

Stoke Climsland Charity Trust

For many centuries, between the Dissolution of the Monasteries in the 16th century to the 19th century, when populations became more mobile, the 'welfare system' was parish based. Those that had some wealth contributed a rate for those in need. The Parish Overseers were responsible for setting the rate each year, which was charged according to the value of the property and was therefore only paid by landowners or tenants of land. Being ratepayers themselves the Overseers would not want to set too high a rate but were also well aware that at some time in their old age they might need assistance themselves so it would not be good policy to be too harsh. They also had the advantage of knowing the parish intimately and would be able to calculate next year's rate knowing there would be Mary Brown's bastard child to care for and Mrs Jones husband who was dying of consumption and would leave her and her family widowed. This system worked extremely well for centuries.

In addition to the funds available through the rates, many parishes also had Charities. It was common for the wealthier residents to leave something for the poor in their wills. Often these were just one-off payments of a few pounds but sometimes they were more substantial. In 1786 Robert Wood of Stoke Climsland gave the income of some land to be used for teaching the children of poor to read, but this only applied for 20 years. Joan Clarke in 1783 also gave money for the same purpose but by 1836 this was treated as void.

The Stoke Climsland Charity Trust today, is based upon donations by three persons. Sadly the first person is an 'Unknown Donor'. This donor was 'unknown' even in 1786 and it was said at the time that the gift came from 'time immemorial'. The benefaction consisted of land and an almshouse, income from the rent of this was distributed amongst the poor every Good Friday. It is believed that the Almshouse is the cottage on the crossroads of the Penpill/Horsebridge and Stoke Climsland/Beals Mill road. It is marked on the 1841 tithe map and in 1905 is listed as producing an annual rent of £14. 10. 0., the tenant at that time being William Coles. The Minutes of the Charity for the first half of the 20th century contain repeated references to the maintenance of the Almshouse and the need for modernisation. Eventually a decision was made to sell it with the land and in 1965 it was sold for £800. As the Trust had difficulty proving ownership Canon Andrews had to declare that he had known the premises for over 40 years and that they had been held by the Trustees since 1871, so it is possible that these premises are not the original dwelling referred to in the will, which must date from the early 18th century at least.

Money was also left to the parish in the will of Ralph Jope. There are two Ralph Jope's who left wills, one in 1637 and one in 1718, but it is not known which one was the donor. The third donor was Nicholas Jewell, a stone mason, who died in 1738, he left £560 provided two thirds of the interest would be given to the poor of this Parish (the other one third went to the poor of Milton Abbot).

Today the Charity Trust has invested assets of £12-14,000 which provide a disposable annual income of £400 - £500. It is a registered charity with a constitution and audited accounts complying with Charity Commission regulations. It can donate funds within the parish for i) the relief of need and ii) advancement of education. Within the last category comes various forms of assistance for students and also financial assistance to charitable organisations in Stoke Climsland "whose objects include the education or improvement

of the conditions of life of persons under the age of 25 years.” In the past book tokens have regularly been given to students going on to further education.

The Charity will consider any applications within these guidelines. Normally the Trust meets twice a year, usually in January & June, however in cases of real need an additional meeting would be considered. Any applications to the Trust should be made the Clerk to Stoke Climsland Parish Council.