

# A HISTORY OF THE MATTHEW SMITH ALMSHOUSES



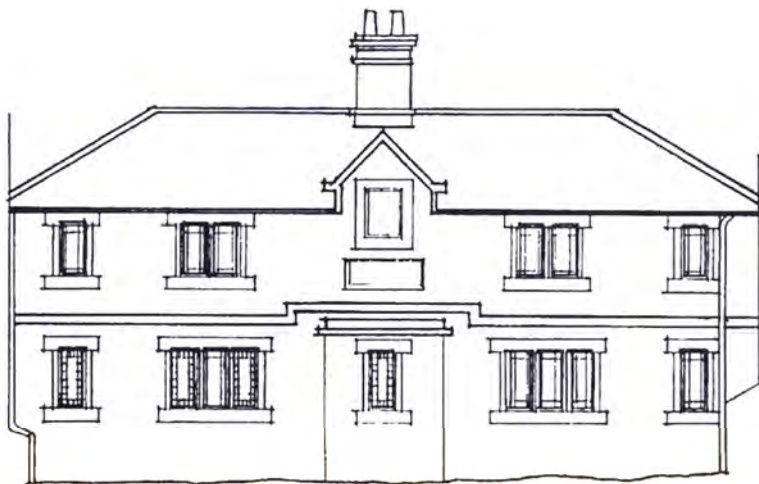
# **A History of the Matthew Smith Almshouses**

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The cover illustration shows Charles and Bena Broadhurst with the two residents of the almshouses (seated) Mrs Elsie Rogers and Mrs Alma McCluskey, on the day in September 1991 the replica coat of arms was put in place. Charles Broadhurst started the campaign to rescue the Almshouses in 1985-6.

## MATTHEW SMITH AND HIS ALMSHOUSES

Matthew Smith, the founder of the Belper Almshouse Charity or, as it was often known in the eighteenth century, the Belper Hospital remains a shadowy figure. He was born in 1636-7 the son of Henry Smith of Denby and Whitemoor and his wife Jane. The family was prosperous; Henry owned property in Denby and bequeathed in his will land in Belper to endow a stipend for the Priest at St John's Chapel and to assist the poor. Matthew Smith added considerably to his inheritance. He continued the family's association with Denby and Whitemoor purchasing during the 1680s an estate in Whitemoor from the Lowe family and building himself a substantial house. Already in 1670 he owned extensive property in Denby and paid tax on seven hearths. The origin of his wealth is unknown but it is clear from his will that he held land and property in Nottinghamshire and in Derbyshire. Among his property was a house in central Nottingham - in High Pavement adjoining the Queen's Hall - and two houses and a malthouse in Linby Lane. In Derbyshire he owned part of the Manor of Holbrook and land in Holbrook and Ripley, land and three houses and tithes in Horsley Woodhouse and further property in Langley, Kilburn, Heanor, Marehay and Belper. In 1685 he was Sheriff of the county and was granted Arms; in 1711 he was one of the Commissioners for the Land tax.

Matthew Smith's philanthropic interests in Belper followed his father's example. On Henry's death he and his brother Timothy administered their father's bequest and later when Timothy died Matthew was in sole charge. So although he lived just outside Belper he retained links with the village and this may help to explain his own generosity to the community. He built his almshouses on the edge of the chapel ground adding to the small cluster of buildings at the heart of the village. No records have survived of the purchase of the land on which the houses were built nor is the date known when they received their first residents though Matthew Smith's will indicates that they were in use sometime before 1713.

In the administration of the Almshouse Charity Matthew Smith made use of his wife's dynastic connections with a prosperous family from Nottinghamshire and subsequently Lincolnshire. He had married Ann Gregory, daughter of Francis Gregory of Nottingham whose family in later generations established themselves at Harlaxton in Lincolnshire and at Hungerton Hall near Grantham. It was this connection which Matthew Smith exploited when, in February 1713/4, a month before his death, he came to make his will. He appointed George Gregory of Nottingham [1669-1746] - his wife's first cousin once removed - to serve as a co-trustee of the Almshouse Charity together with Thomas Goodwin of Derby. As trustees they were responsible for the management of the charity's land in Milford and Belper and the payment of the rent income of eight pounds which was to be given to the almshouse residents. The will stated that the almshouses though

hitherto unendowed were already in existence and occupied. The payments to the residents were to be made in four equal payments on March 25th, June 24th, September 29th and December 25th. Should the almshouses fall vacant the trustees were permitted to divert the rent income towards the repair of the almshouse buildings. No other provision for maintenance was made. How trustees were to keep the buildings in good order under such an arrangement was not made clear. In the event the anomaly was only resolved by increasing the rent income and not passing on the additional benefit to the almspeople; until the 1840s they continued to receive eight pounds - four pounds to each person.

The trustees responsibility for the charity did not extend to the appointment of residents. This task was given to Matthew Smith's executrixes - his daughters Jane Massey, Winifred Nevell and Penelope Kelsall - and to his grand daughters Ann and Mary Smith; and after their death to their heirs. Decisions were to be made by a majority the two grand daughters having one vote between them. One resident was "always to be of the liberty of Belper.. and none.. to be admitted thereinto under fifty years of age". The will also specified that residents once appointed were entitled to their place in the almshouse and to an income "forever".

It would be interesting to know how the founder's daughters and grand daughters coped with this system but no record has come to light. By the 1770s when the first accounts are available the Gregory family had assumed control running the Charity, albeit on a loose rein, from the family seat at Harlaxton.

## THE COMMISSION OF INQUIRY

For a brief period, in the eighteen twenties, our knowledge of the Matthew Smith Almshouses increases dramatically. The wealth of detailed information which is suddenly available was the product of a national inquiry established by Parliament into the state of Charities. It took the form of a Commission of Inquiry and was first established in 1818 to investigate educational charities. A year later, the remit was extended to all types of charitable trust. So began a survey which, in its nineteen years of active life, produced the most comprehensive review of English and Welsh Charities until the present day Charity Commissioners began their own comprehensive survey in the nineteen sixties.

The Commissioners of 1818 were nominated by the Secretary of State and had extensive powers. They could report to the Attorney General any cases of abuse which warranted litigation and, on a day to day basis, in the course of their investigations, could command witnesses to attend hearings and demand the production of documents. The work of the Commissioners was mainly undertaken

by the stipendiary members of the Commission, generally men of legal training, who would be experienced in extracting and interpreting evidence from witnesses. The Commissioners made their inquiries county by county and according to no set pattern. Daniel Finch, one of the most experienced Commissioners, who served for the full life of the Commission, said that he and his colleague William Grant worked on a northern county in the summer and a southern one in the spring. The Commissioners began their investigation with a circular which was sent to local clergy with the aim of acquiring information of local trusts and their managers.

“Sir, I am desired by the Commissioners for enquiring into Charities in England and Wales to request that you will favour them with a list of all the Charities in your parish, stating by whom and when they were founded, and for what purposes; and likewise, that you will state what persons, as trustees, or otherwise, will be best able to give information with respect to each charity.”

The replies to this circular were checked against available records the most useful being the return made under the Gilbert Act of 1787 which had been reprinted in 1816. In some counties the Gilbert returns were found to be extremely accurate but it was not so in Derbyshire of which Commissioner George Long wrote “I fear there was much roguery in the returns made under Gilbert’s Act in this county”. Once the Commissioners had arranged to visit a county witnesses were summoned to attend and to bring appropriate documents with them.

“Sir, I am directed by the Commissioners appointed to inquire concerning Charities in England and Wales, to request the favour of your attendance at \_\_\_\_\_ on \_\_\_\_\_ at \_\_\_\_\_ o’clock in the \_\_\_\_\_ noon in order to give any information in your power respecting \_\_\_\_\_ and to desire that you will bring with you any papers from among the parish documents, or from any other source in your power, which you think may assist the Commissioners in their investigation. And also a copy of the Table of Benefactions if any.”

The Commissioners were accompanied by clerks whose task it was to record the exchanges which took place with the representatives of each charity.

The case of the Matthew Smith Charity was dealt with in August and September 1826. The Commissioners received a statement from Joseph Pym, Belper’s permanent overseer, and from Samuel Harvey who was then tenant of the Matthew Smith land; and these together with letters from Gregory Gregory and the Reverend Charles Nixon form the basis of the Commissioners’ published report.

Joseph Pym’s statement to the Commissioner is dated 8th August. He was able to give them a first hand account of the sad state the almshouses were in.

“There are two almshouses with small gardens before them situate in the Village of Belper, they do not appear to be in good repair. The Land belonging to the Charity has been in the occupation of Samuel Harvey above a year. 8£ a year was paid to the Almspeople by weekly or fortnightly payments till the rent was raised. What has been paid since I do not know.

Mr Gregory is understood to have been the Trustee of this Charity - I understand that a person of the name of Williams who was lately in the occupation of the land paid no more than 8£ a year for it. There does not appear to have been much done in repairs of late years, but I apprehend that what repairs have been were paid for by the tenant or the trustees. There has been no appointment of a person to the almshouses for nearly 40 years. One of them is now inhabited by the widow of James Harrison who was himself one of the alms men and who belonged to Belper. The other was inhabited by a poor man of Codnor and Loscoe who died rather more than a year ago - upon his death the inhabitants of Codnor claimed a right to send a poor person from that place and produced a letter containing an appointment from a Mr Nixon of Nuttall - I had possession of the almshouse and refused to admit an almsman without an appointment from the Trustees - I have placed a poor man of Belper to live in the almshouse till a regular appointment is made but he receives no part of the payment from the Charity - I do not know whether the other person receives the whole or not.

I think the whole of the land including the farm and allotment is worth 2£ per acre.”

Of course Joseph Pym had no legal right to use the almshouse for one of the paupers in his care. But his belief that appointment to the almshouses lay with Gregory Gregory, the trustee, was understandable and this seems to have been the view taken by the Commissioners who, in their report, were content to note the misunderstanding without explicitly condemning Pym's actions.

The Commissioners also received testimony from Samuel Harvey. He met them at the Kings Head Inn in Derby. He confirmed his position as tenant and explained how he had paid the almshouse residents passing on to Mr Burgess, Gregory Gregory's steward at Hungerton, only the balance which remained after these payments had been made. He told the Commissioners

“I occupy the land mentioned in the will of Matthew Smith and an allotment made in respect of it on the inclosure of lands in Belper about 40 years ago. The whole contains 14A 0R 28P - the old inclosure is now divided into two closes and a Pingle - it is all pasture land.

I took this of Mr Burgess the steward of Mr Gregory of Hungerton at Lady



Day 1825 as yearly tenant at £21 per annum. Since I came into possession I have paid £4 to the person occupying one of the almshouses by sums of six shillings or eight shillings at a time the person now occupying the other almshouse has not been appointed to it and I have paid to Mr Burgess the residue of the years rent excepting one guinea paid for a survey.

I do not know many particulars of the Rent previous to my time but I understand it was 12£ a year that 8£ was paid to the two almspeople and 4£ to Mr Burgess for the repairs.

The buildings are old and it will now require a considerable sum to put them into good repair."

It seems probable that Daniel Finch sent Gregory Gregory a copy of the material the Commissioners had collected both about the Matthew Smith Charity and others in which Gregory had an interest. Certainly this would seem to have been so for on 27th September Gregory wrote to Finch thanking him for the friendly way he had treated "the business of the Charities" and explaining

"I was on the point of advancing a sum of money to aid the small balance in our hands for the purpose of rebuilding the Alms Houses but as it appears that a new deed of Trust must be executed I shall not take the steps I had proposed until that instrument may give us a better sanction."

Gregory expected trouble from Nixon "we are in the persuasion that old Nixon means to dispute the point with us but are doubtful of the strength of his claim". At the same time Gregory asked Finch for his opinion of Nixon's claim admitting "I have no papers which can lead me in the formation of an opinion as to its viability".

In fact Nixon did write in support his claim

"Some years back John Kelsall of Nottingham gent was called upon as a Descendant of Matthew Smith, to elect and did then appoint a Person to the same. The Reverend Charles Nixon of Nuttall in the County of Nottingham is the present representative of the aforesaid John Kelsall, and it is considered that the Appointment is now vested in him."

The Commissioners' files contain a summary of the position in an unsigned statement. It would appear to have been produced by the Commissioner or official handling the Matthew Smith case. It confirms four essential points which were later embodied in the Commission's printed report. Gregory Gregory is the trustee; Nixon may well have a right of appointment; the Charity's land has been well let; and the almshouses are beyond repair and must be rebuilt.



## “Belper Hospital

It is correct that Mr Gregory claims to be Trustee for this Charity as heir at law to the late George De Ligne Gregory Esq who was the successor to George Gregory Esq of Nottingham but the Revd Charles Nixon claims the appointment of the Alms People as the representative of the late Mr Kelsall, as the Memorandum made out by himself and herewith sent.

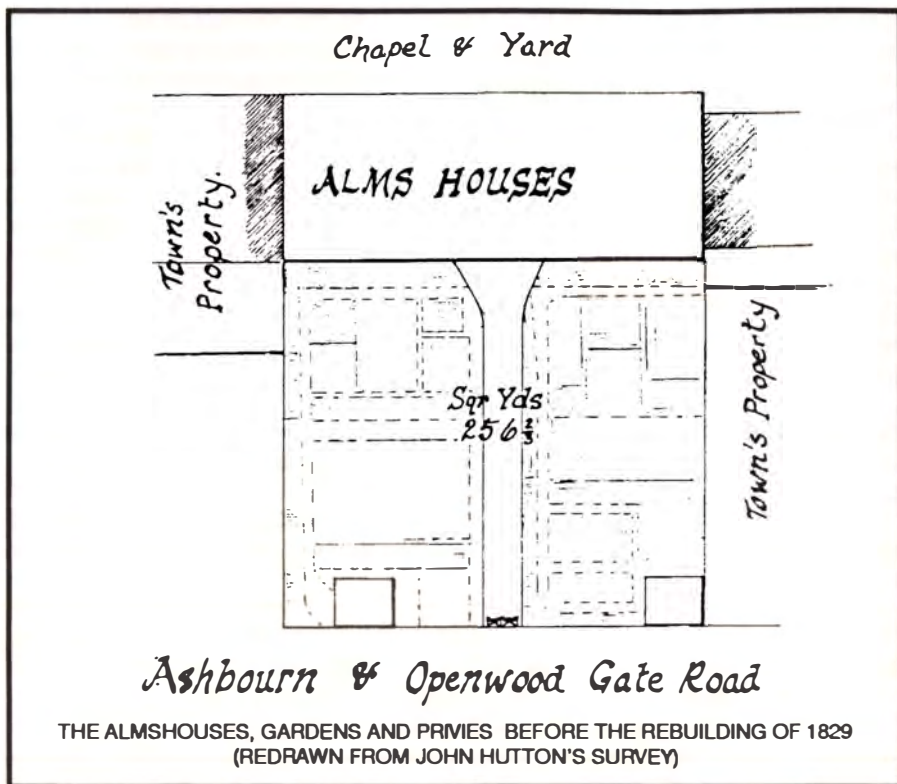
The estate to support this Charity consists of 14-0-28 which is let to Mr Samuel Harvey at 21£ per annum which is considered a full rent. There is not any Building on this estate and very little Timber and any that is in a fit state to be taken down. The Balance in hand belonging to this Charity is £84 6s 5d as per Account sent herewith, and it is proposed that it should be appropriated to the rebuilding of the almshouses, which are in such a dilapidated state, and not capable of being repaired. An estimate for rebuilding these Hospitals has been given in amounting to £130 1s 10d exclusive of the old materials and it was determined to proceed with the Improvement forthwith had not the present inquiry been instituted.”

## REBUILDING THE ALMSHOUSES

The plaque above the door of the rebuilt almshouses proclaims “Re-built by Gregory Gregory Esquire in the year 1829”. Thus it has been generally assumed that Gregory Gregory contributed to the cost of rebuilding the almshouses and we know from his letter to Daniel Finch that in 1826 he had this in mind. In fact he contributed nothing. The Charity’s account books clearly indicate that all costs were met from the annual rent income. Indeed it seems likely that the rebuilding was delayed until 1829 so that three years surplus from the annual rent of £21 was available to add to the balance of £84 recorded in 1826.

Once it had been decided to proceed no time was lost the entire operation being accomplished within seven months. Plans and a specification for the rebuilding were prepared by John Hutton a local surveyor though not before his work had been checked by Mr H M Wood who Mr Burgess brought to Belper in February. He “computed the expense of erecting” the almshouses, examined the existing houses and suggested alterations to Hutton’s design. The plans are lost. The specification has survived and it is a remarkable document both in its attention to detail and in its concern for economy and for quality. It was as if Burgess’s instruction had been spend as little as possible yet produce a building fit to bear the name Gregory Gregory.

Hutton rejected any idea of renovating the existing building. This was to be taken



down "except the back wall and gable ends" which were to form the new boundary walls at the rear of the new dwellings. The stone removed by this operation was to be used in the back wall and east end of the new houses and to raise the backyard wall.

The new almshouses being set further forward acquired the advantages of a backyard part of which would now house privies. Residents would no longer have to walk the length of the front garden to use these facilities. It is likely too that the new houses were taller and provided more headroom and light. They also contained features such as built in sink stones and drains and would be, by contemporary standards, homes of some quality.

The front of the building was to be "of Hungerhill or Shaw Lane stone of a stout quality and good colour to be scappelled similar to the front of the houses built by Mr Jno Williams at The Butts, Belper". The houses referred to are still standing and the similarity in the way in which the stone has been tooled or scappelled, remains quite clear. The west end was also to be built of the same new stone and

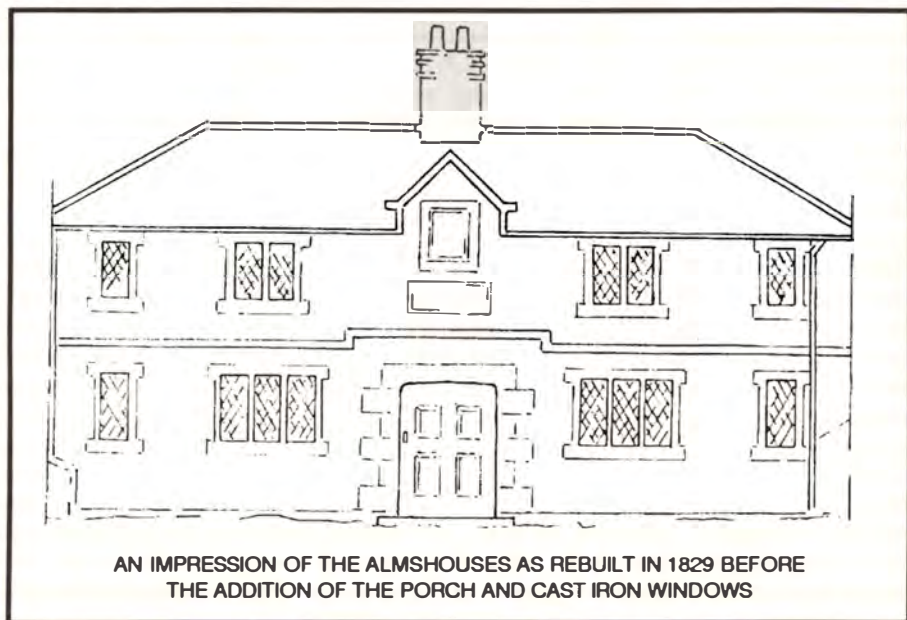
“well hammer knocked and of good colour”. The privies were to be of “single brick or stone” and to be roofed with old tiles level with the coping on the back wall. Inside the buildings all walls were to be well pointed on both sides and to be “well white washed twice and cleaned”. The pantries were “to be sunk two feet below the house floors to have three steps and to fix a sink stone under the windows...and a lattice window... to admit air”. The floors of the houses to be laid with dressed bricks. The pantries and passage to be paved with stone and the five lower steps of the staircases to be of Hungerhill or Shaw Lane stone. Each lower room was to have an oven and fire range and the chambers to have a fire place.

“The roof on the North side and East end to be covered with the old tiles as far as they will go and the West end with the best part of the Newcastle tiles now upon the old houses. The roof on the South front to be entirely of new, Newcastle tiles.”

The back wall of the building was also to contain window heads cills and side jambs for windows to be inserted at any time in the future should they be required.

“The arms of the founder to be cleaned and regilt The Tablet to have recorded upon it a suitable inscription of the date of the first and second erection and the name of the founder etc.”

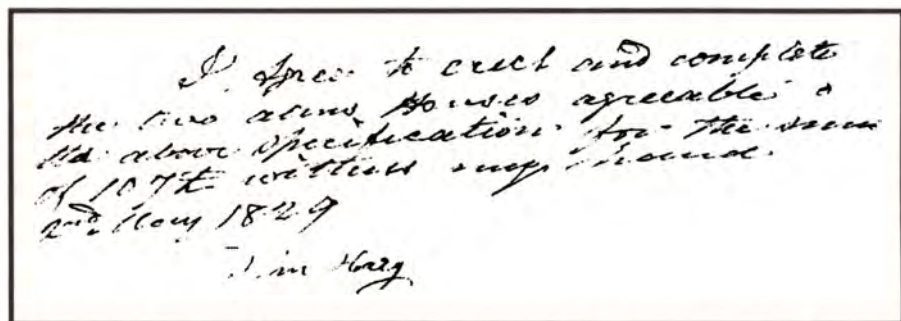
The specification included details of all timberwork, doors, door locks, and shelving. The windows were to be glazed “after the diamond pattern” and each “chamber and house place” to have a single light casement.



Work on the building was to begin immediately “upon the present occupiers being removed from the premises and to be completed in a workmanlike manner in every respect within six months from the commencement”.

Payment was to be made in three stages - first floor; roofed, the floors laid and the staircase installed; and the final stage when all the work was finished.

On March 14th Wood and Hutton conferred again this time considering the tenders they had received to build the new almshouses. None of the paper work has survived but the name of the successful contractor is known. On 2nd May 1829 a contract was signed by John Harvey, a local stonemason for £107. Elizabeth Harrison, the sole resident, was put into lodgings and work on the new almshouses began. William Bamford recorded in his journal “on Saturday May 16th the foundation stone of the almshouses at Butts laid by Mr G H Strutt son of Jedediah Strutt Esq a child about two years eight months”. The rebuilding was supervised by John Hutton who was paid £10 for his services.



*I Agree to erect and complete  
the two almshouses agreeable to  
the above specification for the sum  
of 107<sup>/-</sup> without any increase.  
2<sup>nd</sup> May 1829  
J. Harvey*

John Harvey's agreement to erect the almshouses to John Hutton's specification for £107

By 25th July the work was finished and Harvey was paid his £107. In fact the original estimate had been exceeded and Harvey received a further £20 in April 1830 and £9 12s a year later. It is likely that these payments were deferred until the Charity's annual rent income became available. The cost of the new houses, including fees paid to Hutton and Wood, was £155 13s.

On August 1st 1829 Elizabeth Harrison returned to the almshouses and now that there were again two houses fit for habitation the second was occupied by a new resident, Joseph Holmes. A new era in the life of the Matthew Smith Almshouses had begun.

## JOHN HUTTON

John Hutton was a man of many talents. His name appears in the Derby Mercury from 1806 when he first advertised houses for sale. Three years later he announced his mathematical seminary offering latin, french, and drawing. At the same time he maintained his business as a surveyor and he was for many years Belper's principal auctioneer. According to William Bamford "in his profession he had not the very best of character for probity". In April 1833 he met an untimely end when, in a state of intoxication, he fell down some stairs at the New Inn; he died the next day. Bamford wrote:

"Mr Hutton was a man of rather superior abilities. He came to Belper full thirty years ago as an exciseman which he relinquished and turned schoolmaster. Had a very good school for a number of years and also did surveying... will making etc and whereby he got a very comfortable livelihood but his propensity for drink was so very great he at last gave this up and became a regular land surveyor etc and lastly Auctioneer with these callings he went on pretty well with the assistance of his Son (Charles) but death deprived him of his services and was a terrible shock to his well-being as after this he became still more addicted to drinking and his fortune became every day worse - was very much in arrears with his rent and in every bodys debt that would trust him indeed at the time of his death he had but 8d in his pocket and his habitation was truly miserable. There was not any linen in the house and it was said his wife was destitute of a shift. The Town found him a coffin and must have bourne the whole expense of his funeral had not his widow been assisted by several voluntary Contributions he had lived just to escape the Workhouse."

Bamford knew Hutton and his account of a sad and wasted life has its place. Let us not forget John Hutton's other memorial. The almshouses remain a living testimony to his creative skill and practical ability.

## THE ENDOWMENT

Matthew Smith endowed his almshouses with property described in his will as “My four closes or parcels of inclosed lands one part whereof are freehold part copyhold lying and being in the hoppings near Hopping Mill... containing by estimation thirteen acres and one Pingle now near the Cowhill... by estimation the half of one acre”. The will, which was made in February 1713, described the land as occupied by Samuel Williams at a yearly rent of £8. No further information is available until 1773 when the first of the charity’s account books begins and although sixty years have elapsed the land is still recorded as in the hands of “Samuel Williams of Hopping Milns” though he now paid £9 per annum. And so it continues until Lady Day 1825 when the land is let to Samuel Harvey at the increased rent of £21 per annum.

The Williams family and the agents serving the Gregory estate established a pattern which was to continue until 1864 when John Hunter took over the day to day management of the charity. Williams and Harvey paid the almshouse residents their allowance which amounted to £8 when both houses were occupied and so relieved the agent of any local responsibility for the charity. Indeed agents seldom visited Belper. A visit is recorded in 1775 and it would appear that no further inspection was made until 1788 when the business of enclosure brought Mr Stubbins to Belper on two separate occasions. The enclosure process during the years 1787-1895 forced the agent, from 1788 Nathaniel Stubbins, to take a greater interest in the Matthew Smith land. In 1787 a local man Thomas Nadauld supplied a copy of what he described as “The Charity donations” for Belper. From this Stubbins could establish the Charity’s rights in the enclosure. In fact the Hoppings land enjoyed a right of common upon “Belper Ward Cowhill Hollow Dalley and Hoppin hill” claims which Stubbins and Nadauld attempted to register with the enclosure commissioners. This proved unexpectedly difficult. “I made Claims in your Name”, Nadauld wrote to Stubbins in June 1787, “But it was objected to, not having proper Authority from you as by the Direction of the Act it must be under your Hand and that as Agent to these Gentlemen in Trust. Therefore hope that you will immediately cause a proper Claim to be made”, It would appear that these issues were resolved and in due course, in December 1791 Stubbins received an extract from the award describing the allotment made to the Matthew Smith Charity.

“And we do also set out allott and appoint unto and for the said George Delin Gregory one piece plot or parcel of Land no 142 in the said plan containing by survey 2 acres 1 rood 19 perches or thereabouts situate lying and being on the said Belper Ward... alloted... in Lieu Bar full satisfaction and compensation of and for his right of common in over and upon the said Belper Ward...”.

It then transpired that the rights had been registered in Gregory’s name rather

## *Duffield and Belper Inclosure.*

SIR,

ON the other side I send you the state of your Account, and the Commissioners have desired me to inform you, that they will attend at the Swan in Belper, on Monday the 29th of July next, to receive the Money; and they have also desired me to say, that they hope there will not be any further delay in discharging the demand.

I am, Sir,

Your most obedient Servant,

*Cha. Upton.*

*DERBY, 28th June, 1793.*



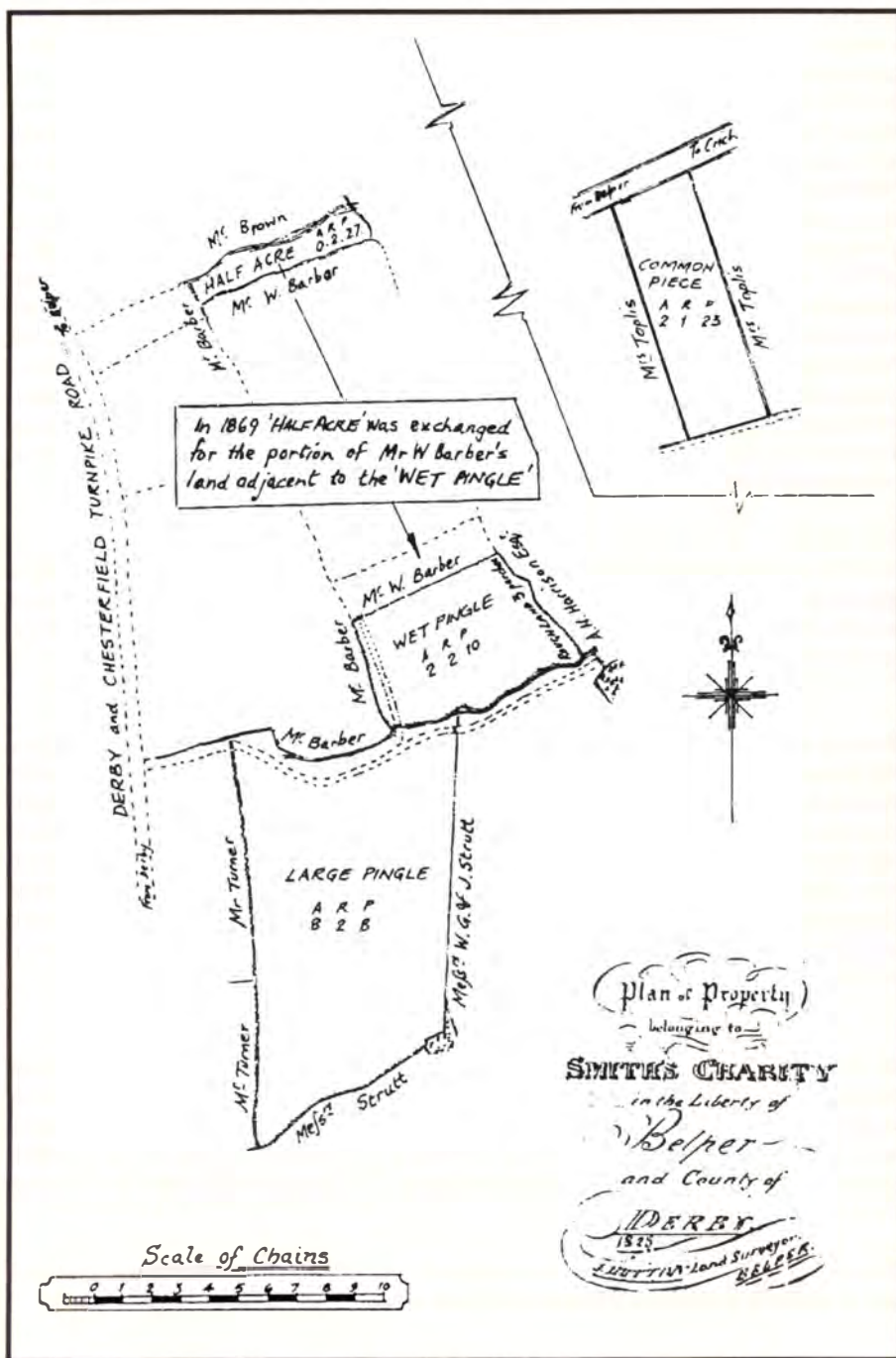
than the charity's and that payment was therefore expected by the Commissioners towards the cost of enclosure. In June Stubbins was informed that the debt amounted to £29 14s 6d and he was instructed to appear at The Swan Inn Belper on 29th July. He did not go and in August he learnt that unless the demand was met in full part of the allotment would be recovered. A year later, a further meeting was held this time at The Bell Inn in Derby. Again the matter was ignored and by February 1795 legal proceedings were threatened. No record of settlement appears in the Matthew Smith accounts. The charity took over the allotment in 1794 and £24 1s 3d was spent "for fencing, leading Ridding and clearing Ground". In 1825 John Hutton produced a survey of the charity's lands and this has been redrawn and reproduced on page 16. Common piece is the allotment land and the remainder was part of the original endowment. Throughout the period of "Gregory" control of the charity there would appear to have been little active management of the estate. Samuel Harvey's notice to quit in 1863 marked the end of this era. Henceforth, with John Hunter and his successors in charge, there was a greater concern both to keep the landholding in good order and to derive a reasonable income from it.

In 1869 an opportunity arose to resolve a long standing anomaly by executing a plan which had been under consideration since 1863. An exchange was arranged with Samuel Kiddy of Belper, a local druggist, which consolidated the Charity's landholding (see plan).

The purchase made in 1911 was of greater significance. Had no action been taken the potential value of the charity's main parcel of land would have been considerably reduced. The trustees, George Herbert Strutt and John Hunter the younger recognised that building development along the Derby Road threatened to isolate the Matthew Smith land and that if no access was retained any development potential the land possessed would be lost. So with the approval of the Charity Commissioners a plot with a 60 foot frontage to the road was purchased at a cost of £220. This wise investment has been retained. The land has been let as a garden to the owner of one of the adjacent houses.

In 1951 the trustees were the victims of a less favourable transaction being persuaded to sell a strip of the road frontage of their land adjacent to Crich Lane to Belper U.D.C. who required it to build council houses. Only a narrow access was retained. The district valuers price was £70. There was talk of the council providing a new access but nothing came of it. The trust was left with an isolated field.

The present day income from the endowed land which continues in agricultural use is modest, between £500 and £600 and is unlikely to increase significantly.



## THE RESIDENTS

“I want to make an N.B. about the Almshouses to you” wrote Susan Agnes Strutt of Bridgehill in June 1887 in a letter to John Hunter, “I have noticed that some neighbour keeps ducks in the little front garden, (Mrs Reader I rather fancy) and the ducks make the front of the Almshouses look very untidy; as the owners even scooped out holes, and filled them with water for the aforesaid ducks to dabble in! I never said anything about in the old days, but determined that when Mrs Malin came to an end, it should be spoken about. When you let the old Kirklands into their new abode, perhaps you will mention this, as I feel sure you would disapprove of the “Poultry” being continued.

I don't know whose ducks it was, but that is unimportant. Forgive my troubling you, and pray don't think of answering.”

Miss Susan Agnes Strutt was George Henry Strutt's eldest daughter. Her letter provides a rare insight into the problems which must have arisen from time to time since the almshouses were first built. The form of division used in the first almshouse building to separate the two houses is unknown but however it was contrived it is unlikely to have been any more satisfactory than Hutton's design. This sets the two units either side of a central passage and provides as much neutral ground as is possible on a site which does not permit side access to the building. Yet for some residents this arrangement has not been sufficient to maintain their privacy. Friction between residents reached spectacular proportions in September 1894 between the Stafford family and their neighbour Eliza Pugh. John Hunter felt obliged to call Superintendent McDonald who called on Mrs Stafford and sent Sergeant Stanley (Sgt 47) to collect statements. Ann Stafford (in language which surely bears all the hallmarks of police assistance) gave this account of the affair. The spelling is Sergeant Stanley's.

“Ann Stafford says I am seventy nine Years of Age. I live at the Alms Houses Nottingham Road Belper On Saturday last the first September nine four about three Pm I was sweeping the passage with a brush when Eliza Pugh who lives in the next house. Came in from the Street. She said you Old bitch you're Sweeping again. I said I will not be anoyed by you I will report you. She then Struck me a Violent blow in the Face causing my mouth to bleed - also my nose. I fainted and my daughter caught me in her Arms. She was about to Strike me with the brush but my daughter took it from her. She would have done me some further injury had not my daughter been present. Pugh is in the habit of bringing Children home & they anoy my husband who is very ill. Some times she will bring a dog & keep it barking alnight I had not spoken to Pugh for several weeks.”

The incident also prompted Hunter to write to the Charity Commission.

“The two almshouses” he explained “are now occupied by (1) one single woman between 50/60 years of age, daughter of a former deceased tenant and (2) by a family, father mother and daughter. The single woman... has developed a very violent temper and is a regular nuisance to the family. Their life has been made miserable by her, and they declare that they regret ever coming to the place.

We should be much obliged if the Charity Commission would say, if we have power to give the single woman notice to quit and if so what notice or whether we can completely stop her pay and so starve her out as it were, and generally advise what course we should take under the peculiar circumstances of this case.

Having funds sufficient could we offer her so much a week to leave the almshouse and then appoint a married couple to the vacant house?”

The Charity Commission reply was unhelpful. They pointed out that they had no information that the woman had been properly appointed and referred to Matthew Smith’s will asking Hunter who appointed, the heirs or the trustees? They also asked why there were three people living in the houses when the founder had specified two! It was suggested that the charity should have a new scheme which would regulate such matters. Hunter’s reply justifying the trustees actions confirms that the policy of appointing couples was long established.

“The single woman now occupying one of the two almshouses is the daughter of two former tenants. On the death of the survivor of her parents the then Trustees allowed her to remain in possession and though probably not “properly appointed an alms person”, yet for a good many years she has been treated exactly as were her parents, and the Trustees cannot say that she was less “properly appointed” than were her parents.

Some 50 years ago (or more) the almshouses were rebuilt and I suppose in more commodious style than the old ones, certainly within living memory, it has been the custom of the trustees to appoint a married couple. The tenants of the other house are two very old folks, who have one unmarried daughter living with them the latter earns her own living.

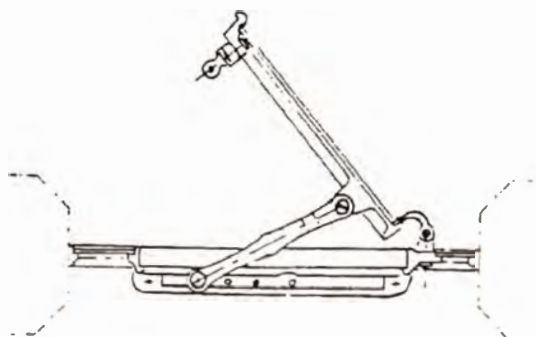
On reading the will once more I find the following - “And she and everyone of them are and shall be successively well entitled to the same forever”. If that means for life, then it would appear that the Trustees cannot remove the unmarried alms woman - occupying one house until another scheme is drawn.”

Hunter assures the Commissioners he will consult his co-trustees about a new scheme; but nothing more was heard of this proposal.

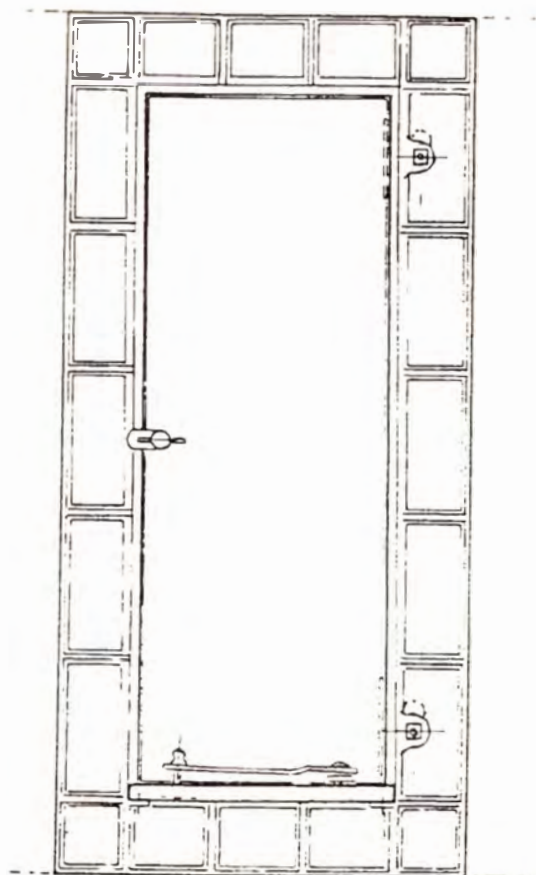
It is not known how far the founder's wishes had been met during the first century of the almshouses life. Joseph Pym's statement to the Commission of Inquiry in 1826 suggests that there had been no appointment for over 40 years. The almshouses had been occupied by James Harrison and his wife and she remained after his death, while in the other house there had been a man from "Codnor and Loscoe" whose name Pym did not reveal. The first account book refers to two women living in the houses in 1773 but when they died and were replaced by the Harrisons and the man from Loscoe is unknown.

The names of the people who have lived in the almshouses in so far as they have been established are set out on page 39. There is no evidence of any formal procedure for the selection residents. One of the oldest scraps of paper in the Charity's archives, filed with a bundle of receipts for the rebuilding of the almshouses in 1829, bears the note "Abrm Harrison and Wife lives near the Ranters Chapel, he is 73 years old and cannot walk without Crutch and stick, workd a little at nailing (no child)(an object of charity)". Years later during the period in which the Strutt estate office administered the almshouses similar notes and letters of recommendation were written.

Rachel Goodwin, aged 81, the widow of a former worker at Brettles, who took up residence in January 1898 - whether she knew it or not is not clear - had Margaret Hunter, John's mother, on her side. "I shall be very glad if the Trustees of the almshouses decide for her to occupy the vacant one. Her house is spotlessly clean and neat - a marked difference to most of the sick of these parts." Mrs Beardmore was less successful. A letter from John Hunter's sister Margaret in February 1909 failed to secure a place for her though she seems to have been offered a house 18 months later. With such recommendations references were unnecessary though if the applicant was not known to the estate office they would be obtained. The Hunter regime under John the younger and subsequently Maurice was efficient and businesslike to the point where it may sometimes have been harsh. New residents were informed of the terms on which they were being offered accommodation.



SECTION THROUGH WINDOW (Casement open)



ALMSHOUSE WINDOW (viewed from inside)

window pane



Threaded brass catch  
secured to casement  
frame lug with  
a square nut

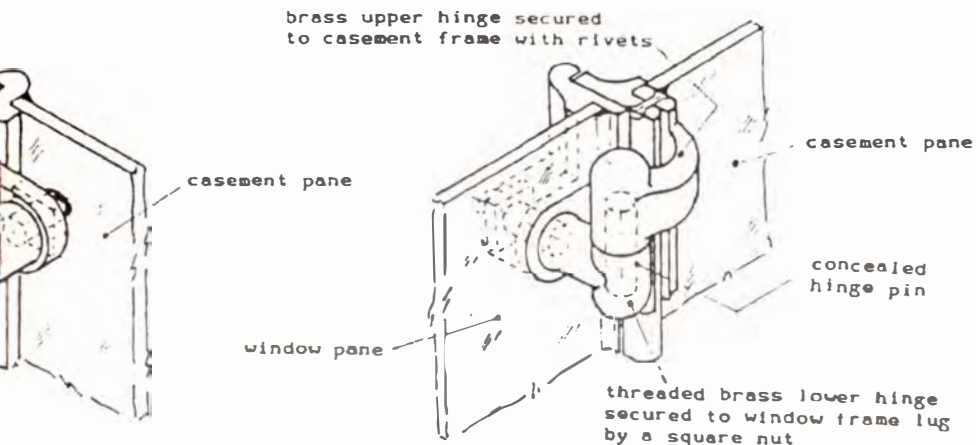
DETAIL OF CATCH (v



locating pin firmly fixed  
at end of casement stay &  
placed in one of four loc  
holes

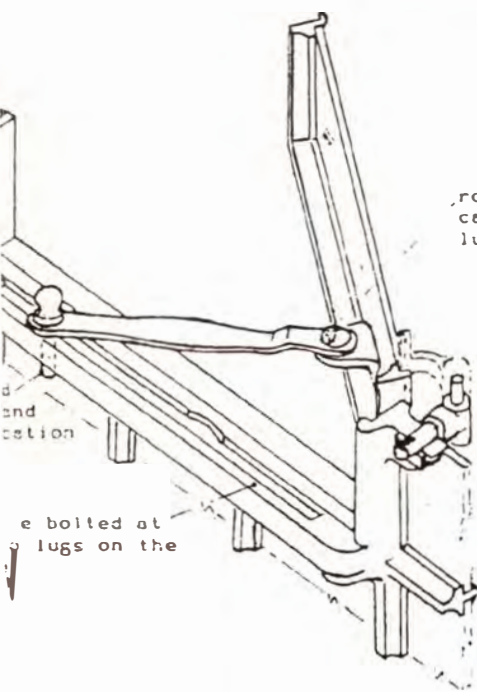
location pin  
either end of  
window frame

SECTIONED DE



(viewed from inside)

DETAIL OF HINGE (viewed from outside)



DETAIL OF WINDOW SHOWING CASEMENT STAY  
(viewed from the inside)

THE CAST IRON WINDOWS ADDED IN THE 1870'S



12th July 1920

Mr James Wetton,  
Brookside Belper

Dear Sir,

Smith's Charity, Almshouses, The Butts

The Trustees of the above Charity accept you as Tenant of the vacant house lately occupied by Mr and Mrs Beardmore. We are having the whitewashing done at once, so you must please enquire when the house is habitable.

The conditions are as follows:-

- 1        Until Mrs Wetton receives the Old Age Pension you will receive £1 8s 0d every 4 weeks.
- 2        When Mrs Wetton receives the Old Age Pension that amount will be reduced to 16 shillings every 4 weeks.
- 3        In addition to the house Free, the Trustees will pay the Rates. Taxes and Water and allow an extra 10 shillings for Coal in December.

Please let me know when you will be able to take possession.

Yours faithfully

By this time the trustees had adopted a formula which took account of pensions. Ten years earlier an undertaking had been required from Mr and Mrs Beardmore.

Belper, October 20, 1910

UNDERTAKING

We THOMAS and Elizabeth BEARDMORE of St Johns Road, Belper hereby promise to vacate the Alms House, Nottingham Road at once on receiving an old age pension.

Witness

John H Ball

X Thomas Beardmore's mark  
Elizabeth Beardmore

The Beardmore's life in the almshouses came to an untimely end. Elizabeth Beardmore had died and Thomas had become an invalid. Hunter wrote to the Revd Cooper at St Peter's Vicarage "I shall be obliged if you can make it convenient to see Mr Thomas Beardmore at the almshouse and persuade him to go to the Hospital". It is not known whether Cooper had seen Beardmore when four days later Hunter wrote to him

Dear sir I'm sorry to have to inform you that the Trustees require possession of your house, say within a week, as it is from information received, quite impossible for you to continue in possession of the house and to be looked after as you should be looked after, under the unfortunate circumstances which you find yourself.

Please let me know what date you will remove. We suggest the Hospital at Belper.

Yours faithfully

The hospital referred to was of course the workhouse hospital.

At the same time, much thought was given to arranging for companions to move in with elderly residents to help them along. This was not always successful. Certainly not in the case of Sarah Ann Merchant who wrote in October 1931 "I don't want Miss Beresford to live with me any longer than the month on trial because of her vile temper and swear words it's been awful quite as bad as the last woman that lived with me, the person that looked after me before is willing to do so again when she is gone."

The founder left instructions that each resident should receive £4 a year and this regime was maintained rigorously until the 1840's when the rate was doubled. By the 1880's residents were receiving £1 per month. With the introduction of pensions the trustees seem to have fixed payments according to the need they perceived and generally paid couples more than single people. In 1910 the residents received £2 per household per month yet in 1921 the amount had fallen to £1 8s. Ten years later 16s per month was not unusual. The trustees could only pay what the trust's income could afford.

Additional allowances at times of exceptional hardship were paid from time to time but the trustees were not conspicuously generous in this respect. "We thank you very much for your kindness to us in allowing the extra money... mother keeps so weakly and needs extras and needs more coal" wrote Ann Stafford in January 1898. During the 1920's when John Hunter ran the charity "the old ladies [came] down to the Estate office monthly for their payment". There is no evidence that the trustees regarded it as part of their duty to visit the old people in the almshouses though they must have been in touch with some network of pastoral care to have attempted to arrange for able bodied residents to live in.

Of all the almshouse residents Eliza Pugh was the most celebrated. In December 1897, her story became headline news. It was revealed to the public at a meeting of the Belper Board of Guardians and was taken up by the local press.

## BURIED TREASURE FOUND IN BELPER

### NOT A SPANISH PRISONER'S TRICK

#### Sensational story of a wealthy pauper

So industriously has the "spanish prison trick" been worked in England and equally industriously exposed by ourselves and other journals, that the very mention of "buried treasure" has now a decided flavour of incredibility about it, but the story of hidden gold which has set Belper tongues wagging at a most furious rate is not one of this ilk. Neither is it a concoction got up to amuse a cosy circle around a Christmas fireside, though for interesting details it could give points to many a yarn of Churchyard goblins, midnight mysteries, dreamland dangers, or African adventures which will pass muster during the next week or two. Stories sometimes reach us of hermits hoarding up a store and secreting the proceeds of their greed in the most odd and out of the way corners. Even widows dwelling in almshouses have been known to conceal their unknown savings in the innermost recesses of a flock bed, the person who purchased the few sticks of furniture for an old song after the widow's death considering himself mighty lucky when he found some ten or twenty pounds which were not in the sale catalogue.

The Belper sensation, however, caps all these, for the net find runs into hundreds. It appears that a woman named Pugh, well known in Belper, a diminutive creature who might have just stepped out of Charles Dickens' pages, has been living in one of the almshouses connected with Smith's Charity for more than 30 years. Her ancestors, we believe, lived there before her. She is said to have been most regular in attendance anywhere and everywhere where "charity" was wont to be dispensed, and no-one dreamed of gold being associated with this woman, so cunning and deceptive can humanity become. The time came, however, when she was stricken sore, and had to be conveyed in a cab to the Belper Union Hospital for succour. Her hidden gold appears to have been a source of considerable anxiety, and from the first she was anxious to get back to the almshouse on the Butts. She frequently sent for one of the Belper guardians and implored him to have her taken back again because she "feared her house was going wrong." Alas, her extremity proved somebody else's opportunity. While the cat was away the mouse, in the shape of a relative, who was not at play but very much at work. Evidently some suspicion existed in the mind of this "caretaker" that there might be something worth looking for. The little house was searched through and through, and at last the upraising of the pantry floor revealed a sum of £72, a small instalment as an incentive to go further. No doubt "burying" was the peculiar feature of the "hiding", and probably some clue was obtained of the whereabouts of the remainder. Whether this was so or not, some few weeks ago a party might have been seen beneath the light of the pale moon groping and grovelling in the Parks for that which ninety-nine out of a hundred would have sworn did not exist. The "ninety-nines" would have

called the “hundreds” mad had they known what was taking place, but the “hundreds” did not send the town crier round advertising their mission. They searched on into the night and into the gold grey hours of early morning, and the proceeds of the protracted search are said to have totalled something like £250. Thus, whilst the ratepayers of the Belper Union were having the honour of housing and nursing into renewed health the dweller in Smith’s almshouse, others were unearthing the gold with which she should have faced the world a self supporting woman. By some means a good lump sum of the find came into the hands of a clergyman who was probably called in to arbitrate between the finders, and he very promptly deposited it in a bank, not the bank or earth in which it had lain for over two years, but in a joint stock concern to the credit of the owner. When the Belper Board of Guardians heard that a “woman of means” had been living on the rates they very properly ordered steps to be taken to recover the cost of this wealthy pauper’s maintenance. We imagine there will also be a vacancy in Smith’s almshouses.

The Matthew Smith Charity had paid the Guardians £2 8s for Eliza Pugh’s stay in the workhouse hospital. No money was recovered from her but before the end of January the almshouse had a new resident.

## FROM GREGORY TO STRUTT

Little is known of the life of the Matthew Smith Charity in the thirty years following the rebuilding of the almshouses. An account book survives but no correspondence and it is not possible to present more than a cursory impression of the Charity’s affairs. No more was heard of the Nixon family and its claim to appoint residents. The Charity continued to be managed by the Gregory estate, first by Robert Burgess, and on his death in 1847, by William Booker. Burgess had not been paid for his services to the Charity but Gregory agreed to revert to the earlier practice and Booker received ten shillings per annum. It was not overtaxing. He did little more than keep the accounts. But it may be that there was little more that needed doing. The almshouses were in good repair and the tenant paid the money due to the almshouse residents directly to them.

Over the years the Charity accumulated a healthy surplus. There was little regular expenditure to set against the annual rent income of £21. Between 1829 and 1841, apart from the outstanding bill for the new almshouses which was not settled until 1831, repair and maintenance cost only 8s 2d. Even after the regular payments to the residents of £8 per annum had been added, the account showed a credit balance year after year. Thus when Robert Burgess’s executors handed over the Charity’s accounts to William Booker in November 1847, he was able to deposit £147 10s 2d in Wright’s Bank in Nottingham. In 1841 the residents’ allowance was increased to £12 and to £16 a year later. This reduced the Charity’s annual surplus

so that by 1862 when William Booker was succeeded by William Henry Booker and a further deposit was added to the bank account, no more than £58 had been accumulated. Nevertheless this must be regarded as a significant sum. In thirty years the trustee had amassed more than enough capital to replace the almshouses. In one sense this was prudent management yet it could be argued that the trustee had ignored the founder's intentions in not distributing a larger proportion of the income to the almspeople.

In the 1860s the management of the Charity underwent a major change. The ties with the Gregory family, in effect the inherited umbilical cord, was cut. An era of local management began. Gregory Gregory died in 1851. He was succeeded by George Gregory. On his death in 1860 the estate passed to John Sherwin Sherwin. The position of the Gregory family at this juncture was set out in a letter to the Charity Commission from a firm of Nottingham solicitors, acting on behalf of the Matthew Smith Charity, in November 1866. Sherwin,

“supposing that the care and management of Matthew Smith's Almshouses devolved upon himself has for some years past acted as the representative of the surviving trustee of the will of Matthew Smith.

Mr Sherwin is not the heir at law of the said George Gregory and it might be extremely difficult and expensive to find out who is.

Mr Sherwin, now Mr Sherwin Gregory, being in a bad state of health wishes to be released from the trust which he has (under an erroneous view of his position) assumed, and that two or three gentlemen in the immediate neighbourhood of Belper whom he is prepared to recommend should be appointed to manage Smith's Charity - as it appears the legal estate is outstanding with the heir of law of George Gregory whoever he may be, we shall feel obliged if you would suggest what steps should be taken to relieve Mr Gregory from any further trouble or responsibility in the matter.”

The Commission replied that Gregory should apply to be discharged as sole trustee and have the new trustees appointed in his place. In January the following year Gregory obtained his release and George Henry Strutt of Bridge Hill, Belper and Francis Bradshaw the younger of Barton Blount became the new trustees. The origin of Francis Bradshaw's link with the Matthew Smith Charity remains obscure. No close ties with Belper have come to light. He appears to have been on good terms with Sherwin Gregory and it is assumed that he undertook trusteeship at Gregory's request as an act of friendship. George Henry Strutt, who as a child had laid the foundation stone of the new almshouses was now head of the Belper branch of his family and the most powerful man in the town. He had of course known the almshouses all his life but apart from his childhood contact with the charity he had had several years of constructive involvement behind the scenes.

The annual report for 1863 prepared for the Charity Commission refers to Strutt and Bradshaw having been nominated for trusteeship; also, from April 1864, Strutt's agent and manager John Hunter, had taken over the task of paying the residents' allowances. Soon the company, Messers W. G. & J. Strutt, which to service its substantial property holdings in Belper and Milford employed its own maintenance teams, would take over the repair of the almshouses. It took a while to complete the administrative formalities and transfer the bank account but within a year or two the charity had become comfortably established under Strutt patronage.

The almshouses prospered under the new management. Henry Harvey's tenancy of the charity's land was brought to an end and new agreements raised rental income to £39 10s. Not that there was a shortage of money; by May 1868 the account at Wright's Bank contained £262. Once the new trustees were in post this sum was transferred to a new account with the Derby and Derbyshire Bank. The new managers were prepared to consider improvements. In March 1864 John Hunter estimated the cost of supplying the almshouses with piped water. At £1 19s 3d this was more than he had expected but as he wrote to Bradshaw "The pipe required to be used by the water company is very heavy". Unfortunately Mr Strutt was abroad and the matter was deferred. Two years later William Henry Booker, Gregory's agent, and John Hunter were still discussing the same question. They could not decide who should pay for the water once the pipes had been laid. By December 1866 John Hunter had established that "The occupants would be glad to pay the charges". Again the matter was deferred and it was not until January 1868 that the residents enjoyed the luxury of piped water; and the charity paid the water rates.

**Read the instructions on other side.**

**Hours of transacting business at the residence of the Secretary,  
New Road, Belper, 12 to 2 and 4 to 6 p.m., daily.**

**Water Rates are required to be paid between the above hours.**

No. 196 Belper, October 1st, 1868.

*Trustees of Alms Houses*  
**To the Belper Waterworks Company, Dr.**

|   |  |
|---|--|
| Arrears (if any) at the commencement of this Quarter .....                |  |
| One Quarter's supply of Water for Domestic purposes, payable in advance.. |  |
| One ditto ditto Business ditto ditto .....                                |  |

Received J. Pym

*[Signature]* d.

20

An early water rates bill. Notice that the business was conducted from Joseph Pym's home. Later the company had an office in High Street and then Bridge Street.

Not all the improvements took so long. In November and December 1866 extensive repairs were undertaken by W. G. & J. Strutt at a cost of £10 19s 3½d.

“To Wages and materials for repairs at alms-houses, Belper, viz New Chimney-top, repairing roofs, new soot-doors for sweeping chimneys, making good the plastering of Walls, repy inner doors and frames, a new floor to entrance, painting Window places, repy Fire places and ovens and boilers, putting in stench traps in back yards and in drains of slop stones, Stripping re-timbering and retiling roofs of petties, repy doors and door frames of the same, covering the vaults, and repy Back yards.”

John Hunter was disappointed by the cost. He wrote to Booker “It amounts to somewhat more than the estimate for on close examination there was so much more to do, to make a good job, than was at first anticipated that the expense could not be kept down to the estimated sum altho everything is charged at actual cost prices. However the houses are in good repairs now and tolerably comfortable.”

Six years later the trustees embarked on more substantial improvements and it was the work which was undertaken between 1873 and 1875 which was to give the almshouses the appearance which they have retained substantially unaltered to the present day. At the front new windows were installed, a porch was added and a new front door. The windows chosen in 1873 to replace the diamond pane leaded lights Hutton had fitted in 1829, were cast iron with brass hinges and catches. They were clearly of high quality but it is not known where they were made. The Strutt company made extensive use of cast iron windows in its own property and is said to have manufactured windows but it is not known where the almshouse windows were made. The illustration on pages 20-21 shows the opening light design which was fitted to the kitchen, the middle opening of the living room, the staircase and one of the two bedroom windows. The remainder, including the porch window, were similar in appearance but with no opening light. This refurbishment cost £42 5s. In the same year, the coat of arms was cleaned - a task which took David Beresford three days and cost the trustees 17s 6d. In 1876 £16 13s 1d was spent on a new shed. It seems likely that this included the erection of a corrugated iron lean-to roof across the rear of the almshouses for which Strutts obtained an estimate in November the previous year. A roof of this description in a dilapidated condition was removed from the almshouses when they were refurbished in 1990-91. The modernisation of the almshouses was completed in 1880 with the installation of gas lighting.

The trustees now turned their attention to expansion. By December 1879, despite the recent expenditure on building work, they had accumulated more than £400. In February 1880 G. H. Strutt wrote to the Charity Commission suggesting that a plot of land should be purchased and two more almshouses built. The proposal did not impress the Charity Commission.



**Notice.**—The Directors of the Belper Gas & Coke Company inform their consumers that no Discount will be allowed, unless Accounts are paid on delivery, or within 14 days thereof, at their Office, Prospect Cottages, between the hours of 7 and 8 p.m., on the evenings of Monday, Wednesday and Saturday in each week, during the 14 days after the delivery of this Bill.

The Collector will also be in attendance every Saturday night between 7 and 8.

No. 434

Belper, December 31st, 1881.

*Mr. H. Trusler Smith, Charity, Dr.*

**TO THE BELPER GAS AND COKE COMPANY.**

To Gas supplied by Meter, viz:—

State of Index when taken present Quarter...

*13 3*

Deduct ditto when taken last Quarter .....

*8 1*

*6 2 4/6 pr. 1000*

Less Discount payable as per other side.....

|          |          |          |
|----------|----------|----------|
|          |          |          |
| <i>1</i> | <i>3</i> | <i>5</i> |
|          |          | <i>8</i> |
| <i>1</i> | <i>2</i> | <i>9</i> |
|          |          | <i>2</i> |
| <i>1</i> | <i>3</i> | <i>4</i> |

For One Quarter's Rent of

Light Meter.....

Account delivered January

1882.

Received the above Account

*10 Jan'y*

1882.

*Collector.*

One of the Charity's first gas bills.

"I am to point out", the secretary wrote in reply, "that the two inmates of the Almshouses are entitled under the terms of the Instrument of Foundation by which the Charity was created to the income of the endowment. The Commissioners would not therefore be disposed to sanction any increase in the number of recipients unless the income can be shown to have so largely increased as to be in excess of the requirements of the almspeople intended to be benefited by the founder.

The stipends of the Almspeople should be sufficient to afford them respectable and decent support, the present payment of four shillings a week each is barely sufficient to provide the necessaries of life. It does not appear after making allowance for outgoings repairs and insurance that the whole income of the Charity including interest on the accumulation would be more than enough to provide proper support for two Almspeople.

I am to request that you will be good enough to state the extent of accommodation afforded in the present building to each inmate and whether the Almshouses are now in a sufficient and proper state of repair. The Commissioners would

be quite disposed to sanction any necessary outlay on the existing buildings in order to promote the comfort of the Almspeople and to provide suitable accommodation for them.

I am now to suggest that the accumulations (subject to any such necessary outlay) in the hands of the Trustees should be invested in the purchase of Consols in the name of the Official Trustees of Charitable Funds in trust for the Charity..."

The trustees were not happy with the Charity Commissioners' reply and Strutt suggested that he or Bradshaw should meet the Commissioners before a final decision was made. He told the Commissioners that the almshouses were in a good state of repair. "In one house is a widow and in the other a widow and her daughter, and they all express themselves satisfied and thankful for the stipend and allowances which are considerably in excess of those the present Trustees found when appointed. The almshouses are so hemmed in by other property that it would be impossible to add to them except by raising them which does not seem advisable."

The Charity Commission offered the possibility of an interview but by June the trustees had given up the struggle and agreed to sign an order placing £413 in the hands of the official trustee to purchase 3% stock. The trustees also increased the amount paid to the residents.

There were approximately sixty more years of Strutt management of the almshouses. In 1882 George Herbert Strutt became a trustee and he was followed in 1929 by George Ashton Strutt. From time to time other trustees were appointed, served the charity and were replaced (a list of trustees appears on page 40) but the continuity of the Strutt line was unbroken until George Ashton Strutt's death in 1935. Even then the Strutt estate continued to play its part in managing the property directed by John Hunter's successor, Maurice Hunter. By 1938, however, the association was becoming strained. In March 1938 N. S. Brundell, who had succeeded Maurice Hunter as agent to the Strutt estate, wrote to the Charity Commission as follows

"During Mr J. Hunter's lifetime any repairs that were required to the property were carried out by this Estate and charged to the Charity, and all rents etc were paid in through the Estate. This procedure continued throughout Mr J. Hunter's lifetime and during the time Colonel M. Hunter was Agent for the Estate.

I have now taken over from Colonel Hunter and as the Estate have done the work for so many years, I am prepared to continue on the same lines as long

as I have a written authority to carry out all repairs to the properties that are in my opinion necessary.

If this cannot be arranged, I shall have to hand over the management as I have not the time to consult the Trustees and get their permission for any repairs that are required."

Brundell went on to explain that he needed authority to spend money installing a water supply to one of the charity's fields and he asks the Commissioners for authority to undertake this work. It is not clear from this letter what Brundell's relationship was with the trustees. Had he fallen out with them or had they simply ceased to exist as a coherent management body? The latter would appear to be the case as Brundell in a subsequent letter to the Charity Commission asked for advice as to who should take over the Charity's deeds accounts and cash if he gave up the management of the charity. The outcome of this further enquiry was the appointment of new trustees of whom one was Brundell himself. Brundell did not survive the war and although there is no record of any formal handover of control from the Strutt estate it would appear that the Strutt association did not continue for many years after the war. It is possible that the breach dates from 1948. In 1947 new trustees had been appointed and from April 1948 meetings of trustees began to be held regularly and each meeting was reliably minuted. Also at this time the charity's account was moved from the Westminster Bank to the Belper Savings Bank.

## DECLINE AND CLOSURE

The loss of Strutt patronage was a serious blow but in fact the seeds of the problem the charity was to face over the next twenty years had been sown years before. Like so many other charities with capital invested in government stock producing a secure but modest return, the Matthew Smith Charity had no protection against inflation. In addition its rent income was hardly more than double what it had been a century earlier; in 1960 it was £48 10s; in 1860 it had been £21. An effort was made to keep up with modern developments and in 1952 electricity was installed in both houses and the resident's allowance doubled from 2s to 4s per week. A year later one of the houses was redecorated at a cost of £18. In 1961 enquiries were made to see if a bath could be installed in the almshouses (sic). It was not until 1972 that one of the houses was equipped with a modern sink and a bathroom though the lavatory remained in the shed in the back yard.

The last meeting of the trustees before the trust was revived in 1988, for which minutes survive, was held in October 1969. It was agreed to discontinue the payment of pocket money to one resident - newly installed - but to continue to pay

the other one.

Conditions in the almshouse to which no improvement had been made were deteriorating fast. In November 1972 a letter was received from Derbyshire County Council Social Services Department.

“Mr George Loving (72 years), 25A The Butts, Belper

As I'm sure you will know Mr Loving is a registered blind person. He lives alone and is uncomplaining, coping cheerfully with what must be a rather lonely and sometimes difficult existence. Although a member of several clubs, he does not seem to have many visitors and the initiative to call on acquaintances seems to be left with Mr Loving.

He does not find it easy to cope in the house, not being able to cook proper meals for himself, and much of the time he goes out for meals.

I understand that the adjoining flat was recently modernised, and I really feel that if Mr Loving's flat could be similarly improved, his situation would be made very much easier. Particularly having to fetch water from a cold tap in the hall whenever he needs water is more difficult for a blind person to manoeuvre, as well as being inconvenient.

His rooms are dismal and poorly furnished and in need of decoration. But while Mr Loving feels there is a chance of his flat being modernised, he is obviously not making efforts to improve things.

This department would be able to offer Mr Loving up to six weeks Short Term Care at our short stay old people's home in Chesterfield, subject to a vacancy at the appropriate time, if you required him to leave the rooms during modernisation.”

But the trustees were not in a position to undertake any further work and in 1974 Mr Loving left 25A. Number 25 continued in use but by 1982 it too was empty. In 1978 J. G. Lamb, the honorary secretary/treasurer to the charity, wrote to the Charity Commission seeking approval to let one of the almshouses to a “young man and his future wife” attempts to find an aged person having failed. The Charity Commission would not agree to the property being let to anyone not having the required qualifications for appointment

“It may well be that because of the age of the property... it lacks many modern amenities and for this reason alone potential beneficiaries may be deterred. In any event if it could be conclusively shown that there is no need for almshouses in the area the Commissioners would expect the property to be sold and the proceeds invested so that the income could in future be put to

some other charitable purpose. We would certainly not agree to a sale without first considering whether the property could continue to be used for the purpose for which it was originally provided.

It seems to me that at this stage the first step must be to examine the current finances and consider whether it would be feasible to modernise both the almshouses up to the current standards expected of old people's dwellings. This may not be as difficult as you might imagine as it is possible to get substantial grants for improvements."

The Commission also indicated that they would be prepared to consider a new scheme for the regulation of the charity. Mr Pym considered the Charity Commission's suggestion but although he was aware that Mr Beresford the one surviving co-trustee wanted to resign, he did not feel able to appoint new trustees. He wrote to Lamb "I think that it will be dangerous for me to attempt to appoint a new Trustee at this stage, merely because I believe that the Charity Commission wish to take some action with regard to the Charity. Furthermore I do not think that it is very easy for us to continue the maintenance of the property." Nine months later, in December 1979, a letter from the Department of the Environment advised the trust that the almshouses had now been listed so imposing further obligations to keep the building in good repair. Two years later, in December 1981 Mr Pym learned of Mr Beresford's death; he was now the charity's sole trustee. A further two years passed. There was now talk of terminating the Trust and in June 1983 an offer was received from Mr J. R. Fox to purchase the almshouses but sale was not a course of action the Charity Commission would entertain.

In 1984 Messers Pym and Lamb made a final attempt to resolve the trust's problems. In January the Charity Commission asked for a description of the property and an account of what needed to be done to bring it up to modern standards. Lamb commissioned Roy Meakin, a local architect to inspect the property. His report described extensive decay, rising damp, and perished wiring. The iron windows needed scraping, painting and reglazing and the rainwater goods would have to be renewed. The roof too needed some repair. He concluded that although the property was generally sound in construction it would need extensive refurbishment and additional accommodation if it was to meet the standards that would be required by the local authority. He estimated the capital cost to be fourteen thousand pounds. The report was sent to the Charity Commission who put Mr Lamb in touch with the National Association of Almshouses and subsequently the Association and representatives of the Walbrook Housing Association visited the property. The verdict was depressing. Walbrook's architects considered that the cost of renovation would be forty thousand pounds whereas the funding available from the Housing Corporation would be unlikely to exceed twenty five thousand pounds. The only hope seemed to lie with a sale of land and the reinvestment of the proceeds in the renovation of the building. It

is not clear how far this option was investigated. Meanwhile the almshouses were becoming increasingly dilapidated and had begun to attract the attention of vagrants and vandals. Following complaints from the public the Amber Valley Borough Council approached Mr Lamb requesting action. There was no alternative but to seal the buildings. The window openings were built up with concrete blocks and the doors secured. All this cost £256 which the charity could ill afford.

The condition of the almshouses increasingly attracted public comment. Among the local residents who expressed their concern there was one, Charles Broadhurst, who refused to let the matter rest. In 1985-6 he raised the problem with local politicians, the Amber Valley Borough Council, the Belper Historical Society and with the Charity Commission. As a long standing member of the Belper Local History Group - a local history workshop run by the University of Nottingham Department of Adult Education and the Belper branch of the Workers Educational Association - he won support from within the group and once again the matter was taken up with the Charity Commission and with the National Association of Almshouses and now with the Derbyshire Rural Community Council. In June 1987, as a result of this pressure, the director of the National Association of Almshouses, David Scott, set up a meeting with Mr Pym, a representative of the Derbyshire Rural Community Council and three members of the Belper Local History Group.

Three years earlier the Charity Commission had spelt out the only way in which progress could be made to revive the Matthew Smith Almshouse Charity and, it was hoped, save the almshouses. The Charity Commission's instructions were clear. The Charity required a new constitution if it was to be able to attract finance from the Housing Corporation or indeed to serve contemporary needs. The only authority to direct trustees was Matthew Smith's will and the statement of the charity's objects prepared by the Commission of Inquiry in 1826. But to adopt a new scheme the legal representatives of the existing charity had to make such a choice formally and agree to a new legal framework. However, this could not be done by the sole surviving trustee. He must first appoint new trustees. The meeting considered these issues and a way forward emerged. Mr Pym would send the names of the three representatives from the Belper Local History Group - Mr Broadhurst, Mr Charlton and Mr Holden - to the Charity Commission as new trustees and Richard Gibbs, Deputy Director of the Derbyshire Rural Community Council, agreed to act as correspondent so relieving Mr Pym and Mr Lamb from the responsibility of administering the charity. Mr Gibbs agreed to perform this task until such time as the new trustees were confirmed by the Charity Commission. No action was possible until the process of appointment had been completed and it was in fact not until February 1988 that the new trustees were able to join Mr Pym in managing the charity. A first and vital step had been taken yet there was little the trustees could do to rescue the almshouses. Although the trust now had four trustees and a secretary its financial state had not improved. It had access to just

over four thousand pounds, not enough to begin repairing the almshouses even though parts of the roof had now begun to collapse and work was urgently required. It was decided to move as quickly as possible towards the adoption of a new constitution while, at the same time, raising funds for essential repairs and planning the extension and refurbishment of the almshouses. In April the trustees commissioned the architects Anthony Short and Partners of Ashbourne to prepare a scheme and put in hand the repair of the roof. By September 1988 the trustees had agreed the form of the new constitution. Henceforth the charity would be managed by eight trustees, one ex-officio, two nominated and five co-opted. The ex-officio trustee would be the incumbent of St. Peter's Church Belper and the two nominated trustees, representatives of the Amber Valley Borough Council and Belper Town Council. The five co-opted trustees "shall be persons who through residence, occupation or employment, or otherwise have special knowledge of the area of benefit". The Charity Commission was anxious to retain the founder's original intentions for the charity and with this object in mind the minimum age of residence remains fifty; and the preference for Belper residents has been maintained.

The new scheme had been agreed informally with the Charity Commission by the autumn of 1988 but no action could be taken until formal approval had been granted and it soon became clear to the trustees that they were involved in a race against two bureaucracies. On the one hand the Charity Commission with its legal procedures to complete and on the other the Housing Corporation grant timetable for which registration and all other legal arrangements including the Charity Commissions approval of the new scheme had to be complete by March 31st 1989 if the charity was to receive financial aid. In the event, with friendly cooperation from all parties, the deadlines were achieved. The new trust held its first meeting on March 13th. Messrs Broadhurst, Charlton and Holden were joined by the Rev Martin White; Mrs Janet McKee representing the Amber Valley Borough Council; Mr Peter Smedley representing Belper Town Council; and Mrs Jenny Harrington and Mr A. B. Williamson. The trust placed the administration of the Housing Corporation grant and loan in the hands of the Walbrook Housing Association and builders were invited to tender for the repair and conversion of the building. The contract was placed with P. J. Whitehurst of South Normanton and work began in December 1989.

In April 1991 the new almshouses received their first residents, Mrs E. M. Rogers and Mrs A. McCluskey. For the trustees the rescue of the Matthew Smith Almshouses will not be complete until the official opening by Her Grace The Duchess of Devonshire on October 5.





## THE NEW ALMSHOUSES

The adaptation and extension of the almshouses has been approached from the beginning as a compromise between the need to provide accommodation of a high standard and a concern to preserve the integrity of John Hutton's original design. In fact the space Hutton created to the rear of the almshouses when he erected his building nearer to the front of the plot than the original one enabled modern extensions to be attached to each almshouse at no greater visual cost than the demolition of the outside toilets and coal sheds. Each extension contains a kitchen, bathroom and back door access to the yard. Internally, alterations were minimal. The fireplace in number 25 and iron range which had survived in 25A were replaced by gas fires and central heating boilers. New floor surfaces were provided though the original lime ash upper floor was not disturbed. The beams and joists - many of which came from the first almshouses - have been cleaned and waxed and left exposed. Particular care has been taken with the cast iron windows almost all of which had to be replaced. New castings were supplied by S and D Castings of Chesterfield and the brass fittings were made and the windows assembled by William Haycock of Ashbourne. The replacement of the windows has greatly improved the external appearance of the building but the most striking change will be the replica plaque painted and gilded in its original colours. The plaque which formed the central adornment of Hutton's building in 1829 was then already more than a hundred years old and it is probable that even at that time the stone was seriously flawed. By 1989 much of the plaque had disintegrated and what remained was found to have at least thirty fractures. With great care Messrs Harrison Hill removed the ancient plaque, consolidated it by chemical treatment and returned it to be mounted in the central passage between the two houses. To replace it, Malcolm Bennett, a local sculptor was commissioned to make, paint and gild a replica. A brass plate commemorating the restoration and enlargement of the almshouses and their formal reopening has been placed beneath the original plaque. From the first meeting of the rescue group in June 1987 the rebirth of the Matthew Smith Charity has been both a national and a local community project and has attracted widespread support.

It will be some time before the final cost of the refurbishment is known but the trustees are expecting a figure of sixty thousand pounds. The lion's share of the funding has been provided by the Housing Corporation but the trustees have raised at least fifteen thousand pounds most of it locally. Generous help was received from A. B. Williamson; from Michael Thornton who agreed to become patron of the Matthew Smith fundraising appeal and from Thorntons plc; from the Baron Davenport Charity; the Strutt Charity; the Belper Unitarian Chapel Cottage Trust; Silkolene and British Gas (East Midlands). An application has been made for a grant from the Belper Town Scheme. In May 1990 a raffle to which numerous local firms contributed raised one thousand pounds and did much to publicise the Matthew Smith appeal.

In considering the history of the almshouses and the 130-140 year cycle of decline and rebirth the question might well be asked how long will the new charity and almshouses survive? Who can tell. All the present trustees can promise is that the steps they and the Charity Commission have taken should be adequate to see that funds are retained for maintenance of the building and for its ultimate renewal. But no doubt their predecessors would have given a similar answer; and look what happened to their good intentions.

## Note

This account of the Matthew Smith Almshouses has been based almost entirely on the records held by the present trustees. The files of the Charity Commission in London and Liverpool have been consulted and the account of the Commission of Inquiry is based on The Charity Commission and the Age of Reform, Richard Tompson, 1979. The author would like to thank the following for their help in producing this booklet; David Hool, Adrian Henstock, Charity Commission staff in London and Liverpool, Mr & Mrs Kitson, Dianne Castle and the staff of the Cromford Mill project and Tom Brown, Printers. The trustees of the Matthew Smith Almshouse Charity would like to thank the University of Nottingham Department of Adult Education for its generous assistance in covering the cost of printing.

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# RESIDENTS OF THE MATTHEW SMITH ALMSHOUSE CHARITY

|   |              |              |
|---|--------------|--------------|
| 2 women                                   | present 1773 |              |
| A poor man of Codnor and Loscoe           |              | dead by 1825 |
| James Harrison &                          |              | dead by 1826 |
| Elizabeth Harrison                        | present 1830 |              |
| Joseph Holmes                             | 1829         |              |
| Mr Hall                                   | 1843         | 1857         |
| Mrs Hall                                  | 1843         | 1845         |
| Samuel Harrison                           | 1845         | 1851         |
| William Pugh                              | 1857         | 1865         |
| Mrs Hannah Pugh                           | 1857         | 1881         |
| George Bridges                            | 1851         | 1860         |
| Mrs Bridges                               | 1851         | 1860         |
| Thomas Alton                              | 1860         | 1872         |
| Mrs Phoebe Alton                          | 1860         | 1875         |
| John Malin                                | 1875         | 1877         |
| Mrs Martha Malin                          | 1875         | 1888         |
| Eliza Pugh                                | 1881         | 1897         |
| Joseph Kirkland                           | 1887         | 1887         |
| Mrs Mary Kirkland                         | 1887         | 1892         |
| Mr R Goodwin                              | 1898         | 1903         |
| Mr Isaac Stafford                         | 1892         | 1895         |
| Mrs Ann Stafford                          | 1892         | 1899         |
| also Miss Ann Stafford from time to time  |              |              |
| James Stone                               | 1899         | 1910         |
| Mrs Crooks and Mrs Mawby                  | 1903         | 1909         |
| John Davenport                            | 1909         | 1909         |
| Mr John Taylor                            | 1909         | 1913         |
| Mrs Mary Taylor                           | 1909         | 1919         |
| Mrs Beardmore                             | 1910         | 1919         |
| Sarah Ann Merchant                        | 1919         |              |
| sometimes Miss Beresford later Hallsworth |              |              |
| Mr Thomas Wetton                          | 1920         | 1921         |
| Mrs Elizabeth Wetton                      | 1920         | 1921         |
| Jackson                                   | 1921         | 1928         |
| Hall                                      | 1928         | 1931         |

The last residents of the almshouses were Miss B Clyde and Mr G Loving. He left in 1974 and she in March 1982. She had moved in when the bathroom had been fitted in 1972 but by 1982 the cottage had become too damp for continued occupation.

## TRUSTEES OF THE MATTHEW SMITH ALMSHOUSE CHARITY

|   |      |              |
|---|------|--------------|
| George Gregory  | 1713 | 1746         |
| Thomas Goodwin  | 1713 |              |
| Gregory and Goodwin were appointed by the will of Matthew Smith |      |              |
| George Gregory  | 1746 | 1758         |
| George De Ligne Gregory   | 1758 | 1822         |
| Gregory Gregory   | 1822 | 1851         |
| George Gregory  | 1851 | 1860         |
| John Sherwin Gregory  | 1860 | 1867         |
| George Henry Strutt   | 1867 | 1895         |
| Francis Bradshaw the younger                                    | 1867 | 1881         |
| The Rev Henry Bradshaw  | 1882 |              |
| John Hunter   | 1882 |              |
| George Herbert Strutt   | 1882 | 1928         |
| George Ashton Strutt  | 1929 | 1935         |
| H. V. A. M. Raikes Later Sir Victor Raikes KBE                  | 1929 | died 1986    |
| J. P. R. Pym  | 1929 | 1938         |
| N. S. Brundell  | 1939 | dead by 1945 |
| G. A. Beresford   | 1939 | 1953         |
| W. S. Beresford   | 1947 | 1981         |
| C. H. Greenwood   | 1947 | 1949         |
| J. R. Brittain  | 1950 | 1963         |
| J. P. R. Pym  | 1950 | 1989         |
| Hubert Tunnard  | 1953 |              |
| Christopher Charlton  | 1988 |              |
| D. C. Broadhurst  | 1988 |              |
| Bernard Holden  | 1988 |              |
| P. A. Smedley   | 1989 |              |
| A. B. Williamson  | 1989 |              |
| Mrs J. M. Harrington  | 1989 |              |
| The Rev Martin White  | 1989 |              |
| Mrs Janet McKee   | 1989 |              |