

DAME MARY BRIDGEMAN CHARITY TRUST

BACKGROUND:

The Charity was established by Lady Mary Bridgeman, the wife of Sir John Bridgeman I of Castle Bromwich Hall. After Sir John's death in 1710 Lady Mary made her Last Will and Testament on 19th November 1711; this document is six pages long and the Trustees have recently obtained a copy of this from the National Archives in London. It is hand written in 'modern' English of the early 18th Century and can be read fairly easily although some phrases and the formation of some letters (especially capitals) do complicate the issue. Lady Mary died in early 1713 and this will was granted probate on 16th March 1713 with her second son, Orlando Bridgeman as one of the Executors. The eldest son, Sir John II had succeeded his father; he continued to add improvements to the Hall and commissioned Thomas White of Worcester to build the present Church of St Mary and St Margaret.

There were complications in establishing the Charity and a Charity Commissioners journal of the 1830's indicates that this was enacted in 1725. A colleague of mine who is very experienced in this field and is related to Lady Mary's family (the Saunders) informed me:
Quote:

"Jerry. Did I make it clear my antiquarian book makes it clear that Lady Mary's will created the Charity. It says that her son used the money from it unofficially by giving out coals to the poor until the feoffees were ready to do it fully in 1725. There were some accounts in the parish chest I think that told the Charity Commissioners in 1830s about the first days. Doreen"

The Trust has a transcription of some early accounts of payments made between 1737 to 1770 that was published –probably by the old Castle Bromwich Advertiser in the late 50's early 1960's - and gives as its source the Castle Bromwich Parish Church magazine "CONTACT". An example of this is:-

"1751 June 1st. Pd Mr Wenden for carriage of Charles Hargroves wife to Birm, to be Electrified for her Paralytic disorder 4/6."

I wonder what 'Electrified' meant? This, 1751, was before the Lunar Society (1766-1809) was formed that used to study the sciences (Physics, Chemistry etc). It is difficult to say what the payments in the first half of the 18th Century (usually old shillings) equate to in modern values but under the same Will Lady Mary bequeathed £4. to establish a girls and infants school!

OVER THE YEARS:

Since 1725 the Charity has been amended and revised to suit the needs of the times; always remember that it was not until after the second world war that the present 'Welfare State' became established that actually looks after (as well as it can) our less fortunate citizens. This is not the place to embark on a study of the Poor Law system, workhouses and the like, suffice it to say that up until the 1940's the onus was on the family in the first place (as it still is in many third world countries) and secondly on the Parish. This is where Charities such as the Dame Mary, the Richard Knight and St Thomas' Dole were able to give assistance.

Up until 1984 the Dame Mary Bridgeman Charity owned a farm at Hurley, between Kingsbury and Atherstone that was farmed by a tenant farmer and the surplus income this generated funded the grants made by the Charity. Due to changes in the farming economies (Brussels and European Community?) it was decided to sell the farm and invest the proceeds in a safe portfolio of Stocks and Shares which was duly enacted and is how we now operate.

The Charity meets twice a year (May and November) to distribute the interest gained from the portfolio to individuals or organisations from within the ecclesiastical parishes of St Mary and St Margaret and St Clements of Alexandria who apply to the Charity and fall within the criteria established by the Charity Commissioners in a document (Regulations) dated 3rd February 1989. We have three funds under the Dame Mary Bridgeman Charity heading under which the interest is allocated:-

2/5th (40%) to the Ecclesiastical Fund

2/5th (40%) to the Non Ecclesiastical (Community) Fund

1/5th (20%) to the Education Fund

Under the same 'Regulations' we cannot support National Charities such as the 'Poppy Appeal' or 'Children in Need' or organisations such as the NSPCC, RSPCA and the RNIB.

Grants may be awarded where there is a recognised need that is not covered by the Social Services, or there is proven financial hardship in the applicant's personal circumstances that to meet the anticipated need would cause further distress. The Trustees have been advised to follow the guidelines below:

** It is for the charity trustees to decide whether need exists in any particular case and to assess the extent of that need. Eligibility for statutory benefits is not a decisive factor in itself. People receiving such benefits may need additional help from charitable funds. Equally, it must be borne in mind that those who are not receiving statutory benefits and who are not eligible for them may also need help*

** Charity trustees proposing to give immediate aid in cases of emergency should take into account any arrangements made by the statutory authorities to provide essential services in such an emergency and should ascertain, so far as they can, that emergency relief is not available from public funds.*

An example of this is apparent in Ecclesiastical Fund whereby the ongoing maintenance of the structure of the Churches is at risk and contributions from external sources, such as the Diocese, are not forthcoming.

Any person or organisation may apply to the Charity for consideration but should ensure that their request reaches the Secretary by 31st October for our November meeting or 30th April for our May meeting.

The Dame Mary Bridgeman Charity is also responsible for the administration of the Butler and Sadler Fund to supply Bibles to School Leavers at St Mary and St Margaret's CE Aided School. The Butler and Sadler Trust owned the land on which the school was

built and was very active in establishing this school on its original location near the (Village) Green in the 1870's. This Trust (now disbanded) may be able to trace its origins to Isaac Sadler who was one of the witnesses to Lady Mary's Will in 1711.

Jerry Dutton

Secretary/Treasurer, 60 Whateley Crescent, Castle Bromwich, West Midlands, B36 0DP.