.
- 56 D&CA, CF/6/12, Chapter Act Book 1725-44, fo. 143v.
- 57 *Ibid.* and fo. 228.
- 58 SRO, D/P/W.St.C: 13/2/2: Overseers' accounts.
- 59 See Chapter 5, note 40.
- 60 SRO, D/P/W.St.C: 13/2/2: Overseers' accounts.
- 61 SRO, D/P/W.St.C: 9/1/1: Vestry Minutes.
- 62 *Ibid.*
- 63 *Ibid.*
- 64 *Ibid.*
- 65 SRO, D/P/W.St.C:9/1/2.
- 66 *Ibid.*
- 67 *Ibid.*
- 68 *Ibid.*
- 69 *Ibid.*
- 70 See plan. [*Jean Imray intended this to be included but gives no reference for it.*]
- 71 D&CA, AH/F/1.
- 72 *D & C*, Vol. 2, p. 538.
- 73 D&CA, AH/F/1: the account for the year ending Michaelmas 1756 was presented by Susannah, his executor, but her relationship to Jacob Nicholl is not recorded.
- 74 D&CA, AH/F/11.
- 75 D&CA, AH/F/1, 1751-71 and AH/F/2, 1772-1824.
- 76 D&CA, AH/F/11.
- 77 D&CA, AH/F/2.
- 78 *Ibid.*
- 79 *Ibid.*
- 80 D&CA, AH/ADM/2, Report of the Charity Commissioners, 1820.
- 81 D&CA, AH/F/2.
- 82 *Ibid.*
- 83 D&CA, AH/ADM/2.
- 84 D&CA, AH/F/1, 2.
- 85 D&CA, AH/ADM/2.
- 86 D&CA, AH/AF/552.
- 87 [?? - *Jean Imray gives no reference for this.*]
- 88 D&CA, AH/AF/457.
- 89 D&CA, AH/AF/361.
- 90 D&CA, AH/AF/427.
- 91 This map and survey have not been found among the Almshouse records.
- 92 D&CA, AH/F/2. The Commissioners gave no date for this account but the figures they quote seem to correspond with what was recorded for 1817-18 in the account book even though this is one of the accounts which is short on details.
- 93 By this time the difference between men's and women's clothing was distinct.

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- ⁹⁴ Francis Drake was a burgess, who also served as Mayor.
- ⁹⁵ D&CA, AH/AF/430.
- ⁹⁶ D&CA, AH/F/3.
- ⁹⁷ William Mellior, senior, was listed as an attorney in Bailey's *British Directory* of 1784 (typescript extracts, Wells & Mendip Museum Library, Som/D4). Also D&CA, DC/ADM 2/66(a), 9 Sept. 1814, and numerous other references to the legal activities of the Melliors on behalf of the Dean and Chapter.
- ⁹⁸ D&CA, AH/F/3.
- ⁹⁹ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁰² *Ibid.*
- ¹⁰³ *Ibid.*



1. Bishop Nicholas Bubwith depicted in a corbel (centre south) in the chapel of Bubwith's Almshouse, St. Saviour's Chapel. His mitre is marked with his initials, "N. B.". © *Jerry Sampson*.



2. View of Bubwith's Almshouse taken in 2019 from Chamberlain Street, with the chapel nearest to the camera.
© *Jerry Sampson*.



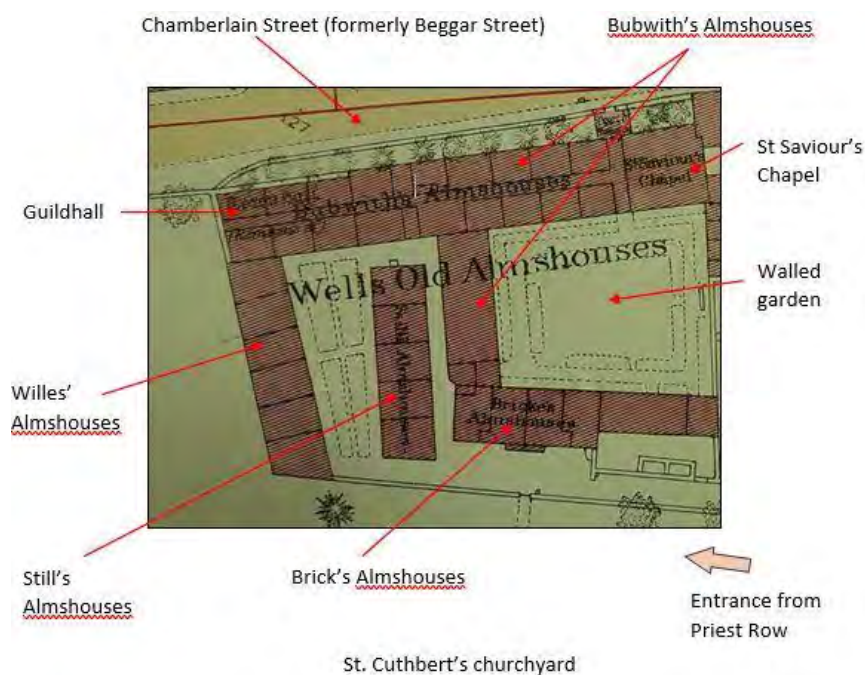
3. Aerial photograph from St. Cuthbert's Church tower looking north, showing the whole complex of Bubwith's, Still's, Willes' and Brick's Almshouses.
Photographed by Paul Fry in 1995. © Wells City Council Archives.



4. Section of William Simes' *Plan of Wells* (1735), showing the Almshouses (labelled "d") to the north of St. Cuthbert's Church. © Wells & Mendip Museum.



5. Wells Old Almshouse as depicted on the 1888 Ordnance Survey map of Wells (scale 1:500). The modern names of the roads shown above in yellow are Chamberlain Street (north), Priest Row (east), St. Cuthbert Street (south) and Portway (west). © Wells City Council Archives.

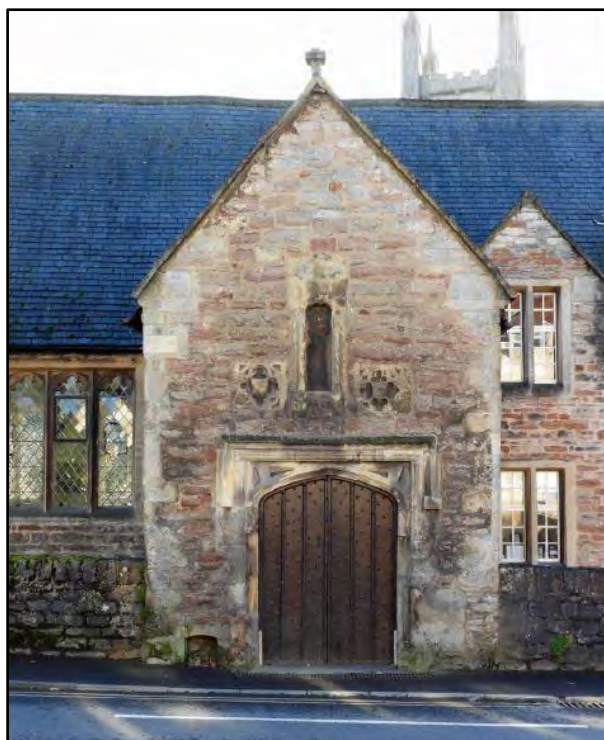


6. Diagram showing the location of the various parts of Wells Old Almshouse.

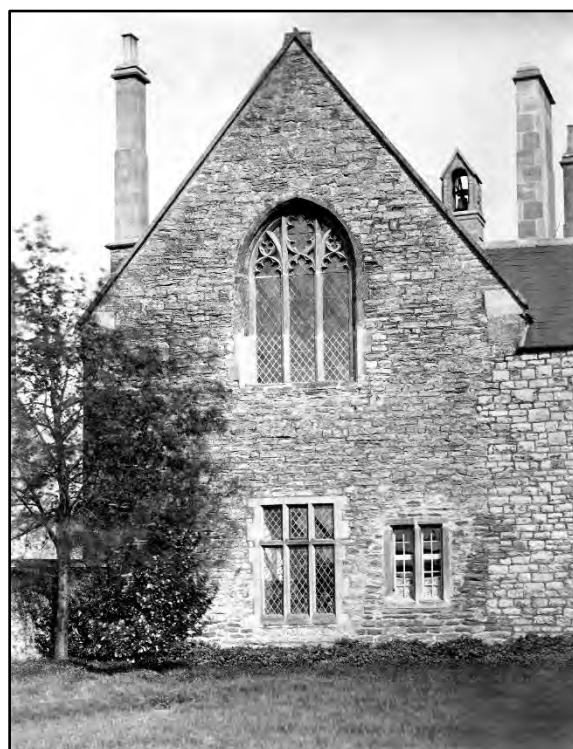


7. Sepia watercolour and pencil drawing of the North Porch of Bubwith's Almshouse by W. W. Wheatley, painted in 1846 prior to the major restoration.

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8. The North Porch photographed in 2019. The porch originally bridged a river called the Ludborne which ran down the south side of Chamberlain Street. © *Jerry Sampson*.



9. The west elevation of the old Guildhall, Bubwith's Almshouse, photographed c. 1900. © *Wells & Mendip Museum*.



10. The rear of the main block of Bubwith's Almshouse, looking north west. Photographed from the garden by Paul Fry in 1995.
© Wells City Council Archives.



11. Sepia and grey watercolour drawing of interior of the Almshouse chapel by W. W. Wheatley, 1847, prior to the major restoration. © Reproduced with kind permission of the Somerset Archaeological and Natural History Society and the South West Heritage Trust (SHC A/DAS/1/420/14).



12. The roof of the Almshouse chapel, looking east, photographed in 2019. © *Jerry Sampson*.



13. The old Guildhall, Bubwith's Almshouse, now a communal area for residents. Photographed by Paul Fry in 1995. © *Wells City Council Archives*.



14. The walled garden of Bubwith's Almshouse, photographed in 2017. The building with the two white doors in it is now used as a garden shed but was the original Almshouse mortuary. © *Meredith Roberts*.



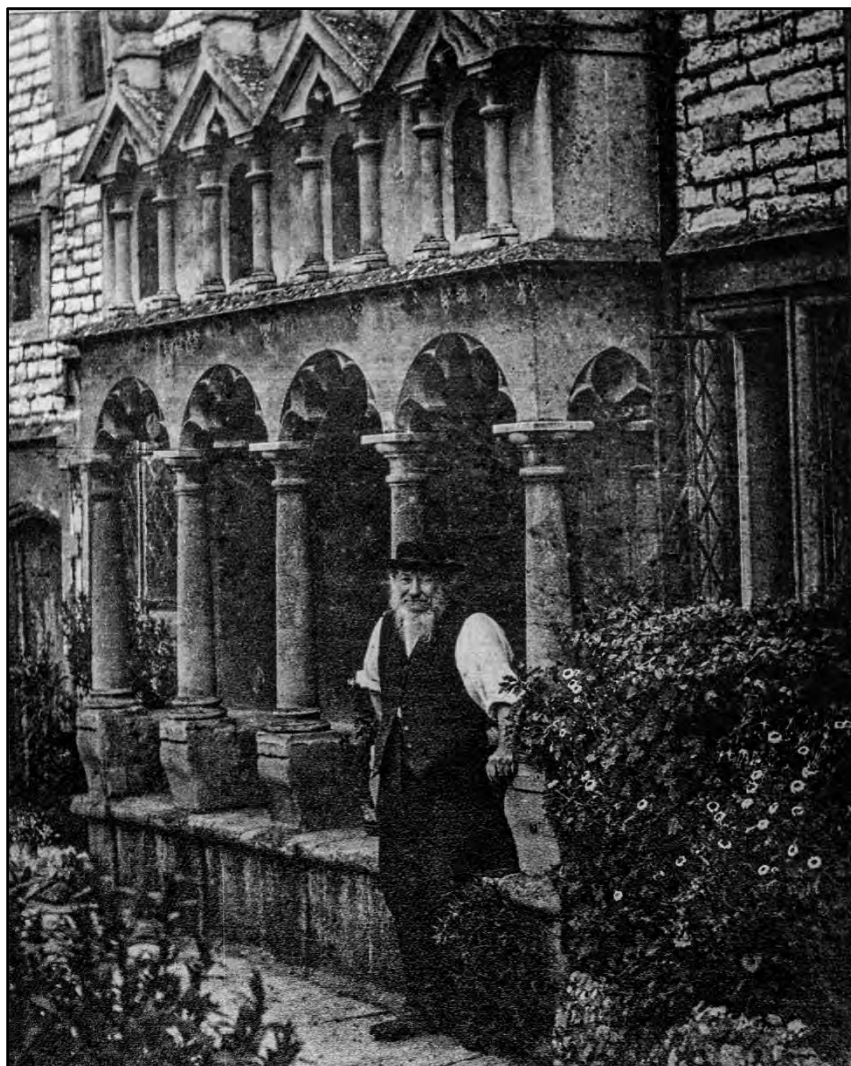
15. Courtyard between Still's (*left*) and Willes' (*right*) Almshouses, looking towards St. Cuthbert's churchyard. Photographed by Paul Fry in 1995. © *Wells City Council Archives*.



16. Still's Almshouse, photographed in 2017. © *Meredith Roberts*.



17. Willes' Almshouse, west elevation from St. Cuthbert's churchyard, also showing west elevation of the old Guildhall. Photographed by Paul Fry in 1995. © *Wells City Council Archives*.



18. John Showering standing outside Brick's Almshouse
in 1907. © *Wells & Mendip Museum*.



19. Southworth's document chest. It is still kept in the old Guildhall of Bubwith's Almshouse. © *Wells Old Almshouse*.

INSCRIPTIONS ON THE SOUTHWORTH CHEST

Left side:

God and good fovnders for poore hath don well
Yf faythe abyde wheare yt ovght to dwell
But fydelyte faylinge, saye what be shall
The meanest mvst wane when ye mightye have all.

Inside lid:

Lockes, keyes, this frame and chest
For ever in this place let rest.
As Henry Southworthes gift thought meet,
Poores stocke and writings safe to keep.

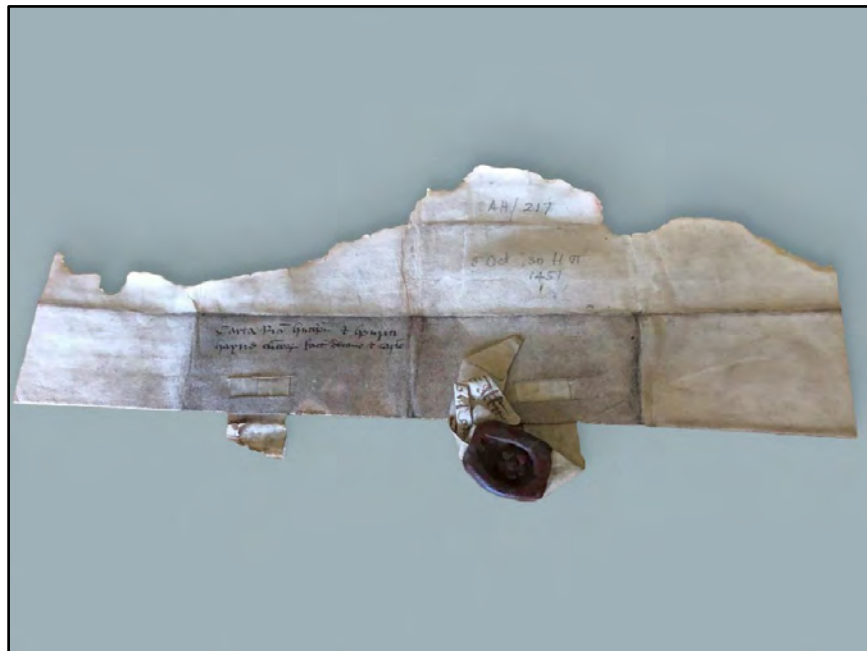
Right side:

In yearlye accovntes ye fovnder doth will
To reste ye gvifte of ye Lorde Bvishopp Still
Leaste by neglecte, poores payments, in neede
Be all bvt in worde, and nothinge in deede.

20. Inscriptions on the Southworth chest.

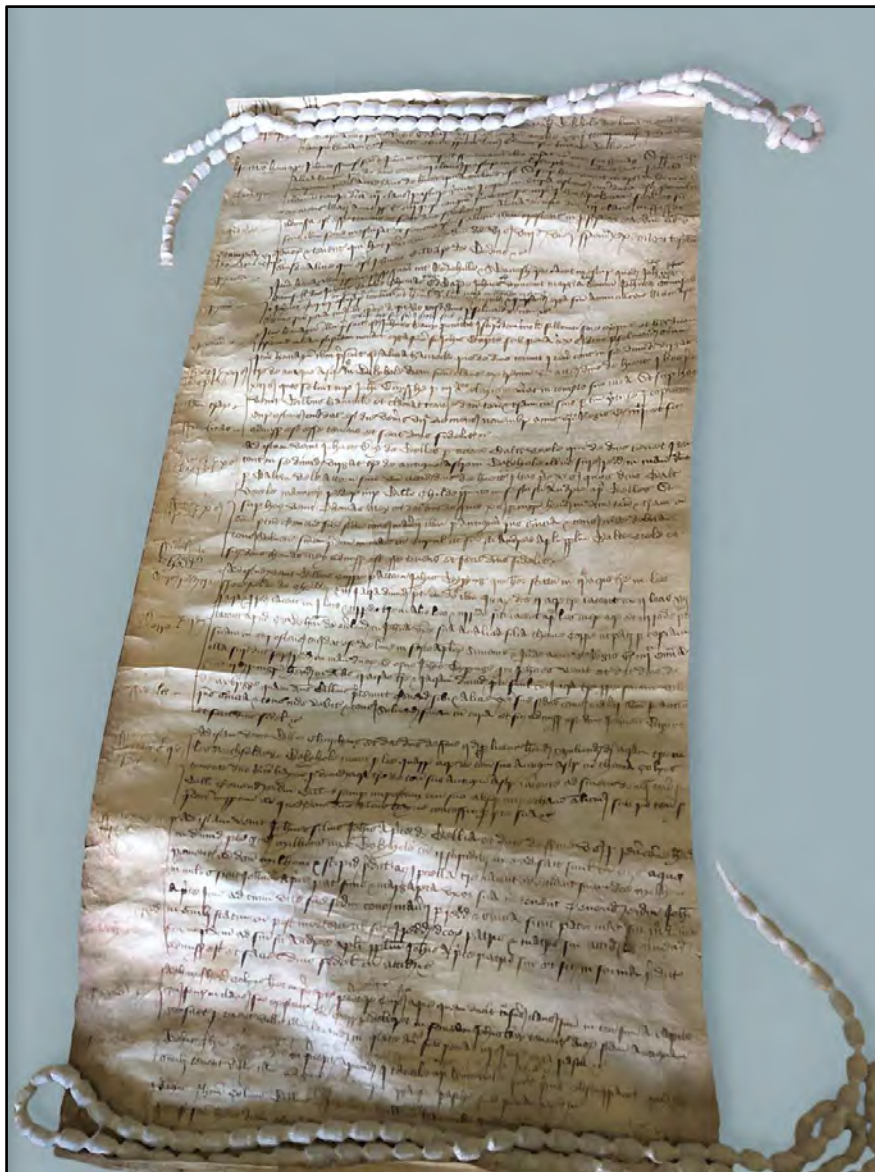


21. A late 13th-century Almsouse charter. One of the witnesses was Robert Blakett, then bailiff of Wells. © Reproduced by kind permission of the Dean and Chapter of Wells Cathedral (D&CA, AH/AF/5).

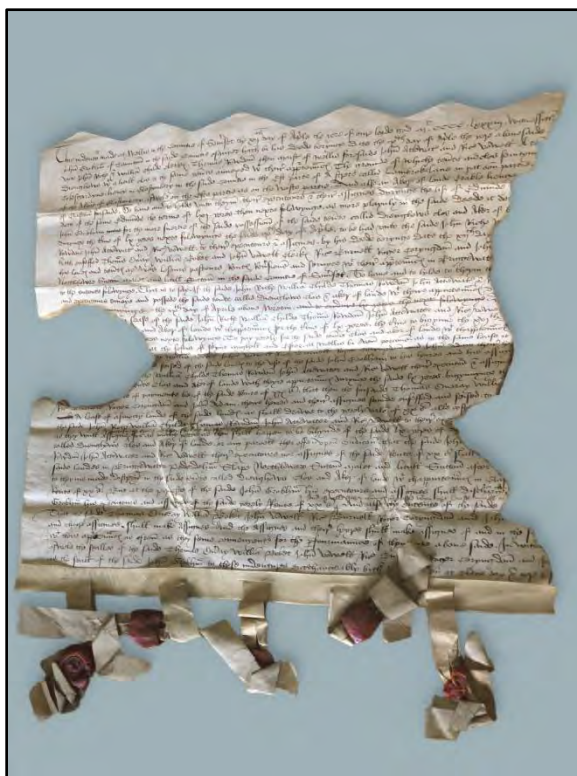


22. The reverse of an Almsouse charter (damaged) dating from 1451. It is the grant of a tenement and garden “to the use of the chaplain and 24 poor people in the house newly built called le Almeshouse in Beggerisstrete”.

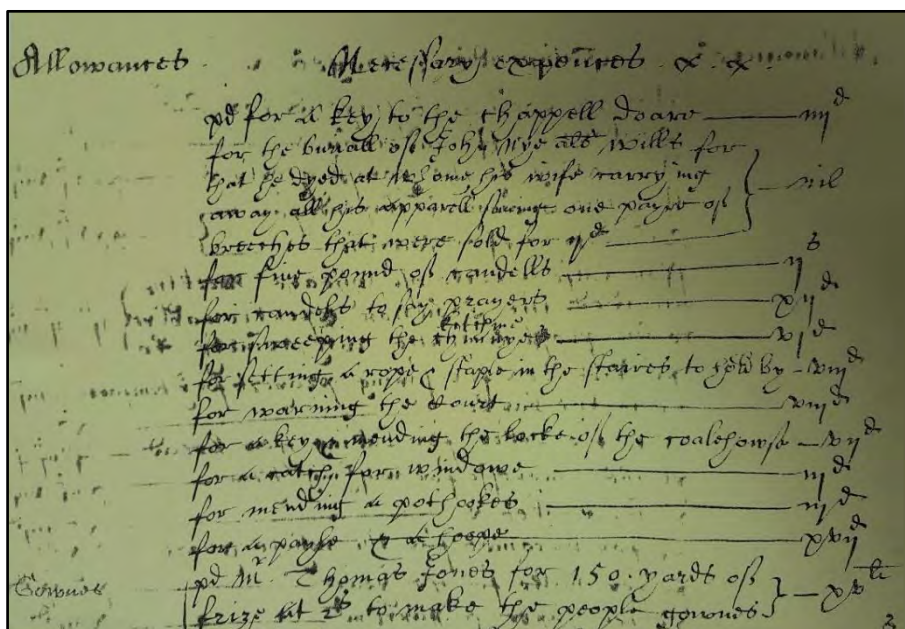
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23. Court Roll of the Dean & Chapter of Wells for the Manor of Wokyhole and Melesburghe, held on 18 November 1482, in the time of Dean John Gunthorpe and William Childe, Provost of the Alms House of the Holy Trinity, Wells. © Reproduced by kind permission of the Dean and Chapter of Wells Cathedral (D&CA, AH/AF/264).



24. An Almshouse deed (damaged) dating from 1483. Originally it had six seals, though only five survive. © Reproduced by kind permission of the Dean and Chapter of Wells Cathedral (D&CA, AH/AF/268).



25. An Almshouse account dating from 1634-35, illustrating the Trustees' recognition of the needs of their less able-bodied residents. This outlines a payment made to install a rope and staple in the stairs. © Reproduced by kind permission of the Dean and Chapter of Wells Cathedral (D&CA, AH/AF/463).



27. "Mrs Bincham" of Wells Old Almshouse. She is presumably the Caroline Bincham, a widow, who was listed as being resident here in the 1891 and 1901 censuses. Original photograph by Phillips Photographic Studio, digitised by Steve Wilkinson (photographer and SDFHS). © *Wells & Mendip Museum*.



28. Richard Granville Harris, Governor and Steward of Wells Old Almshouse, 1922-52. © *Lafayette Photography*.

A New Beginning: Coping with Change, 1840-75

The disappearance of the former City Corporation in 1834 brought about considerable changes in the management of the Almshouse. It took a while to establish the exact role of the new City Council which replaced the Corporation and at times relations between the Council and the surviving Trustees, representatives of the Dean and Chapter, were somewhat strained. For the first time in its history we have detailed minutes kept by the Trustees which provide us with a much more complete picture of the management of the foundation, and also of the almspeople, their lives and the buildings they inhabited. The Governor no longer resided at the Almshouse¹ and the care and welfare of the residents was largely in the hands of the resident Matron and her assistant. Gradually we become conscious of changing attitudes towards the inmates which led to improvements in their living conditions made possible by careful management of the Almshouse money.

Between 1840 and 1875 there were three Governors and Stewards of the Old Almshouse, the two offices always held by the same man. Joseph Lovell Lovell, the first Governor, was appointed in 1840 after the death of William Mellior. He was the only one of the five who did not also hold the office of Chapter Clerk at the Cathedral though he did serve the Dean and Chapter in other capacities. Lovell served as Governor until his death in 1843 and his successors too remained in office for the rest of their lives. Edmund Davis was Governor and Steward from January 1843 until 8 August 1863 when he was succeeded by Henry Barnard. Barnard died on 15 October 1875.

The contents of this chapter are based almost entirely on two sources, the Almshouse minutes² and accounts.³ When any other sources have been used references are given in the footnotes.

i. 1840-43: John Lovell Lovell, Governor and Steward

The first meeting of the new City Council for Wells took place on 31 December 1835.⁴ The only business done was the election of Aldermen, including Joseph Lovell Lovell who, along with John Roy Allen, would serve until 1838. At a meeting next day Joseph Lovell Lovell was elected Mayor with an annual stipend of £65. He took the oath of allegiance and was made a JP along with John Roy Allen and William Parfitt. At the beginning of March a Finance Committee set up in February to identify the Council's property and responsibilities produced its report. Schedule 9 of the report dealt with Almshouses and Charities. It included the following statement:-

“There is a Charity called Bubwith’s Almshouse and all the knowledge I possess relating to it is derived from the Parliamentary Commissioners’ Report”.⁵

The Mayor’s name was not among those elected to the Finance Committee in February but he may well have presided over its meetings by right. Whether or not he was the “I” of the Report who claimed to have little knowledge of Bubwith’s Almshouse he was certainly well aware of a later statement in the Schedule:

“The Mayor for the time being has the privilege of nominating two and the Dean one and so in successive nominations of two to one in the Almshouse”.

It was a privilege Lovell never overlooked. So long as he was Mayor he was scrupulous in entering in the Council minutes any such nominations made by him.

In 1838 Lovell ceased to be either Mayor or Alderman. In September 1840, as Mellior’s executor, Lovell presented to the Trustees, an account of the money belonging to the Old Almshouse in Mellior’s hands at the time of his death. It revealed that Mellior’s careful management had resulted in a balance of £2,043 18s. 9d. which was further increased by a legacy of £300 from Mellior’s estate. It appears that for the time being the money was managed by three members of the City Council, acting as Almshouse Trustees until a new Governor had been appointed.

The choice of Lovell was a wise one. He was not only a lawyer who had played a crucial role in the establishment of the new City Council, but, as Deputy Steward and Clerk of the Court for the Dean and Chapter, he had close connections with the other partners in the management of the Almshouse. His duties as Deputy Steward had involved managing property belonging to the Dean and Chapter including negotiating leases. In 1836 he had negotiated a lease of Claver Morris’ former house to Robert Charles Tudway in 1839.⁶ He was also astute at acquiring and managing his own property, striking an advantageous deal with the City Council in 1836 when they wanted to buy some of his property in the High Street, to improve the approach to the Town Hall.⁷

New management meant new records were kept and Lovell’s first minute book of meetings of the Almshouse Trustees and his first account book of the Almshouse finances were entered in beautifully written leatherbound volumes. The minute book reveals that most of the meetings, other than the annual audit of the accounts, were held, not at the Almshouse, but at the Governor’s house in the Liberty identified by the late Dr. Reid. In 1828 Lovell had bought from the Bishop the house which is now the Wells & Mendip Museum and had built the present west wing with the very fine rooms overlooking the Green.⁸

The exact date of Lovell’s appointment as Governor is not recorded but it was not later than October 1840. On 26 October he wrote to the City Council about repairs needed at the Almshouse for which the Council were responsible under the terms of

the 1436 foundation deed. Recent repairs had been carried out costing £42. 9s. 11d. which the Council should pay and more repairs were needed. By the following May the Council had failed to comply and had intimated that it doubted whether it was liable to carry out such repairs. This provoked another letter from the Governor pointing out that “the Establishment is deteriorating and the inmates inconvenienced and in some danger”. There was “no ground whatsoever to doubt the liability of the Council” and he suggested that the Council should get legal advice “to prevent contention and to avoid expense both to the inhabitants of the City and the Charity”. The Council should obtain counsel’s opinion and should lay before him “the Records acquainting him with the immemorial usage”.

The Council considered the matter at a special meeting held on 8 June 1841.⁹ The Town Clerk, together with a small committee were instructed to make “full examinations into all the ancient documents and make personal enquiries whether the Council and Trustees respectively have repaired any and what part of the Almshouse”. By August they had drawn up a case to be submitted to counsel. They referred to the 1436 foundation deed and to the Charity Commissioners’ report of 1820¹⁰ and they noted that, in 1833, the old Corporation had spent £70 on repairs to the two rooms at the Almshouse formerly used by the Corporation but later by St. Cuthbert’s parish for vestry meetings and other business. The parish, or the Dean and Chapter on their behalf, had paid for repairs to the roofs of these rooms during their occupancy but the Commissioners had thought this had “proceeded upon ignorance or forgetfulness”. According to an old workman and his father neither the Corporation nor the parish had paid any rent for the use of these rooms. In 1833 the parish surrendered the rooms to the Corporation and in July that year the Corporation paid upwards of £70 for new tiling the roofs.

The Dean and Chapter had never called on the Corporation to do repairs but the Governor had now submitted a bill for £42 9s. 11d. The Council referred to the recent correspondence with the Governor but insisted that they were not justified in incurring expenditure on repairs to the Almshouse. The Council was a differently constituted body from the Corporation and the income from its property was insufficient to pay for repairs to the Almshouse. It would mean imposing an extra rate on the citizens. They also referred to the foundation deed of Still’s Almshouse which stated that representatives of the Mayor and Corporation should be present at the sealing of any leases or fines and at the annual audit of accounts. This had been disregarded by the Dean and Chapter and the Council had no access to the muniment box containing the relevant records. It had been suggested by the Dean and Chapter that the Council might consider giving up their right to nominate two thirds of the inmates of Bubwith’s Almshouse in return for exemption from the responsibility for repairs.

This was the case submitted to P. S. Carey of the Inner Temple. His opinion was received on 5 August 1841.¹¹ In spite of its pleadings the opinion given by Mr. Carey was that the Municipal Corporations Act had not destroyed the individuality of the former Corporation. This simply continued under a different form. He dismissed the repairs done by the Corporation to the roofs of the former parish room in 1833 as

irrelevant and he doubted whether, as these rooms had been especially built by the Trustees for the use of the Corporation, at a different time from the rest of the Almshouse, they were subject to the terms of the 1436 covenant. Any repairs which might have been done by the Dean and Chapter did not relieve the Corporation of its liability nor was there anything in the Municipal Corporations Act to alter that liability. The Council had suggested that they might be willing to abandon their right to nominate residents of the Almshouse but this would not relieve them of the burden of repairs. The Council had to accept this opinion and they did so without demur. On 23 November 1841 it was unanimously resolved that the Council should in future to do all necessary repairs to the Almshouse, that is to say, Bubwith's and Willes' Almshouses.¹² The Council's liability did not include Still's Almshouse. Repairs to that part of the Old Almshouse should be paid out of the income from the Still's properties.

The Council instructed their Surveyor, Joseph Hippisley, to inspect the state of the Almshouse and to call in such aid as he thought proper. A copy of these minutes was sent to the Governor together with a letter thanking him for obtaining an English translation of the 1436 foundation deed. In acknowledging their receipt Lovell pointed out that the City had still not paid the £42. 9s. 11d. due for repairs already done. In January 1842 the Council appointed a committee to carry into effect the repairs needed and for which it was responsible. The committee was given power to enter into a contract and to seek professional advice and it was required to report to the Council from time to time.¹³

A month later a special meeting of the Almshouse Trustees, including those appointed by the City Council,¹⁴ was convened to receive the Surveyor's reports on repairs needed to all parts of the Old Almshouse. Details of the work subsequently carried out on Still's houses were recorded in the minute book. By April 1842 Joseph Hippisley could report that the work was nearly finished. The roof was virtually rebuilt. Except for the principal couples it was newly timbered with purlins and rafters of best Memel deal, the chimney gutters were newly cast and laid and the whole roof had been slated and capped with a stout roll freestone crease. The ceilings of the rooms were so much decayed it had been necessary to put in new ceiling joists and then to install new laths and plaster. At the moment this was not yet dry enough to receive the last coat of plaster. All the interiors would then have to be coloured and the doors and windows painted. The old shoots on the west side of the building had been taken down, repaired, re-fixed and given two coats of paint together with the windows and the garden door. New iron shoots were about to be put up on the east side of the building. In May it would be necessary to repair and colour the rough cast of the exterior and all the shoots, doors and windows should then receive a last coat of paint.

Considerably less work was needed on Bubwith's and Willes' houses. At the February meeting the Surveyor had noted that new privies were needed for female residents and on 31 March he reported that a new privy for them had been installed in Still's garden. It was not yet fit for use because the plastering on the walls was still

damp. Unfortunately this garden privy was not a success. In 1846 the Almshouse Medical Officer, Richard Hawkes, complained that it caused great inconvenience to the inmates because it had been built too close to the walls of Bubwith's Almshouse. It was now considered unnecessary and the interior fittings were removed and the drain securely closed. The building itself was kept as it could be used as a washing shed and for other purposes by the female residents. As for the old privy in the interior of Bubwith's Almshouse, Hippiisley reported that the City Council had already begun repairs to that building. It would be unwise for the Trustees to interfere.

On 8 April the City Council instructed their Treasurer to transfer £120 to the committee appointed to carry out these repairs and in May this committee was able to report that the repairs had been completed to the satisfaction of the Surveyor. They had been careful to avoid useless expenditure but the work had been substantially and effectually done. The total cost was £233 8s. 0d. and the outstanding balance of £113 8s. 0d. should now be paid. It was also decided that the buildings comprising Bubwith's Almshouse should be insured against fire for the sum of £500.¹⁵

Lovell's skills as a lawyer had proved invaluable in untangling the different responsibilities for the upkeep of the Old Almshouse buildings but the relationship between the City Council and the Dean and Chapter regarding the Old Almshouse remained uncertain for some time, even after Lovell's death. As a lawyer Lovell also wanted to be sure that, as both Governor and Steward, he did not fail in his own responsibilities. He was particularly concerned to know just what powers he possessed with regard to the foundations' money.

The Almshouse minute book starting in 1840 opens with a "Record of Facts with reference to Wells Old Almshouse in the City of Wells" which lays out the details of all three foundations and lists other benefactions received between 1772 and 1840. One of the foundations, Willes', was funded with a gift of £1,200 Old South Sea Annuities and Clement Tudway's bequest of £500 in 1815 was in the form of more of these Annuities. The sum of £2,282 9s. 1d. which Lovell inherited from his predecessor, William Mellior, was invested in Consolidated 3% Annuities on 18 October 1840 in the name of the same Trustees as Willes' foundation.¹⁶ Authority was given to Hoare's Bank to place any dividends to his own account at the bank. Further purchases of these Consols were made in January 1841 including £260 when a mortgage granted to a Mr. Wilkins was repaid. Lovell was obviously uncertain about these transactions. He wrote to Hoare's Bank asking for advice. Was he able to receive the dividends and how could he make new investments? The reply was that he could receive the dividends but he could not make new investments. A new account should be opened in the names of three Trustees especially appointed for that purpose and a new power of attorney would be required. This advice was heeded and the new appointments made.

In January 1841 Lovell also obtained the opinion of Walter Coulson of Lincoln's Inn as to the wisdom of investing money received for the repayment of mortgages in

Consols. Were the securities covering the Consols valid? How could the Trustees protect this charity against loss? A recent mortgage had been repaid voluntarily. If the investment was ineffectual the present mortgagee would want a refund. Are charity funds safe against such a claim?

Coulson's advice was that all mortgages should be called in as they might be considered invalid under an Act of 1828 because the use of the money for trust purposes was not made clear. The investment of money from these repaid mortgages, including the recent repayment in January, was safe. There could be no claims against them by present representatives of the original mortgagee. As a result of this advice, between March and June 1841 ten mortgage debts were called in and a total of £3,590 invested in 3% Consols. On 3 August 1841 it was reported that the total investment in Consols amounted to the handsome sum of £15,032 14s. 2d.

How did the Almshouse residents fare during Lovell's governorship? He seems to have regarded New Year's Day 1841 as the real beginning of the new regime when his first annual audit took place at the Almshouse at 12 noon. This was followed by a dinner for the almspeople at one o'clock. In preparation for this day, at a meeting at his house on 17 November he had ordered the two Bailiffs or Surveyors, Joseph and Edwin Hippisley, to provide new clothing for the inmates which was to be ready for 1 January 1841. The names of the suppliers were listed in detail:

Mr. Binning was to provide cloth for greatcoats and linings for the sleeves.
Mr. Davies linen for the men's shirts and materials for the women's bonnets.
Mr. Fry materials for gowns and linings for the sleeves.
Mr. Jervis for the women's shifts.
Mr. Giles was to provide hats and Mr. Clarke bonnets.
Thomas Lovell was to make the coats and Mr. Wade the gowns.

The Surveyors should take care that the materials were good and made up in the best way. The total cost was £9 6s. 3d. The new outfits were not always appreciated. When the Surveyor presented his report on the repairs needed in February 1842 he also reported that the inmates did not always wear "the clothing of the establishment". The Trustees ruled that they must wear them on all occasions. The Matron was to report any disobedience and the transgressors warned that they could be deprived of the advantages of the charity.

At the meeting on 1 January the Matron and the residents were each given a special gift of 1s. 0d. It was also decided that proper lists of residents should be drawn up for all three foundations. The registers would record the date of admission and the age of each new resident and whose place he or she was taking. Separate registers would be kept for each of the three foundations.¹⁷ Lovell also laid down the proper procedure for admission following the approval of a nomination.

The death of James Francis, an inmate of Still's Almshouse since 1835, was reported to the Bishop on 9 December 1840 as he had the sole right of nomination to that

Almshouse. The Bishop's choice fell on William Scriven for "the vacant situation in the Blue Almshouse". The nomination was approved on 10 December and the order given to the Matron to admit him. A few days later, on 21 December, the Governor received a letter from the Palace informing him that the Bishop understood there was soon likely to be another vacancy "at the Blue Coat Almshouse". He reminded Joseph Lovell of the Bishop's promise to Mrs. Wickham on behalf of "Doderidge" and the Bishop would be grateful if this promise could be kept. Fortunately there was a vacancy in Still's Almshouse following the death of Henry Foster and on 26 December the Bishop's request was granted. These two occurrences revealed how muddled the Palace was about the Old Almshouse, apparently linking it with the Blue School Foundation, perhaps because the official clothing of the Almshouse residents was always blue.

Lovell also took the opportunity offered by James Dodderidge's admission to make sure that, in future, new residents should meet the requirements of the 1446 ordinances with regard to health. He sent a letter to the "Medical Attendant of the Establishment", at that time Richard Hawkes, saying that, in addition to his usual duties and for the same salary, he should report on the state of health of any candidate for an Almshouse vacancy. Was James Dodderidge free of leprosy or of any other infectious or contagious disease? Evidently the answer was satisfactory. From a certificate provided by W. P. Wickham, the Governor also learned that Dodderidge was a poor and impotent man, over 50, who had been resident in Wells for seven years. He was of honest and good behaviour in life and conversation and no common drunkard or idle person. This too revealed Lovell's concern to comply with the letter of the law as laid down in the ordinances. A mandate for Dodderidge's admission was granted at that same meeting on 26 December. The mandate was addressed to the Matron who was expected to admit the new inmate at once. This set the pattern of admission procedure for the future.

Although the residents were no longer provided with meals and had been admitted only if their health was reasonably good, many of them, as they grew older, became frail or ill, needing care and attention from the Matron. This was the case with Robert Johnson, an inmate of Bubwith's Almshouse, who died in October 1842 aged 82. The date of his admission has been lost but in February 1842 it was reported to the Trustees that he was in need of constant attendance. The Almshouse accounts record that from 27 November 1840 to 19 February 1842 Johnson had been looked after by Robert Tucker. He was paid 1s. 0d. a week for the period of 12 weeks. The care of Johnson was then transferred to Widow Young who was to be paid 6d. a week. Neither Tucker nor Widow Young appear to have been residents of the Almshouse.

The minute recording the transfer also reveals that for 73 weeks prior to this date soap and vinegar had been provided for the washing of Johnson's bedding and clothes at a cost of £1 16s. 6d. The information had come from a letter which Hippisley & Sons had sent to the Trustees with a statement of money owed to the Matron, Sarah Giles. Sarah may well have done the washing herself. She was certainly responsible for keeping the Almshouse neat and clean, as demanded by the Trustees at their meeting

on 1 February 1842, and also for reporting any disobedience on the part of any residents. By November 1842 Sarah realised that all this was more than she could manage without help. She appealed to the Trustees for assistance, in part because of the infirmity of so many of the inmates. On 4 November Ann Young was appointed Assistant Matron at a salary of 2s. 0d. a week as from 28 October last.

By the end of 1842 Joseph Lovell Lovell was dead. On 29 December he was buried in the Cathedral and later a memorial plaque was placed in the east cloister of the Cathedral.¹⁸ He was 62 years of age, younger than many of inmates of the Old Almshouse. Between 1835 and 1842 he had achieved a great deal. As Alderman and Mayor he had steered the new City Council through the first three years of its existence, establishing their duties and responsibilities and how and by whom they should be carried out. He then turned his attention to the Old Almshouse and gradually put into place a way forward which respected its origins but made space for changes necessary with the disappearance of the former Corporation. Sadly he did not manage to satisfy completely the fears of the new Council regarding their role in the management of the Almshouse. It was a subject which surfaced more than once in future years. It was his skill as a lawyer which enabled him to achieve what he did and it is significant that all future Governors of the Almshouse were lawyers as well as Chapter Clerks.

There is an intriguing postscript to the story of Lovell's governorship. The fine Almshouse minute book started in 1840 had an exact twin.¹⁹ It too is a splendid book written in the same beautiful hand. Among the miscellaneous payments recorded in the accounts for 1843 is a sum of £3 14s. 4d. It comprised £1 1s. 0d. paid to Mr. Backhouse for a new book and £2 13s. 4d. to Henry Price for copying the minute book. It was, therefore, Henry Price, who had the beautiful handwriting.

Why was a second copy of the minutes necessary? In February 1844 Lovell's successor as Governor, Edmund Davis, wrote to Lovell's son, Edward, questioning this payment. On 7 February he received Edward Lovell's reply. Lovell pointed out that, when William Mellior was Governor, no proceedings relating to the Almshouse had been recorded. It had been his father's wish to have his own copy of the Almshouse minutes to justify any of his transactions as Governor. He had always procured the signature of the Trustees for such transactions, particularly if they involved large sums of money. It was true his father charged the charity for the books but he did not think the Trustees should have expected his father to pay for them out of his own pocket, "when he received no emolument from his office, or remuneration for professional business transacted for the charity during the two years he filled the office of Governor". Asking to have this book returned was unreasonable and uncalled for as the present Governor had an exact copy of it and the Trustees had access to any part of the proceedings to which his father had been a party. Again it was Joseph Lovell making sure that, if necessary, he could justify his actions. Eventually the second copy did come into the hands of the Trustees and it now forms part of the Almshouse archive.

ii. 1843-63: Edmund Davis, Governor and Steward

Only four months after Davis' appointment, in May 1843 the City Council again raised the question of their responsibilities with regard to the Old Almshouse and, in particular, the powers they had as co-Trustees with the Dean and Chapter. On 1 May they had passed a resolution instructing their Trustees to enquire into the affairs of Bubwith's Almshouse. They wanted to know the number and the names of the inmates, their weekly allowances and the annual income of the Almshouse. The City's Trustees should be present when agreements were drawn up for the lease of Almshouse properties and they should enquire into the character of all existing leases, the names of the lands and their lessees and how much remained of the term such leases. The Trustees should then report back to the Council.²⁰

A copy of this resolution was transmitted to the Governor who called an immediate meeting of the Dean and Chapter at the Deanery. They resolved that no other business should "be entered upon until the question between them and the Council be adjusted". Edmund Davis was instructed to communicate with the Council and "express the desires of the Trustees that the rights and privileges of the Council (if they have any) should be continued or restored". The point was open to doubt and the Dean and Chapter suggested that a case approved by both parties should be laid before some eminent counsel or, more advisedly, they should seek the guidance of the Attorney General. This was forwarded to the Town Clerk and on 7 August the Governor attended a meeting of the Council when he was informed that the Council had already taken counsel's opinion and they thought it advisable that the Trustees appointed by the Council should meet with the Dean and Chapter at a special meeting to define the powers to be exercised by either body. However, the Dean and Chapter considered that no good could result from their meeting with the Council and they would themselves obtain the opinion of the Attorney General.

On 20 November 1843 Edmund Davis reported that he had submitted a case to the Attorney General asking whether the deeds of 1436 and 1615 (relating to Bubwith's and Still's foundations respectively) and the recent Municipal Corporations Act entitled the City Council to exercise any or what powers with respect to the management of the Almshouses. He had emphasised that the Dean and Chapter were not jealous of the rights and privileges of the City. The Attorney General's reply was that, where there had previously been joint trusteeship as was the case with the Old Almshouse foundations, the City Council had the same right as the former Corporation to appoint Trustees. Whatever rights had belonged to the former Mayor, Masters and Burgesses now belonged to the City Council. Nine Trustees should now be nominated. Two of them could attend the granting of new leases and four could become feoffees of Still's foundation in accordance with the 1615 deed. All nine of them could attend the annual audit of the Almshouse accounts. Frederick Pollock ended by advising the Dean and Chapter to intimate that they were willing to receive the members of the Council so nominated and cordially to act with them for the benefit of the charity.

A letter was sent to the Mayor on 31 January 1844 incorporating this last part of the Attorney General's advice. It also gave notice to the Council of a meeting on 6 February at noon to make new leases, to accept the accounts and to make any new ordinances. They were not aware of any need for new ordinances but they were anxious that, at this first meeting, the Council members should have an opportunity to make any suggestions for the well-being of the charity. The minutes of this meeting included a few items not mentioned in the suggested agenda. The date of future annual meetings would be on the second Tuesday in January, allowing time for the Council to make its choice of Trustees at the beginning of the year. When any repairs were needed at Bubwith's Almshouse the Town Clerk should be given due notice.

At the annual meeting held at the Almshouse on 14 January 1845 there was much discussion as to the alterations needed to Bubwith's Almshouse "to promote the health and comfort of the inmates". There were doubts whether the City Council would be liable to pay for such alterations but, again, the Governor was asked to seek counsel's opinion. In October it was made clear that, under the terms of the 1436 deed, the City was responsible for repairs only. It could not be required to alter or improve the building. Counsel refused to comment on the use of any trust funds for this purpose.

At the next annual meeting a committee was appointed, including the Governor and the Surveyor, to consider what alterations were necessary, and to obtain plans and estimates for any proposals they might have. The Committee reported on 6 October 1846. Two plans were submitted by Hippisley & Sons. The first involved the conversion of twelve rooms, described as "cells", into ten rooms, the present number of male inmates. The ceilings should be made two feet higher and a boiler house should be built with the apparatus needed to heat the "cells" by hot water. There should be a bathroom with a full-sized galvanized bath. The estimated cost was £206 11s. 0d. It was pointed out, however, that the adoption of this scheme would mean the appointment of someone to superintend the hot water system and there would be a considerable increase in the consumption of coal, raising the estimated annual cost from £12 to £15. The "cells" would be without fireplaces and consequently the inmates would be "deprived of one of the greatest comforts of old age and sickness, that of sitting by their own fireside without being obliged to go for all necessities in the preparation of which fire is required into the Common Kitchen".

The second plan was recommended by the Committee because it was free from the disadvantages of the first. It involved the conversion of 12 of the men's "cells" into eight with eight rooms over them. Access to the latter would be from the present landing leading to the Matron's room. All 16 rooms would be 11-12ft. long, 7ft. 8ins. wide and about 8ft. high. Each room (no longer described as "cells") would be provided with a fireplace, a repository for fuel and other articles and a window double the size of the present window. It would be necessary to cut into the roof to provide the new windows but stone gables could be erected to correspond with those already in existence which would add greatly to the appearance of the building. The six rooms, additional to the ten proposed in the first plan, would remove a problem which

existed at present, namely men being separated from their wives in their old age, when they most needed help. The new rooms could be used by married couples or as a hospital in time of sickness. The estimated cost of this plan was £343 18s. 10d., that is £135 more than plan one, but there would be no further increase of running costs.

There was unanimous agreement that plan 2 should be adopted. The City Council must be informed as their sanction would be required, but they should be assured that the Borough funds would not be called on to contribute to the cost. Once approved by the Council detailed specifications were to be drawn up. That approval was received the very next day.

Henry Knight, builder, put in a tender of £306 0s. 1d., not including grates, which would be provided by the Trustees, and this was accepted and a contract drawn up. The work should be completed by 24 June 1847.

Meanwhile the Governor was to make arrangements for the comfort of the male inmates while the work was in progress. In fact they were found lodgings at a cost of £4 14s. 6d. Knight's contract was fulfilled by July 1847 but it was by no means the end of the building work. Knight was asked to remove three steps leading from the landing to the first floor in order to make the approach easier for aged inmates and to repair and clean the banisters and handrail on the landing and to paint them "a good dark oak colour". The final cost of these alterations was £363 5s. 0½d. The extra work done by Knight cost £22 7s. 3½d. and John Kelway, ironmonger, was paid £7 16s. 0d. Messrs. Hippisley & Sons charged £20 for drawing the plans and preparing estimates and Edmund Davis, the Governor, acting as a solicitor, received £7 1s. 9d. There was also a payment of £20 for providing eleven iron bedsteads for the new apartments and inevitably a few problems arose once the new rooms were in use. In January 1848 the Governor was instructed to take measures to prevent the chimneys of the new rooms on the north side of Bubwith's Almshouse from smoking.

As soon as this contract had been completed the Surveyor was asked to prepare plans and specifications for the removal of the common kitchen and to build a new kitchen, a coal house, wash house and other offices, with an apartment for the Matron above. The plans were accepted on 9 August but when put out to tender only two were received. Henry Knight was not one of them. Perhaps he had taken umbrage at being asked to re-do some of his work. The contract went to John Hill, builder, who had put in a tender of £265. The eventual cost of this improvement was £299 8s. 10d., including further payments to John Kelway, Messrs. Hippisley & Sons and Edmund Davis. The work was completed by January 1848.

In September 1847 the City Council was informed that the chapel attached to Bubwith's Almshouse was also in need of repair. The Trustees proposed to repair, ornament and fit it up for divine service and that the considerable expense should be raised by voluntary contributions. At a special meeting of the Council on 7 September it was agreed that the sum of £20 should be paid out of the City's funds towards the cost but that the Trustees must indemnify the Council against any future

liability for repairs to the ornamental parts of the chapel or for fitting up.²¹ At the annual meeting on 11 January 1848 the Governor could report that £150 had been raised by public subscription and he was authorised to restore the chapel in any way he thought proper. He could make alterations both to the interior and the exterior and he was particularly asked to remove the room or buildings on the north side of the chapel “now or lately used as a Hospital”.

The need for this refurbishment suggests that the chapel was no longer in regular use. None of the recent Governors had been priests so they could not hold daily services in the chapel as required by the 1446 ordinances nor could they act as Curates for St. Cuthbert's Church as ordained by Queen Mary and Queen Elizabeth in the 16th century. Instead the Trustees paid a priest to conduct services in the chapel but no longer did he necessarily have a connection with St. Cuthbert's Church. In fact there were occasions when relations between the Almshouse and the Church were somewhat strained. At the annual meeting on 9 January 1849 Edmund Davis was instructed to inform the Vicar that St. Cuthbert's must provide a better pall for funerals or they would withdraw the 3s. 0d. they paid for funeral services and provide their own pall.²² Three years later on 25 May the Governor reported that the Rev. Canon Barnard and the Rev. Aaron Foster were willing to perform divine service in the chapel. He was instructed to provide a new surplice and to provide kneeling stools for the inmates. In 1857 the Trustees agreed to pay 10s. 0d. a year to the Vicar to be given to whomsoever conducted services in Bubwith's chapel. They pointed out that they still reserved the right to appoint their own Chaplain and that this money was not to be seen as remuneration, just as a mark of appreciation.

In addition to changes to the buildings comprising Bubwith's Almshouse it was felt that the comfort of the inmates would be improved by the conversion of the garden, which had, in the past, supplied the Almshouse with fruit and vegetables, into an “airing yard”. In 1846 the trees were cut down and the earth removed to the level of the ground floor of the Almshouse. The whole area was covered with gravel and benches were provided for the use of the inmates who would no longer have to go beyond the precincts of the Almshouse when they required fresh air and exercise.²³

So far the improvements had been confined to the northern and eastern ends of the Almshouse and at the 1852 annual meeting Davis pointed out that the rooms at the west end of Bubwith's Almshouse, then occupied by female residents, were exceedingly small and unhealthy. These rooms and the rooms over them and, if necessary, the staircase should be taken down and other rooms of greater dimensions and convenient with other necessary offices erected instead. A room for the Trustees should be provided at the extreme west end. It was agreed that the Surveyor should prepare plans and specifications for the execution of this work. On 16 February 1852 it was agreed that the plans of the proposed alterations should be deposited in the Governor's office for inspection daily between 11 a.m. and 4 p.m. A meeting would be held at the Almshouse at 10 o'clock on 1 March to decide whether or not to proceed.

The plans provided for fourteen apartments for inmates, a meeting room for the Trustees, a dead house, two W.C.s and a storeroom and they were adopted. The Surveyor was also asked to draw up specifications for the removal of the porch at the north-west end of the Almshouse and for the restoration of three ancient windows in the large room adjoining that porch and to advertise for tenders. On 25 May Henry Knight's tender of £430, £5 less than that of John Hill, was accepted. Edmund Davis assured the meeting that accommodation for the female residents could easily be provided in the upper rooms of Still's Almshouse, but he felt it would not be advisable to allow the present bedsteads to be used after they had been taken out of the old rooms. He was instructed to purchase twelve new bedsteads for the temporary accommodation, later to be transferred to the new rooms. The work was completed by the following January at the total cost of £555 19s. 6d.

How were these improvements paid for? The Almshouse account book suggests that money was not a problem. The annual balances fluctuated a great deal, between £6 7s. 6¾d. in 1848 and £720 16s. 8½d. in 1852, which might give the impression of instability but they were the result of frequent new investments being made and just as many existing investments being sold. Interest from investments formed a considerable part of the annual income of the Almshouse. Traditionally rents from the Almshouse property provided the regular annual income of the foundation but after the 16th century this was more than matched by interest on mortgage loans. By the end of the 18th century the Almshouse had received two gifts of stocks in the form of South Sea Annuities which also brought in sufficient annual interest to support additional residents. When Joseph Lovell had discovered that existing mortgage loans did not meet legal requirements these were called in and the money invested, as required by the Charity Commissioners, in 3% Consols, the approved government stock. In 1842 when Davis became Governor, there was £7,650 invested in this way. By 1848 this sum had been reduced to £1,100. Sales of Consols had taken place regularly during these years but much of this money was then paid out in the form of new mortgage loans which now met the necessary legal requirements.

When Davis became Governor in 1842 income from rents that year amounted to £172 19s. 1d. In 1863, the year of Davis' death, rents brought in £251 7s. 9d. In 1846, when the Trustees started making mortgage loans again, interest on these loans amounted to £27 3s. 8d. By 1863 they were regularly producing interest of £319 10s. 0d. By contrast interest on 3% Consols in 1842 amounted to £251 but, because of sales, by 1863 it was only £45 1s. 11d. The £7,650 stock which Davis had inherited in 1842 had, by 1863, been reduced to £1,100. Most of the sales of these stocks took place between 1845 and 1848, the very years that the refurbishment of Bubwith's Almshouse was taking place. There can be little doubt that some of the money from the sale of Consols had paid for the improvements of Bubwith's Almshouse.

Obviously the Trustees were pleased with what had been accomplished. The 1853 annual meeting had unanimously resolved that the thanks of the Trustees be voted to Edmund Davis, Esq., the Governor, "for his unwearied attention to the interests and his ability and prudence in the management of the concerns of the Charity". Davis

remained Governor for another ten years but he did not embark on any more major projects of this kind.

We do not know how the residents responded to the upheavals of these years. How did the old men feel about being put into temporary lodgings or the women having to sleep in the upper rooms of Still's foundation? Certainly no complaints were recorded in the minutes apart from the smoking chimneys in the upper rooms on the north side of Bubwith's Almshouse but it would have been interesting to have had some comments from individual almsmen and women.

Edmund Davis had inherited Joseph Lovell's Matron, Sarah Giles, and, by this time, it is clear that the Matron played an important role in the day-to-day running of the Almshouse. She not only saw that the rooms were kept clean and tidy. She had the specific duty when a new resident was appointed to see that person formally admitted. She must report any wrongdoing or misbehaviour on the part of individual residents and deal with their complaints. All this was in addition to the care of inmates who were ill or disabled. In November 1842 she had appealed to the Trustees for assistance because so many inmates were infirm and Ann Young was appointed Assistant Matron at a weekly wage of 2s. 0d. In October 1842 Sarah Giles, then aged 70, herself became an inmate of the Almshouse, filling the vacancy left by the death of Ann Westcott. On 29 December it was agreed that her salary should cease and instead she would receive a weekly payment of 5s. 0d. in addition to the allowance given to all residents, providing her with a weekly income of 8s. 0d. between September and March, and of 8s. 6d. for the rest of the year. Ann Young also received an increase of 6d. a week. In October 1846 it was reported that Sarah Giles was ill and her salary was increased by 2s. 0d. a week. She died a month later. By then she was 74 and had served the Almshouse for 34 years. Ann Williams, a widow aged 67, was admitted a resident in her place.

Several candidates offered to take Sarah's place but none of them were suitable so an advert was put in the *Bath Chronicle* and the *Bristol Mirror* for a respectable middle-aged woman with references from two or more respectable persons. These must be received by 4 January 1847 and the candidate would have to attend the annual meeting on 12 January. Only two persons proved eligible, Hannah Spencer, aged 44, a nurse at the Wells Union Workhouse, and Sarah Giles, 38, the daughter of the previous Matron, presently a servant residing with Mrs. Osborne, at 5, The Circus, Bath. Needless to say it was Sarah Giles who was appointed.

Occasionally the records provide us with glimpses of the care provided for sick and disabled residents. The accounts sometimes record money spent on remedies and equipment. In 1850 Sarah Giles spent 14s. 9d. on leeches, flannels and chips and 5s. 6d. on a night commode. Sheets were bought for beds occupied by inmates who were sick and William Berryman, wine merchant, provided brandy for the sick every year as well as sacramental wine presumably for use in the chapel. Until 1860 Richard Hawkes remained the Almshouse Medical Officer and in 1858 he was paid 9s. 8d. for the carriage of a truss and for repairs to the enema apparatus. Four years earlier his

annual fee was raised from ten to fifteen guineas because of the increase in the hours of attendance required over recent years. This was with the proviso that he should also attend the Matron and her assistant should this be necessary.

At the annual meeting on 5 April 1860 Richard Hawkes resigned because “his health was much impaired”. The Trustees expressed their regret and their thanks for his years of service and set a date for a meeting at which a new surgeon would be appointed. Each member of the medical profession in Wells would be informed. The two candidates who attended received equal votes and it was the casting vote of the Dean which resulted in the appointment of Dr. Livett as their new Medical Officer who would be paid the same annual fee as his predecessor. A year later he advised the Trustees that a building detached from the Almshouse should be provided to house the bodies of deceased inmates until their burial. However much care might be given to the inmates they were all elderly and deaths were not infrequent. In 1849, for instance, there were five deaths and in 1854 ten, roughly a third of all the residents.

Life in the Almshouse was not always peaceful. Inevitably there were complaints and disputes, sometimes involving residents, sometimes the officers. The first and perhaps the most serious incident during Edmund Davis’ governorship occurred in 1844 when Mary Ann Seaford complained to the Trustees about the conduct of a male resident whom she said had assaulted and indecently exposed himself to her ten-year-old daughter. At a special meeting at the Almshouse on 14 October the Trustees heard evidence from both parties and they came to the conclusion that the inmate’s conduct had been “highly disgraceful and indecent” and he was expelled from the Almshouse and forced to give up his coat and hat.

In 1852 it was Ann Young, aged 76, the former Assistant Matron, admitted as a resident in March 1849, who was in trouble. At the annual meeting on 20 January one of the Trustees said there was reason to believe that she habitually left the Almshouse and frequented the house of notorious ill fame kept by her daughter. A committee of three was appointed to investigate and at a special meeting on 16 February she was severely reprimanded and her weekly pay reduced to 2s. 6d. for the next two weeks. She was never to leave the Almshouse without the consent of the Matron. Her pay would eventually be restored only if she provided a testimonial of good behaviour signed by the Vicar and Curate of St. Cuthbert’s, the Governor and the Matron. At the next annual meeting the sentence was relaxed and her full privileges restored. She died, aged 91, on 17 February 1864.

Ann Young’s successor as Assistant Matron, Sarah Petvin, also got into trouble. On 29 August 1853 she was accused of charging inmates for attending them for the previous four years. She was called before the Trustees, admonished and reminded that such attention was part of her duty. Five years later she was dismissed because of her improper language to the Matron and for other, unspecified misconduct. The dismissal was issued at the annual meeting on Tuesday, 9 February 1858, to take place on the following Friday. She was offered £1 in lieu of notice if she behaved herself in the meanwhile.

Sarah Petvin was succeeded as Assistant Matron by Hester Willis who, at the annual meeting held on 5 April 1860, was described as not only diligent in the performance of her duties but kind and attentive at all seasons to the inmates and she was granted the 1s. 0d. increase in her weekly salary for which she had asked. However, she and the Matron, Sarah Giles, later became embroiled in serious complaints against both of them.

The almspeople continued to receive regular gifts of new clothing but at the annual meeting held on 9 January 1849 it was agreed that the prices paid for clothing were too high and the Steward was instructed to prepare a scheme for the future "on more economical principals". It is probably as a result of this that the accounts presented at the next annual meeting included a very detailed record of the money spent on clothing.

For the men:

42 yards of blue beaver for 16 coats at 6s. 6d. per yard: £13 13s. 0d.
16 yards of black Holland for linings at 10d. per yard: 13s. 4d.
Thomas Lovell making the coats: £2 16s. 0d.
Buttons and twist: 8d., padding 6d., canvas, thread and tape: 8d., and pockets 6d.: total £1 13s. 4d.
John Willmott: 128 yards of shirting for 32 shirts, being 8 yards for 2 shirts for each man, at 6d. per yard: total £3 4s. 0d.
Buttons and thread: 2s. for each man: 2s. 8d.
Charles Binning: 16 hats at 4s. 0d.: total: £3 4s. 0d.

For the women:

J. G. Everett: 30 and 1/16th yards of blue cloth at 4s. 9d. per yard: £7 2s. 9½d.
13 cotton linings at 6d. each: 6s. 6d.
Louise Wade making 13 gowns at 1s. 9d. each: £1 2s. 9d.
Thread at 1d. each: 1s. 1d.
John Willmott: 13 yards of black velvet for 13 bonnets at 1s. 6d. per yard: 19s. 6d.
19½ yards of black satin ribbon at 6d. per yard: 9s. 9d.
13 yards of black satin ribbon at 3½d. per yard: 3s. 9½d.
5 yards of stamped linings at 4½d. each 1s. 10½d.
4 yards of buckram: 4d. per yard: 1s. 4d.
4 yards of Persian: 11d.
13 paste boards: 2d. each: 2s. 2d.
6 reels of wire: 1½ d. each: 9d.
Sarah Clarke making 13 bonnets at 1s. 0d.: 13s. 0d.
Joseph John Tasker for 78 yards of calico for 26 shifts, being 6 yards for two shifts for Matron and each of 12 women: £1 19s. 0d.
Thread: 1d. for each woman: 1s. 1d.

Total: £25 6s. 4d. for the men and £13 6s. 3½d. for women: making full total
£38 12s. 7½d.

Such a detailed account gives us a good picture of the appearance of the residents at this time. It also makes clear that, with regard to clothing, the Matron was treated as a resident. However, in 1857, Sarah Giles exchanged her uniform for an increase of 3s. 1d. to her annual salary. The account also shows that there were only twenty nine residents, including the Matron, at this time, five short of the thirty four which the Almshouse could accommodate. We also learn something about Wells tradesmen in the clothing business and a good deal about the making of women's bonnets. Two of the tradesmen, Thomas Lovell and Charles Binning, had been suppliers of clothing in 1840. By 1856 Thomas Lovell was dead and his place as maker of the men's coats was filled by John Phillips. At the same time, Louise Wade, the maker of women's gowns, who had left Wells, was replaced by Lucy Sturges.

Edmund Davis did not embark on any more building projects during the last ten years of his governorship. Instead there is evidence that the Trustees became more involved in the management of their property including the possibility of disposing of some of it. For instance, in 1844, at the annual meeting on 6 February, fines for renewals of leases, applications to cut timber and refusals to allow ploughing appeared on the agenda. Five years later at the annual meeting on 9 January 1849 the Trustees asked their Surveyors to make a survey of all the timber on Almshouse property, 1,577 trees in all, noting which trees were fit for sale and should or may be cut. At that same meeting they instructed the Governor to obtain an estimate from their Surveyors for making new maps and surveys of all the Almshouse property. An estimate was produced and a committee was appointed to arrange terms but there is no evidence that full surveys were ever carried out. The accounts record one payment of £6 7s. 0d. to the Hippiseys in 1849 for a survey of timber at Wookey Hole and a sum of £88 19s. 2d. for the sale of timber there. Another sum of £78 15s. 0d. was received for timber in 1850. The location of this second sale is not recorded but it may well have been Wookey Hole. By this time the Trustees were considering the possibility of exchanging or selling some of their land there.

At a meeting at the Almshouse on 27 August 1850 the Steward reported that he had received a proposal from the Rev. Charles Edward Band, who held some property under lease and by copyhold from the Trustees, to exchange these for freehold land belonging to him at Wookey Hole and other Almshouse land there at present in the possession of Robert Charles Tudway. The Trustees did not wish to encourage Mr. Band but they were as yet unwilling to reject the proposition entirely. They could not make a proper judgement from the information they had been given but they were willing to consider a more definite proposal for the exchange of Mr. Band's freehold land on the south side of the road leading from Wookey Hole to Easton for land belonging to the Almshouse on the north side of the same road. They listed certain lands which would not be available for exchange, above all the land in which the Wookey Hole Cavern was situated. This resolution was forwarded to Edward Lovell,

acting as agent for Mr. Band.²⁴

On 11 January 1841 the Trustees received Lovell's reply. He thought that Mr. Band's proposal had not been maturely considered. A survey would be needed before a more definite proposal could be submitted and the Trustees should reconsider their decision not to include the fields above the caves. They appeared to have forgotten that there was no access to these fields without going nearly a mile round by the road to Mendip. The Trustees' response was to appoint a committee to survey all the Almshouse lands in Wookey Hole and to report any dilapidations needing repair. If a proper exchange was proposed the committee should identify which lands should be excluded.

A year later the annual meeting heard that Mr. Band had erected a new and substantial farmhouse, outbuildings and a cottage on the site of the former farmhouse and had reinstated gates on lands held by him. He should make good damage done to lands called Broadacre and Parfitts by removing clay from them. He should also reinstate the Croft as pasture, which he had recently ploughed up without licence and he should repair some fences which were in a very dilapidated condition. All the lands should be manured and cultivated in a good and husbandlike manner. The roadway leading from the road at Wookey Hole which had been improperly destroyed must be restored. It was also noted that the farmhouse and outbuildings occupied by Mr. Tudway were much in need of repair.

So far as the possible exchange of lands was concerned it was noted that the leases of all the Wookey Hole properties, amounting to more than 100 acres, would soon expire. This might provide an opportunity to rationalise some holdings by means of exchanges and certain proposals made by Mr. Band might then be considered. The Trustees were adamant that the lands on the north side of the road from Wookey Hole to Easton, comprising the site of the caves and their approaches, should not be disposed of. What might be exchanged was a tract of land against the hill which could form part of a new farm. Land on the south side of the road could also be exchanged with advantage but this must be land close to Wookey Hole and not in the remote area of Knowle Moor as Mr. Band had suggested. These modified proposals were sent to Edwin Lovell and, if accepted by Mr. Band, maps and valuations could be drawn up by the Surveyors.

At this point another player entered the scene. On 29 August 1853 the Trustees learned that William Hodgkinson wished to purchase the paper mills and other land at Wookey Hole at present held by Robert Coles on a 99-year lease. The Trustees felt that it might be advantageous to the charity to sell this property but that they must first look at the Charitable Trusts Act just come into force. By the following January they were convinced that they had the right to sell or exchange property provided the Charity Commissioners were satisfied that it was to the charity's advantage. On 10 May 1854 the Trustees agreed to sell their interest in this property to William Hodgkinson for £800 provided he paid all expenses. For the next two years the Trustees were engaged in negotiations with Hodgkinson about alterations he wanted

to make particularly with regard to ensuring a supply of clean water to the mill. This involved the acquisition of some additional land adjoining the mill, part of the orchard called Bullshay and a close called Sidelands, in order to insert a culvert. For this a separate agreement was required.

By January 1855 the Trustees were able to submit their proposal for the sale of the mill property to the Charity Commissioners who issued the necessary order on 19 March. The deed conveying the property was dated 28 April 1856. The agreed purchase price was £800 plus interest of 5% amounting to £73 16s. 1d. for the period between 24 June 1854, the date the sale had been agreed, and 28 April 1856. The money was immediately invested in Consolidated 3% Annuities. The second sale was referred to the Commissioners who issued their order of approval on 15 August 1856. The conveyance was dated 4 October that same year. The purchase price was £30 plus expenses which Hodgkinson had agreed to pay, enabling the Trustees to invest a further sum of £30 12s. 2d. in 3% Consols.

Meanwhile the proposed exchange of property with Rev. Mr. Band was not proving straight forward. On 14 November 1855 the Trustees had approved two exchanges of land with Mr. Band but the Charity Commissioners would only consent to the exchanges if Band's solicitor could provide a full abstract of title to his property. In October 1856 the Steward was instructed to take legal advice but Band objected saying there was no need to incur the additional expense involved. Two years later the matter had still not been resolved. The Commissioners were unable to dispense with an investigation of Band's title and they advised withdrawal from any further consideration by the Trustees. In desperation the Trustees turned to the Enclosure Commissioners who were able to make an award completed on 13 January 1858. A copy was sent to Rev. Band who paid all the expenses involved as well as £90 for the timber on the land he thus acquired and 10 guineas for one other plot he acquired. From then until Edmund Davis' death on 8 August 1862, sales of Almshouse property, particularly for the building of railways, were not unusual. It was setting a pattern for the future.

After the completion of the alterations to Bubwith's Almshouse in 1853 the Trustees had expressed their thanks to Edmund Davis for what he had achieved. He seems to have been highly regarded both by them and by the Dean and Chapter. When he died in August 1863 the Chapter recorded their appreciation of his "Sense of Trustworthiness, great ability and unwearied industry shown by him in the conduct of the business of the Chapter".²⁵ The Trustees may well have felt the same about his governorship of the Almshouse.

iii. 1863-75: Henry Barnard, Governor and Steward

Henry Barnard's twelve years in office saw none of the problems and upheavals which marked the governorships of his two predecessors. There were no difficulties in the relationship with the City Council nor were there any major building programmes and the accounts show that the finances were sound.

Less than a year after his appointment, on 8 March 1864, the Trustees agreed that two more inmates should be appointed, thus completing the number intended to be managed by the charity: twenty four under Bubwith's foundation, six under Still's and four under Willes'. There were a number of ways in which additional income was generated, some of it a direct result of the survey of the properties at Wookey Hole. Just before Edmund Davis' death a special Timber Committee had been appointed to survey the timber ripe for felling at Wookey Hole. A fly was hired at a cost of 7s. 6d. for the Committee to visit Wookey Hole and in 1863 the felling began. It was sold to John Withers for £11 6s. 1d., the Surveyor's valuation, less £2 6s. 6d., the cost of shipping, curing and hauling 1ton. 1cwt. of bark. From 1869 even more profitable was the stone quarried in Broadmead by Messrs. Burgess and Co. for which they paid 4d. a yard. In 1869 338 yards were quarried bringing in £5 12s. 8d., 897½ yards in 1870 paid £32 5s. 7d. and 736 yards in 1873 paid £12 6s. 0d.

The Almshouse income was also increased from time to time by the sale of properties, not only in Wookey Hole. It was the era of the coming of the railways and there were sales to the Bristol & Exeter Railway Co. for land needed for the Cheddar Valley and Yatton Railway in Wookey, Cheddar and Tucker Street, Wells, in 1867 and 1869, bringing in £125 15s. 9d. and £98 6s. 2d. respectively. In 1868 Thomas Clarke bought 1ac. 1r. 4p. of land in Long String, Wells, for £200 plus £17 6s. 1d. interest and in 1875, shortly before Barnard's death, some dilapidated and uninhabitable cottages in St. Cuthbert Street were sold. Together with the sale of timber from Old Wood at Wedmore these brought in £100. There were also occasional windfalls when the principal sums of money lent by the Trustees as mortgages were repaid. This was the case in 1866 when £340 lent to Matthew Cock was repaid following his death. Sums like these had previously been invested in 3% Consols but in 1865 the Charity Commissioners recommended that Government securities belonging to the charity should be transferred to the Official Trustee of Charitable Funds. The Trustees agreed to this and instructed that the half yearly dividend should be sent to the Governor and Steward. When the transfer had been completed the charity had a total of £1,426 9s. 5d. in the hands of the Official Trustee. Henry Barnard suggested that the annual income would now justify an increase in the weekly payment to the residents from 4s. 6d. a week in summer and 5s. 0d. a week in winter to 5s. 0d. every week.

The sound financial state of the Almshouse during the later years of Barnard's stewardship enabled the Trustees in 1874 to offer an annual payment of £20 to the Vicar of St. Cuthbert's for holding services in the Almshouse chapel, on the clear understanding that the Trustees reserved the right to nominate their Chaplain whenever necessary. In the same year they made donations of £25 towards the rebuilding of Wookey Hole Church and £3 towards the enlargement of Wookey School and in 1875 they made an agreement with the Wells Waterworks Company for a regular supply of water to the Almshouse at a cost of £4 a year.

The survey of the properties at Wookey Hole had revealed dilapidations "suffered to accrue by the late copyholders" on properties which fell in hand in November 1863 on

the death of James Teek. It was estimated it would cost £106 17s. 8d. to carry out the necessary repairs and this sum was charged and collected from the copyholders or their representatives. The work was carried out by James Rossiter and completed in 1865 on the properties by then known as Bubwith Farm. From 1865 onwards a new heading, "Repairs and Improvements", appears in the accounts as the Trustees themselves began to accept responsibility for the upkeep of their properties. In 1866, for example, they paid the following sums:-

Thomas Reeves for gate and posts for a field at Cheddar occupied by Jeremiah Evans: £2 12s. 2d.
Peter Drummond & Co. for apple trees for orchard at Wookey Hole: £1 11s. 6d.
James Rolls for nails used on land in his occupation: 1s. 5d.
Samuel Richards for repairs to the roof of a house in St. Cuthbert Street: £1 8s. 6d.
James Rossiter for one moiety of cost of draining 17ac. 1r. 30p. of land, part of Bubwith's Farm: £27 10s. 4d.

This new-found involvement in the upkeep of their properties was not confined to Bubwith's foundation but covered Still's foundation as well. At the annual meeting on 31 March 1869 Henry Barnard reported that he had recently walked over Still's property at Wedmore and noticed that a number of trees had blown down. Others should be felled to allow younger trees to grow up. At the next annual meeting he reported that the money received from the sale of stones at Wookey Hole and from the sale of timber from Bagley Wood at Wedmore had paid for building a "fence wall" between the stream and home orchard at Wookey Hole.

There is evidence that by now the Trustees were less happy with the traditional grants of long leases for lives with responsibility for upkeep resting with the lessees. At the annual meeting on 4 May 1874 the properties still "outstanding on lives" were considered and the Surveyor was instructed to prepare a list of repairs needed and to see that they were carried out by the lessees.

If shortage of money did not trouble Henry Barnard as it had so many earlier Governors, he did have considerable problems with complaints about the management of the Almshouse. At the meeting at the Almshouse on 8 March 1864, when it was decided to admit two more residents to complete the full number of thirty four, it was noted that the outlay for wine and spirits during the previous year had far exceeded that of previous years and ordered that there should be no more wine and spirits for the inmates unless ordered by the Surgeon. Was this a sign of slackness in the management? Reports had reached the Governor that some objectionable practices prevailed in the domestic arrangements and a committee was appointed to investigate. The report was presented on 16 March and it was long and detailed.

The "objectionable practices" had been reported to the Governor by Ann Young, the former Assistant Matron, subsequently a resident of Bubwith's Almshouse, aged 91, who had died in February. It was her daughter, Mrs. Mary Thomas, presumably the

daughter previously alleged to run a house of notorious ill-fame, who now spoke to the committee at a meeting on 11 March. The first charges were against Sarah Giles, the Matron. She was accused of allowing Mrs. Willis, her assistant, unrestricted control over coal, turf and candles. She had used jeering and unfeeling language in the kitchen with respect to Ann Young and her family and she had failed to give Ann a share of some wine sent by a gentleman for the use of the inmates. This last accusation was withdrawn by Mrs. Thomas because she realised she had been misinformed.

Sarah Giles' response to the first accusation was that she allowed the keys of the coal store to remain in the kitchen during the day so that the fire could be replenished from time to time. The presence of other inmates in the kitchen was a sufficient check on improper use of the keys and she herself regained possession of the keys when the inmates retired for the night. However, the committee recommended that she should keep the keys at all times.

More serious charges were laid against Mrs. Willis, the Assistant Matron, whose husband was an inmate of Brick's Almshouse next door. It was alleged that she took in washing for her own profit, using Almshouse conveniences, appliances and fuel but the committee, on investigation, discovered that she only washed regularly for her husband and for her son and daughter occasionally for which she received a small remuneration. Mrs. Thomas said Mrs. Willis' husband had taken coal from the Old Almshouse to his own room in Brick's Almshouse and Mrs. Willis had given a basket of coal to John Seal, an inmate, as a present for his wife. Neither of these complaints could be corroborated by Mrs. Thomas and, when the committee interviewed each inmate privately, only two inmates were not satisfied with the management of the Almshouse. The majority were unanimous that the Matron, Sarah Giles, was "cordial and positive" but the committee found that the Assistant Matron, Mrs. Willis, was not generally acceptable. She lacked the cordiality and positive attitude of Sarah Giles.

It was discovered during the course of the investigation that the wives of some of the inmates took in washing and some of the men spoke of the inconvenience of clothes being dried in the kitchen. It was ordered that washing should be restricted to that required by the inmates and that no clothes should be dried in the kitchen before 9 o'clock at night.

The first of the two inmates who had expressed dissatisfaction, Mrs. Maber, complained that the Matron had beaten her husband over the head with a mop and given him a black eye. Sarah Giles said that Maber had been committing an indecency and she told him that, if he did not desist, she would put the mop in his face. She did so and, unfortunately, a nail had struck him below the eye. She admitted that she had been indiscreet and expressed her regret. Another inmate, John Bown, had thrown water over Maber because he had stolen parsley from his garden. It appeared that Maber was very childish and troublesome. He wandered over the premises and occasionally made himself very offensive. His wife had to admit that she was obliged to use force to keep her husband in his room and "out of mischief".

Mrs. Radford, the second inmate who had expressed dissatisfaction, complained that, during a recent illness, the Matron had enquired for her every morning but she did not so much as offer to make her a cup of gruel. However, she admitted that she had not expressed any need for it. As for the Assistant Matron, if any inmate offended her she would not speak to them for months and she thought they would all get on more comfortably without her.

The conclusion of the committee was that, having regard to the number and ages of the inmates it would be more desirable that the Assistant Matron should be a widow without children or other relatives requiring her personal assistance or attention, so that her entire services might be under the command of the Matron for the use of the house and its inmates. This was approved by the Trustees and, in effect, Mrs. Willis would have been sacked, though it was agreed that some acknowledgement should be made to her in consideration of her past services. During the summer they would advertise for a suitable woman and lay any applications before the Trustees at a meeting to be arranged. She would be offered a room, free fuel and candles and a weekly payment of 6s. 0d.

A year later, at the annual meeting on 16 March, Henry Barnard reported that no eligible candidates had offered themselves. He was told that he might tell anyone he pleased that the situation was still vacant and if any application was worthy of consideration a meeting of the Trustees would be called. Meanwhile Mrs. Willis was still Assistant Matron and she continued to hold this post until 1868, when she asked for an increase of salary. This was reported to the annual meeting on 6 April but an increase could not be justified. The time was not far distant when a new Matron would be needed, because Sarah Giles was less capable than she had been. At the same time there should be a new Assistant Matron in accordance with the Trustees' previous resolution.

Once again some of the inmates expressed dissatisfaction with the management of the Almshouse and again a committee was appointed to investigate. At the next annual meeting it reported that they had met with several of these inmates on 6 April 1868 but the inmates had disclaimed any personal grounds for complaint. The committee had also held separate interviews with the Matron and Assistant Matron. Mrs. Willis' reason for asking for an increase of salary was on the grounds that the Matron's powers were failing and, as a result, more work fell on her. Sarah's reply was that she was continuing to carry out all her duties but that she had been temporarily disabled by an accident. The accident had occurred in November 1867 when she was returning to the Almshouse one evening after dark and fell in Priest Row where the City Council had been carrying out some repairs. Henry Barnard wrote to the Council on her behalf but the City Surveyor's reply was that they had taken every precaution to prevent such accidents and that Miss Giles had no claim on the Local Government Board.²⁶ Consequently she had been obliged to obtain additional help at her own cost.

The committee felt that no immediate action was necessary but "as the Matron's

physical powers must in the course of nature be in decline” she should become an inmate with an annuity to supplement her ordinary pay when the funds of the charity would permit such an arrangement. It should be treated as an exceptional case without interrupting the ordinary rotation of rights to nomination and it should be left to the Steward to inform the Trustees when it was necessary to take this step. It was not until October 1872 that Dr. Livett reported that Sarah Giles had been suffering for some time from a cancerous disease. She was now unable to perform her duties and it was unlikely she would ever be able to resume them. She was immediately relieved of those duties and admitted as a resident of the room called the Hospital Room with a weekly pension of 12s. 0d. and free coal from the general household store. At the same meeting Mrs. Hester Bricknell, wife of Richard Bricknell of Wookey Hole, was appointed Matron in her place at a salary of 12s. 0d. a week with the customary apartment and free fuel. Sarah Giles survived for another five years and died in September 1877 at the age of 91.

What became of the Assistant Matron, Hester Willis? She became ill in June 1872 and for the few months before her own admission as an inmate, Sarah Giles carried out the duties of Assistant Matron as well. In March 1873 Hester also became an inmate of the Almshouse. By 1876 she was described as an aged woman of weak mind in the care of her daughter, Mrs. Loxton. Her daughter continued to nurse her until April 1877 when she died aged 81. By then Henry Barnard, the Governor and Steward was also dead and the Almshouse had passed into the care of Charles William Garrod.

Notes

- ¹ According to the 1446 ordinances, the Governor should be a priest who lived at the Almshouse. How long this ordinance was respected is uncertain. Certainly Joseph Lovell’s predecessor, William Mellior, was a lawyer like himself. The background of William Marchant, the long-lived 18th-century Governor who preceded him, is unknown.
- ² D&CA, AH/AF/556.
- ³ D&CA, AH/AF/559 and 560.
- ⁴ WCA, Wells City Council Minute Book No. 1, 1835-43. In future these books will be referred to as *WCCMB*.
- ⁵ Charity Commissioners’ Report, 1820, D&CA, AH/ADM/2.
- ⁶ Derrick Sherwin Bailey, *The Canonical Houses of Wells* (1982), pp.178-83.
- ⁷ WCA, *WCCMB* No. 1, *op. cit.*
- ⁸ R. D. Reid, ‘The Museum House’, *Wells Natural History & Archaeological Society Report*, 1961-62, p. 8; Derrick Sherwin Bailey, *op. cit.*, pp. 116-22.
- ⁹ WCA, *WCCMB* No. 1, *op. cit.*
- ¹⁰ Charity Commissioners’ Report, 1820, D&CA, AH/ADM/2.
- ¹¹ WCA, *WCCMB* No. 1, *op. cit.*
- ¹² *Ibid.*
- ¹³ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁴ *Ibid.* Nine members of the Council including the Mayor were appointed annually to act as Trustees of the Almshouse together with the representatives of the Dean and Chapter. Two were to be present when any new leases of Still’s properties were to be approved and two were to attend the annual audit. The Mayor was not to be one of these four. When matters such as making new ordinances, hearing complaints or altering allowances were to be discussed all nine should be present.

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- ¹⁵ WCA, *WCCMB* No. 2, 1843-59.
- ¹⁶ Consolidated 3% Annuities was government stock favoured by the Charity Commissioners.
- ¹⁷ D&CA, AH/R/2, Register of Inmates: 1828-59; one book but with separate lists for each Almshouse.
- ¹⁸ The plaque is on the wall of the east cloister, towards the south. It records not only Joseph Lovell's death on 21 December 1842, but also the death of his widow, Margaret, aged 66, on 26 August 1849, and the deaths of his two sons, Edward, aged 53, on 22 September 1857, and Edmund, aged 25, on 11 September 1831.
- ¹⁹ D&CA, AH/AF/555.
- ²⁰ WCA, *WCCMB* No. 1, *op. cit.*
- ²¹ WCA, *WCCMB* No. 2, *op. cit.*
- ²² The funerals of most of the almspeople were held at St. Cuthbert's Church and the costs were paid by the Trustees. Occasionally families or friends preferred to make their own funeral arrangements and were willing to pay the costs involved.
- ²³ A dissertation by Sarah Hare, entitled 'A Study of Somerset Almshouses: their Gardens, Buildings and People', includes the Wells Old Almshouse garden. A copy is held in the Garden History Section of the Resources Department of Archaeology & Anthropology of the University of Bristol. A second copy is available in the Somerset Studies Library at Somerset Heritage Centre, Taunton.
- ²⁴ Presumably Joseph Lovell's son.
- ²⁵ D&CA, DC/CF7/4, Cathedral Chapter Minutes, 1863.
- ²⁶ There is a gap in the Council Minutes between 1863 and 1873 but the Rough Minutes have survived and there is a reference to this accident in the Rough Minute Book No. 4, 1867-74 (WCA).

The Harris Years: 1875-1952

For most of the century 1875-1975 the governorship and stewardship of the Almshouse were in the hands of three members of the Harris family, Richard Harris from 1884-1922, Richard Granville Harris, his son, from 1922-52 and Richard Wyndham Harris, his grandson, from 1952-75, but the postwar era of the latter forms the next chapter. The story begins with Charles William Garrod, a lawyer, who by 1882 was already in partnership with Richard Harris.

i. 1875-84: Charles William Garrod, Governor and Steward

The Governorship of Charles Garrod was comparatively short, 1875-84, and the first few years passed fairly quietly. Again there was concern about the Almshouse properties, particularly those held on long-term leases. In October 1876 Garrod was instructed to ascertain if, for any reason, any tenants' holdings required reversion. If so, these tenants should be given notice to quit in due course and the Steward should submit to the Trustees a list of any alterations he might consider necessary or desirable. Three years later Garrod was instructed to have maps prepared showing the Almshouse property in each parish and distinguishing lands in hand and those on lease.¹

By 1877 the falling in of leases was sufficient to enable the weekly payment to the inmates to be increased from 5s. 6d. to 6s. and the Matron's salary from 12s. 6d. to 14s. In addition, at some time in 1875, the Almshouse had received a sum of £550 from the estate of Henry Clarke, decd.. At the annual meeting in June that year it was decided that two cottages in St. Cuthbert Street, too dilapidated for human habitation, should be sold. In spite of their condition they were bought by Joseph Perren for £100. There were also sales of timber: from Old Wood at Wedmore in 1876 bringing in £41 13s. 3d. and from Wookey Hole and Melsbury in 1877 bringing in £24 12s. 9d. The financial state of the Almshouse was therefore sound, in spite of the sums now spent by the Trustees themselves on repairs and improvements, not only to buildings, roofs and drains, but also to gates and fences.

In 1878 the Trustees turned their attention to the female residents. At the annual meeting on 23 September 1878 it was agreed that for the greater comfort and convenience of the female inmates they should be allowed to use the Trustees' Room as a sitting room.² Fire and lighting would be provided "at all proper seasons", chairs would be purchased and matting laid down. A year later it was resolved that some of the rooms near the Matron's apartment should be fitted up as an infirmary for the sick. A committee was appointed with instructions to consult the Surveyors and to obtain plans from them for the necessary alterations. The committee was empowered to carry out the works and to provide furniture and fittings recommended by the Medical Officer.

Instead a very different programme was carried out. So far as the infirmary was concerned the committee felt that it would be better to build a house for the Assistant Matron with additional rooms attached. These new rooms could be used, either for additional residents when the income of the Almshouse had increased, or as rooms for sick patients requiring more space than their existing rooms afforded. For the moment these new rooms could provide accommodation for the residents of Still's Almshouse whilst their rooms were being enlarged. It was the first indication that Still's Almshouse was being considered for improvement.

The committee had instructed Hippisley & Sons to prepare plans and specifications for the new rooms and to receive tenders. The tender of Mr. Pullen of Shepton Mallet, £482 12s., had been accepted and a contract signed and the work was in progress. By December 1881 the work had been completed at a final cost of £531 9s. 6d., excluding the architect's commission. One of the buildings provided a residence for the Assistant Matron, another was reserved as an infirmary and the other four were allotted to four married inmates of Bubwith's Almshouse. Meanwhile the almspeople of Still's, pending the alteration and enlargement of their rooms, had been accommodated in Bubwith's Almshouse. Plans for the restoration of Still's houses were submitted by Hippisley & Sons to the Trustees at this same meeting but were rejected and the Surveyors were instructed to furnish something different. This was still the situation when Charles Garrod died on 5 January 1884. His governorship may have been short but he had set in train plans which led eventually to the complete rebuilding of Still's Almshouse.

ii. 1884-1922: Richard Harris, Governor and Steward

At the annual meeting on 14 February 1884 at which Richard Harris was appointed Governor, it was reported that the six rooms of Still's Almshouse were now vacant. It was proposed that Still's wing be altered to give each resident a bedroom constructed out of the long room over the existing rooms. The firm of Manning, Tate and Barnes were to examine this area with the Almshouse Surveyors to consider what alterations would be necessary. The result of this investigation was that there should be an entirely new block of buildings. The Surveyors produced plans and elevations to provide five bedrooms and five sitting rooms which were approved. A copy of the plans was sent to the City Council to arrange for the removal of two water closets and the erection of new ones.

These plans reached the Council at a time when they had recently gone through one of their periodic doubts as to their responsibility for the upkeep of Bubwith's Almshouse. At the monthly meeting of the Council on 3 April 1882 members were unanimous that the Town Clerk should find out whether they were really liable for the repair of the roof of Bubwith's Almshouse.³ On 5 June the Town Clerk reported that he had searched through old papers and documents but could find no copy of the Henry VI deed. He had applied to Messrs. Garrod & Harris "who had courteously allowed him a sight of a copy of a translation" by which it appeared that the former

Corporation had granted land for the Almshouse and covenanted “to pay all burdens and execute all repairs”.⁴ On 3 July Councillor John Kelway reported that he had made enquiries about the Council’s obligations and he had seen a printed copy of Bishop Bubwith’s will, previously reported as lost by the Charity Commissioners. He thought it would be inadvisable to investigate further and the matter was dropped. The only immediate action the Council took was to instruct their Surveyor to measure the north front of Bubwith’s Almshouse. As a result of Kelway’s advice, on 5 October 1885, when the Council considered a letter from Richard Harris to the Town Clerk reporting that water was coming through the roof of Bubwith House “a great deal”, probably for the want of a few slates, the matter was referred to the Council’s Surveyor and he reported that, if nothing was done, there would be considerable damage to the woodwork. The repairs were carried out immediately.

Once the Council had again accepted their responsibility for the upkeep of Bubwith House, they looked at the plans for the rebuilding of Still’s Almshouse in March 1884 very carefully and they recorded their findings in the Council Minute Book.⁵ They began by describing the existing building. It consisted of six rooms on the ground floor, each 12ft. by 9ft. used as both a living room and a bedroom. The upper floor was used only for lumber. The size of these rooms was too small to comply with one of the Council’s byelaws but it was proposed that the whole building should be pulled down. The five new houses as proposed and the conditions under which they were to be occupied were quite different from ordinary occupation as contemplated by the byelaw. The number of occupants would never exceed ten, that is, two to each house, no more than the average in an ordinary house. Each house would provide a living room and bedroom averaging 14ft. x 10ft. and 8½ft. or 8ft. high. There would be a clear space of about 1,000ft. in front of the new building open to the south. The width of the passage between Still’s and Willes’ houses would comply with the byelaw. The two closets would be removed as requested by the Almshouse Trustees and the plans for the new building were approved subject to an alteration to one staircase pointed out by the Council’s own Surveyor.

By 6 February 1885 the new wing had been completed and it was reported that it should be ready for occupation within one month. The contractor was paid £300 of the total cost. The dwellings would be assigned as far as possible to married residents at the discretion of the Governor. The residents could be transferred as soon as the Surveyor had certified the houses fit for habitation. The old tablet which had originally been placed on Still’s house would not be replaced as it could cause confusion so the Surveyors were asked to place a new tablet giving the date of the new building on the south gable. The new tablet bearing the inscription, “These dwellings erected by the Trustees A. D. 1884 take the place of the almshouses built in accordance with Bishop Still’s will A. D. 1614”, was in place by February 1886 but later in the year it had to be lowered because it was too high to read. The old building had also displayed three stone tablets over the double doorways in the east wall leading to the six rooms on the ground floor. These bore the following inscriptions:

“John Still, late Lord Bishop of this Sea (sic) for the perpetual releefe of the

poore of this Hosp. gave 500£ wherewith”

“Nathaniel Still Esq. The sonne purchased lands built this house for 6 poore more to the other 24 poor and”

“Faithfully performed his Father’s Will in this Charitable Worke: Anno Dni. 1614: A* M”.

They were removed and placed on the east wall of the new building where they can still be seen, though worn and difficult to read.

It is clear that, because the new building contained only five units which might be used to house married couples, it would no longer be the home of Still’s almspeople alone. Six men could still be nominated by the Bishop as John Still had intended but the Old Almshouse was seen as a single unit and inmates would be allocated rooms according to their needs rather than according to their sponsors. It also meant that married couples need not be separated. The Trustees considered, too, the hardship suffered by turning out the widow of a resident without any provision for her support when she was old and helpless. It was suggested that the Governor should have power to allocate her any empty room which was available and to pay her half the normal weekly allowance.

It was not until 1887 that any action was taken in this last matter. It was realised that any such payment to widows would have to be approved by the Charity Commissioners and application for a payment of 5s. per week was submitted. The Commissioners replied that such a use for any surplus income of the charity would require a separate scheme established by them and application for such a scheme was duly submitted by the Trustees. When the Trustees had accepted the tender for the new building on 9 May 1884 they applied to the Charity Commissioners for permission to borrow some of their capitalised income, but by October that year the Trustees realised that they did not need a loan. In 1881 they had granted a mortgage loan to George Thorn and Albert Whitehead secured by freehold property in Wells Out Parish and Baltonsborough and in 1884 the capital, £1,100, was repaid. Instead of investing this in Government stocks they placed it on deposit in Stuckey’s Bank where it was more readily available.⁶

The rebuilding of Still’s house was the major achievement of Harris’ governorship but there were other, more mundane, problems with which he had to cope. The chapel needed attention from time to time. In 1885 the east wall was found to be damp and had to be re-pointed. The Governor was instructed to call on the landlord of the adjoining premises to prevent further damage to the chapel wall by an overflow from a water butt there. At the same time there were complaints about a draught in the chapel and Harris was given permission to place curtains on the screen that divided the chapel from the passage. Two years later the Chaplain complained about the non-attendance of men at chapel services. Their excuse was that they suffered from the draught there. This time the Governor was ordered to obtain a dozen skull caps for

their use. The chapel also acquired a new harmonium. In 1884 the existing harmonium, which was the property of Revd. Beresford, was moved to the parish room in St. Cuthbert's Church and it was necessary to buy a new one. £10 was approved by the Trustees for the purchase but the actual cost was £12 10s. The Dean and others made up the difference.

As always, the care of the residents sometimes caused problems. There were inmates whose needs were beyond the scope of the Matron and the Surgeon. In March 1886 the Matron reported that James Burrige, admitted in 1884, was unable to look after himself and the Surgeon said that he was not a fit subject for the Lunatic Asylum as he was only partially demented.⁷ His wife lived in Union Street and he should be placed in her care instead of remaining in the Almshouse. Later that year Dr. Livett wrote to the Trustees reporting that Jane Brown, admitted in 1876 at the age of 74, was now old and infirm and she required constant attention. The same was true of two other female residents. It was his opinion that their relatives ought to provide someone to look after them when they needed special attention. In the case of Jane Brown, the Trustees allowed 2s. 6d. a week to provide additional help for her.

Medical equipment wore out or sometimes had to be bought specially. In 1886 the bath chair belonging to the Almshouse was "worn out beyond repair" and it was agreed that a new one should be purchased provided it did not cost more than £3. It was reported on 8 June that it had proved impossible to find a good one at this price. In this case, fortunately for the Almshouse, the inmate who needed it was able to buy for himself. In October, on the other hand, there was no hesitation about buying a crutch for Ann Cattle, who, at the age of 85 had broken her hip and was unable to get about without one.

The opinion of the Surgeon that the families of residents should play a part in their care when necessary may seem a little harsh but during Richard Harris' governorship it was not unusual for inmates to be given leave of absence for short periods in order to be with their families. William Garnsey, for instance, was allowed out for three weeks in 1886 to stay with his wife at Wookey Hole, she being dangerously ill. Going Teal, aged 71, a onetime Mace Bearer, was admitted on 7 December 1886, having been nominated by the Mayor. Three days later he was given permission to defer his entry for a short time because his wife was seriously ill. By February he had still not taken up his place and it was not until June that he finally became a resident. His time as an inmate was relatively short. In 1888 he fell ill and, in spite of special nursing and being plied with beef tea, he died and was buried at the expense of the Almshouse.

During these years Elizabeth Young, Tabitha Smith and the Matron had all been granted leave of absence for short periods. The fact that almspeople were not necessarily resident at all times led Dr. Livett, the Almshouse Surgeon, to ask in 1883 whether he should visit almspeople when they were not living in the Almshouse but staying with family or friends. The foundation ordinances had made it clear that, in order to qualify for any benefits, they must be resident in the Almshouse and the

Surgeon was told he should not attend any almspeople who, for whatever reason, were living, even temporarily, elsewhere.

Richard Harris remained Governor until his death in July 1922. By then he was 81 years old and had held the office for thirty eight years. Between 1888 and 1922 there are no surviving minutes and information comes from the accounts alone.⁸ Minutes did once exist, as the account for 1914 records the purchase of a new minute book. The unanswered question is how were the minutes lost?

By the 1900s the law firm of Garrod & Harris were already settled in the Market Place at Wells from which Richard Harris would have conducted his business not only as Governor and Steward of the Almshouse but as Chapter Clerk and City Treasurer as well. There is one aspect of the second of the two account books covering the period between 1888 and 1922 which might suggest that Richard Harris, towards the end of his life, played a less active part in Almshouse business. Normally the heading at the beginning of each account names the Governor and Steward but from 1916 to 1921 no name appears. In 1922 there is still no name in the heading but Harris' son and successor, Richard Granville Harris, was paid £40 4s. 1d. for collecting rents, compiling the rent roll and entering the minutes of proceedings in the minute book.

The records of the City Council covering the latter part of Harris' governorship do virtually nothing to fill the gap caused by the disappearance of the minutes. There are, however, entries in the Council Minutes for 1904 which provide us with more precise details about those parts of the Old Almshouse for which they accepted responsibility.⁹

This arose from the question of fire insurance. In May 1904 the Town Clerk produced a report on such insurance and it was agreed that he and the Steward, that is, Richard Harris, should define which parts of the Old Almshouse were the responsibility of the City Council. Once defined, the Surveyors, Messrs. Hippisley should value them for fire insurance. By August these instructions had been carried out and it was resolved that the total cover required amounted to £3,325. This was made up of £3,000 for the buildings: the chapel, the porch, the range westward from the chapel, one tenement of five on the west which connected with the Governor's room, the kitchen and offices with the Matron's room over adjoining and communicating on the south with the central block. £175 was required to cover furniture and fittings in the chapel, the east window, the carved oak screen and other fittings and another £145 to cover fittings elsewhere in various rooms and dormitories, including old carved work and a chest in the Governor's room.¹⁰ Finally the bell should be insured for £5.

The biggest loss from the lack of minutes is information about what was actually happening at the Almshouse and the day-to-day life there. The accounts show that no more major building work was carried out but there are payments for repairs and small improvements. In 1913 Minimax fire extinguishers were purchased at a cost of

£5 7s. 3d. Fire must always have posed a threat in an establishment like the Almshouse but also in Wells occasional flooding was not unusual. In 1900 there were payments for moving furniture from rooms which had been flooded and also for cleaning the rooms. The chapel, too, required attention. A gas stove was installed in 1898 and gas radiators in 1910 and again in 1913. In 1914 the chapel was provided with a new organ at a cost of £21. During the 1890s the garden was looked after by the Matron, Mrs. Budge, for which she was paid £1 a year. Some changes appear to have been made at this time. Border stones were removed, turf was laid and plants and shrubs were purchased from Browne & Sons. It was no longer just an “airing place”, more like a garden.

As for the almspeople themselves, the accounts provide a very clear picture of the costs incurred in supporting them, for the weekly allowances paid to them, for their clothing and their funerals. The total sum for allowances obviously depended on the number of almspeople resident throughout the year. Thirty four places were available but some might remain vacant for several weeks after a death. If so, this was recorded in detail.

From 1880 to 1917 the annual cost for a full house was £618. In 1917 a decision was taken to pay an extra 1s. per week to inmates under the age of 70. The reason behind the decision remains a mystery but as a result between 1918 and 1922 the cost varied from £650 to £690. The clothing provided was the traditional blue uniform, new every two years, costing between £50 and £60. In 1917 the cost rose to £70 7s. 1½d., but this might have been due to wartime shortages. Alterations and making do with second-hand clothes were not unusual. The cost of individual funerals remained the same throughout the period of these accounts. The £2 6s. 10½d. covered not only the provision of a coffin and the use of a pall but payments to the bearers, the sexton and parish clerk, the Burial Board, and the horse driver of the hearse. There was also a long-standing tradition that the Matron and the surviving residents should each receive 2½d. instead of the ale originally provided. The funeral accounts give the names of all deceased inmates each year and occasionally there is only the sum of 2½d. against a name. The presumption is that in these cases the funeral was paid for by the deceased’s relatives or friends.

The extra costs of caring for sick or injured almspeople included the provision and upkeep of special equipment. Some residents needed extra care and attention when they fell ill or met with an accident and additional nursing care was paid for and items such as bed rests, commodes and crutches were purchased when needed. One resident, Tabitha Smith, was in hospital for eighteen months in 1899 and 1900.¹¹ The reason for her long hospitalisation is not recorded but it seems most likely that she had been referred to the Lunatic Asylum.¹² During this time she was paid a total of £11 8s. 0d. in addition to her weekly allowance. In 1918 both the Matron and the Under Matron fell ill which meant extra nursing care had to be provided at a cost of £12 15s. 1d. By this time the Trustees were paying 1s. per month for National Health Insurance for both of them and in 1918 they gave the Matron £2 8s. towards her holiday expenses, presumably in order to convalesce. Perhaps the two women were

victims of the notorious flu' epidemic but only two of the thirty four almspeople, who would surely have been very vulnerable, died in 1918.

One innovation during these years was an annual tea for the residents paid for by a well wisher. In 1887 the residents had been given a dinner by W. H. Wickenden to mark Queen Victoria's Jubilee and the annual teas seem to have stemmed from this occasion. Normally they were held in the Trustees' Room at the Almshouse but in 1900 the party was moved to the Red Lion Temperance Hotel; perhaps this was because the Almshouse was still recovering from the flooding that took place that year.¹³

The accounts provide many tantalising glimpses of life in the Almshouse between 1888 and 1922. Those quoted are just a tiny fraction. It is perhaps surprising that there is nothing in the accounts to suggest that the Almshouse was aware that between 1914-18 the country was embroiled in a horrendous war. Where the accounts come into their own is the very detailed record they present of the Almshouse finances and the management of the Almshouse properties. With the exception of 1922 at no time during Richard Harris' governorship was there a shortage of money. There were however changes in the way money was managed which were later proved to have been unwise. During the years covered by the accounts there were also significant sales of Almshouse properties which preceded the wholesale disposal of property in 1923.¹⁴

One item which appears regularly in the accounts is the payment of annual salaries, not only to the Governor and Steward, the Matron and her Assistant, but also to the Surveyors, the Chaplain, the Medical Officer and the barber. It was as Steward that Richard Harris was responsible for preparing the accounts as well as writing the minutes and for this he was paid a salary in addition to the £13 he was paid as Governor. He also prepared an annual rent roll and parchment was purchased for this purpose every year until 1916. None of these parchment rolls have survived and the accounts usually record only a total of the amount collected together with a note of any changes or special payments, such as heriots. The annual income from rents in 1888 was £643 13s. 11d. It rose to £910 17s. 4d. in 1894 and by 1904 had dropped to £570 4s. Variations in the income from rents can be attributed to a number of things, leases falling in, new leases being granted, payments in arrears, for example. Falls in income did not always result from the sale of property, but by 1900 sales had begun to make a great difference.¹⁵

In 1899 the Trustees sold land at Beryl on the outskirts of Wells to Earl Mount Cashell for £241 19s. 6d. and in 1900 they sold Bubwith's Farm at Wookey Hole to William Hodgkinson for £6,089. All the securities transferred by Hodgkinson to the Official Trustees of Charitable Funds to cover this sum were invested in railway stock. Such an investment was not new. In 1898 and 1899, at the instigation of the Charity Commissioners, Consols were sold and the money invested in railway stock. Bubwith's Farm was the farm which the Trustees had decided to create some 40 years earlier and on which they had spent considerable sums of money by way of repairs

and improvements. In particular, they had built five cottages on the farm for which the Charity Commissioners had allowed them to take out a loan. The loan was secured by £830 Consols set aside by the Commissioners and a New Cottages Repayment Fund was set up from £1,233 8s. 3d. Consols sold and invested in London and North Western Railway Company stock from which annual repayments were made.

Every year until 1922 the accounts show a balance in hand.¹⁶ By the early years of the 20th century the annual audit was very different from what had been customary before 1840. It is perhaps not surprising that, given that Richard Harris was City Treasurer, as well as Governor and Steward of the Almshouse, the City Council played a more active role than hitherto. The audit was divided into two parts, the first being an examination of all transactions and the documents concerning them by two City Councillors annually elected for the purpose. Their report then went to the annual meeting for consideration and acceptance. Here, too, the City Council played a greater role than previously. Traditionally the approved accounts had been signed by the Dean and members of the Chapter and by the Mayor and a number of burgesses. Now it was signed by whoever had taken the chair at the annual meeting, sometimes by the Dean, but frequently by a member of the City Council, not necessarily the Mayor.

Richard Harris died on 16 July 1922 and the last few months of his life are covered by the new minute book beginning in April of that year.¹⁷ At the annual meeting held on 11 April a deficit of £72 0s. 8d. for 1921 was reported and it was likely that the income for 1922 would be reduced largely because of the rising costs of labour and materials for repairs and of fuel, particularly coal and turf. The Dean and the Mayor were asked to postpone any further appointments of inmates until the finances had been adjusted.

A special sub-committee was appointed to consider, with the Surveyor, the question of selling all or part of the Almshouse properties. At the same meeting the Surveyor had suggested, as a means of cutting costs, that inmates should be given two rooms each and that those thus dispossessed should be given an outdoor pension, but any action was postponed until sufficient vacancies had occurred. To add to the dismay the Trustees must have been feeling, the Chairman, Councillor J. M. Alcock, in his customary address to the inmates, warned the men against spitting and uncleanness and Joseph White was told if there was any repetition of his drunkenness he would be dismissed. The meeting approved the sale of property at Westbury for £115, subject to the approval of the Charity Commissioners and Mr. Hodges was thanked for several entertainments he had given the inmates at the Picture Palace. Almost certainly these would have been black and white silent films accompanied by piano music.¹⁸

The sub-committee appointed at this meeting presented their report on 9 May. They recommended that the permission of the Charity Commissioners should be sought for the sale of all landed and house properties to existing tenants, either by auction or by

private treaty. The only exceptions would be life-hold properties, that is, properties leased for a number of lives. These should be retained until the lease fell in. Some small properties in Priest Row and Chamberlain Street should also be retained. The proposals were accepted and Messrs. Hippisley were instructed to prepare a valuation and a report for the Charity Commissioners.

The sub-committee also gave their opinion as to the proposed sale of property at Westbury. It was very disappointing. The Surveyor regarded the proposed asking price of £115 as out of all proportion for "Mendip land" which was rocky and of poor quality. Only two acres were of value as pasture. With difficulty he had got A. J. Phelps, the existing tenant, to offer £40 which was a good price. The meeting decided to ask for £45 but with power to accept £40.

There can be little doubt that Richard Harris must have died a disappointed man but in fact he had achieved a great deal, particularly with regard to the Almshouse buildings. His funeral took place on 28 July 1922 but it was not as the family had planned.¹⁹ They intended the service to take place at St. Cuthbert's Church where he had been a regular worshipper but the Dean and Chapter "in the kindest possible way intimated" that, because he had been Chapter Clerk, the service should take place in the Cathedral and that he should be buried in the Cathedral Churchyard. The family agreed to the Cathedral service, but not to the Churchyard burial because Richard Harris wished to be buried alongside his wife in Wells Cemetery. The service was taken by the Dean and in addition to Richard Harris' family, it was attended by the Mayor, the Town Clerk, the Vicar of St. Thomas (the Vicar of St. Cuthbert officiating at the Cemetery) as well as by legal colleagues and many worthy Wellensians. Also present were many inmates of the Almshouses of Wells, "the deceased gentleman having taken a deep interest in these institutions".

iii. 1922-52: Richard Granville Harris, Governor and Steward

The first Richard Harris was succeeded as Governor by his son, Richard Granville Harris, who held the post until 1952. The early years of his governorship were taken up with implementing the decision to dispose of the Almshouse estates. By the time of Harris' first annual meeting on 19 March 1923, the Surveyors had valued the properties currently in hand at £15,148 10s. with an additional £137 for timber. Lands still occupied at Westbury, Wedmore and Kingsbury Episcopi were valued at £1,960 and offers had already been made by the lessees for them. Acceptable minimum sums were set and if these were not forthcoming then the land was to be offered for auction. The same procedure was followed for land with buildings in Glastonbury, Wedmore (Old Farm) and Wells. The total valuation for these properties was £3,715 of which £2,500 was for Old Farm, including the timber. The remaining property already in hand should be offered at the Surveyors' valuation plus 2½ per cent. The proposals for the disposal of these properties had to be approved by the Charity Commissioners before any further action could be taken. Only two properties at Bagley and in Wells were still let for lives and when they came to hand they would be offered for £700 and £170 respectively.

By August 1823 the Charity Commissioners had approved the proposals for sale to tenants on the terms suggested but they wished to be informed when offers were accepted before proceeding any further. The minutes record details of the sales which had already been agreed, totalling £3,919. Provisional contracts had been signed which were subject to the formal consent of the Charity Commissioners. Deposits of 10% had been paid and it was agreed that the steps necessary for completion should now be taken.

Some tenants had declined the Trustees' offers but had made offers of their own. Richard Harris, acting as Steward, was instructed to accept almost all of them. The minutes show that in a number of cases where the terms had been accepted by tenants the actual price paid was reduced by the Trustees, in accordance with a decision to accept 5% less than the asking price. Sales resulting from the instructions given to the Steward produced £3,702 7s. With the £3,919 received from the earlier sales, by December 1923 the Trustees now had £7,621 7s. in hand and they asked the Charity Commissioners to invest this sum in 3½% Conversion Stock. By December the deeds of conveyance for the property sold privately had been approved and could now be executed.

It had been agreed at the meeting on 12 August that any property which was not sold privately should be sold by public auction. Hippisley & Sons were appointed auctioneers with power to make all the necessary arrangements including settling reserves with the Charity Commissioners. The result of these auctions was reported to the meeting held on 5 December 1923. A number of the properties failed to find a buyer. It was agreed that the property not sold should be retained for the time being, with a few exceptions, including Glastonbury, where they hoped they might still be able to dispose of the small properties there by private agreement.

The proceeds of the auction sales, after costs had been taken into account, a total of £9,038 7s., were invested in more 3½% Conversion Stock which would be redeemable in 1929. At the same meeting a special Sales Committee was appointed to deal with any future sales and all matters concerning property. It made its first report on 19 February 1925. One of the matters dealt with was a lease of the Wells City Council allotments in "White's Close", one of the Almshouse properties. It had been agreed as early as August 1923 that this property should not be sold but that the City Council should be offered a new seven-year lease. A draft lease was now drawn up for the approval of the Council which was forthcoming by the time of the annual meeting in March.

Over the ensuing years sales of smaller properties continued but it was becoming apparent that some properties were never going to sell and that the Trustees would have to make new agreements with the sitting tenants. Much more serious was the failure to dispose of the two farms, Bagley and Old Wood at Wedmore, originally part of Still's foundation. The last life tenant of Bagley, John Wall, died on 19 April 1925 and the old farmhouse, buildings and 10ac. 2r. 29p. of land fell into the Trustees'

hands. It was offered to the sitting tenant, Matthew Wall, in its present condition for £1,000, with a possible reduction of £100 if necessary. In the meantime the rent of £38 was reduced to £36 but in June 1926 it was reported that Wall was not able to buy and the Surveyors were instructed to obtain estimates for repairs which were needed. In September it was agreed that Wall should be required to thatch where necessary, but other repairs and alterations, including the conversion of an existing lean-to building into a trap house, would be carried out by the Trustees at an estimated cost of £67 0s. 6d.

At the annual meeting in May 1827 the Surveyors had to report that when the work had commenced it was discovered that the old thatched building was beyond repair. They recommended that the derelict building should be removed and a dairy and kitchen erected on the site. They also suggested converting the attic of the main building into two bedrooms. They were instructed to prepare specifications and to obtain estimates and to ask Matthew Wall for a 5% increase in his rent. If he did not agree the Trustees would not carry out the improvements. It was thought that to do the work to the ruinous part of the house and to provide a new cow stall would cost at least £450. In fact, when the final estimate was accepted, the sum was £648 10s. This would cover the demolition of the old building, the materials of which could be used for concrete, and the building of a new kitchen, scullery and dairy downstairs, with two bedrooms above. The present staircase would be removed and a new one erected adjoining the new building. A new drainage system would be installed to meet the requirements of the Sanitary Authority and there would be a new cow stall for ten cows.

Matthew Wall had refused to pay more rent but he had offered to pay 5% of the cost of the cow stall. He was again threatened with notice to quit if he would not pay a higher rent but by November 1928 it was agreed that work could proceed on the understanding that Wall would accept an allowance of £10 on his rent for 1928 and 1929 and that he would pay an additional £10 a year once the work had been completed. At the annual meeting on 26 March 1929 it was reported that the new cow stall had been built, the other new work on the site of the old demolished building was very nearly complete and the new staircase should be completed by Midsummer.

The story of Old Wood Farm is less dramatic as relations with the tenant, W. J. Tucker, appear to have been more amicable and there were no threats of dispossession. In 1925 a sale of timber from the farm brought in £100 and in February 1926, when Tucker asked that the Home Orchard might be re-stocked, it was agreed immediately that two dozen new apple trees should be provided. Tucker continued to hold the tenancy until 1930 when he asked that it might be transferred to Francis Stephen Banwell. The Trustees agreed with the proviso that the new tenant's father should act as surety.

It was not only unsold property which needed attention and cost money from time to time. The Old Almshouse buildings themselves also suffered with the passing of

time. In March 1929 the Surveyors reported that cracks here and there in the buildings were due to vibration caused by heavy motor traffic in the street adjoining the Almshouse. Five years later the Finance and Estates Committee reported that there was increasing evidence that damage to the exterior and the porch on the north side of the buildings was caused by fast lorry traffic and Harris was instructed to draw the attention of the police to the problem and to request their help. In November 1928 there had been problems with the windows of some of the rooms, where the rain beat in between the woodwork and the stone. It was decided that the wooden frames should be replaced with steel. Ten rooms on the south side of the buildings were provided with the new frames at a cost of £22 10s.

Chimneys were always causing trouble. In July 1929 it was reported that the chimney over the women's kitchen was in a dangerous condition and needed immediate attention. Padfield, the builder, was asked to attend to it. Scaffolding was erected and it was discovered that the chimney was in a worse condition than expected. The chimney over the men's kitchen also needed attention and later in the year it was found that the chimney between cottages 37 and 38 on the Square needed to be rebuilt as soon as possible.²⁰ It was to be done in Doulton finish concrete blocks as adopted with the approval of the Commissioners for the College of Vicars Choral. It was less expensive and more permanent than Bath. The chimney over the main building, that is, Bubwith's Almshouse, had also suffered in the gales of March 1930 and part of the boundary wall had fallen down. In this case the cost of the repairs fell, not on the Trustees, but on the City Council who met their responsibilities without demur.

As time passed there were also improvements to be made. In February 1933 it was noted that many of the portable hand lamps used had worn out and they were difficult to replace and it was decided that electric lighting should be installed in inmates' rooms in the main building, controllable by the Matron from her room. The Surveyors were to get estimates for wiring which should match the requirements of the Advisory Committee for the Protection of Churches. In May the Finance Committee accepted the tender of the North Somerset Electric Supply Company and the work proceeded. It was completed by June 1934. The Supply Company had suggested a charge of 9d. a unit and it was hoped that the annual cost would not be more than £36.

The Matron reported in June 1934 that there was a much larger use of the bath by the newer inmates and she asked for a separate bath to be provided for herself and the Under Matron. It was agreed that this could be provided by using half of the storeroom next to the women's kitchen. A year later it is evident that more extensive changes had taken place. A 5ft. 6ins. bath for inmates, with hot and cold water, had been installed downstairs. Four washbasins in the men's ablution room had been removed but two of them were re-fixed on the south side of the room. In the women's kitchen, the 30-gallon hot water cylinder had been replaced with a 40-gallon cylinder, and in their wash-house two sinks with hot and cold running water were installed.

In March 1937 the Finance Committee met the Surveyors and the Matron at the

Almshouse to consider the possibility of providing additional sanitary accommodation for the inmates. They proposed to erect a wooden partition in one of the rooms adjacent to the W.C.s on the first floor. The rest of the room would be made available for other purposes.

Richard Harris had inherited his Matron, Miss Lydia Wilson, from his father who had appointed her in 1911-12. In 1935 the Dean reminded the Trustees that she would soon have been in office for 25 years and suggested that the occasion should be marked in some way. The matter was adjourned until nearer the time and in 1937 she was given a special payment of £5. By that time she had worked with five different Assistant or Under Matrons.²¹ In May 1927 the Trustees were looking for a new Under Matron to replace the third of these Assistants, Miss Combe, and for the first time the duties of both the Matron and her Assistant were recorded in detail in the minutes. By then the sales of Almshouse property were relatively infrequent and were dealt with by a committee and it seems that the Trustees and the Governor in particular were able to turn their attention to the rules and regulations for the proper running of the Almshouse. The set of rules for the Matron and Assistant Matron which they drew up form Appendix 2.

In 1927 Edith Appleby was appointed Under Matron on the new terms. In 1929 she married Edward Hillbourne of Easton but she was anxious to continue as the Assistant Matron, and asked that her husband be allowed to live with her in the Under Matron's cottage. The Trustees were agreeable provided her husband's occupation was terminated at a moment's notice, should they think it desirable. However, by 1930 she had resigned and her place was taken by Mrs. Mary Frances Neale, a nurse recommended by two doctors and the Vicar of St. Cuthbert, at an increased salary of £65.

Lydia Wilson, the Matron, may have been rewarded for 25 years' service in 1937 but she remained in office for another 11 years. She seems to have taken particular care of the chapel and the services which took place there. In October 1925 she asked for new prayer and hymn books for the chapel and tenders were obtained from Pettigrew's, a local firm, and from the S. P. C. K. Canon Alcock thought it should be possible to obtain copies "good enough for use" from the Cathedral and elsewhere and the matter was left to him and the Steward. The Dean and Chapter did provide sufficient hymn books and a new music book was purchased. The Steward bought 30 new prayer books at 3s. each from the S. P. C. K.

In June 1926 the Matron reported that attendance at chapel services had been very good but she also said that there had been complaints from some inmates because the Chaplain [Prebendary Cook, the Vicar of St. Cuthbert's] had several times neglected to come on the appointed days and he was very unpunctual. Miss Wilson produced the Preacher's book which showed that no services had been held on 23 April, 28 May or 1 June and other occasions. The Steward was asked to write to the Chaplain "expressing the Trustees' very strong desire that more care should be taken in future". A year later the Chaplain's explanation for his misdemeanours was accepted and there

were no more complaints.

In 1931 the Matron herself presented the chapel with a large-type bible and in the same year a number of additional gifts were made to the chapel. Prebendary Cook and Miss Symington gave a new altar cloth, Canon and Mrs. Alcock some carved oak candlesticks, Miss Beatrice Helyar a silver chalice and patten and the Steward an iron safe for the plate. A year later the Steward was offered some old oak panelling by the Ecclesiastical Commissioners and this was fixed to the chapel walls discoloured by damp.

Problems concerning the use of the chapel and the communion services held there emerged a few years later. It seems that Miss Wilson may have overstepped the bounds of her authority with regard to the chapel, perhaps relying too much on the good relations established with the Vicar who acted as Chaplain to the Almshouse. At a meeting of the Trustees on 22 February 1933 it was reported that the Chaplain had asked the Matron for the use of the chapel by the St. Barnabas Guild of Nurses on two occasions. They had used the gas radiators and the lighting without consulting the Trustees or the Steward. Before Founder's Day members of St. Cuthbert's congregation had been invited to attend the communion service for the almspeople. This too was without consulting the Trustees and a letter was sent to Prebendary Cook saying that the Trustees were happy to allow such use of the chapel provided permission was obtained in advance of each occasion. In 1934 Prebendary Cook asked for a credence table to be provided for communion services and this was provided at a cost of £1 19s. 4d. He was also asked to bring with him a small flask of wine for each monthly service, rather than leaving a whole bottle of wine at the Almshouse. The Trustees would refund him for the wine used. Evidently this last request was ignored or forgotten because in June 1935 it was reported that the communion wine had turned sour after being opened for some time and the Vicar was again asked to bring the wine when he came to the service. If he refused to do so, he should be asked to buy small flagons instead of a whole bottle.

There were other times when, during her 36 years as Matron, things did not always run smoothly for Lydia Wilson. There were irritating minor problems such as neighbourhood children who cycled, threw balls and generally played round the premises. There were complaints from the inmates that the barber cut their hair so badly that he had to be replaced. She herself found it difficult to cook on the communal range and asked to have a gas stove solely under her control in another room. There were inmates who broke the rules, like John Green who stayed away from the Almshouse without leave and was punished by having his allowance stopped for three weeks. Other inmates refused to work in the garden so that a gardener had to be found and hired. In 1935 cockroaches had appeared in some of the upstairs room to the annoyance of the women inmates. The Mayor, William Barnes, offered to let her have particulars of "Pennywell" firelighters which, when crushed and placed near their haunts, had proved effective.

In October 1938 there was a more serious incident. A special meeting of the Trustees

took place at the Almshouse, at Miss Wilson's request, to investigate accusations made by some inmates concerning the treatment of one of their number, Robert Speed. Four inmates were interviewed but only two had anything relevant to say. Edmund Jennings had never seen anything to complain of but that Speed's son had acted in a threatening manner towards his father. Mrs. Summers had heard Lydia Wilson shouting at Speed but her only difference with the Matron was her dislike of wearing the Almshouse cloak and bonnet. It was pointed out to her that acceptance as an inmate involved the wearing of these garments and she was at liberty to resign if she could not obey the rules.

Lydia Wilson's response to the accusations was that Robert Speed was deaf and she had to shout to get him to hear. She complained that she had been cursed and accused of many things by the inmates and now accusations were being made by outsiders and it was time to put a stop to it. The Dean assured her that the Trustees would bring no charge against her. All the accusations had been withdrawn and Speed's son had offered an apology so there was no case to answer. He went on, "They realised the difficulties of her position and wished to support her against all unkind gossip and begged her to forgive and forget and to endeavour to treat the inmates with kindness and consideration, in spite of their peculiarities, which no doubt she did". The four accusers were called in and several of the rules relating to inmates were read to them. They were warned to cease their unkind gossip which was undesirable and reflected no credit on those who indulged in it. The rules could be applied for their expulsion. The Steward was directed to have the rules printed in clear type and exhibited in the Almshouse so that all inmates might read and know them. A copy of these rules has survived and forms Appendix 3.²²

At the Almshouse, the women were beginning to outnumber the men. To some extent the filling of vacancies depended on the state of the Almshouse finances and there were times when there was a shortage of ready money which meant that rooms were left empty. This had already happened in 1922, before the death of the first Richard Harris, and it occurred again in 1936. Shortage of money was due not only to improvements such as the installation of electric lighting and the cost of repairs, but also because of increased payments to inmates, in particular to those not eligible for the Old Age pension. In May 1932, following a request from an inmate for an increased weekly payment because he was not eligible for the state pension, the Trustees agreed to make up the difference in all such cases. Any income from personal earnings or savings would be ignored. At that time there were two women residents and four men eligible for such an increase which meant there would be an additional annual cost to the Almshouse of £69 11s.

At other times suitable applicants were not forthcoming. In 1928 the Dean proposed that local clergy should be given particulars of the qualifications necessary for admission in the hope that they might be able to suggest suitable applicants. Sometimes the Trustees were willing to consider stretching the rules concerning those qualifications. For instance, on 30 March 1931, they looked at an application from a woman, who had been in service all her life, presumably in Wells, but had gone away

to be with her father until he died. She returned to live in Wookey Hole within twelve months but now sought a place in Bubwith's Almshouse. The Trustees thought it was doubtful whether a residence in Wells for the previous seven years was required for Bubwith's and they agreed to consider the matter when the next vacancy for a female occurred. Meanwhile they would consult the Charity Commissioners about the possibility of including the parish of Wookey in the scope of Bubwith's foundation.

At the annual meeting on 30 March 1931 it was reported that, although seven vacancies in the preceding twelve months had been filled, there were still another seven vacancies available for men. A year later the number of vacancies for men had risen to ten and it was admitted that it had become difficult to find suitable male applicants. For the first time it was suggested that the vacant rooms might be filled by women and the Steward was asked to consult the Charity Commissioners. By the following May it was recognised that, while Still's Almshouse was for men only, neither Bubwith's nor Willes' foundations stipulated the number of women who could be admitted and five women had therefore been allocated rooms formerly occupied by five male residents now deceased.

Placing women in rooms previously allocated to men did cause a few problems. In 1941 the men complained that the presence of four women downstairs and their use of the men's kitchen meant that the men could not have the kitchen to themselves in the evening. As a result, in future, the kitchen was reserved for the men from 7 o'clock onwards. The four women concerned could use the upstairs, that is, the women's kitchen and also the Committee Room.

Women residents during these years were not afraid to voice their opinions about matters which troubled or annoyed them. In 1929 they had the silk trimming on their bonnets changed for a lighter weight, even though this would cost an extra 9d. per bonnet. Two years later they succeeded in obtaining a much more important concession. They asked to be allowed to use their own hats and clothes out of doors and the Trustees agreed on the understanding that the official clothing provided would be used to attend the chapel services and what were described as "state occasions". In May 1938 the Trustees proposed to replace the traditional blue dresses with cloaks which would be easier to put on. Bonnets would still be provided and the women inmates were asked for their opinions. A number of them replied that they would prefer an increase in the money paid to them.

The second half of Richard Wyndham Harris' governorship was overshadowed by the Second World War which brought about changes which could never have been foreseen. As early as 1938, when the prospect of war loomed on the horizon, the Surveyors were asked to get instructions about and estimates for equipping the men's kitchen or some other suitable place as a gas-proof room in case of air raids. The Matron was asked to brief the inmates. From then until 1941 life in the Almshouse continued much as it had always done though no annual meeting of the Trustees was held in 1940. It was left to the Finance Committee to deal with any matters which arose, including the payment of bills and the admission of new inmates. Three new

men were admitted but this still left nine places vacant.

It was not until 1941, with the arrival of evacuees, that the Almshouse really felt the impact of the war. By May that year four evacuees were occupying single rooms in Bubwith's Almshouse under notices from the billeting officer. For this the Trustees were paid 5s. per week for each room. A married couple had been placed in one of the outside houses with two rooms the previous November by the billeting officer without proper notice. Strictly speaking this was also against the rules because the husband was able to work. Since 25 April another male evacuee had been living in a room in Bubwith's Almshouse for which an order had eventually been obtained. The Town Clerk should have issued authority for the payment of 3s. 6d. per week for these three rooms but had failed to do so.

At the same time other matters arising from wartime conditions were discussed. The police had complained that the arrangements for black-out in the kitchens and passages were insufficient and Wicks & Son were asked to replace the strawboards being used with curtains. Special War Damage insurance was paid for the chattels belonging to the Trustees in the Almshouse and the chapel, and the 17th-century oak chest, at the time under a window in the hall, a dangerous position in the event of an air raid, was removed to the Surplice Room downstairs when the spring cleaning was done.

At the annual meeting in May 1944 the Matron could report that, on the whole, the situation was generally favourable. The older inmates were in an especially fortunate position following the increase of the Government pension and the priority they enjoyed regarding both food and fuel. These had been supplemented with gifts from the Trustees and from Harvest Festivals at Rodney Stoke, Easton, Dulcote and Green Ore. Unfortunately, there had been a troublesome incident earlier in the year when, during the annual spring cleaning, one inmate had lost £8 from her handbag and she had called in the police. It had been very unpleasant for everyone, the Matrons, the inmates, the workmen and the chimney sweep, all of whom were very indignant. Another inmate said that there had been similar happenings before this and the Chairman came to the conclusion that the lady who had called in the police suffered from delusions. None of the inmates or workmen were under suspicion and no further action was taken. Two years later she was certified insane and transferred to the Mental Hospital.

The only other problem which had arisen since the last annual meeting was that the barber, Mr Chivers, had been called up for the army in September 1941, but his place had been taken by Mary Dymott who received the same wage as Chivers, £8 per annum. What was alarming was that the number of vacancies had now risen to seventeen, almost half the total capacity of the Almshouse. There are also indications that surviving inmates were not content. The Matron reported to the Trustees on 10 December 1946 that the language of some inmates was "not what it should be" and this was borne out by a letter the Dean had received from one dissatisfied resident. The inmates were warned that, if any of them were reported to the Matron in future,

they would be deprived of half their weekly pay. All complaints would be investigated by the Dean or a Trustee.

Dissatisfaction among the residents and the inability to attract new residents may to some extent reflect the state of the buildings and the accommodation on offer at the end of the war. At the same December meeting the Steward reported the receipt of a letter from the Town Clerk. Could the City take over four cottages on the Square, carry out some improvements and so assist with the general housing situation? Housing was to become a major issue of the post-war years and it was the City Council which was responsible for dealing with the problem in Wells. As a result, the Council would eventually play a much more active role in the management of the Almshouse which could provide housing for those most in need. In reply to the Town Clerk's letter the Steward said that he had no power to authorise the use suggested but, if the cottages were requisitioned by the Local Authority or the Ministry of Health, there would be no objection provided that:

- a. No alterations were made to the cottages without the approval of the Trustees.
- b. If the rooms were needed for new almspeople they would be surrendered by the Local Authority.
- c. If they were so surrendered the Trustees would pay two thirds of the costs of the improvements after one year or one third after two years.
- d. The rents of the rooms were to be fixed between the requisitioning authority and the Trustees.

At the next annual meeting the Steward put on record that there was no prospect of filling the cottages in the Square and that the Trustees had no objection to some of them being taken over by the City Council. The Council's aim was to make these four cottages in the Square, Nos. 38, 39, 40 and 41, available to married couples to be used as family dwellings. By February 1947 the Council had the approval of the Trustees to the Council's proposals and by June the City Surveyor had drawn up ten pages of detailed specifications and bills of quantities for the work needed.²³

Only two of the cottages required a complete overhaul but although plans were drawn up they have not survived so it is not clear which of the four received the full treatment. However, the specifications show that W.C. "suites" were installed in each of the two cottages, that new sinks, draining boards, gas or electric cookers and food cupboards were provided in the kitchens and that the casement windows were overhauled or replaced with new ones where necessary. The sum of £3 was set aside for extending the existing electrical lighting to include the provision of a light in the W.C.s and £1 for dustbins. Before the work could proceed it was necessary to have the approval of the Ministry of Health which the Council received in April. It included the good news that expenditure not exceeding £200 would rank for reimbursement by the Exchequer. In July the work was put out to tender and a month later they accepted Melhuish & Saunders' tender of £253. By September the Council had the further approval of the Ministry of Health including reimbursement of the

increased cost and they were able to tell the builders to proceed.

Initially the City paid a rent of £39 for the use of these cottages but after six years the Trustees found it necessary to double this sum. Having inmates appointed by the City Council in these four houses did not always prove to be a blessing. In February 1951 Richard Harris wrote to the Town Clerk complaining that one of the Council's tenants was entering the Almshouse, presumably Bubwith's, for the purpose of drawing off hot water from the system there.²⁴ He pointed out that the Trustees had recently had to introduce rigid economy in the use of hot water supplied by a gas boiler which was very costly to run. The Council should make it clear to their tenants that they had no right to help themselves to this water.

In September that year the Matron, Anne Dodge, wrote to Councillor Mrs. Melrose informing her that a number of the Almshouse tenants in cottages adjacent to those administered by the Council were constantly complaining about one of the Council tenants. Her washing was left on the clothesline all day on Sundays, the house and garden were very untidy, the lights and the wireless were left on late at night and early in the morning and there was a little dog left shut in one of the bedrooms as long as twelve hours at a time. Mrs. Dodge said she was sorry she had to write this letter but felt she must do so in the interest of the old folk living nearby.²⁵ There were other times when the Trustees regretted the agreement they had made with the City for these two cottages and in 1957 the Finance and Estates Committee urged the Trustees to demand that what they considered had been the requisition of these cottages should be cancelled. However, the cottages were not finally handed back until February 1972 and the occupiers were expected to pay the weekly rent of £1 12s. like all other residents of the Almshouse.

Back in December 1946 at the meeting when the agreement with the Council was approved, Alderman Reakes, a Trustee appointed by the City, had asked whether the Trustees could make alterations to, and improve the general condition of, Bubwith's Almshouse. It was time the buildings were modernised, the roof raised, two rooms made into one and better windows inserted. After some discussion a Sub-Committee was appointed to investigate whether it was possible to improve the amenities of the Almshouse "without altering the character of the ancient building".

As early as 1944 the Surveyors had intimated that improvements to the Almshouse were needed and the matter was referred to the Finance and Estates Committee. Alderman Reakes' appeal eventually resulted, two years later, in a programme of improvements to both the men's kitchen and to some of the cottages. One of the Trustees, Mrs. Melrose, had asked whether it would be possible to have some means of heating kettles, saucepans and the like in the men's kitchen in the evening after the fire had gone out so that inmates could make hot drinks before they went to bed.²⁶ It was agreed that the kitchen grate was uneconomical and a sub-committee was appointed to report on what should be done.

Improvements to the men's kitchen were approved in May 1948 but the work took

longer than expected and it was not completed until 1950. It had been decided to install a new cooking range and putting in new flooring or decorating had to wait until the new cooker was in place. In August 1950 the Surveyor could report that the improvements were in place and the new hot water system was much appreciated. He also asked that the cottages should now be inspected in order to make them more habitable. He warned that local authorities could now compel owners of such properties to put them into better condition. It would be some time before any other improvements were made.

During these years, following the end of the war, balancing the inability to attract more residents with the extra cost that more residents would entail together with the need to bring the Almshouse accommodation up to the standard now required was becoming a real problem. The number of men and women actually resident always fluctuated from year to year but the difference between a full house, as was the case in 1922 when Richard Wyndham Harris became Governor, and only twenty residents in 1952 when he died is made clear by the amounts spent on their weekly allowances. In 1922 the allowances cost £648 12s. but in 1952 only £368 18s. The other expenditure on the almspeople, the provision of clothing, was drastically cut during the war years and was not restored afterwards. When it was a year for a complete set of new clothing the cost in the 1920s and 1930s could be as much as £86 9s. 9d. in 1928 and £61 17s. 11d. in 1938. In 1940, 1941 and 1942 nothing was spent on clothing and in 1943 each resident was paid just £1 in lieu of clothing and this continued after the war. In 1945 each inmate received a Victory Bonus payment of 3s.

In the 1920s and 1930s there were times when considerable sums had been spent on the upkeep and modernisation of the Almshouse buildings: new windows in 1929, the installation of electric lighting in 1933, and in 1938 the paving of the Square. During these years there was also expenditure on the upkeep of property which had not been sold, particularly the two farms at Wedmore. This brought the total spent on repairs and improvements in 1926 to £328 7s. 8d. and in 1929 to £847 8s. 1d. The improvements to the Almshouse carried out between 1948 and 1950 resulted in payments totalling £970 12s. 0½d. in 1950.

Throughout Harris' governorship there was always a balance in hand at the end of the year but this was sometimes only achieved by drawing on some of the reserves.²⁷ In his last full year as Governor, Harris warned that in view of the financial situation the present number of inmates, then 22, should not be exceeded. The warning was warranted. The balance at the end of 1952 was just £46 5s. 10d. It was not a good omen for the future. Two years before this the Governor had had to cope with Lydia Wilson's retirement, the Matron with whom he had worked ever since his appointment. As early as 1942 the Dean had interviewed her following a suggestion she had put forward that she would consider retiring in four or five years' time.²⁸ She would hope to be given rent-free accommodation outside the Almshouse and a pension for the remainder of her life. The Dean felt that this was a reasonable request after her long and faithful service and there the matter rested.

At the annual meeting on 3 December 1948 Lydia Wilson asked if both she and the Under Matron could be given a free weekend each month from noon on Friday to noon on Monday. The Trustees agreed provided that the two Matrons were never away at the same time and provided that Miss Wilson was not absent if any of the inmates were sick. This request may indicate that she was beginning to find full time employment and relations with the inmates more than she could manage. She referred to three troublesome inmates in her report and while the Trustees agreed that they were difficult, it did not warrant expulsion. They pointed out that when applicants for admission were examined it was impossible to say how they would respond to life in the Almshouse. When the residents themselves were asked by the Trustees if they were dissatisfied in any way, only one responded, complaining about the state of his hat. He was assured that a new one would be bought for him.

A special meeting of the Trustees was held on 15 December at which the Medical Officer, Dr. Hincks, said that the time had come for the Matron to be asked to give up her duties on account of her age. She should be given one month's notice from 1 January next. A committee was appointed to consider whether she should be given a gratuity or a pension and what salary should be offered to her replacement. By 21 December agreement with Lydia Wilson had been reached. She would be paid a pension of £1 a week for the rest of her life following two months' holiday on full pay after retirement on 1 February that year. It might be possible to offer her accommodation in Chamberlain Street when it became available. In the meantime, storage space for her furniture could be provided. By 10 January 1949 Lydia had found her own accommodation and the Trustees had agreed to pay an allowance of £15 towards its cost. In 1950 her plea for a larger allowance was refused.

The Trustees accepted the proposal of the committee appointed in December 1948 that the new Matron should be offered a salary of £200 a year. The post was advertised in the local papers and in the *Nursing Mirror* and the *Church Times*. Interviews took place in late January and Mrs. Dodge from Aylesbury was appointed. By June she was installed and beginning to suggest changes and improvements she would like to see. In particular, she was concerned that the outside windows were cleaned only once a year and she would like to have them cleaned every eight weeks. The Trustees agreed to cleaning four times a year. Her request for curtains on the landings and in the Committee Room met with instructions to obtain patterns and estimates.

By then the Under Matron, Mrs. Neale, had also resigned on the grounds of ill health and been admitted as a resident with a special allowance of 14s. a week. In September 1949 Mrs. Edith Duggan of Polsham became the new Under Matron but in October she withdrew and Mrs. Williams, the Almshouse charwoman, took her place with wages of £2 10s. per week. She did not wish to live in the Under Matron's quarters, but agreed to sleep in the Matron's quarters when the Matron herself was absent. At the same time there was a new Medical Officer for the City who took over from Dr. Hincks and all these changes occurred at a time when improvements to the building were in progress.

With the loss of his long-serving Matron and the ensuing rapid changes of vital personnel at the Almshouse, together with anxiety about finance and the inability to fill the Almshouse with residents, Richard Granville Harris, like his father before him, probably died a disappointed man.

Notes

- ¹ There are no such parish maps among the surviving records and it is possible that this instruction was never carried out.
 - ² The Trustees' Room was the present hall of the Almshouse.
 - ³ WCA, WCCMB No. 6, 1880-87.
 - ⁴ This partnership must have been formed during Garrod's lifetime, i.e. before Richard Harris became Governor.
 - ⁵ WCA, WCCMB No. 6, *op. cit.*
 - ⁶ *Kelly's Directory* for 1883 states that Stuckey's Banking Company was located at 7, High Street, Wells.
 - ⁷ WCA, WCCMB No. 6, *op. cit.* The full address of the Asylum was the County of Somerset & Bath Lunatic Asylum for Paupers, West Horrington. It was not until 1923 that the name was changed.
 - ⁸ D&CA, AH/AF/559 and 560, two Account Books covering the period 1888-1922.
 - ⁹ WCA, WCCMB No. 9, 1903-09.
 - ¹⁰ Presumably the 17th-century chest given to the Almshouse by Henry Southworth.
 - ¹¹ D&CA, AH/AF/561.
 - ¹² See note 7.
 - ¹³ D&CA, AH/F/6. The hotel was situated at 2, Market Place, Wells: *Kelly's Directory*, 1902.
 - ¹⁴ *Ibid.*
 - ¹⁵ *Ibid.*
 - ¹⁶ The accounts for the years covered by D&CA, AH/AF/560 record the balance in hand each year, but for the last two years, 1920 and 1921, the balance is not "in hand" but in the bank. Is this another indication that Richard Harris was not in personal charge towards the end of his life? [Perhaps senility or dementia, unmentionable among the gentry?]
 - ¹⁷ D&CA, AH/AF/556, Almshouse Minute Book, 1922-79.
 - ¹⁸ The Picture Palace, later the Palace Theatre, was situated in Priory Road, Wells. It had been established by Albany Ward, a London based cinema entrepreneur, in 1912 and was acquired by Hodges in 1914. I am indebted to Colin Peacock, who has been researching the history of cinemas and theatres in Wells, for this information.
 - ¹⁹ *Wells Journal*, 28 July 1922.
- [Notes 20-28: Although these note numbers appear in Jean Imray's main text, the content of the notes appears not to have been given by her.]
- ²⁰ [This appears not to have been given by Jean Imray.]
 - ²¹ [This appears not to have been given by Jean Imray.]
 - ²² [This appears not to have been given by Jean Imray.]
 - ²³ [This appears not to have been given by Jean Imray.]
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 - ²⁵ [This appears not to have been given by Jean Imray.]
 - ²⁶ [This appears not to have been given by Jean Imray.]
 - ²⁷ [This appears not to have been given by Jean Imray.]
 - ²⁸ [This appears not to have been given by Jean Imray.]

The Postwar Years: Charles Wyndham Harris, 1952-75

[Note: This chapter was left in very much draft form at the time of Jean Imray's death and the editors have done their best to put it into a finished form as she might have wished, without adding anything. There were no useable notes, but her sources for this chapter would have been very similar to those of the previous one.]

Charles Wyndham Harris was the third member of his family to be Governor and Steward of the Almshouse. He not only had to struggle with the same problems as his two predecessors, particularly in the realms of finance and upkeep and improvements to the Almshouse buildings, but he also had to deal with a transformed social and political environment for which the traditional almshouse was no longer appropriate. He foresaw the need for changes which would lead eventually to a new role for the Almshouse.

For most of his time as Governor, Charles Harris was struggling to keep the Almshouse financially afloat. He succeeded his father in April 1952 and the tiny balance in hand of £46 5s. 10d. in December that year was a forerunner of what was to come. In September it was reported that the cost of running the Almshouse had risen considerably, partly because of improvements that had been made, such as better heating and the provision of hot water, and that it might be necessary to reduce the weekly pay to inmates. The accounts for 1952 were studied in March 1953 and it was noted that the annual cost of gas and electricity was nearly £300. They applied to the Gas Board for a cheaper rate and by April a two-part tariff was agreed which would save the Almshouse £40 a year.

In May 1952 the Finance and Estates Committee had informed the Trustees that improvements to one of the Wedmore farms, Old Wood Farm at Sand, were needed and plans and specifications were drawn up. In the following April the tender of £2,219 10s. submitted by H. R. Dennis & Son was accepted and the Steward was instructed to sell sufficient securities to cover the cost. The rent of the Farm would be increased to £75. In 1956 the Estates Committee visited Bagley Farm, the other Wedmore farm, and drew up a list of improvements which were needed, including those required under the Milk Regulations. The estimated cost was £605 but it was thought possible that a grant of £200 might be made by the local authority. Again the Steward was told to sell sufficient stock to cover the balance. The Almshouse too was in need of attention. Redecoration of the whole building was required and the Steward was asked to get tenders for as much work as possible. A letter had also been received from the Chaplain drawing attention to the poor state of the decoration and repair of the chapel.

The situation was mitigated to some extent by the disposal of one of the small properties in the vicinity of the Almshouse. By September 1952, 13 Priest Row had

been sold at auction for £650 and the net proceeds invested in 3½% War Stock, but by the following March the financial position had declined further and £50 worth had to be sold in order to bridge the gap until another sum of income was received. In February 1954 a report on other small cottage properties in the vicinity of the Almshouse was drawn up. 61 Chamberlain Street would remain empty until it could be pulled down but 57 Chamberlain Street was let for rent on the strict understanding that interior repairs and the rates would be paid by the tenant. The report ended with the instruction that no money was to be spent on cottage properties without the Trustees' express authority. By then the Trustees had recognised that the financial situation was grave and they drew up a list of steps which might be taken to reduce their costs. The more significant ones were:

1. Abolish any payments to future inmates.
2. Reduce the pensions paid to existing inmates from September 1954 but without causing hardship.
3. Discontinue the annual clothing grant.
4. Postpone the redecoration of the Almshouse.
5. No increase in salary for the Under Matron.

In August 1954 a forecast for the rest of the year was made. The balance in hand at that moment was £69 7s. 3d. and the estimated income to the end of the year was £567 14s. 11d. Payment to the inmates would cost £298 5s., leaving £338 16s. 4d. to cover all other costs. The Steward was given leave to obtain an overdraft to enable the payment of pensions to the end of September. When the accounts were adopted in March 1955 it was estimated that there would be a deficit of £534 17s. 2d. by the end of the year and it was agreed that enough 2½% Consols should be sold to provide £600. Expenditure should be cut as much as possible to avoid selling more securities, but by February 1956 the Steward had to report that very little of the £600 now remained and that a small overdraft would be required to make payments until the next income fell due. It was a sorry state of affairs but the struggle to make ends meet and the continual sale of investments was to be the pattern for much of Charles Harris' governorship.

When the accounts for 1956 were studied in February 1957, the Finance and Estates Committee was asked to examine all income and expenditure, including heating and lighting and the wages paid to the Matron and Under Matron, and to consider the possibility of using only one floor of the Almshouse. The Committee produced its report a month later. So far as income was concerned they felt that there was little which could be done to increase income. Wells City Council might be asked to double their payment for the cottages in the Square "requisitioned" during the War, and the Trustees should give notice of the deaths of any tenants of Almshouse property so that the Surveyor could negotiate increased rents. The Surveyor should also do what he could to secure increased rents from tenants of agricultural land not forming part of the Almshouse farms.

As for expenditure, the Committee made the following suggestions:

1. The pension of £58 10s. paid to the former Matron, Lydia Wilson, was a considerable drain on income. Could it come from some other source? The Steward was asked to find out her present financial status. The records show that in 1952 her allowance for accommodation was increased from 5s. to 7s. 6d. a week. Two years later she was given free accommodation in Harper's Almshouse, a small Almshouse in Chamberlain Street, but at that time the Trustees had agreed not to withdraw her weekly allowance. The Dean, Frederick Harton, undertook to see whether the pension could come from some other source and by 1959 she was in receipt of a pension from the Mercers' Company of the City of London.
2. The pension of 14s. a week paid to Mrs. Neale, the former Under Matron, might be reduced if the Assistance Board would make up the difference.
3. There should be no increase in the salaries of the present Matron and Under Matron: in fact, they already benefited as a result of the reduced number of inmates.
4. Councillor Mrs. Melrose, Mayor of Wells 1955-56, was asked to consult with the Matron about the suggestion to use only one floor of the Almshouse. The Committee did not think it would achieve any reduction in expenditure. However Mrs. Melrose was able to provide a little light in all this gloom. It had been agreed in principle that a TV should be installed in the Almshouse and the Mayor launched an appeal to make the Board Room (previously the Committee Room) more comfortable for the purpose. There was a good response to the appeal: £381 0s. 6d. was raised. A donor gave the television set and a settee was also offered. The fund remained open and was administered by the Dean and Mrs. Melrose. It became known as the Amenities Fund. There was an official opening of the TV room on 12 May 1956 when the television was switched on by Miss Berryman. Visitors from Harper's, Brick's and Llewellyn's Almshouses were invited to share this facility if they so wished.
5. The cost of heating the Almshouse by gas was not unreasonable but the Surveyor should investigate the cost of heating with oil. The amount of coal consumed was also reasonable but the use and cost of electricity was questioned.
6. Could Somerset County Council take over the Almshouse? In February 1959 an approach was made to the National Association of Almshouses asking whether any of its members had experience of their inmates being cared for on behalf of their County Council on a contract basis. Somerset County Council was approached in the hope that they might be willing to contribute towards the salaries of the Matron and Under Matron and for other communal facilities, but in February 1960 it was reported that the Association had failed to persuade Somerset County Council to make such a grant. The matter was pursued by the late Dr. Reid, who was both a Trustee and a member of the County Welfare

Committee, but in February 1961 he reported that there was no likelihood of the County Council helping the Almshouse. So far as running costs were concerned the Council would only consider help if the inmates also contributed to these costs. Any help with capital expenditure was out of the question as long as the Trustees still had unused funds in the form of securities.

By this time the warning given by Charles Harris' father had been heeded and by December 1956 there were only 14 residents in the Almshouse. The inability to offer more places on the traditional terms because of the cost was a matter of concern to the Trustees and from time to time they looked at other possibilities. In March 1955 they advertised four vacancies in the *Wells Journal*. No pensions would be paid and the occupants would be responsible for decorations, though the Trustees would provide materials. The loss of some cottages to the City Council during the war was still resented. In September 1957 the Finance and Estates Committee suggested that the Trustees should demand their de-requisitioning, but a year later they learned that the Council intended to close these properties within ten years and demolish them.

At the meeting in February 1960, Councillor Mrs. Lilian Osmond said that she had attended a meeting of representatives from Rural District Councils responsible for almshouses and they were of the opinion that the Trustees of Wells Old Almshouse paid their Matron and Under Matron rather well. Consequently there would be no increase of their salaries. She also suggested that some people might be willing to leave money to the Almshouse in their wills for a further endowment if the present financial plight was made known. She offered to draft a letter to be published in the *Wells Journal* but in June she said she could not do so until she knew more about the Almshouse.

The approach made to the National Association of Almshouses in February 1959 was not just about asking the County Council for money to cover running costs. It was a cry for help to find a way forward. The Steward was instructed to write to the Association asking whether a member of their panel of architects might visit the Almshouse and recommend what improvements could be made. He would be met by the Almshouse Surveyor and members of the Estates Committee.

There is no record of such a visit in either the Almshouse or City Council records, but at a special meeting of the Public Health Committee of the Council held in the evening of 20 March 1961, the Inspector reported that through Harris & Harris, the National Association of Almshouses had submitted sketch designs of proposed alterations at the Old Almshouse. The Association asked whether the proposals were acceptable to the Committee and whether they ranked for an improvement grant not exceeding £400 per unit of accommodation. Altogether the proposals were for 27 units of accommodation and the Inspector did not think that in any one case would the work amount to a full contribution of £400 by the Council. No estimates of costs had been provided, neither was there a full specification of works provided, so it was impossible to say what the cost per unit would be, but the likely figure was £200-£300. At that rate the total cost of grants would be in the region of £6,700 if all the

suggested improvements were carried out. The Council's contribution would be one quarter of the whole amounting to £1,670.

The proposed improvements suggested by the Association were the installation of modern kitchen amenities in seventeen bed-sitting room plus kitchen units with shared bathrooms and W.C.s. There would be a common entrance passage to each bed-sitting flatlet which meant they would not be self-contained. The Inspector pointed out that previous Council grants of a similar nature had always insisted on self-contained units and individual baths and W.C.s. Therefore these units did not measure up to the Council's grant standard. In addition, there were two flats, one for the Matron and one for the Deputy Matron, which would be improved by modernising the kitchen in one and providing a bathroom in the other. Again the two flats were entered from a common hall but were self-contained once inside. However, this plan contravened the byelaws as the entrance to the W.C. was shown as being off the bedroom. The other eight units making up the total of 27 were all well planned and situated behind the main front block of the Almshouse. On the Inspector's recommendation the Committee agreed to approve the eight units which would be modernised and totally self-contained but to refuse the seventeen bed-sitting rooms because they were not self-contained and the Matron's and Deputy Matron's flat because they did not comply with the Council's byelaws.

A letter from the Ministry of Housing and Local Government subsequently intimated that there had been some relaxation in the rules concerning the conversion and improvement of accommodation for old people and that dispensation could be made in this case having regard to all the facts and the likelihood of good management. It suggested that food and fuel stores should be provided in certain units and laid down requirements for the two shared bathrooms, even though this was outside the scope of the improvement grant scheme. One should be fitted with a suitable side or centrally placed bath with support handles for ease of access and egress. The other should have a thermostatically controlled shower constructed in a recess with a seat of wooden slats. For those units which were private, post boxes and milk and bread boxes should be provided in the entrance hall unless the Matron made other arrangements. It was agreed that the Public Health Inspector should now go back to the Architects acting on behalf of the Almshouse Trustees for their approval.

In October 1961 the Finance Committee agreed that the City Council should make an improvement grant to the Almshouse Trustees, who, at the same meeting, asked whether the Council would be prepared to make mortgage facilities available to them in respect of the amount which would be payable by them. Local authorities could make advances for this purpose by means of mortgages and the Council agreed to do so. The actual amount would be agreed when more details were available. The initial estimate given in March 1961 had been £14,280 but the Architect warned that it could be more, especially as higher rates of pay for building operatives were in the offing.

By November 1961 a new scheme had been drawn up incorporating changes suggested by the Public Health Inspector and the Matron. It was referred to the

Estates Committee who, together with representatives of the City Council, paid a visit on 5 December to Hugh Sexey's Hospital at Bruton which had recently undergone a programme of improvements. The Mayor, the Archdeacon of Wells, four Councillors and the Public Health Inspector were given tea in the Board Room where they met, not only the Steward and Master of the Almshouse, but also the architect who had advised on the Bruton improvements. This visit may have caused the Trustees to look again at their proposals for improvements to the Wells Old Almshouse as it was not until 1963 that a third scheme was drawn up and adopted. Even this needed modification before the work was completed.

In the meantime, while these discussions about major improvements were in progress, the need for immediate repairs and improvements to the buildings had to be addressed. In March 1959 the Council looked into what it described as "the hardy perennial of smoking chimneys" in the Old Almshouse. The chimneys had been built with a large cavity at the base of each, which allowed smoke "to roll round". The smoke came out into the rooms if there were any tendency at all to down draughts caused by the tall trees in the churchyard. Some inmates had put in their own fireplaces which reduced these cavities to the normal size and there was then no more trouble. There were four acute cases in Bubwith's Almshouse, which they had been asked to deal with urgently, and they had discussed them with the City Surveyor, but the root cause was in the structure. Melhuish & Saunders were instructed to fill in the offending space in one ground floor room for which the Trustees would pay. The inmate should have the use of the Sick Room while the work was being done. Ready-made cowls should be placed on two other chimneys. The Trustees pointed out that they were facing a severe financial crisis and were not anxious to spend money on chimney flues. They hoped that the Council would eventually pay the bill.

A year later, in February 1960, the Trustees noted that the large west window in the Board Room needed re-leading. This time the City Council showed no sign of the doubts they had expressed in the past as to their responsibility for the upkeep of Bubwith's Almshouse. On 18 February 1960 the Town Clerk wrote to Charles Harris stating that the City Surveyor would arrange for these windows to be repaired and that the cost would be met by the City Council.

In the years between 1961 and 1963 the estimated cost of improvements to the Almshouse had continued to rise. By 1962 a figure of £22,000 was suggested but the final estimate before any work was put out to tender was well over £26,000. On 13 May 1963 the General Purposes Committee of the City Council received a detailed report from the Public Health Inspector on the progress of the scheme to date. The original plans drawn up in 1962 had been altered to include suggestions made by him and these were again altered on the advice of a Quantity Surveyor.

The scheme now presented was very different from the two previous schemes. For example, the Matron would now have an enlarged flat with a sick room attached whereas the former schemes had reduced the Matron's flat to difficult proportions and provided no sick room. The third scheme would provide a total of 21 units made up

of 17 single-person units with shared bathrooms, the Matron's flat on two floors and three two-person units also on two floors. Six firms had been invited to tender for the main work and that of Messrs. Gamble, £23,490, had been accepted. To this was added £115 for a new water main and fees of £1,350 and £1,885 for the Quantity Surveyor and Architect respectively, making a total of £26,840. This represented a cost of £1,278 per unit. The Council hoped to be able to provide £400 per unit, making a total of £8,400, but the Inspector thought that, given the historic and architectural interest of the building, the Council might be able to pay a 50% grant, that is, £639 per unit, making a total of £13,420. The Committee agreed that the Council should pay half the costs of the improvements but it could not do so without the approval of the Minister of Housing and Local Government.

On 20 May 1963 a letter, accompanied by copies of the plans, applying for the necessary permission, was sent to the Ministry. The Architects had pointed out that the procedure followed in the case of the Council's previous application to the Ministry had been very slow and so anxious was the Inspector to have a decision that he offered to pay a visit to the Ministry himself to plead the case for a quicker reply. He also reported that the Almshouse Trustees intended, if the new scheme and the 50% grant were approved by the Minister, to ask the Charity Commissioners to prepare a scheme enabling them to charge the inmates a weekly rent of £1 5s.

By December 1963 the Trustees had received such a scheme, making it a condition of appointing inmates that they should contribute a weekly sum, not more than £1 2s. 6d., towards the maintenance of their accommodation or such sum as the Commissioners should appoint from time to time. By July 1963 the Council had the reply from the Ministry but it was less generous than they had hoped. Under the Housing (Financial Provisions) Act of 1958 the Council could make grants totalling 50% of the £900 per unit, that is, £450 for 20 units, not the 21 as planned. This caused the Architect and the Public Health Inspector to look again at the plans and some changes were made to comply with the need to reduce the number of units from 21 to 20. In September 1963 a Planning Application was submitted to the Council for approval to reduce the number of units in the West Block from three to two.

It was never going to be easy for the Trustees of the Almshouse to find their share of the money required but they fully accepted that, unless improvements were made, the Almshouse could not continue. In October 1961, when the City Finance Committee first agreed that it would make an improvement grant to the Trustees, it also agreed that they would make mortgage facilities available to the Trustees but that the actual amount should be decided when more details were known. In the meantime the Trustees had set about trying to put their finances in order.

In November 1961 the Finance Committee of the Almshouse resolved to sell all securities under the direct control of the Trustees, that is, investments made without the intervention of the Charity Commissioners, in the hope that the sum raised in this way would more than cover their present overdraft and any balance could be placed on deposit. It was hoped that the current account could then be kept in credit.

By November 1961, £1,275 1s. 6d. of 3½% War Stock had been sold which paid for repairs at the two Wedmore farms and cleared their overdraft. The situation was further mitigated by the sale of some of their smaller properties. In December 1961 the Trustees began negotiations with the City Council for the sale of the Drang allotments. The asking price was £2,000 per acre and, as well as the Council, the Trustees also considered the possibility of a sale by private treaty. By March 1962 they were getting impatient with the Council and informed it that, if it did not make a higher offer, they would sell to a private buyer who had proposed to pay £2,240. This was sufficient for the Council to act and the deed of conveyance was executed in December. The proceeds were invested, as was now customary with sales of property, in the Charity Commissioner's own investment fund.

In January 1959 a cottage in Priest Row and five cottages and a garage in Chamberlain Street had been condemned by the City's Public Health Inspector and Medical Officer of Health as unfit for habitation. The Council agreed to purchase them from the Trustees and to demolish them. In June 1960 the Chamberlain Street cottages were sold to the City for £1,100, but the Priest Row cottage used by St. Cuthbert's as a Church Room presented a problem. If this cottage was demolished a replacement would have to be found, but if it was not, then it would prevent the proper re-development of the area.

Three years later demolition had still not taken place and in March Charles Harris wrote to the Town Clerk pointing out that, when it did, a small strip of land should be set aside to provide access to the Almshouse garden and the rear of the Almshouse.

A special Finance Committee was set up and in March 1962, when the original estimate of £22,000 for the improvements was discussed, it came to the conclusion that the Trustees would have to charge each resident £1 a week for their accommodation plus the cost of electricity used. For this they would need the approval of the Charity Commissioners and they would also have to get permission from the Commissioners to discontinue the weekly payments to inmates and their clothing allowances. By December 1963 the Trustees had the Commissioners' scheme which stated that it would be a condition when appointing new inmates that they should pay a weekly sum of not more than £1 2s. 6d. towards the maintenance of their accommodation or such sum as the Commissioners should approve from time to time. Following further discussions with the Commissioners as to the wisdom of selling existing investments forming their permanent endowment fund, in July 1963 they again applied to the Charity Commissioners, this time to authorise the sale of sufficient of their securities held by the Official Custodian for Charities to produce £13,570, that is, half the estimated cost of the improvements.

The Trustees knew by now that the City Council's grant would be limited to £9,000. They therefore took up the mortgage promise made by the City in 1961 and mortgaged the Almshouse property for £4,000. The loan would be repayable by 60 half-yearly payments of the principal plus interest at 6¼%. In fact, the Trustees made

a repayment of £1,000 in 1967 rather against the wishes of the Council because they would have to find a use for this sum which would meet the requirements of the Ministry of Housing and Local Government. Possibly thanks to the insistence of a former Mayor, Mrs. Lilian Osmond, the Council accepted this premature repayment, leaving a sum of £3,975 9s. 7d. still outstanding.

The Trustees had also looked elsewhere for help to fund the improvements but without success. As early as 1961 they had explored the possibility of help from the County Council but the County Welfare Committee had said there was no likelihood of the Council providing any money. Grants for maintenance would only be considered if the inmates paid towards the running costs, something which the Trustees had not contemplated at this time. No help with capital expenditure could be granted so long as the Trustees still had unused funds. The Trustees had also approached the National Association of Almshouses but the Secretary had replied explaining its attitude with regard to grants. Where a scheme could be financed locally the prospect of any grant was very remote.

Eventually it was the citizens of Wells who came to the rescue. In May 1963 Mrs. Lilian Osmond again became Mayor. A week before she was installed she had proposed that the report of the General Purposes Committee, including the decision to pay half the costs of the improvements to the Almshouse, should be adopted by the full Council. As Mayor she became a Trustee of the Almshouse and early in 1964 she wrote to the Town Clerk voicing her concern about its financial position. It should be a matter of concern for the City as a whole and she suggested that a public meeting, to include representatives of the churches and other local organisations, should be held to discuss the matter.

Unusually Mrs. Osmond continued as Mayor for a second year. Her extended term of office was proposed because of her extensive knowledge of the housing problems in the City and her success in launching an Almshouse Appeal, the outcome of her letter to the Town Clerk in January. At her inauguration in May 1964 she was able to report that the Appeal launched in January had already raised £700. She was sure that the Old Almshouse, after modernisation, would provide good accommodation for the people of Wells and she hoped that the many projects which the Appeal Committee were planning would be supported generously by the citizens.

In June 1966 the General Purposes Committee of the City Council recommended that the collection of money from the Conduit for the Fund should cease on 30 September next and that the electric lighting and advertising material installed should be removed. This did not go down well with the Appeal Committee. The Secretary, Mr. Finnern, wrote to the Town Clerk on 1 September pointing out that the Conduit coins had been a great success. He wondered whether the Almshouse Trustees who were members of the City Council had lost interest in "something which is essentially for the benefit of Wells people".

A further letter from the Secretary was considered by the General Purposes

Committee on 19 September. The cessation of this source of income would effectually terminate the Appeal Fund, and the organisations and people who had supported the Appeal would conclude that the Council had withdrawn its blessing and decided that there was no need for funds to recoup the cost of improvements. The object of the Appeal Committee now was to gather funds to reduce the debt incurred by the Council. It had already been reduced by £3,000 and there was more money in hand. It was obvious and logical that the more the Appeal Fund could raise, the better. The Committee recommended that the Council should rescind the decision to terminate the collection of money from the Conduit, provided that the existing notice boards were removed and replaced with a single board in the vicinity of the Conduit's waterfall. On 3 October the Council granted an extension for the collection until 30 April 1967. In August 1970 the Finance Committee agreed that an inscription should be added to the board in the entrance hall of the Almshouse recording that the Mayoral Appeal Fund had collected a total of £5,000.

By this time Lilian Osmond was no longer Mayor but she continued to look for ways to make the lives of the inmates of the Almshouse easier. In May 1965 she raised money to provide a spin-dryer for the Almshouse laundry. She may also have played a part in the decision taken by the Trustees on 30 March that year to discontinue the use of the Board Room for viewing TV and to allow the inmates to install sets in their own quarters, provided they paid the cost of connection. The sets would only be permitted if they were used in such a way as not to become a nuisance to other residents. If this provision was not complied with, the sets would be withdrawn. It appears that the appointment of women as Trustees, women like Lilian Osmond and Mrs. Melrose before her, may have resulted in a better understanding of the expectations of residents in the 1950s and 60s.

In March 1964 the Public Health Inspector presented another report to the General Purposes Committee of the Council on progress made so far and the further alterations made to the scheme since 1963. Work had begun on the Matron's accommodation and on the West Block. By this time further changes in the units to be provided in this Block had been made. The original proposals had the disadvantage for old people of stairs between the living rooms and the bedrooms and the W.C.. If this area was converted into flats, four units could be provided instead of three or two, thus restoring the original total of 21 units. The Architect had not yet provided the necessary plans nor a final estimate of the cost, therefore he could not give any figure as to the likely final amount. However, the Council had the approval of the Ministry to make a grant of £9,000 towards the cost of the improvements and the reports of the Finance Committee show the Council making payment of this sum to the Trustees by instalments over the next few years, with a final instalment of £2,500 in 1965.

In August 1965 the Finance and Estates Committee learned that the Architect now estimated that the final cost of the improvements was likely to be £23,817 but would certainly not be more than £30,000. However, the contractor was sure that the final figure would be even higher. The increase may have been due in part to a decision

taken in the following January to extend the central heating system to Willes' Almshouse. Evidently the Trustees realised that they still did not have sufficient money to meet the final cost and in October Charles Harris wrote to the Town Clerk asking for a further loan of £7,500 to finance the improvements being made at the Almshouse. He also asked for an additional loan of £2,000 for improvements to be made at Harper's Almshouse in Chamberlain Street. Both properties would be offered as security for the loans and the Trustees would pay the legal costs. At the end of January 1966 the Finance Committee of the Council agreed to make the loans on these terms but would lend only £4,000 for the Old Almshouse and £2,000 for Harper's Almshouse. Mortgage deeds would be drawn up and sealed with the City's seal.

The inclusion of Harper's Almshouse in this request from the Trustees is significant. It was an indication that the possibility of bringing more than one Almshouse managed by them under a single scheme, first suggested in 1964, might be feasible. Among the Town Clerk's correspondence for that year is a copy of a letter dated 3 January from one of the Charity Commissioners to the Trustees concerning the three Almshouses, Bubwith's or the Old Almshouse, Brick's and Harper's, and proposing to visit Wells in March. Having set out the details of all three he asks whether these three trusts are in fact and in practice very different. He wanted to be provided with a map of Wells showing the locations of the three and the plans for their modernisation. He would not rule out the inclusion of other charities but this would depend on the attitude of the Trustees.

Along with this copy is a letter dated 10 January from Charles Harris stating that it would not be to the advantage of Brick's Almshouse, which was in a comparatively sound financial position, to combine it with the two less fortunate Almshouses. Brick's should have a proper scheme to enable its Trustees to fill vacancies without deeds of appointment, as the other two did. It may have been as a result of the Commissioners' visit and the thought of possible amalgamation that in April 1967 the Trustees agreed that the composite name, Wells Old Almshouse, should not be used in future. Instead the three separate trusts making up the Old Almshouse should be known as Bubwith House, Still's House and Willes' House. In 1972 the Trustees took another step towards the possible amalgamation of some or all of the Wells Almshouses first suggested in 1964. At a meeting on 24 February 1972 held in Bubwith House the Governor undertook to approach the Trustees of other Almshouses in Wells with a view to making an approach to the Charity Commissioners to combine them all under a single governing body.

The improvements to the Old Almshouse were virtually completed by 1966 but the Trustees had not yet finished with building works. In January 1966 they received a report on the chapel from Beech and Tyldesley, the Almshouse Surveyors, setting out repairs which were needed and improvements which could be made. It was sent at once to the Town Clerk as it was the City Council who were responsible for the upkeep of the chapel building. It was reported to the General Purposes Committee which agreed that the Council should pay for all the repairs and decorations needed

but thought that the work could be carried out in two stages costing an estimated £800 and £450. At the same time the east wall of the garden was in need of repair but it was agreed that no action should be taken until a decision had been made about the development of the City Council's estate on the far side of the wall.

At their meeting on 30 March 1966 the Trustees adjourned to the chapel with a copy of Mr Beech's report and noted some improvements which they thought might be made. They suggested that a window should be placed in the west wall of the porch and that a board headed "Bubwith's Almshouse" should be set up in the garden on the north side of the Almshouse. It should bear the arms of Bishop Bubwith and invite visitors to inspect the chapel. A box in the chapel should ask for donations. In 1972 it was recorded that this board bore the Bubwith coat of arms and the following notice: "Lodgings for Pensioners: Guildhall Chapel open to the Public". A year later another notice was installed in the entrance hall bearing the single word "PRIVATE" to prevent visitors to the chapel wandering through the rest of the building, suggesting that the invitation to visit the chapel had proved popular.

It was September 1967 before the repair work on the chapel was put out to tender and that of R. W. Knott and Sons accepted. The total cost would be £1,897 15s. 0d. By July 1968 this work had been carried out and the Trustees had to consider some additional improvements for which they would be responsible. These included lighting, the porch and the porch door, the provision of carpeting and curtains and a harmonium. Mrs. Ozanne and the Ladies of the Confraternity of St. Andrew undertook to provide an altar frontal and the curtains, the former to be paid for by the residents and the latter by the Trustees.

In 1972 St. Cuthbert's Church had a new Vicar and the Almshouse a new Chaplain who undertook to provide the weekly celebration of Holy Communion and a weekly evening service in the chapel on Mondays or Tuesdays. Wells Council of Churches was asked to provide a rota of people willing to take evening prayer. The continuing regular use of the chapel for the benefit of the residents was by now the only one of the original 1446 ordinances for Bubwith's Almshouse still carefully observed.

As well as the chapel, the Trustees also had to consider the upkeep of the east wall between the Almshouse and the property now held by the City Council. In February 1967 Cluttons, by then the Almshouse Surveyors, wrote to the Council pointing out that the east boundary wall of the garden was in a poor state and enclosing a plan showing that the wall was attached to the main fabric of the chapel. A report had recently been submitted to the Trustees and they had instructed the Chairman to enquire whether the Council were responsible for the upkeep of this wall. The Town Clerk said that he had looked into the question and he was of the opinion that it was a matter for the Trustees and not for the Council. He referred to the deed of 1436 and pointed out that the wall was old but that it had been built long after the Almshouse.

Charles Harris replied on 21 March stating that the mortuary and shed near the ash pits were part of the property for which the Council was responsible. The wall formed

part of the mortuary and enclosed the block of premises referred to in the 1436 charter. Its repair was now a matter of urgency and would the Council please arrange for its repair. The Matron felt that the wall should not be lowered as it preserved the privacy of the Almshouse and kept out hooligans. However, the matter was again deferred until it was known what form of development was proposed for the Council's land on the east side of the wall. Eventually, in 1975, the east wall was re-instated by the contractors who were then building bungalows on the site at the expense of the then new Mendip District Council.

By the 1970s the Almshouse had a different Matron. On 30 September 1966 Mrs. Findern had resigned the office which she had held for the previous thirteen stressful years. In November Mrs. Blakemore was appointed in her place, to begin her duties on 24 December, but in the following June she was superseded by Mrs. Hayes. Recent changes had made the residents much more independent so that there was less need for close supervision and a year later the Trustees decided that the Almshouse no longer needed an Under Matron. Instead they would look out for a couple as residents who would be capable of dealing with any emergencies which might arise when the Matron was absent. In her report to the Trustees in 1970 Mrs. Hayes asked that the windows of the Board Room should be made draught proof and that bolts should be fixed to the double doors on the path dividing the Almshouse property from the churchyard. She also asked for her flat to be redecorated and for emergency bells to be installed in Still's Almshouse. In June 1971 Mrs. Hayes was given permission to accept the additional post of Matron to Harper's Almshouse and in 1972 her salary was increased and arrangements were made for providing her with a retirement pension. Unfortunately, she fell ill that year and the Trustees realised that they did need an Under Matron after all and Mrs. Scott was appointed to the post.

During the last five years of Charles Harris' governorship there were no major works carried out at any of the three Almshouses but repairs and maintenance were necessary from time to time. When in 1966 the City Council had accepted responsibility for the repairs needed in the chapel, the suggestion had been made that perhaps some of the work could be done by direct labour. In December 1972 it was Corporation building staff who installed new putty in windows in Still's and Willes' Houses, re-decorated them and removed defective rain pipes and gutters on outbuildings facing St. Cuthbert's Church. A year later they were employed to decorate the exteriors of all three Houses: Bubwith, Still's and Willes'.

In 1974 there were problems with flooding due to water entering from Chamberlain Street. A scheme was drawn up by Cluttons and in March it was submitted to Mendip District Council which had by now taken over many of the former responsibilities of the City. It was made clear to the new Council that it should take action to abate the nuisance by providing flood boards and weep holes in the boundary walls at their expense as successors to Wells City Council. By May nothing had been done and the Mayor undertook to take up the matter with the District Council. It was not until December that the flood prevention work was completed and the Matron was instructed to install a cord across the doorway and a warning notice when the flood

boards were in use.

In order to meet the continuing rise in costs for repairs and maintenance of the Almshouses, negotiations with the Charity Commissioners were begun in 1974 about the possibility of setting up an Extraordinary Repair Fund. The Trustees proposed setting aside a sum based on £30 per unit in 1975 but the Charity Commissioners would allow only a smaller sum per unit. They also required assurance about the local authority's liability for the main structure of Bubwith House. In 1975 the Trustees agreed to pay annual instalments of £540 into a Repair Fund based on £20 per unit for Bubwith House and £30 per unit for Still's and Willes' Houses.

Since 1963 it had been necessary to increase the weekly rent paid by the inmates of the Almshouses. In 1974 application was made to the Charity Commissioners for a new scheme enabling the Trustees to charge £2.50 per week but in February 1975 it was proposed to charge £5 a week for single quarters and £7.50 for married quarters from April that year. Residents should be made aware that financial help was available from the Department of Health and Social Security. This was confirmed by the Trustees in September. It was the month when Charles Harris relinquished the office of Governor and Steward of the Almshouses.

During the years that the Trustees were immersed in making so many changes at the Almshouse there is little in the records about what remained of their agricultural properties but on 4 June 1975 they paid a visit to Old Wood Farm, Sand and Bagley Farms at Wedmore. This resulted eventually in the sale of Old Wood Farm and increased rents and repairs for other properties there, but by this time there was a new Governor and Steward and the Harris Years had ended. During the next few years the changes begun by Charles Harris were completed and the Almshouse was carried forward into its new role as part of a Housing Association linked with other Wells Almshouses.

Epilogue: 1975-2004

During the governorship of Charles Harris hints of the changes which were to be made by his successors had already emerged. Ever since the end of the Second World War the City Council had begun to play a much more active role in the management of the Almshouse. This was due to the universal and chronic shortage of housing throughout the country which resulted in the intervention of both central government and local authorities in all matters relating to housing. So far as the Old Almshouse was concerned there was a chronic shortage of money not only to keep the buildings in good repair but also to provide the modern facilities which 20th-century residents expected. For centuries the Almshouse had been maintained by the income received from the properties, many of them agricultural, owned by the Almshouse Trustees, but this was no longer sufficient.

Two years after the resignation of Charles Harris the tenant of Old Wood Farm at Bagley died and it was decided to sell the property by auction. It was hoped that the sale of the house and land would bring in a sum of £24,000 but it actually raised £33,250. At first it was intended to invest £30,000 and to set aside the rest to cover the cost of ensuring that the Almshouse met the statutory requirements for fire precautions but eventually only £28,500 was invested in funds which had the approval of the Charity Commissioners.

On 18 May 1978 the Trustees visited their agricultural properties at Wick, Bagley, Sand and Cheddar and on 13 July they submitted a report as to the work, particularly relating to drainage, which they required. The Trustees were firmly wedded to their agricultural properties which had upheld the Old Almshouse ever since the 15th century and they continued to consider such properties a viable investment even though it was gradually becoming evident that the income from them would never produce enough to support the Almshouse and to make the repairs and improvements which were now necessary.

In June 1979 their Land Agent assured the Trustees that he would continue to look for additional land in which to invest but in the following October a new Land Agent pointed out the difficulties of buying agricultural land. Purchase with vacant possession was expensive and the value of the land fell as soon as it was tenanted. Land already tenanted was usually snapped up by an adjoining sitting tenant on very favourable terms. The Agent thought that the present arrangement of the Almshouse estates was reasonable. It consisted mainly of small pieces of land which did not involve the Trustees in responsibility for repairs and which would always be in demand from potential tenants. The only exception was Bagley Farm at Theale which required at least another 70 acres to make it viable. The Trustees had no doubts as to where they stood. They agreed that, despite these difficulties, they would perpetuate the basis of the original Trust and would not allow capital to be transferred to paper

securities and thus become subject to the vagaries of the Stock Exchange.

The Trustees paid another visit to their agricultural properties in June 1981 by which time they were committed to improvements at Bagley Farm, particularly with regard to drainage. Grants were available from the Ministry of Agriculture for drainage work but, as the Steward pointed out in October that year, such grants were not paid until the work had been completed. Meanwhile he had outstanding bills for £2,200, including those incurred at Bagley Farm, with only £750 in the Almshouse bank account. The situation was improved when a tenant of land in Cheddar Moor surrendered his lease and the 4,269 acres were eventually sold at auction for £5,000. The Trustees again voiced their desire to buy other land to maintain a reasonable land bank for the trust. They acknowledged that it might be difficult to find land adjoining existing holdings and they instructed their Agent to look for any sort of agricultural land regardless of whether or not it was away from existing holdings.

It was not until 1986 that the Trustees had to agree that the purchase of more agricultural land was no longer viable. Their agent had reported that such an investment was at present unattractive and that the future did not look any more hopeful. He had noted that the Almshouse investments did not have to stay in agricultural land, even though he appreciated that Bubwith's Almshouse had been founded on that basis. Land would continue to be an investment worth considering because of the need for food production and the demand for housing, but it was not worth pursuing at present. This time the Trustees agreed not to buy any more agricultural land unless it adjoined an existing holding and that there should be no sales of any Trust holdings unless they were vacant.

The Almshouse did not, of course, rely solely on income from its agricultural estate. There was interest from capital which had been invested and there were what were called "contributions", in fact rents paid by the inmates. Somerset County Council, Mendip District Council and the City Council made grants to the Almshouse, the County on a yearly basis and Mendip and the City when money was needed for particular projects. From 1981 onwards income seldom matched expenditure and the situation grew worse as the years went by. In February 1981 the Charity Commissioners gave the Trustees permission to sell £5,000 of their endowment capital to cover the cost of emergency repairs which had outstripped what was available from the Emergency Repair Fund and available income. £5,000 would be sufficient to cover all expenses so far authorised and the Trustees hoped that the next year could be one of entrenchment as the Commissioners would require a proportion of the annual income to be set aside for the time being to repay the £5,000.

It was in October that year that the Steward had found himself unable to pay outstanding bills and when the accounts for 1981 were examined in May 1982, the excess of expenses over income was £1,341 as compared to £479 in 1980. Income had increased by £837 but costs by £2,353. No money had been paid into the Repair Fund which had been exhausted by the work on fire precautions in 1980. The auditor felt that the demands made on the Trustees in recent years compared to

their income was not a temporary embarrassment and that they should look for other sources of income. He estimated that the Trustees should be looking for an income of £50,000. Budget levels of expenses should be used for guidance in controlling expenses and not regarded as the amounts permitted to be spent. The aim must always be to achieve the lowest possible level of expenditure. The Steward felt that the situation had arisen because the money received from the sale of properties between 1920 and 1930 had been used for expenditure and not regarded as capital to be invested. It was clear that the Almshouse finances were in a parlous state and he thought approaches should be made to the National Association of Almshouses, local industries and charitable trusts prepared to consider revenue grants.

By this time it was becoming evident that the Almshouse buildings, and particularly Bubwith's, were badly in need of repairs and bringing up to date. In October 1982 the Steward and the Land Agent had a meeting in London with the Historic Buildings Section of the Department of the Environment and they came away much encouraged. The situation with regard to government and other public funding had changed. Previously grants had been confined to repairs only in cases of hardship in areas of housing action or general improvements, but new grants were now available for substantial and structural repairs to buildings such as almshouses wherever they were. In the case of Wells Old Almshouse, the Historic Buildings Section was keen on a scheme which would restore the old buildings to their original state and make improvements in line with modern requirements. It should be possible to obtain grants to cover 100% of the cost. The Trustees lost no time in appointing an architect who would be responsible for drawing up plans and specifications and securing grants to cover the cost of what became known as the Repairs and Improvements Scheme.

A year later the architect submitted his plans to the Trustees. He estimated that the cost would be £95,000 and thought that 75% of this should be available from the Department of the Environment through the Historic Buildings Council. The other 25% might come from Somerset County Council, Mendip District Council and Wells City Council.

It must have seemed that the future was bright but it was to be more than ten years before the scheme was put into action. Part of the problem was that alterations to Bubwith's would necessarily involve the loss of accommodation, either one or two apartments, and opinions varied as to which was the better arrangement. By 1984 English Heritage had taken over from the Historic Buildings Council and this not only prolonged the discussion but meant that only money for repairs would be forthcoming. Money for alterations would have to come from other sources. The problem was that in order to meet the requirements of English Heritage with regard to repairs some alterations were inevitable. Wells City Council had expressed willingness to cover the cost of repairs to Bubwith's roof and the exposure of the roof trusses but were persuaded to transfer their grant to the alterations demanded by English Heritage. Somerset County Council and Mendip District Council would help to the extent of their own budgets but they, too, were unwilling to provide money for alterations.

In 1982 the Friends of Bubwith House had been formed with the express purpose of raising money for particular projects relating to Bubwith's and in 1986 they undertook to raise money for a lift to be installed. The original estimate of the cost was £9,000 but in December 1986 the British Standards Institute imposed a change from an electric to a hydraulic lift doubling the likely cost. The project was saved by an interest free loan and a bequest made to the Friends. By February 1988 the lift had been installed and it was already in constant use.

Meanwhile the finances for the day-to-day running of the Almshouse continued to give cause for concern. The accounts for 1983 had shown a slight improvement. Expenses had been reduced and there was a small surplus of £4 but it would not be possible to sustain similar reductions for another year. It had been a good year on the stock market too and varying the Trust's portfolio to further increase income was recommended. By the following year however the picture was very different. In 1984 expenses had exceeded income by over £2,000. No money had been paid into the Extraordinary Repairs Fund or the cyclical Maintenance Fund and the Charity Commissioners had not agreed to an increase in contributions from the residents though their separate payments for heating and lighting had been doubled. Changes had been made in some of the Trust's investments, especially some of the money in the Charities Official Investment Fund, but it seemed that there was little they could do to improve the situation.

With so much uncertainty about the future of the Almshouse and the disruption likely to be caused by the proposed alterations to the buildings, how did the existing residents fare? The minutes show that during these years normality was preserved as far as possible. In February 1986 the Matron reported that the customary Founder's Day service had been held and, following a visit from the Health and Safety Inspector, the Almshouse had passed "with flying colours". A House Committee of residents had been set up and activities beyond the Almshouse bounds were arranged. Five residents had attended the National Association of Almshouses service in Westminster Abbey and fourteen inmates had visited Ambleside Bird Garden. There was an outing to Cheddar, a strawberry tea party in the Mayor's Parlour and shopping expeditions to Taunton, Exeter and Cardiff. When the local M. P. paid a visit in February 1987 he was impressed by what he saw and particularly by the independence of the inmates. They were residents very different from those who had preceded them and their expectations too were different. There would have to be more fundamental changes than had so far been planned.

At a special meeting held in March 1988 it was pointed out that any new accommodation would have to provide separate bedrooms: the days of small bed-sitting rooms were past. This would mean another look at the Repairs and Improvement Scheme which was still under consideration. There had been times when a smaller and less expensive scheme had been suggested but now the Trustees decided that the full scheme would have to be accepted regardless of the cost but where would the money come from?

It was not until February 1991 that it was finally accepted that the income from their capital base together with the contributions from the residents would never provide sufficient income for the Almshouse to pay its way. It was estimated that additional capital of £50,000 would only yield enough to stand still. At the present rate of erosion the Trust would fold within five years. A sub-committee was set up which reported in the following June. It thought the closure of the Almshouse would be inevitable even if the capital base was restored. Sheltered accommodation was still needed but continuation would depend on elements such as Community Care legislation and "the colour of the Government of the day". The committee recognised that throughout history sociological changes had taken place but they had accelerated over the last twenty years. People were living longer and were fitter so their expectations were increasing.

The Steward suggested that perhaps there should be some variation of the Trust to allow for a change in the type of people to be admitted to the Almshouse. By November pre-appeal discussions had been held with a number of interested bodies but it was emphasised that sentiment should be set aside and consideration given to whether or not some other body or organisation could manage things better in this day and age. Some thought should be given to a co-operative effort with a Housing Association.

By February 1992 discussions with Mendip District Council had taken place. It was the Council's opinion that the accommodation at present provided by the Almshouse was not what people expected, even if they were homeless. The rooms met basic needs but they were not large enough for housing purposes. The Trustees must enlarge the living spaces and provide sanitary and other facilities now expected. This would reduce the number of units in Bubwith House by one third. The Council recommended a link with a Housing Association and offered its help and advice but warned that it might involve a change of status for the Trust.

This report from Mendip confirmed the conclusion which the Trustees had already reached following advice received from the National Association of Almshouses. However there was considerable dismay at the thought of losing some of the character of the existing Almshouse and its independent status and it was only during the following months that the need for change was gradually accepted. It was proving difficult to attract new residents for the existing rooms but the Council had intimated that there was a demand in Wells for sheltered accommodation in places like Bubwith's, provided that it could offer self-contained units with a minimum of two rooms and a private bathroom. It should no longer be thought of as an old people's home. The Council's Housing Needs Register might help with finding suitable occupants for self-contained units which it should be possible to install without interfering with the medieval structure. The total cost of such improvements to Bubwith House was estimated at £600,000.

In order to become eligible for government funding to help with such a cost the Trust

accepted the need to register as a Housing Association with the Housing Corporation, thus becoming a Registered Social Landlord, subject to regulations set by the Corporation. Application for registration was made and granted in July 1994, to take effect from 1 November that year but, because it was a small and newly registered Association, it did not come within the criteria set for Housing Corporation Funding. The Trust would have to appoint an agent to carry out any redevelopment on its behalf. Knightstone Housing Association of Weston-super-Mare was chosen as the Trust's agent and Caroe and Partners were appointed architects to draw up plans for the project and to deal with the necessary planning applications. During this period the remaining residents were invited to view the plans and proposals for improving their accommodation and encouraged to add their own ideas if they so wished.

In order to help with the cost of the improvements the Trustees had agreed in December 1993 that their three remaining agricultural properties should be sold and in June 1994 they were offered to the sitting tenants. By the following March contracts for the sale of Bagley Farm and land at Wick were completed and in January 1996 the land at Sand was also sold.

The decision to go ahead with the improvements had been taken by July 1993. In spite of attempts to entice more residents into the Almshouse over the previous years, by 1993 there was only one surviving resident in Bubwith's and, because of his frailty, he was found a place in a care home. Only the Matron would lose her position and not be re-instated. Work could not, however, begin immediately. There were matters resulting from the transformation of the Trust into a Housing Association which had to be resolved before any building work could begin. To what extent would the City Council still be responsible for the obligations laid down in the 1436 charter?

A new scheme from the Charity Commissioners was needed to accommodate the changes in the way the Trust would now be managed. The result was that the contract for the building work could not be signed until 26 September 1995. Another result was a change of names. That of Almshouse ceased to be used and the three became Bubwith House, Still's House and Willes' House. On 13 September a tea party for the residents of Willes' and Still's was held at the Town Hall to meet the Contractor's Site Agent and the Clerk of the Works in order to keep them fully informed. A month later the procedure for these residents to apply for accommodation in the new apartments was in place and by the following March all but one couple had asked for places in Bubwith House even though they would have to observe a "No Smoking" rule. The solitary couple would rather return to their former accommodation in Willes' House because they were inveterate smokers.

The building work had begun the day after the contract was signed and it was completed on 29 March 1996. The main part of the project involved the complete gutting of Bubwith House together with the Matron's house so that it was possible to see the inside of Bubwith House between the Guildhall and the chapel as one single building from the floor to the beautiful beamed roof. The discarded flats had all comprised single spaces for cooking, eating, living and sleeping with separate

bathrooms and toilets used on a shared basis. Within the space now available eight apartments were installed, six in the area of Bubwith House and two in the area of the Matron's house. Three were upstairs and five on the ground floor. The aim had been to provide apartments with as much light and space as possible together with high quality modern fittings in the bathrooms and kitchens. Neutral colours for decoration and carpets were the same throughout. The Guildhall was also extended and provided with a kitchenette next to one of the flats in Willes' House.

The preservation and re-vamping of medieval Bubwith House formed the greater part of the project but Still's and Willes' Houses were not overlooked. Both buildings were re-roofed and one of the flats in Still's, the only one with two bedrooms, became the accommodation for a Warden, who would replace the former Matron. All the flats were re-organised internally within the confines of the existing drainage and building limitations and bathrooms, kitchens and floor coverings were of the same quality as in Bubwith. These improvements were completed in the summer of 1996 and in September a special dedication ceremony was arranged. It was a "happy and memorable occasion" but the Trust complained that the Press reporting was very poor and did not do justice to such an important occasion.

Mendip District Council had warned that becoming a Housing Association might mean changes in the way the Trust was managed and so it proved. Once the redevelopment had been completed new management systems were set in place.

A House Management Committee of three Trustees was set up, one to take the chair, one to be responsible for the buildings and the third to be responsible for the residents. The Housing Corporation recommended that the Committee should also include the Warden and a representative of the residents. There should also be two more representatives, one from the local community who could provide local voluntary help with surveying and building works and another from the Friends of Bubwith House. It was a requirement of the Corporation that one Trustee should take responsibility for an annual internal audit which would make sure that the management system was working efficiently and for suggesting any changes or improvements necessary. Budgets were set for maintenance and a Recoupment Fund opened to take money from the sale of the Trust's land holdings and investments. Another innovation was the production of an Organisation and Management Manual and a Residents' Handbook. Both set out the aims and philosophy of the Trust.

During the period of these considerable changes the decision to amalgamate Brick's Almshouse with the Old Almshouse Trust had not been forgotten but in 1993 it was agreed to defer the matter until the situation of the Old Almshouse had become clearer. In October 1996, following the completion of work on the Old Almshouse, a feasibility study was carried out on Brick's Almshouse and between 1998 and 2000 the refurbishment of the building was carried out by the Association to bring it in line with the Old Almshouse. The existing four flats were converted into two cottages with the same quality fittings as all the other buildings and were ready for occupation by the end of 1999.

In 2004 the final step was taken when Wells Old Almshouse, Brick's, Harper's and Llewellyn's and Charles' Almshouses were all brought together to form the City of Wells Almshouses. Llewellyn's and Charles' Almshouses continued to provide sheltered accommodation along with Wells Old Almshouse but Harper's Almshouse in Chamberlain Street had been empty and derelict for six or seven years. Redevelopment was not feasible and it was decided to sell the property. The money raised by the sale, £360,000, was used to provide enhanced facilities for the residents of all the Almshouses together with a new flat for the Warden in a central location. The site chosen was an area the Trustees had long wanted to enhance in the corner of Bubwith's garden adjacent to Henderson Place and it included a garden room for the use of the residents.

Can we still think of these institutions as almshouses? Historically paternalism had been built into the culture of almshouse provision. It was a means of managing the poor and those in need and, in the early years, an act of charity on the part of their founders. Towards the end of the 20th century the Trustees of these establishments recognised that this approach was no longer possible. Both local and central government now played a vital role in their management. Residents expected a privacy they had not enjoyed as almspeople and should be given the opportunity to participate in decisions made.

There were other significant changes to the Old Almshouse. In June 2000 it was agreed that the inmates need not be Wells residents. They would qualify for a place provided they lived within the BA5 postal area. Modern technology also appeared: a computer for the use of the inmates and a Sky television dish were approved. Perhaps they are no longer almshouses in the original sense but by retaining their original names we are constantly reminded of their long and benevolent history.

Appendix 1

The Melsbury Story

Even before the agreement with the City was sealed in 1436, the executors had begun to look for a property which might provide an income for the Almshouse. The first indication that Bubwith's executors were interested in acquiring an estate at Melsbury was a grant dated 25 August 1432¹ by which Thomas Wayfer granted to Sir John Stourton, Kt., Richard Stourton, clerk, John Stourton of Preston and William Carent, one time Escheator of Somerset, all his lands and tenements, rents, services and reversions, with their appurtenances in Melsbury and Wookey Hole in the Hundred of Wells Forum in the county of Somerset, apparently on his forthcoming marriage to Joan Broke of Hallowtrow.²

The conditions of the grant were that, in addition to paying the customary rents and services due to the capital lords of the fee, the new owners would pay Thomas 20 marks (£13 6s. 8d.) a year which was to go to Bath Abbey and that his wife, Joan, would be paid as much of the rents from the estate as could be agreed with the new owners. If Joan died before him, or if the marriage did not take place, Thomas' heirs would receive one red rose at Midsummer every year for the next 40 years. Thereafter they would receive £100 a year. If these terms were not met Thomas or his heirs could re-possess the property. This arrangement may well have suited both parties. Wayfer retained some hold on the property and Bubwith's executors did not have to find a large sum of money to buy the estate outright. They may still not have known just how much money would accrue to them from the residue of Bubwith's estate.

Whatever property was eventually chosen, because it would remain in the Trustees' hands in perpetuity, it was first necessary to obtain official approval. On 10 July 1438, at the request of the executors and with the help of Bishop John Stafford, who, by good fortune, happened to be Chancellor of England at the time, a licence in mortmain was issued. It enabled the Dean and Chapter, who were to be the Trustees of any Almshouse property, to hold lands and rents to the value of 40 marks (£28 13s. 4d.) a year to support a Chaplain to celebrate divine service in "a hospital called the almessehouse lately erected in Wellys" and to maintain the twenty four residents. Prayers in the chapel should include the King, John Stafford and his progenitors.³

An estate so conveniently close to Wells as Melsbury would obviously be attractive to the executors, because it should be relatively easy to administer. However, its acquisition by the Almshouse was fraught with difficulties spread over many years. It makes an interesting story.

Thomas Wayfer's principal estate was at Sherston and Willisley in Wiltshire. The Melsbury estate in Somerset had come into the hands of the Wayfer family through the marriage of Margery, one of the two daughters of William de Melsburgh, to Robert Wayfer of Willisley. On her father's death the estate had been divided between

Margery and her sister, Agnes, who married Ralph de Shipton. On 2 January 1313 Ralph granted their share of the estate to his brother-in-law.⁴ Robert Wayfer later leased it to Richard de Forde, Treasurer of Wells Cathedral, for the term of his life at an annual rent of £8 13s. 4d.⁵ By Michaelmas 1332 the Melsbury estate was back in the hands of Robert and his wife and it passed to and fro between the brothers until Robert's death in 1348. His widow, Margery, immediately conveyed her share of the property to her son, Robert, who died in 1360 and was succeeded by his brother, Thomas. This Thomas was almost certainly the father of Thomas Wayfer, party to the deed of 25 August 1432.

Thomas Wayfer evidently felt that this grant to Sir John Stourton and the others needed ratification by some higher authority. He admitted that his own seal was unknown to most people and he "specially and personally arranged for the seal of the Mayoralty of the City of Bristol to be set to these presents".⁶ The Mayor, Richard Trenode, duly obliged but Thomas wanted more.

On 27 August he appeared before the Mayor in the counting house of John Bolton, the Town Clerk, in the High Street "in his own person and not under compulsion but completely of his own volition in order to affirm truly and, touching the holy gospels of God, took the corporal oath, saying and affirming upon this his oath so laid upon him, that he never before the 25th of August last past acknowledged any recognizance or staple or statute merchant, nor had ever made any gift or feoffment nor granted any rent to any person or persons from any of those lands and tenements, rents, services and reversions with their appurtenances, nor any part of the same", which had been conveyed by the deed of 25 August.⁷ Wayfer said that on that day he was "in full and peaceable possession and seisin of all ... the lands and tenements, rents, services and reversions with their appurtenances without pretext or falsehood whatsoever". The Mayor stated that he had seen and touched the deed in question and Wayfer's statement was duly sealed with the Mayor's seal and enrolled by the Town Clerk. Did Thomas Wayfer seek this confirmation of his grant because he feared it might be challenged?

The challenge was not long in coming. The instigator was one Thomas Harryes who claimed kinship to Thomas Wayfer, though the exact nature of the relationship was never stated. It may have been through Thomas Wayfer's first wife, Aderna, either by a former husband or even possibly by an illicit liaison.⁸ Harryes seems to have been concerned to protect the interests of Thomas Wayfer's two sons, John, the heir, and another Thomas. He may have felt that the sons' interests would be threatened by Thomas Wayfer's proposed marriage to Joan Broke.

On 26 March 1433 Thomas Harryes of Sherston Parva granted to John Wayfer, son and heir of Thomas Wayfer, all the lands and tenements in the manor of Willisley, Wiltshire, and all the lands and tenements in the demesne of Melsbury and Wookey Hole, which he claimed to hold by gift and feoffment of Thomas Wayfer.⁹ On 1 April that year there was executed a quitclaim, ostensibly by Thomas Harryes, to the Melsbury property in favour of Robert Stourton, one of the parties to the grant of

August 1432, though Harryes later said it was a forgery.¹⁰ By October 1433 the situation had changed dramatically. The proposed marriage of Thomas Wayfer to Joan Broke had apparently been abandoned, for whatever reason, and Thomas had decided to disinherit his sons. On 12 October he sealed a second deed confirming the grant of the Melsbury and Wookey Hole estate to Sir John Stourton and the others, still for an annual payment of 20 marks, but there was no longer any mention of a payment to Bath Abbey, nor of Joan Broke. Following his own death Thomas' heirs would now receive nothing.¹¹ This second deed also received ratification, this time by the Prior of Bath and the Master of the City of Wells, who appended their seals.

On 14 March 1434 Thomas Harryes acted as though he had certainly not made any quitclaim in the previous year by appointing Robert Hert, who had married one of his daughters, to deliver seisin of the manor of Melsbury and Wookey Hole to John and Philip de Witton and others.¹² Harryes said that he held this property together with Hugh Bisley and Thomas Wayfer, the younger, "of the gift and feoffment of Thomas Wayfer, the elder, according to the form of a certain deed to them thereof made".

That there was such a deed cannot be disputed as it survives among the Almshouse archives. It was dated at Sherston on 10 December 1411 and records that Thomas Wayfer of Willisley granted to Hugh Bisley, Thomas Harryes and Thomas Wayfer, his son, both his lands and tenements in the towns and fields of Willesley and Sherston Magna in Wiltshire and in Melsbury and Wookey Hole in Somerset.¹³ Thomas Wayfer persisted in his claim that he had never granted the Somerset property to Bisley, Harryes and his own son, only the Wiltshire estates. He made two further attestations under oath to this effect on 9 July 1434, one before the Priory of Bath and the other before the Mayor of that City.¹⁴

This uncertainty over the validity of Thomas Wayfer's grant of 1432 may be the reason why no further steps were taken to transfer the Melsbury property to the Dean and Chapter in trust for the Almshouse until 1438. During the four years after 1434 the records provide no evidence of any further interference from Thomas Harryes and John Reynold may have become sufficiently confident to proceed further. The result was the licence in mortmain of 10 July 1438 obtained through the good offices of Bishop Stafford. Two years after this, on 3 October 1440, Sir John Stourton and William Carent, who had held the Melsbury estate jointly with Richard and John Stourton since 1432, granted it to John Reynold, now Sub-Dean, Thomas Chelyngton, the Communar, Thomas Goldclyf, Richard and John Shere, clerks.¹⁵ It could still not be transferred to the Dean and Chapter until further royal approval had been obtained.

In October 1441 a writ *ad quod damnum* was sent to the Escheator of Somerset, William Neuton, to hold an enquiry concerning the proposed transfer to the Dean and Chapter and on 8 October this took place at Axbridge. It found that a conveyance of the estate to the Dean and Chapter would not be harmful to royal interests and a writ was directed to Chancery for the issue of the necessary licence.¹⁶ This second licence in mortmain, dated 20 November 1441, has also not survived, except as a copy on the Patent Roll. It enabled John Reynold to convey to the Dean and Chapter the manor of

Melsbury in the Hundred of Wells Forum, and three messuages, 20 acres of land and 7 acres of meadow in Wookey, Cheddar and Draycott. Together they were valued at 9 marks a year in part satisfaction of the 40 marks of lands and rents they already had licence to acquire.

In anticipation that the necessary approval would be forthcoming, John Reynold and his co-feoffees held a manorial court at Melsbury on 23 March 1441.¹⁷ In effect they were compiling a survey of the manor, identifying the tenants, the lands which they held and on what terms and conditions. Those who were copyhold tenants produced their copies of court roll as evidence of their title. Only one tenant, John Stot, failed to produce his copy and his case was disallowed until the next court. None of these copies of court roll have survived so there is no means of knowing what rents and services were due from them.

A number of tenants had been granted long-term leases by Thomas Wayfer between 1425 and 1430 and these survive in the Almshouse archives. Of the twenty tenants who attended the court on 23 March, seven held their lands by such leases paying rents amounting in total to over £8 a year.¹⁸ A few new tenants were admitted at the same court and their fines, though not their rents, were recorded. All the tenants, both old and new, promised fealty to their new lords.

Some of the manorial lands were in the lords' hands and details of these were presented to the court by the homage. One was the fulling mill at Wookey Hole which had been let to Walter Dylverton for 92 years on 29 September at an annual rent of 12d. It now remained in John Reynold's hands.¹⁹ A parcel of land on the hill called Mendip used to bring in 3s. 4d. a year and another in Merlemede 3d. Of greater concern were 30 acres of land at Redehull and elsewhere and 9 acres of meadow in Poleshamede which were bringing in no income while they were in the lords' hands. To remedy this a second manorial court was held on 26 July 1441 at which most of the 30 acres at Redehull were let "to cultivate for this year" in small parcels, mostly to existing tenants of the manor.²⁰ No parcel was larger than four acres and one was as small as an acre. Each tenant paid a fine ranging from 1d. to 8d. according to the size of his holding. This brought in a total of 7s. 7d. The nine acres of meadow in Poleshamede were recorded as having been sold to John Reynold. Three acres of demesne land still remained in the lords' hands.

After the issue of the second licence in mortmain in November 1441 a grant of the Melsbury estate by John Reynold and his co-feoffees to the Dean and Chapter should have been routine but, if there was such a grant, all trace of it has disappeared. All we have is a contemporary copy of an *inspeximus* issued by Dean Nicholas Carent on 24 July 1454.²¹ It is in the form of a lengthy letter addressed to the Mayor and Commonalty of Wells stating that he had found, in the Cathedral Archives, evidence concerning the foundation of the Almshouse. He acknowledged the role that the City had to play in the running of the Almshouse and, so that both parties should have full understanding of the arrangements, he quoted in full an instrument dated 15 November 1446, under the seal of John Stafford, by then Archbishop of Canterbury,

setting out in full the statutes and ordinances for the government of the Almshouse, which had been drawn up by John Reynold, John Storthwayt and himself. These form the principal part of the manuscript and are the only surviving copy of the original ordinances, which are dealt with in Chapter 3.

They are preceded by a concise statement concerning William Gascoigne's gift to the Almshouse, also dealt with in Chapter 3, and a much vaguer statement about the property acquired by John Reynold. It says that Reynold, a canon and the Sub-Dean, by the licence and authority given to him, had by his charter confirmed to the Dean and Chapter certain unspecified lands, tenements, rents, etc. scattered in various places in Somerset, which he had acquired with and from goods which came to him from the late Bishop Nicholas Bubwith. The yearly value of these lands was recorded in the rent roll. The equivocal nature of this statement does suggest that a conveyance of the Melsbury estate by John Reynold to the Dean and Chapter had at least been intended but perhaps Reynold and Stafford felt that the title to it was still not sufficiently secure to incorporate any details in such an important, public document.

By 1446 a few outstanding problems had been overcome. The holder of Melsbury manor was obliged to pay suit of court at Harptree²² and on 20 August 1442 Alice, widow of Philip Hampton, Lady of East Harptree, gave John Reynold permission to give the manor to the Dean and Chapter for the support of Wells Almshouse.²³ The lord of the manor also owed allegiance to the Honour of Gloucester and on 11 October 1445 John Reynold paid a fine of 100s. to John Chocke, Feodary of the High Court of Bristol and Receiver of the Honour, both for acquiring the manor from Sir John Stourton and William Carent without licence and for granting him permission to give the manor to the Dean and Chapter in perpetuity.²⁴

In the previous year, on 20 April, five tenants of the manor holding leases for lives of land in Melsbury granted by Thomas Wayfer, paid fines ranging from 20d. to 6s. 8d. to the same John Chocke for acquiring the lands without licence.²⁵ They may well be related to the grant by the City in September 1446 of an annual pension of 20s. for life to "that honest and discreet man John Chokke, man of law" for his good and laudable counsel".²⁶ Were the City fathers so concerned to ensure that the title to the Melsbury estate could not be challenged in any way that they consulted John Chokke on the matter? His advice may have given Reynold and the Dean and Chapter further reason to proceed cautiously.

A month after the sealing of the instrument by Archbishop Stafford, John Wayfer of Sherston, gent., Thomas Wayfer's son and heir, executed a deed setting out the conditions upon which he granted the manor of Melsbury and Wookey Hole to Edward Basyng of Brynkeworth.²⁷ The deed no longer exists but we know that the witnesses included Sir Edmund Hungerford and Thomas Hasard, an alderman of Malmesbury.²⁸ Thomas Harryes was presumably dead by this time and John Reynold had apparently accepted the fact that he would have to clear the title to the Melsbury estate of any claims by either John Wayfer or Harryes' two daughters, Aderna and Margery. At this time he seems to have upheld the view of Thomas Wayfer, the elder,

that there had been no grant of the manor to Hugh Bisley, Thomas Harryes and Thomas Wayfer, the younger.

On 20 March 1447 a notarial instrument was drawn up by Thomas Been, public notary of the diocese of Bath and Wells, incorporating evidence given him by William Powle of Wookey Hole and others, tenants of the manor, all aged 60 years and upwards, that their only lord was Thomas Wayfer, the elder, who had held the manor for 60 years and more, until it was sold to Sir John Stourton in 1432.²⁹ Asked if Hugh Bisley had ever been enfeoffed of the manor, "they unanimously said not according to their knowledge", but they revealed that Bisley had been Thomas Wayfer's steward. These statements were made in the presence of William Gascoigne, then Master of Wells, and a number of his fellow burgesses, again suggesting that the City authorities may have been exerting pressure to get the matter of the title to Melsbury cleared up as soon as possible. By now the Almshouse had been built and the first residents admitted so it was essential to know that the endowment was secure.

The Wayfer faction had still not given up, however. In 1448 the Abbot of Malmesbury employed Walter Everard, gent., to examine the title of Hugh Bisley, Thomas Harryes and Thomas Wayfer, the younger, to the manor of Melsbury and Wookey Hole, which title Everard found to be proven. The verdict was delivered on 16 February 1448. A month later the Abbot lodged a complaint about John Reynold's conduct.³⁰

He said that Reynold and his counsel declared that Bisley, Harryes and Wayfer, the younger, had never had either livery or possession of the manor. Walter Everard and Robert Longe, of Wroxale, had felt themselves threatened when they had to go to Wells to be examined by John Reynold and John Wayfer. Two tenants of the manor, John Forest and William Wheler, both of Wookey Hole, had testified that, when Thomas Wayfer, the elder, had delivered possession of the manor to Bisley, Harryes and Wayfer, Hugh Bisley had broken a bough in their presence and had subsequently held a manor court in his own name and those of his partners. This Walter Everard and Robert Longe reported to the Abbot when they came home. Reynold had also claimed that Thomas Harryes had given up all claim to the manor in favour of John Stourton but this was not the case.³¹ Harryes had appeared before the Abbot and brought with him a number of witnesses from Sherston who would testify that he had never executed such a quitclaim. It was openly known in Sherston that the document had been forged by one John Newe of Sherston.

By this time John Reynold was approaching the end of his life and he must have become tired of the wrangling over the Melsbury estate.³² It may be then that he decided to call on the Hungerford family to help him resolve the problem. Sir Walter Hungerford, whom Nicholas Bubwith had nominated as an overseer of his will to help the executors should any difficulties arise, died on 9 August 1449 and it was his second son, Edmund, who took on the task entrusted to his father. He had already been called upon to act as a witness to the deed by which John Wayfer granted the manor to Edward Basyng in December 1446.³³ He now took a much more active

role.

On 6 August 1449 the two daughters and co-heiresses of Thomas Harryes, Aderna, who had married Nicholas Walker, and Margery, who had married Robert Hert, granted the manor of Melsbury and Wookey Hole to Sir Edmund Hungerford and on the same day Edward Basyngge was given power of attorney to take seisin of the manor on his behalf.³⁴ Also on the same day Sir Edmund transferred the manor to a number of very powerful feoffees, namely John de la Bere, Bishop of St. David's, Thomas Courtenay, Earl of Devon, John Tiptoft, Earl of Worcester, Lord Robert Hungerford, his brother, Sir Philip Courtenay, Kt., Sir Edward Hulle, Kt., John Noreys, Esq., and Walter Osborne, clerk.³⁵ Again Edward Basyngge, together with Richard Page, who had been given power of attorney to deliver seisin of the manor to Sir Edmund on behalf of the Walkers and Herts,³⁶ were now given power of attorney to deliver the manor to these feoffees.³⁷

Who now was likely to challenge the title to the manor? All possible claimants were either dead or had surrendered any rights they might have inherited. As a final safeguard, on 20 January 1464, Robert Mede of Willisley, whose wife was Joan, the daughter and heiress of John Wayfer, confirmed the title of the Dean and Chapter to the manor of Melsbury and Wookey Hole, which the Dean and Chapter lately had by the gift and grant of John Reynold "to the use of the chaplain and poor people of the almshouse", so that neither Robert or Joan, or their heirs, nor any other person could lay claim to them in future.³⁸ The deed bore the seal of the City of Wells and was witnessed by the Master and a number of burgesses. Again the City seems to have played a role in making absolutely sure that the Almshouse endowment was safe from interference.

Was the acquisition of the manor of Melsbury and Wookey Hole worth all the trouble involved? In the long run it probably was. The two licences in mortmain had allowed a total endowment of forty marks of which nine were to be derived from the Melsbury estate. When the survey of the manor was conducted in 1441 the rents which were recorded amounted to just over £8. Between 1447 and 1465 no manorial court rolls or other manorial records have survived in the Almshouse archives. The first rent roll proper, covering all the Almshouse properties as they then were, is undated but is certainly as late as the last quarter of the 15th century. By then the income from the Melsbury property was reckoned to be just over £7 a year.³⁹ The decision to acquire the estate appeared to have been justified but, on its own, it was never enough.

Notes

¹ D&CA, AH/AF/165.

² Thomas Wayfer's first wife, Aderna (or Adriana or Audrey), probably died in 1425. She is last mentioned in a lease dated 3 June 1425: D&CA, AH/AF/143.

³ *D & C*, Vol. 2, Charter no. 183.

⁴ *Ibid.*, Charter no. 207, 30 September 1324.

⁵ *Ibid.*, Charter no. 375.

⁶ D&CA, AH/AF/165.

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- ⁷ D&CA, AH/AF/164.
- ⁸ Thomas Harryes had a daughter, also called Aderna, which adds weight to this suggestion: D&CA, AH/AF/209.
- ⁹ D&CA, AH/AF/169.
- ¹⁰ D&CA, AH/AF/170, 202A.
- ¹¹ D&CA, AH/AF/172.
- ¹² D&CA, AH/AF/173. This is the first deed to describe the property as the Manor of Melsbury and Wookey Hole.
- ¹³ D&CA, AH/AF/126.
- ¹⁴ D&CA, AH/AF/175, 176.
- ¹⁵ D&CA, AH/AF/82.
- ¹⁶ *D & C*, Vol. 2, Charters nos. 611, 612 and 613; *Calendar of Patent Rolls, Henry VI*, Vol. 2, 1441-46, p. 24.
- ¹⁷ D&CA, AH/AF/184(a).
- ¹⁸ D&CA, AH/AF/154-161. The total rents named in these leases amounted to £8 13s. 6d., but not all the tenants appeared at the manorial court on 23 March 1441.
- ¹⁹ D&CA, AH/AF/162.
- ²⁰ D&CA, AH/AF/184(b).
- ²¹ D&CA, AH/AF/552. The survival of this and a number of other contemporary copies of documents concerning the Almshouse is both providential and remarkable. They are written on parchment and were incorporated in a volume compiled in the 19th century. The rest of the volume consists of 19th-century copies and translations of other documents concerning the Almshouse. It is thought it might have been compiled by Thomas Serel, a Wells antiquarian, and sold at the auction of some of his books and papers in Bath in 1909. The purchaser may have been Herbert Balch, intending it for Wells Museum, but it subsequently found its way to Wells Town Hall where it was discovered among the City Archives. It was transferred, with official approval, to the Cathedral in 1989 to join the rest of the Almshouse records.
- ²² D&CA, AH/AF/38.
- ²³ D&CA, AH/AF/185.
- ²⁴ D&CA, AH/AF/195.
- ²⁵ D&CA, AH/AF/187-191.
- ²⁶ *Wells Convocation Acts Books*, Vol. 90, *op. cit.*, p. 318.
- ²⁷ D&CA, AH/AF/199. This is one of the deeds recorded by Walter de Gray Birch in his catalogue of the Almshouse archives compiled c. 1881. The deed is now missing and so we do not know the conditions of this grant.
- ²⁸ D&CA, AH/AF/202 and 202A; AH/AF/202 is another document recorded by Walter de Gray Birch but now missing. AHAF/202A has survived. It was transcribed in full and printed in the *Eighth Report of the Historical Manuscripts Commission* (1861), p. 639.
- ²⁹ D&CA, AH/AF/201.
- ³⁰ D&CA, AH/202 and 202A; see note 28 above.
- ³¹ D&CA, AH/AF/170, the quitclaim of 1 April 1433.
- ³² John Reynold was dead by May 1451. *D & C*, Vol. 2, Charter no. 641: a grant was made by his executors to the Vicars Choral of £2 and a pair of vestments for the daily repetition of a prayer for his soul.
- ³³ D&CA, AH/AF/199.
- ³⁴ D&CA, AH/AF/207, 208.
- ³⁵ D&CA, AH/AF/205.
- ³⁶ D&CA, AH/AF/209.
- ³⁷ D&CA, AH/AF/206.
- ³⁸ D&CA, AH/AF/236.
- ³⁹ D&CA, AH/AF/285.

Appendix 2

Duties of the Matron and Assistant Matron, 1927

The Matron must:

Reside permanently at the Almshouse. She was not to be absent at night without the special permission of the Governor, nor at other times without leaving the Assistant Matron in charge.

She was to undertake the general supervision of the [?] and of the inmates, including those in the two wings and, surprisingly, those in Brick's Almshouse.

She was responsible for seeing that the Chapel, the passages, stairs, kitchen and wash-house, the Committee Room, the hospital, the closets and the outbuildings were kept properly clean and dusted: also the rooms of any inmates who were too feeble to clean their own.

She should see that the chimneys were swept and the windows cleaned regularly.

She should keep proper order among the inmates who were expected to keep their rooms clean and tidy.

She was responsible for lighting and attending fires in the chapel, the Committee Room and in the rooms of the more feeble inmates.

She should see the gas turned off and the doors closed at the proper hours. The door of the Chamberlain Street porch was to be locked at dusk.

She must inform the Doctor of all cases of illness or accident and carry out his instructions.

She must inform the Governor of all complaints against the inmates, of all repairs needed and of any emergencies.

She must have the chapel ready for all services and attend them herself.

She was to act generally under the directions and instructions of the Governor.

She must devote the whole of her time to the duties of the Almshouse.

The duties of the Assistant Matron and the terms offered to Edith Appleby in 1927 were:

To light fires, assist the Matron and act under her; also to do any necessary cleaning

with the help of the charwoman.

To reside permanently at the Almshouse.

To undertake the general supervision of the Almshouse and its inmates in the absence of the Matron.

To attend chapel services.

She would receive an annual salary of £60.

She would have the use of two furnished rooms with coal, gas and medical attendance provided but she would receive no allowance for board, washing or clothing.

Her appointment could be terminated at any time given one month's notice or the forfeit of one month's salary.

She must sign an agreement that the two rooms and their contents would be handed over at the end of her engagement in good condition, subject to fair wear and tear. The agreement, together with an inventory of the contents of the rooms, was signed on 19 May 1927.¹

Notes

¹ Source document is D&CA, AH/M/3.

Appendix 3

The Almshouse Rules, 1938

Rooms: Each inmate is entitled to a room or (if married) to two rooms but must provide his own furniture.

Clothes: A new hat and overcoat is provided when required for each man and a new bonnet and cloak for each woman, but in case of death the last hat and coat or bonnet and cloak are to be left for the next inmate.

Linen: Every year each inmate is supplied with material to make up and submitted to the Governor or Lady Visitor for inspection.

Pay: Each inmate receives the weekly sum of seven shillings which is paid every Friday at 2 o'clock in the Men's Kitchen.

Medical Attendance: Medical attendance and medicine are provided for all inmates while in the Almshouse but not for their wives.

Funerals: On the death of an inmate the sum of £5 5s. 0d. towards his funeral is paid by the Trustees to the undertaker. The inmate's nearest relative takes his pay up to the first Friday after his death (less any fee paid for his laying out). The funerals of inmates are to be attended by those who can walk and each then receives 2½d. for refreshments.

Residing: Every inmate must reside constantly and sleep in his house or room and keep it and himself clean and tidy, but leave of absence can be given by the Governor.

Lodgers: No inmate is allowed to have any person to sleep or have meals in his room except his wife or except in case of serious illness.

Closing Time: No inmate may stay out of the Almshouse after 9 o'clock in the evening from 1st November to 31st January or after 10 o'clock from 1st February to 31st October.

Visitors: All persons visiting the inmates must leave the Almshouse not later than 8 p.m. in the winter and not later than 9 p.m. in the summer.

Lamps: No inmate is allowed to use spirit or oil lamps in his room.

Electric light: Electric light is now provided in every room and inmates must be careful to switch off the light when they leave their room: and all lights must be extinguished by 10.30 p.m. in the summer and 10 p.m. in the winter.

Kitchens: The downstairs kitchen is for the use of all the men and for the women who live downstairs. The upstairs kitchen is for women only and the women may also use the Committee Room for sitting, reading and working. Men having outside houses are not to use the inside kitchen for cooking without the permission of the Matron but may sit there.

Chapel: All who can do so are expected to attend the Chapel services in the Almshouse.

Work: All inmates who can do so are expected to assist the Matron in the garden and other work and in taking messages when required.

Laundry: All women are entitled to the use of the wash house at time[s?] to be arranged by the Matron but not on Sundays. As the noise of the mangle disturbs those in the Men's Kitchen it is not to be used between 1 and 4 o'clock in the afternoon.

Closets: The inside closets are for the use of the women only and the outside closets are for the use of the men.

Bath, etc.: The lavatories may be used by all inside inmates as also the bath, subject to arrangements by the Matron.

Matron's Orders: Inmates must at all times obey the orders of the Matron and her Assistant but can appeal to the Governor if they think such orders are unfair or unreasonable.

Penalties: Any inmate who does not conform to any of these rules or gives way to drink or does not behave properly is liable to have all or part of his weekly pay stopped and after the first offence may be expelled by order of the Trustees.¹

Notes

¹ Source document is D&CA, AH/M/3.

Appendix 4

Inventory of Furniture in the Under Matron's Cottage

1 Armchair	1 sugar basin
1 Iron bedstead	2 large knives
1 wire mattress	2 small knives
2 white table cloths	Dust pan and brush
3 tea cloths	1 tray
3 bath towels	1 pie dish
2 Duchess sets	1 cake tin
2 pairs sheets	1 broom
3 blankets	1 scrubbing brush
1 Quilt	2 blacklead brushes
2 Toilet covers	1 polishing brush
2 pillow cases	1 rug
2 pairs white curtains	1 glass
2 pairs pink curtains	1 bucket
1 green table cloth	1 pepper pot
Lino: 2 rooms	1 suet grater
2 chairs	2 egg cups
1 table	1 mattress
1 fender & fire irons	1 bolster
1 coal scoop	1 pillow
1 cretonne curtain	1 chest of drawers
$\frac{1}{4}$ dinner service	1 wash stand
$\frac{1}{4}$ tea service	1 ware [?basin and jug]
3 tea spoons	2 chairs
2 large forks	1 water bottle & tumbler
2 small forks	1 coal saver
2 dessert spoons	1 dripping tin
2 table spoons	1 candle stick
1 iron saucepan	1 fry pan
1 ash preventer	6 dusters
4 blinds	1 kettle

Signed: E. Appleby: in presence of Trustees, 19 May 1927; appended to signed acceptance of post. These articles now in her custody, to return in good condition subject to fair wear and tear.¹

Notes

¹ Source document is D&CA, AH/AF/557.

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