

The History of the Dulwich Almshouse 1616-2016



By Brian Green

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THE DULWICH ALMSHOUSE
1616 - 2016

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FOREWORD

On 30th September 1616, Henry Briggs of Peckham became the first of the almspeople to benefit from Edward Alleyn's bequest to provide accommodation for 12 poor brothers and sisters in the Almshouse in Dulwich.

Today's residents range in age from 70 to 100, with the oldest two having lived here for 25 years each. Understanding earlier this year that we had no protocol on how we celebrate the 100th birthday of a resident, let alone a quater-centenary, was a nice problem to have. Our residents enjoy the privacy of their individual homes but equally enjoy the community within which they live, their mutual companionship and support.

When the Dulwich Almshouse Charity Trustees began to consider appropriate ways to celebrate this 400th Anniversary there was unanimous support for the idea of putting on record the history of the first 400 years.

We turned to local historian, Brian Green, the author of many respected historical books about Dulwich, to undertake this task on behalf of the Almshouse Charity. We are very appreciative of his efforts in trawling through archives and records within Dulwich and those Parishes associated with the Almshouse as stipulated by its founder and benefactor.

This history is a fascinating and informative read which we are sure you will find enlightening.

We are also grateful to the Dulwich Community Council who have awarded us a grant from the Neighbourhood Funds to publish and distribute this record.

The book captures both the high and low points, as the fortunes of the Almshouse have ebbed and flowed over the past 400 years, its relationship to the other foundation institutions and to the wider community.

The book highlights the part played by so many in securing a future for the Almshouse, be it a financial bequest or the support of individuals such as Chaplains, Governors, Doctors and Wardens. Brian Green outlines their many contributions, often in the face of resistance and adversity.

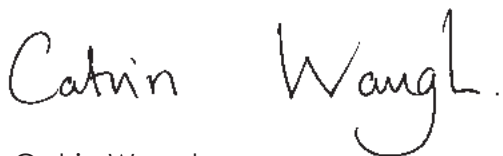
As the current Trustees, we are grateful not to have been confronted by the long list of disciplinary issues that one of the residents, John Allenbee, invoked in 1633, nor the trauma of evacuating 15 residents at the outset of the Second World War in September 1939. This uprooting

was not without its difficulties and blitz or no blitz they returned to London the following July!

In 1935 an inspection of the Almshouse had deemed that the accommodation was unsuitable and that modernisation of the existing building impractical; yet it was reported in 1951 that:

"There were no baths or washing accommodation. There was 1 WC between 4 almspeople. Lighting was still by gaslight. Heat was only obtained from a fireplace in the living room (except for the 4 larger flats where there was a small fireplace in the bedroom)"

Within the constraints of the existing building the Almshouse has undergone significant improvements, and schemes to build a replacement Almshouse have come and gone. Now, in this 400th Anniversary year we are once more attempting to secure this ambition which has eluded the Governors and Trustees for at least 80 years. It is our hope that when the next chapter is written it will record the move of Edward Alleyn House from its current building of 1739 to a new purpose-built replacement Almshouse which will continue the vision of Edward Alleyn 400 years ago.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading 'Catrin Waugh'. The script is cursive and fluid, with the first name 'Catrin' and the last name 'Waugh' clearly distinguishable.

Catrin Waugh,

Chair of the Dulwich Almshouse Trustees 2016



Edward Alleyn House from College Road

INTRODUCTION

Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up. (The First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians chapter 13, v.4)

With The Bible strewn with references to the need to help the poor, it is hardly surprising that the Church, through its monasteries and friaries, alleviated poverty in the forms of food and alms. Through the centuries, however, a small number of individual benefactors had approached the problem of the aged poor by providing almshouses: simple accommodation, where the poor, supported usually by some form of stipend, might live out their remaining years. With the beginning of the decline of the monasteries in the 15th century, the Church's avenue of relief began to dry up and increasingly assistance for the aged poor was taken up by wealthy laypeople. Their motivation, aside from natural concern, might also have been that through such good works they would secure a place in Christ's Kingdom. With the end of the monastic system in England at the Reformation only lay initiative remained. Now, apart from satisfying individual Christian conscience, such acts of charity could also bring public approbation and prestige to the benefactors. Yet the historian John Stow observed in his monumental *Survey of London* published in 1598 that there was, in his lifetime, 'a declining time of charity'.

The wealth of the nation grew in the Elizabethan period. At the same time it was a period of greater fertility and the

population expanded. The City of London and its overflow in Southwark, at the southern end of London Bridge, increasingly became the centre, not only for a highly skilled labour force but also as a destination for large numbers of the unskilled and unemployed. This brought the problem of dealing with poverty sharply into focus.

Towards the end of the sixteenth century, the extent of poverty was so great, especially among the elderly and the unemployed, that dealing with it became the responsibility of the State who delegated the task of exercising relief to local parishes.

A series of modest attempts to deal with the situation had been undertaken somewhat earlier in the century but in 1601 the Poor Relief Act sought to divide the deserving from the undeserving poor. Workhouses and Houses of Correction were required to be built in the parishes for those fit to work and almshouses, often built, as we have seen, by charitable individuals or City companies, usually on land provided and maintained by the parishes, attempted to deal with the aged poor. For example, at Cripplegate – on the north side of Beech Lane towards Whitecross Street, the Drapers of London built eight almshouses for eight poor widows of their own company. In Golding Lane, Richard Gallard of Islington,



Edward Alleyn 1566-1626

citizen and painter-stainer of London, founded thirteen almshouses. Thus Edward Alleyn was in the vanguard of individual efforts to relieve the plight of the indigent elderly.

He was well able to appreciate the situation

for himself. He had grown up in the parish of St Botolph's, a parish on the extremity of the City where poverty over the succeeding centuries would tend to increase and which, later, with the neighbouring parish of St Luke's, Finsbury, would be termed 'Costermongria' by the Reverend William Rogers. And he should know, because Rogers was the Rector of St Botolph's for twenty years from 1863 (as well as being a College and Estate's governor).

It was in Finsbury that Alleyn built his Fortune Theatre, and rebuilt it in 1621 after a disastrous fire. Lastly, he lived with his wife Joan in Southwark, in the Clink Liberty of the parish of St Saviour's (now Southwark Cathedral). He chose Southwark because it was the home of both the Elizabethan theatre and his father-in-law, Philip Henslowe, who owned the Rose Theatre where Alleyn performed and was his business partner. It was also convenient for the Bear Garden where he and Henslowe jointly enjoyed the Royal Warrant for staging bear and bull-baiting shows for James I and his Court.

Alleyn took his civic duties seriously. Following the Elizabethan Poor Act, St Saviour's parish opened what was called 'The Great Inquest' or 'The Great Enquiry', to assess the numbers of the poor and who in the parish would contribute to the subsidy needed to pay for their relief. It was an ongoing exercise and Philip Henslowe served on the enquiry from 1604-1614. Edward Alleyn and Henslowe were appointed joint Assessors for the Clink Liberty from 1608-9 and made the

assessment for the first payment of the third Subsidy. At the time, the Clink Liberty extended from St Saviour's to approximately the site of today's Tate Modern Gallery.

The *"State of the Clincke LibertyeConsisteth of five C and lx householders; 201 of them being watermen, one hundred and more of handye trades; besides 101 veerie poor people, widows and others, all readye to take and not to give. Of which number manye doe now receive relief of weekly pension in a farre larger measure than ever heartofore, which charge is chiefly born by the Subsidy men with the help of some few others of the Libertye as a burden growing everye day more heavy then other"*.

In 1610 Alleyn succeeded Henslowe as one of the two churchwardens representing the Clink Liberty of St Saviour's. It is possible he was churchwarden again in 1616-17 as the name Alleyn appears on the list of churchwardens. There is also a reference in his diary *"21st March 1617 I went to ye Vestry"*. There can be no doubt Edward Alleyn was fully aware of the extent of poverty that existed in London.

It seems unlikely that when Alleyn purchased the Manor of Dulwich in 1605 he envisaged setting up his charitable foundation of school and almshouses to aid poor boys and the deserving aged poor. After all, he had only just retired from his successful stage career, he had not at that time involved himself so deeply in parochial affairs at Southwark and he already had a reputation as a property investor with

investments in Sussex, Kennington and the City. The objects of his benevolence would be the parishes of London with which he was so closely involved: St Botolph's, the parish where he was born, St Giles's, Cripplegate, where he had his theatre, St Saviour's, Southwark, where he had been churchwarden and lastly Camberwell, the parish in which Dulwich and his college were situated.

Some event or perhaps a reflection on life's inconsistencies might have been the catalyst for the dramatic step he would take in 1613 when he began to put his great plan for his Foundation into action. Two possibilities present themselves. He would have been aware that by leaving to the world a charitable legacy he would be affectionately remembered. Maybe this might have appealed to his actor's desire for applause. On the other hand he might, possibly, have been moved to devote his wealth for the benefit of others less fortunate in life than he because of his Christian conscience.

In support of the latter, the fact is that he did put a place of worship, literally, at the centre of his Foundation. When he framed his Statutes to ensure it would continue after his death in the way he wanted it to, he required that the services at Christ's Chapel of God's Gift be the same as those of the King's Chapel or Westminster Abbey. In his Diary and Account Book, he closes each month's summary with *"Blessed be ye Lorde god Everlasting ye giver of all. Amen ."* For the end of year accounts in 1618 he wrote:



Geronticonium , Amsterdam. This print is in the Dulwich College Archives and bears a similarity to Edward Alleyn's design of his college.

"Praise bee ye name of our good god both now and ever through Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen".

One aspect of his character appears to have been overlooked by historians; Edward Alleyn was a very organized and methodical man. It is quite certain that he did not enter upon his Foundation blindly. There is plenty of evidence that he inspected the Statutes of various other schools like Winchester and Eton and there is a translation of the Statutes of the

Orphanoconium and Geronticonium in Amsterdam as well as an etching of this building, which bears some similarity to his proposed college, in the Dulwich archives. At St Saviour's, Southwark, almshouses had already been built by Thomas Cure and the parish boasted a grammar school. Alleyn would certainly have observed how all these were conducted and was of course also aware of the school and almshouses being built by Thomas Sutton at the Charterhouse in 1611.

By 1613 his mind was certainly made up to create his foundation as he gave detailed building instructions to his contractor John Benson of Westminster. These instructions on the building of his College are so detailed that he must have had the advice of an architect. The name of Inigo Jones immediately comes to mind. He was a friend and business colleague of Alleyn, a designer of stage scenery on occasion and, with Alleyn, an emissary of the Jacobean Court. There is no evidence that Jones actually oversaw the construction, indeed there is documentation to show that he was abroad during the building, but his hand in the detail of the design does seem likely.

The building was completed by 1616 and on 1st September, his birthday, the Chapel of God's Gift was consecrated. His staff of four Fellows, a Preacher, a Schoolmaster, an Usher and an Organist began to be assembled. On the 30th of the same month, the first of the poor brothers and sisters was admitted. The poor brethren were placed in ground floor rooms in the east wing and the poor sisters in similar accommodation in the west wing. For the next ten years Alleyn managed the College himself, assisted by Thomas and Matthias Alleyn his cousins who would succeed him as Master and Warden respectively. During this time he carefully worked out a structure of how the enterprise would function after his death. These instructions were summed up in the Statutes he issued a couple of months before his death in 1626. His Will, written in his closing days, demonstrated his wish to spread his benevolence as far as possible

and he left instructions that ten almshouses were to be built in the parishes of St Botolph's and St Saviour's. He had already laid the first brick of his almshouses at St Giles's, Cripplegate. Furthermore, it was also his wish to give a weekly pension to all thirty poor people who occupied them.

Alleyn calculated that the income from rents on his estate would meet the £600 per annum running costs of the College and leave an anticipated £200 balance. £100 of this was to be retained in the treasury chest for emergencies and building repairs and the second £100 was to pay other expenses such as financing the boys at university and parish charges like road repairs. If there was more than £15 left after deducting these costs, then a dividend would be declared and the residue shared on a set scale among the Master, Warden, Fellows and even the poor brothers and sisters.

During Edward Alleyn's stewardship there was a decline in the value of rents caused by a series of bad harvests and he was obliged to add more property investments to his endowment to ensure the Foundation's future viability. He got his sums just about right because In 1628, two years after his death, a small dividend was declared and the almspeople received a no doubt very welcome one shilling each. However, there would be no further dividends for the next 85 years, such would be the precariousness of the financial position of the College.

When, in the early eighteenth century, the

east wing needed to be rebuilt, the College was able to take on a loan to carry it out. A century later the west wing reached a similarly ruinous state but the ingenious idea of placing the poor sisters in purpose built rooms on the west side of the new Picture Gallery relieved the situation for the next, almost, eighty years.

What changed significantly in the second half of the eighteenth and first half of the nineteenth centuries was the rise in income from Edward Alleyn's estate in Dulwich. Better transport links created by new and improved roads brought Dulwich within easy travelling distance of the City and, via the new bridges across the Thames, with Westminster. Prosperous new tenants, wishing to avail themselves of Dulwich's peaceful and sylvan setting were prepared to invest in substantial properties even though the leases, as originally set by Alleyn, were, at 21 years, ridiculously short. Ways were found around this difficulty and the income flowing in continued to increase. At the same time there was no legal requirement to share this beyond the original beneficiaries of Edward Alleyn's bounty – the Master, Warden, the Fellows and the 12 poor brothers and sisters in the almshouses in Dulwich.

Over the centuries, the three parishes who benefitted from Edward Alleyn's legacy, either by nominating deserving elderly poor or bright young schoolboys for his almshouse and College pressed for pensions for the thirty outpensioners, ten from each parish, whom Alleyn wished to help when he made provision for them

in his Statutes and his Will. For a time, in the seventeenth century, the parishes, through the actions of their churchwardens who acted as Assistants in scrutinizing the quarterly accounts of the Warden at Alleyn's College, were successful in persuading the Visitor, the Archbishop of Canterbury, of the right of their case. By the early eighteenth century, a different archbishop dismissed this claim but the parishes would always continue to press for a share of Dulwich's increasing wealth.

To give some idea of the value of the vast increase in wealth to be shared among the members of the College, the almspeople who had received the one shilling dividend in 1628, were, by the first half of the nineteenth century receiving, in addition to their lodging and pension, an annual amount in today's money of around £8000 each. Of course this grotesque situation for a charity could not last, although it did persist for many years, and the College of God's Gift was reformed by Act of Parliament in 1857, and reformed once again to create more schools and beneficiaries in 1882.

The care of the almspeople, which had been overseen over the years by the Warden, was after 1857 carried out by the Chaplain. When the responsibilities of the Chaplain were reduced soon after 1900, the Manager of the Dulwich Estate took over these duties. However, from time to time, a small committee drawn from the governors of the estate met regularly to inspect and report on the condition and well being of the almspeople. It was not

until after World War 2 that this committee had any form of permanency.

Although the 1882 Act was principally concerned with establishing schools, it did also address the question of pensions for the poor of the three parishes, so dear to the heart of the Founder, and accordingly allocated two forms of out-pensions to those nominated. 1st Class pensioners, who might later be admitted to the Dulwich almshouses, were given a higher pension than the 2nd Class pensioners who were usually resident in the parishes' own almshouses. It also established an annual endowment for running costs of the almshouses and the paying of the pensions. By setting the endowment with a fixed value and no access to capital sums, there would be difficulty for the new Estate's Governors, whose hands were tied in what they could and could not do when major works needed to be done.

In 1902, the former parish vestries were phased out and their duties passed to the newly formed borough councils. At the same time, responsibility for nominating both almspeople and out-pensioners passed to these new local authorities. In practice, the borough councils delegated this work; in the case of St Botolph's, to the newly founded Bishopsgate Institute, at St Luke's (which had replaced St Giles' Cripplegate because of population pressures in the early eighteenth century) to St Luke's Parochial Trust. The new borough of Camberwell took over St Giles's, Camberwell role which had been awarded to the parish in 1857. Previously, local

almspeople were selected by the College.

Although still needy, the almspeople of the twentieth century had usually enjoyed the benefit of a more improved lifestyle than their forebears. The need for discipline imposed by College Statutes disappeared. The age of the residents tended to increase, especially for women, as the health of the nation improved and there was a decline in both the numbers of those being nominated by the inner City parishes and in the number of male applicants.

The outbreak of World War 2 precipitated the evacuation of the Dulwich almspeople to a nursing home run by an order of Anglican nuns at Findon, Sussex. The men were accommodated in houses in the village. The evacuation lasted almost a year during which there was little or no enemy activity. A return to Dulwich virtually coincided with the start of the Blitz. The almshouses escaped largely unscathed until 1944 when a V1 flying bomb caused massive damage to the Picture Gallery, Old College and Chapel and partially to the almshouses. Fortunately there were no injuries to the almspeople.

After the war, as expectation of improved living standards increased, each almshouse committee was exercised in finding solutions to the inadequacies of the accommodation. Efforts to relieve these inadequacies by rebuilding elsewhere were frustrated by lack of funds, access to loans and a site to build upon. The pensions, which, because of a need for economy, had been reduced from their 1882 amount

in 1904, were still at the same level more than half a century later. Rising costs, caused by rapid inflation, dictated that the building should be patched up instead of properly rebuilt. In the 1970's, when fire hazards became obvious, it precipitated the introduction of a new scheme to allow funds for a more comprehensive overhaul. Around the same time there was also an

understanding that the term 'almshouse' was obsolete and a decision was taken to officially rename the building Edward Alleyn House and all references to the almshouse charity would be also called by this title.

In 1995 there was a further major reorganisation of the Foundation's structure. It was designed, largely, to allow the

Dulwich schools greater access to the income of the Foundation generated by the Dulwich Estate. At the same time it floated off three other parts of the Foundation as individual charities; Dulwich Picture Gallery, Christ's Chapel and what would now be termed the Dulwich Almshouse Charity. The Picture Gallery was separated from the Foundation by a lump sum endowment. The Dulwich Almshouse Charity would remain a beneficiary of the Foundation but would have its own trustees, funds and property.

In 2016 as the 400th anniversary of its foundation is celebrated the trustees still grapple with the problem their counterparts faced before them; how best to care for their elderly residents. The historic almshouses, now, sadly, fail to meet modern expectations of housing, however well the building itself is maintained. The trustees have therefore embarked upon an exciting new chapter in its history, by drawing up plans for a new building designed for maximum comfort and security and providing homes for an increased number of needy older people.



Residents of Edward Alleyn House today

CHAPTER ONE

Edward Alleyn runs the show

Edward Alleyn project-managed the building of his college, from the ordering of the bricks, to the glazing of its windows. That it was ready and opened on 1st September 1616, when Christ's Chapel was dedicated on his birthday, is testament to his organisational powers. He then went on to oversee the running of his new foundation until his death ten years later. He was assisted by his cousins, Thomas and Matthias Alleyn, who would in due course become Master and Warden respectively after his death. Although they may well have dealt with the day to day business of the estate, the conduct of the school and almshouses, Alleyn himself kept a close rein on expenditure and the financial stability of the enterprise. He even seems to have paid the almspeople their weekly pensions personally.

The first of the almspeople, Henry Briggs of Peckham, was admitted on 30th September 1616. St Giles', Cripplegate had also been quick to respond to the invitation to nominate suitable candidates over the age of sixty by having responded to the invitation on 14th September. John Jones, Alice Foster and Margaret Chapman were proposed. St Botolph's followed with

Mawde Lee, Henry Phillips and John Muggleton. St Saviour's reply is missing but soon after William Ceeley, James Saunders and Ann Allen from this parish were enrolled. A poem sent by the churchwardens of St Saviour's has survived:

*As god did move to build
A howse for many poore
To lieu by weekly almes that you
Allott them of your spore
God graunt they may be thanckfull still
While aged years give space
To Founders care and friends repport
That brought them to this place*

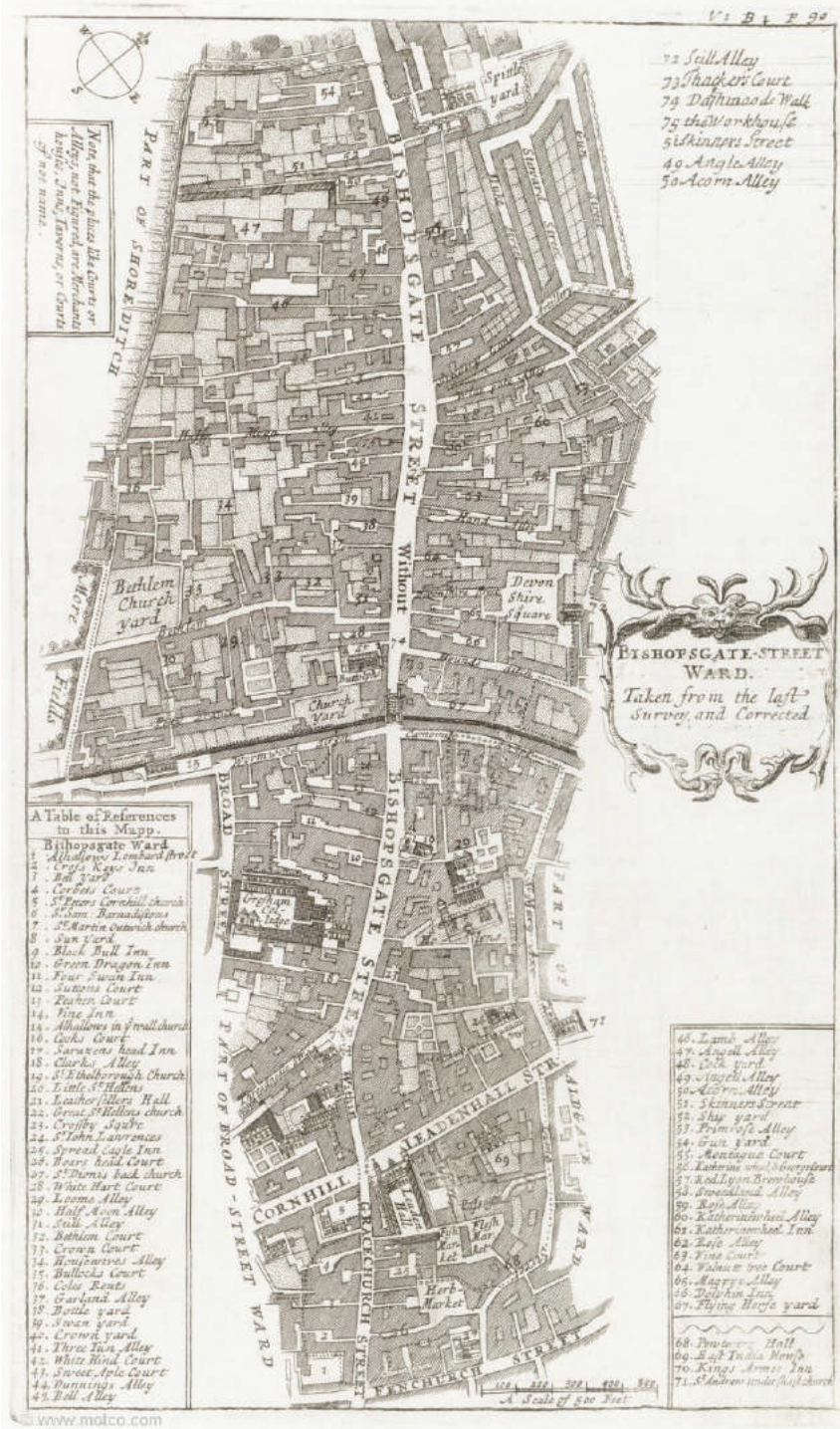
For Ann Allen the space was all too short as she died a couple of months later.

On Christmas Day 1616, Alleyn noted in his diary, "We received and dined ye poor people". It was a custom he established. This first dinner must have been a great success because ten days later, on January 4th 1617, a further invitation was made.

Occasionally, down the years, one or other of the poor brethren and sisters blotted their copybooks. John Muggleton, one of the first of the men admitted was one, "after many admonishions for drunkenness and contract of marriag wase expelled". The object of his affection was Sarah Sheppard, one of the poor sisters from

Camberwell who “went away to be married to Muggleton” in September 1618. It appears that Alleyn had made up his mind that he would only accept unmarried persons, although this requirement would change many years later.

In 1619, after considerable effort and anxiety, Edward Alleyn received the King's Letters Patent which would ensure the continuance of his Foundation after his death. It was this instrument which would determine over the ensuing years what could and could not be done in the running of the College, despite his afterthoughts, which are contained in his Statutes and his Will. The contradiction is, and this is what would give hope to the three parishes as they later sought to gain a greater share of the Dulwich estate, that the Letters Patent actually state that the College of God's Gift should be maintained, governed, sustained, guided, governed and ruled “according to such Ordnances, Statutes and Foundacon as shall be made...” That Alleyn later had bigger plans for his Foundation there can be no doubt as they are set out in his Statutes which he drew up during his years of personally running his charity. He also



Map of the parish of St Botolph's, Bishopsgate in 1720 . Petty France, the site of the Alleyn Almshouses is in the middle of the map.



The upper map, dated 1720, depicts the area which would form the new parish of St Luke's, Finsbury created in 1733 under the Eleven Churches Act (1711) to ameliorate some of the overcrowding in the adjacent parish of St Giles', Cripplegate

thought that they would be inviolable. As the subsequent history of the College tells us, they were not. For example: Statute 2 shows that he envisaged having six professional chaunters to sing and play music in Christ's Chapel. They were never employed. Alleyn also wished to extend his charity among the poor of London by establishing almshouses for ten persons in each of the City parishes and from whom candidates would be drawn and be removed to Dulwich as vacancies occurred. These were termed the 30 out-members and the funding of these with pensions and gowns would become a source of friction between the parishes and his successors.

The detailed Statutes also dealt with the conduct of the almspeople. One of the ablest and healthiest of the poor sisters was to be the matron for the twelve poor scholars, making their beds, sweeping their rooms, mending their clothes. Each of the other almswomen was to give her sixpence quarterly to recompense her, deducted from their pensions. Another of the almswomen was required to make the beds and sweep the chambers of the Fellows if they required it. If none were able to carry out these duties then hired help from elsewhere might be employed. In addition the other women "*shall weede and keepe clean the gardens in the forecourt of the college....*" The men and women were expected to look after each other in times of sickness. Although the men seemed to have got

off lightly, they were sometimes given odd jobs to do.

They were also supposed to account to the Master and Warden how they spent their pensions. There was a fear that the money might be spent on drink rather than clothes, bed linen or furniture. With the exception of a cat, they might not keep animals. There were strict rules about washing clothes and these were not to be done in their rooms and no washing was to be placed to dry in the courts. So there must have been some arrangement about doing their laundry elsewhere. They were also expected to attend Chapel twice every day at specified times and receive Holy Communion four times a year. The upside of this last regulation was that they would feast at dinner and supper on those days at the expense of the College.

Each was given a daily bread and beer allowance of a wheaten loaf weighing 12 ounces and a quart of 'eight shillings' beer. They would also receive (and be required to wear at all times) a black gown which would be replaced every two years on the 1st September. For any almsperson who frequented taverns and came back drunk they would get three warnings and at each warning a deduction of three days' pension would be made. If there was a fourth offence, then the miscreant would be set in the stocks in the outer court for one hour and also lose three days' pension. If there was a fifth occasion, the time

spent in the stocks would be two hours and the loss of a week's pension. A sixth time would result in a further hour in the stocks and two weeks' pension. Only after seven offences would the offender be expelled. However, Dorothy Jenks managed to achieve this dubious record in 1656.

During his acting career, Alleyn had experienced the effects of plague. The theatres were closed up and he was obliged to leave his wife and go on a lengthy tour out of London. During these tours he sent her some tips on preventing the disease spreading, by keeping the house fair and clean, throwing water every evening before the door and in the back premises, and to have in the windows '*a good store of rue and herb of grace*'. In 1625 the plague struck in Dulwich and on 7th June Richard Barnes, a poor brother, '*dyled of ye plague*'. In the following eight days three villagers also died from the disease.

As far as the thirty members or out-pensioners were concerned, they would receive a pension of sixpence per week and a gown every two years. They were also required to attend the College four times a year. The maintenance of the almshouses which as we will see were built for them in their City parishes by Edward Alleyn would be the responsibility of those parishes.

Although Alleyn drew up these Statutes (which altogether number 121

items) during the years he governed the College, they were not actually published and witnessed until 29th September 1626. He had fallen ill after a long business trip to North Yorkshire to inspect some property he had purchased in the village of Aysgarth. He clearly wanted to put his affairs in good order and not leave the future of his Foundation to chance. His health deteriorated and, as was customary at the time, he drew up his last Will and Testament when he was close to death.



Christ's Chapel interior today. Edward Alleyn's tomb can be seen in the middle of the nave.

He made the Will on 13th November 1626 and, less than a fortnight later, on 25th November, he died. Unlike his father in law, Philip Henslowe, who had left instructions in his will for a very stylish funeral in the church of St Saviour's to include a sermon and the attendance of 'fortie poor men of the Libertye of the Clynck' to swell the number of mourners, Alleyn's request to be buried in the Chapel of God's Gift showed much more restraint.

Interestingly, Alleyn had penned an earlier Will, discovered in the nineteenth century by John Payne Collier, the author of *The Memoirs of Edward Alleyn including some new particulars*. Its substance reinforces the evidence of Alleyn's serious concern for those in poverty.

This draft Will, which must have been cancelled by Alleyn, was written before 1620 when he built the Finsbury almshouses, having laid the first brick and superintended the construction of the 10 almshouses himself. These almshouses were built in the parish of St Giles, Cripplegate, near his Fortune Theatre. On 30th April 1621 Alleyn "went to town and placed 3 men and 7 women in ye houses of Finsbury liberty ye building cost all £200".

By his last Will, dated 13th November 1626 Alleyn also required his executors within two years of his death to build 10 almshouses each in both St Botolph's and St Saviour's parishes. This was not

Draft Will of Edward Alleyn

".....And furthermore for I see the number of poor daily do increase in and about the City of London being in their youth brought up to the faculty, theyr age not able to labour, receiving pensions of theyr parishes which will scarce find them bread, sitting at great rentes and not able to pay according to their talent which God hath lent me I am desirous to resarve in the most needful thing viz house rent, fuell. Therefore my will is to have in the three parishes in or near London almshouses built – 10 in each parish containing 1 room apiece and on such waste ground as the parishes allow for that purpose which said houses 30 of the most aged and poorest pensioners off the said parishes and to those 30 pensioners I give every one of them a gown of the same goodness and att the same tyme the brothers and sisters shall receive theirs being 1 every two years and on 1st September and more I give to the said 30 pensioners on the same days yearly to each of them ½ chaldron of sea coal and 10s a piece in money to be paid and delivered quarterly upon 1st September which 30 persons aforesaid shall be taken and reported as members of God's Gift College aforesaid for ever and ever."



Map of the parish of St Saviour's, Southwark 1720



Edward Alleyn's almshouses built in Gingerbread Court, Lamb Alley, Petty France, St Botolph's parish

immediately carried out and in 1633 the parish of St Botolph brought a suit against Matthias Alleyn as the surviving executor of Edward Alleyn's Will, Thomas Alleyn having died in 1631, to enforce the building of the ten almshouses as directed. Matthias Alleyn agreed that if the parishes would find the land from their own resources he would pay as far as £120 would extend to build the almshouses. Edward Alleyn's ten almshouses at St Botolph's were built in Petty France, later New Bread Street. They survived there until 1731-2 at which time they were combined with

Edward Alleyn's almshouses built in
the Soap Yard, Deadman's Place,
Liberty of the Clink, Southwark



Map of the Liberty of the Clink,
St Saviour's, Southwark (detail) 1720
showing Deadman's Place.



Underwood's almshouses and rebuilt in Gingerbread Court, Lamb Alley. They remained until 1901 (the site is now covered by Liverpool St station and railway lines).

The record of the arrangement he came to with St Saviour's has not survived but we must assume it was somewhat similar and almshouses bearing his name were built in Deadman's Place in the Clink Liberty and rebuilt in Soap Yard behind Park Street near today's Tate Modern. In 1862 they were united with almshouses founded by Thomas Cure in the sixteenth century and relocated in Gravel Lane, Southwark. The combined almshouses were moved again, this time to Hamilton Road, West Norwood in St Saviour's College in



The Old Blew House or The Blue House, Dulwich Common, left to the Parish of St Botolph's, Bishopsgate by Edward Alleyn in his Will, so that the rent from the property would go to the benefit of the poor of that parish



Edward Alleyn's almshouses, formerly in Deadman's Place were combined with those of Thomas Cure and rebuilt in Gravel Lane in 1868

1886 when a number of almshouses were brought together by the Charity Commissioners. This site was sold to a housing association in 2003 and with the proceeds 54 new almshouses were built by the St Saviour's United Charities in Purley in 2006.

In his Will, Alleyn had also bequeathed to St Botolph's the rent of a house which still stands on Dulwich Common called 'The Blew House'. This was given for the benefit of the poor of the parish where he was born. As with a number of other bequests, the rent of the property was to be given on the Sunday nearest 1st September, his birthday, "to the neediest pore of the parish 12d apiece and as more after as rent will reach unto." In 1635 the deeds of The Blew House were handed over to churchwardens of St Botolph's. The house today is used by Dulwich College.

CHAPTER TWO

The Foundation Finds its Feet

One has to feel sorry for Alleyn's cousins, Thomas who would succeed him as Master and Matthias Alleyn who was Warden. Although the financial position of the College at the time of his death was satisfactory and even a small dividend was declared two years later, Thomas and Matthias had not only to contend with the opening of disagreements with the three parishes as we have seen but with internal disciplinary problems with one of the almspeople named John Allenbee. Allenbee had earlier had to be admonished for drunkenness and lewd behaviour, but he went on to commit a whole litany of further offences. Typical of the times, John Allenbee invoked the freedom of religious expression as justification for his actions and 'stubbornly answered that he did no more than the spirit of God moved him to do, justifying himself and would not be brought to any obedience of an orderly and civil life'.

On the first day of March 1631 Allenbee was reprovved by the Master for:

1. Being a scolding and railing person, falling out with the rest of his brothers and sisters and would not live at peace

with them.

2. For abusing the Fellows of the college at sundry times and cursing and swearing and wishing to confound all proud priests.

3. For being often drunk.

4. For running into chapel at divine service drunk and reeling unable to stand upon his legs.

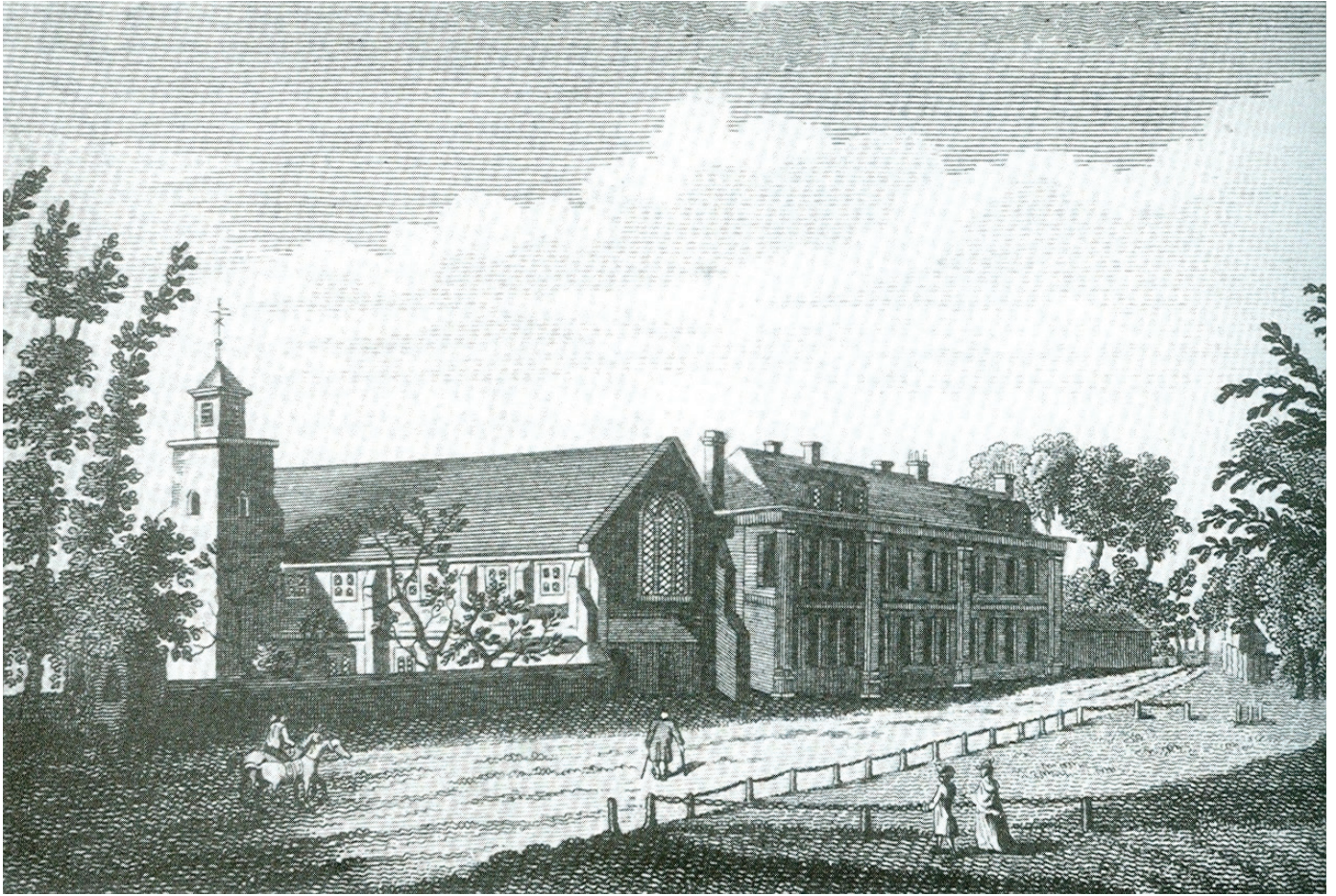
5. For his obstinate answers to the master of the college to justify himself in his lewd courses being reprovved.

6. For frequenting the women's chambers contrary to the Statutes.

7. For that it did appear by confession of one of the poor sisters of the college that John Allenbee would have lain with the said poor sister persuading her that fornication was not a sin at all if both parties agreed.

Disciplinary problems with the almspeople did not occur again for another twenty-five years when a deluded Dorothy Jenks was first warned but persisted in a number of colourful slanderous accusations against the popular schoolmaster Edmund Colby which resulted in her undergoing the seven stages of punishment set out in the Statutes until she was finally expelled in 1655.

With the financial situation of the



Eighteenth century print of the College showing the rebuilt east wing containing the rooms of the six poor brothers.

College of God's Gift deteriorating in the 1630's through the receipt of lower rents and the burden of increased costs, a demand from two of the London parishes came at the worst possible moment. St Botolph's and St Giles both took action against the college over non payment of the 30 out-members, the inhabitants of their own almshouses which by his Statutes and his Will, Edward Alleyn had ordered. Apparently the college had successfully argued, soon after the death of the founder, that

there was no legal obligation to pay the pensions and they were stopped. The parishes were advised by their own counsel that the college was (by 1640) deep in debt and the Letters Patent did not permit the extension the Statutes envisaged.

The Visitor, William Laud, Archbishop of Canterbury, had made an inspection, called a Visitation in 1634. However, this was more to ensure that the Chapel was conforming to the new emphasis

on ritual which, through Laud, had been introduced in the Church replacing the earlier, more Puritan and plainer orthodoxy. The following year, there was a further inspection by Laud's Vicar General Sir Nathaniel Brent who this time also inspected the fabric. Finally there was yet another inspection in 1638 by Dr Thomas Rives, Laud's lay surrogate. He found the buildings in a perilous state. The steeple had fallen down shortly before and there were insufficient funds to rebuild it. He reported back to the archbishop who immediately closed the whole College down for six months in order to save money on salaries and expenses. The poor brothers, sisters and boys were returned to their respective parishes, the pensions of the almspeople being reduced from three shillings and sixpence to two shillings per week.

By 1641 the finances had recovered sufficiently to reglaze the east window of the Chapel in stained glass "in divers coloured glass of the same worke and fashion as the east window of the parish churches of St Martin's in the Fields and St Clement Danes". With the outbreak of the Civil War the new window would not last long, nor would the Chapel's organ, nor indeed would Archbishop Laud who was executed in 1645.

The new Parliamentary authorities took over the running of the College in 1644. The four College Fellows had each departed and the Master and Warden attempted to deal as best they could with the new regime. Parliament,

through its Committee of Plundered Ministers, appointed a new preacher and a new schoolmaster of its own choosing. In the Chapel, the choir was disbanded, the altar rails removed and the altar returned to the middle of the nave. As we have seen the new window and the organ were destroyed.

For the almspeople, life probably went on more or less as normal. The whole of London was under Parliament's control and as the school for the poor scholars was being conducted far better than previously and local children were being admitted to the delight of local parents, we must assume things on the whole were satisfactory. There were minor inconveniences with soldiers being billeted at the College for several weeks in the summer of 1647.

The Restoration took a little time to filter through to Dulwich and the first visit by the Archbishop, Gilbert Sheldon, was delayed because of more pressing business of bringing conformity back to the Church. It was further interrupted by the outbreak of the Great Plague of London in 1665. While Dulwich saw 37 fatalities from the plague, including two of the poor scholars and a kitchen boy at the College, none of the almspeople was affected.

The Visitation concluded in 1667 and the churchwardens of the London parishes rejoiced in their victory when Archbishop Sheldon restored the right of the 30 outmembers to their pensions

and gowns. These were swiftly claimed by the respective churchwardens. At Dulwich, the Warden delayed carrying out the archbishop's order and was sent a letter saying that "they should have their gowns against this Christmas.." The money for the gowns was finally paid on 31st December. However ten years later, in the summer of 1677, the college again resisted paying the 30 outmembers' pension, stating that the Archbishop had not authority to enforce it as it was contrary to the Deed of Uses. The churchwardens promptly appealed again to the archbishop and under protest the warden reluctantly paid the arrears of pensions and gowns on 23rd June 1677.

It would seem that every few generations, when there were new and energetic churchwardens they would look at the Will and Statutes of Edward Alleyn and consider that they had a case to claim some of the income from his estate for their own pensioners. Since the Restoration they had been successful and the pensions continued to be paid until the College recruited its own energetic and capable member in the person of the Reverend James Hume in 1706, who was appointed 2nd Fellow or Schoolmaster on the order of the current archbishop.

Hume had a fascination with the College's archives and also with the law. He was able to use the former in his arguments for the latter. One example was that he convinced

the Master, James Allen, that if less lavish entertaining were offered by the College, then the finances might be strong enough to reintroduce the declaration of a dividend, the first for over 80 years. In the year 1713-14 these economies resulted in a dividend being shared among the Fellows and £36 being shared among the twelve poor brothers and sisters at Dulwich and even £13 being sent to the 30 out-members. Although the dividend continued to be declared every year until the first reform of the College took place in 1857 and the almspeople each year received their share, sending pensions as well as a share of the dividend to the three parishes' 30 out-members soon stopped



Archbishop Wake (1657 – 1737) He carried out a Visitation of the College in 1723 which made wide ranging changes including the ordering of the rebuilding of the 'feeble' east wing.

after James Hume had studied the records in greater depth.

In 1723, Archbishop Wake's visitation was the first by an Archbishop of Canterbury since 1677. It was largely concerned with the poor standards being attained by the boys but an inspection of the buildings concluded that the east wing which contained the poor brothers' rooms was 'crazy and feeble'. Furthermore, the court wall and gates needed rebuilding. Wake also took a good look at the Statutes himself and decided that 200 faggots should be given to the almspeople for heating and that medical care should be given to the sick or maimed. Earlier residents of the almshouses had had the benefit of medical services being given firstly by Thomas Alleyn who was a barber-surgeon and later by several succeeding Wardens or Masters who were also medics. On the archbishop's instructions, Mr Joseph Wood, a surgeon, was engaged and paid £10 but this arrangement only lasted for the next three years.

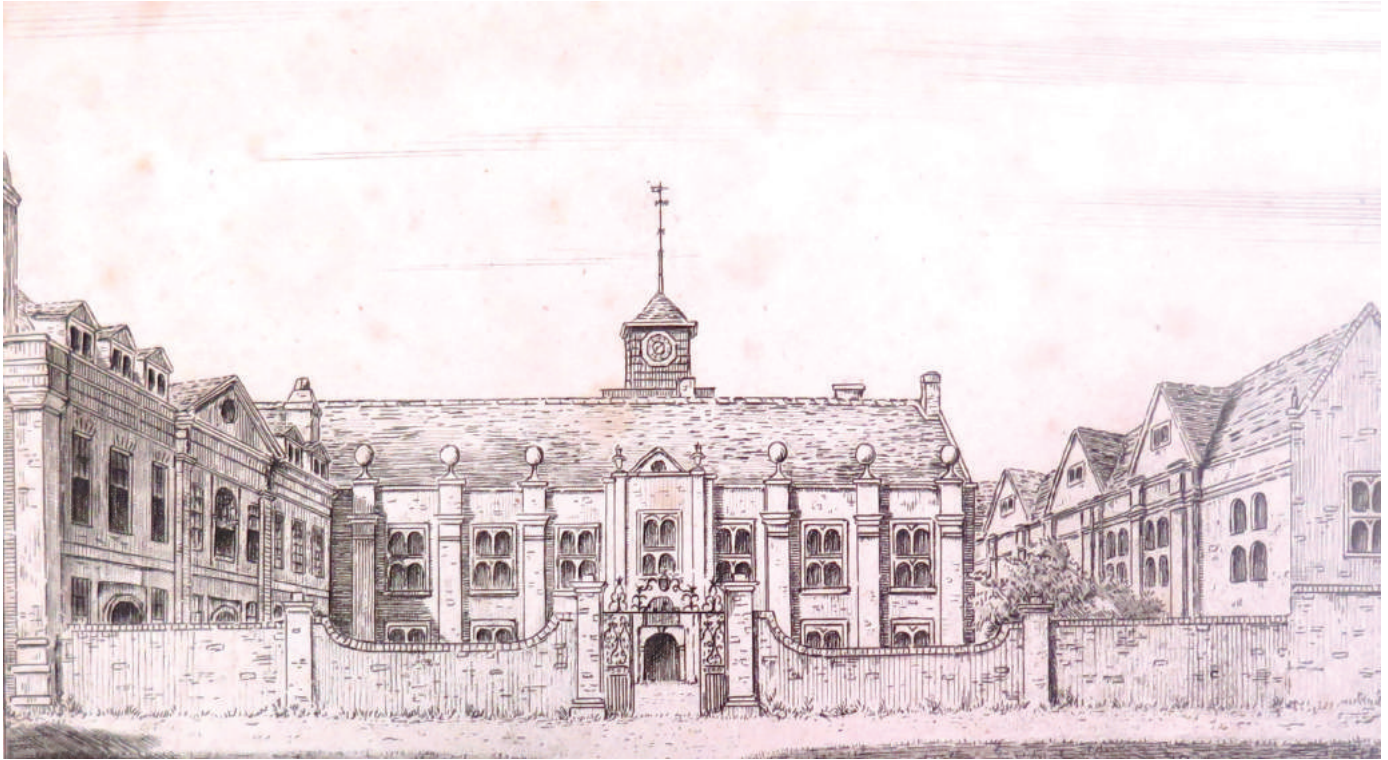
Meanwhile James Hume, who had been studying the Letters Patent and the Statutes, made the case to the archbishop that the three parishes were not legally entitled to the benefit of extending the Letters Patent. He suggested to the archbishop that the matter should be referred to a proper legal test case. This was heard by the Lord Chancellor who declared that the Statutes could not be extended.

He suspended Archbishop Sheldon's earlier injunction to pay the pensions to the 30 outpensioners to allow the College to apply to the Court. Probably put off by the likely costs of an ensuing legal battle, the parishes did not pursue their claim and the pensions therefore ceased to be paid.

In August 1738 it was resolved to rebuild the east wing containing the poor brothers' accommodation. It was completed in the amazingly short time of eleven months at a cost of £3645, the money coming from the rebuilding fund and a loan provided by the friends and relations of the Master, James Allen.

With the accession of Archbishop Herring in 1747, a new generation of churchwardens presented a fresh petition on behalf of their outpensioners. Each side again took legal advice but nothing was settled and the archbishop declined to interfere.

By the middle of the eighteenth century, Dulwich was becoming a favoured place to live by City magnates and the value of rents of the Dulwich estate was increasing to £1000 per annum. In 1760 each poor brother and sister received a share of that year's dividend amounting to £15.4.2 each. Wisely, the college fellowship anticipated that there would be building expenses at some future date and additional sums were being added annually to the rebuilding fund for the west wing containing the six poor sisters' rooms. From 1772, £80 a year



Eighteenth century print of the College showing the east wing built at the instructions of Archbishop Wake

was being added and placed into government security bonds (consols) for this fund. This increase in income, which was largely shared by the members of the College itself including their almspeople, naturally infuriated the churchwardens from the three parishes who as Assistants according to statute were obliged to audit the College's quarterly accounts. The churchwardens again took a stand about non payment to their 30 out-members and refused to sign the audit book. The archbishop, like his predecessors, rejected the petitioners' arguments and the six assistants were obliged to sign at the following audit. A minor satisfaction for their efforts was that at each audit they

received a generous dinner served by the College.

In 1776 Sarah Lady Falkland died and bequeathed £300 in trust that it should be invested and pay interest in equal proportions to the 12 brethren and sisters every Christmas Day. This bequest was merged into the general funds of the College in 1857. Lady Falkland was the daughter of Thomas Inwen, MP for St Saviour's Southwark, hence the probable connection with Dulwich. Richard Randall, the personable singer, organist and 4th Fellow of the College noted her death in his diary. Lady Falkland made other small bequests to the poor in Essex, where she lived.

CHAPTER THREE

It all ends in tears

By 1806 the finances were on such a strong footing that the dividend had reached a total of £4000, with each brother and sister, now hardly poor, receiving £60. Two years later the College considered embarking on a considerable extension to its estate by the building of roads to provide new building frontages. It had also overcome the problem of the short leases to its property which had been set by the Founder, by virtue of an Act of Parliament which extended existing leases by 63 years and permitted the granting of new leases of 84 years. Naturally these changes to the leases brought yet more interest in leasing or building property in Dulwich and of course this resulted in the annual dividend increasing still further. On the subject of redeveloping the estate, however, the College got cold feet at the possible expense and withdrew from the idea.

The death of Sir Francis Bourgeois in 1811 and his bequest of his valuable collection of paintings to the College in his Will brought an unexpected solution to the problem of the now ruinous

condition of the west wing which not only contained a picture gallery on its first floor, but the rooms of the six poor sisters. Bourgeois probably had heard of its condition from his conversations with one of the Fellows which led to his gift and he further bequeathed £2000 towards the costs of repairs. He probably imagined that his collection would be exhibited in the existing picture gallery.



Sir John Soane (1753 – 1837) architect and builder of Dulwich Picture Gallery, which also contained the rooms for the six poor sisters.

Following Bourgeois' death, the architect Sir John Soane was appointed to fulfil Sir Francis' dying wish and carried out a survey of the college and found the west wing to be in such a ruinous state that it needed to be taken down. He proposed instead that there should be a new gallery for the Bourgeois' bequest built in the back yard of the College, onto which he suggested building rooms for the six poor sisters. The College's rebuilding fund had reached £5800 but

there was still a shortfall even when Bourgeois' £2000 was added. In the event, it was Mrs Desenfans, the widow of Bourgeois' business partner and friend, Noel Desenfans, who made up the difference amounting to £3000 with a gift matching the College's fund of almost £6000.

The new gallery was completed in 1814, a few months after Margaret Desenfans' own death, but the accommodation

for the poor sisters would not be ready for several more years. In 1816 it was resolved to spend £900 to finish the sisters' apartments in the new gallery. Ten years later, there were sufficient funds accumulated to contemplate the repair of the old west wing but the poor sisters would remain in their rooms at the new gallery for a further 70 years.

It would appear that despite not acknowledging any responsibility to pay the 30 out-members a pension, the College, to its credit, had made an annual present of coals to the inmates of the almshouses in their respective parishes for many years; the accounts show the '*usual allowances of coals*'. Another custom which had persisted was that one of the poor sisters would continue to act as matron for the poor scholars. For this duty she received 2/6 per quarter. It was now decided that the goods and chattels of a deceased poor brother or sister should not be sold and the sum distributed (the matron receiving a double share) but that each resident might dispose of them as they wished and to offset the matron's loss she would be awarded five shillings - per quarter in lieu by the College.

In 1833, a new generation of churchwardens, no doubt envious of the College's wealth, pressed for the almshouses in their respective parishes to be repaired and made yet another claim for pensions and gowns for the out-pensioners plus 39 shares from the Dividend and a further 15 'for the

bettering of their Gowns' according to the Statutes. This request was turned down by the College but this time the parishes appealed to the Charity Commissioners.

The Commissioners' Enquiry conducted in 1834 noted that the almshouses at St Botolph's are '*now in so ruinous a condition, that the poor men and women are sent only to occupy them a few nights before they go thence to the College, in order to give them a qualification. Those of St Saviour's are much dilapidated, but inhabited and those at St Luke's are in good repair. It does not appear that any part of the expense of repairing any of them has ever been defrayed out of the funds of the College*'. They also noted that for some years the benefits of the College had been so considerable that few men and women were meeting the entry requirements i.e. most '*were rather decayed housekeepers of respectable character*'. It also appears that St Luke's, at least in the years 1831 and 1832, induced their candidates on becoming poor sisters to give the parish a refund of £50 per year to the five poor women living in the parish almshouses built by the Founder '*and this on several occasions had been actually paid*'.

The inquiry by the Charity Commissioners also revealed that the Statute requiring the poor brothers, to 'sweep and keep clean the College', was actually being done by persons hired for the purpose. Similarly, the poor sisters no longer made

the poor scholars' beds as this was now performed by a servant hired by the College. The Matron was still an office among the poor sisters but her wage of



Print of the College dated 1840 showing that the west wing had been repaired and the entire building rendered in stucco which was fashionable at the time. The oriel window was added in the east wing at the expense of John Lindsay, one of the fellows. The tower has now been rebuilt on the north side of the central block.

6d from each almsperson was instead paid by the College.

On the plus side, the Commissioners considered that the Statutes relating to the payment of pensions and the requirement for the brothers and sisters not to visit each other's apartments was 'inexpedient to enforce because of the age and respectability of the parties concerned'. It noted that the brethren each had three comfortable apartments, the sisters two each, *"all of which have lately been either rebuilt or improved. The pensions to the*

almspeople amounted to £5.12 per month, plus £2 annually in lieu of bavins (bundles of firewood) from the woods, plus £13.50 each per year from the dividend for betterment of their gowns plus a share of the dividend, which in 1834 amounted to £134.11.10½ each". Never in its history, before or since, have the Dulwich almspeople had such a good deal!

The Commissioners dismissed the parishes' claim for their almshouses to be repaired from College funds and found the College in the actual but perhaps not the moral right, in view of the large increase in the dividend caused by improved roads, leases and development. The Commissioners proposed seeking the Attorney General's advice whether the opinion of the Court of Equity should be taken on the propriety of extending the charity. This actually did not take place until 1841 and the case for extending the charity was dismissed although the Master of the Rolls did privately suggest to the Master, John Allen, that more should be done by the College with its large resources, for local children. As a consequence the Grammar School was built. It still stands, at the corner of Gallery Road and Burbage Road.

Several years later the churchwardens of St Luke's and St

Saviour's asked for help "*finding that the almshouses of the late Edward Alleyn Esq in the Soap Yard of this parish wherein the Poor Men and Women reside who are elected for candidates for admission as vacancies occur are in a very dilapidated state ; and scarcely weather proof*". Perhaps wisely, the College decided not to argue and offered to subscribe £100 as a gift towards repairs.

Of course it could not last. There was widespread criticism from all manner of sources, perhaps the most damning from the former pupils of the 'new' grammar school who complained about the quality of education being given to the 12 poor scholars and the lack of achievement expected of them as they were being apprenticed into various trades. Even Charles Dickens, on behalf of distressed members of the acting profession, attempted to divert some of the College's income.

In 1854 a new enquiry was conducted by the Charity Commissioners. The poor brethren and sisters were interviewed and some stated that

in the previous year they each received £11.17.5½ per month, one pound of bread and one pint of beer daily besides £2 per year faggot money and every two years the surplus of the gown money amounting on the last occasion to £13.16.3. They also received from the Master, 19s. 5d from Lady Falkland's gift. Some of the poor brothers and sisters stated that according to agreements made before their election they allowed £30 - £40 per annum either to the unsuccessful candidate they

The design of the new almshouses in St Luke's, Finsbury by T J Hill published in 1874 in *The Builder* magazine. The new almshouses built in Bath Street combined the almshouses of Edward Alleyn formerly in Pest House Lane, Old Street, with those of several other benefactors of the parish. In the twentieth century the almshouses and land in Bath Street were sold off by the parish to build a new community centre, supported by the Dulwich Almshouse Charity.



drew lots with when there was more than one candidate for admission or to the inmates of the almshouses of their parishes. Considering many families in the same districts as the three parishes were existing on the wage of the father of £1 per week, the College of God's Gift had become a farce and an obscenity.

As a result of the Charity Commissioners' enquiry, a Bill was introduced in Parliament on 30th April 1857. It received its second reading that July and the Foundation was dissolved in August, the Bill having received Royal Assent. On 31st December 1857 the Dulwich College Act 1857 came into force. The former Master, Warden, and the four Fellows were pensioned off, rather like monks at the Dissolution of the Monasteries.

The new Act established a Board of Governors, headed by the 2nd Duke of Wellington and included the Reverend William Rogers, who had caught the attention of the Prince Consort when he served as a member of the Endowed Schools Commission. Rogers would remain on the board for the next 30 years and become a major influence in the drafting of the 1882 Dulwich College Act.

The Act called for as many almspeople as the governors thought the charity could afford but for the first instance not to exceed 24. Suitable residences, with gardens if possible, and all necessary and proper fittings and conveniences,

were to be erected upon the Charity Estate if possible or elsewhere in Dulwich. While the rebuilding was in progress, the governors were to provide suitable temporary accommodation. The men were in future to be called Brethren, and the women, Sisters, and both classes were to be selected from among respectable persons, either married or single, who had fallen from better circumstances into indigence. They were to be aged 60 upwards and should be appointed from the three parishes and also from St Giles's, Camberwell; a quarter from each Parish, who were each to submit a list of three names with supporting documentation. With regard to Camberwell, preference was to be given to candidates from Dulwich. If no candidates were nominated within 28 days by a parish, then the governors could fill the vacancy.

The accommodation would be rent free plus a weekly pension up to 20/- per week. It was still a very generous deal. The chaplain of the College was to have immediate supervision over the almspeople and report to the governors at least half-yearly on the condition of the almspeople and the eleemosynary branch generally. Whenever there was a surplus over 24 residents it could be distributed as outpensions not exceeding the number of almspeople for the time being and not exceeding 32 in the whole. The recipients should be of either sex and as far as possible of equal numbers.

CHAPTER FOUR

Hard times

The 1857 Act was of course a very optimistic piece of legislation and the central requirement of the Act for the new board of governors to build new schools was only realised when unexpectedly the railway companies showed interest in buying Dulwich land for their tracks. The school side expanded rapidly out of the nucleus of boys being educated in the Grammar School which had already been divided into a lower and an upper school, determined by social class. When, in the mid 1860's, the railway money permitted the building of the new College, the upper school moved there and the lower school began to occupy the vacated west wing.



A photograph c1890 showing the east wing , partially rebuilt in 1866 and College Road.

Although hampered by financial constraints, the new board of governors nevertheless decided to expand the almshouses to accommodate a further eight persons, bringing the number to 24, the number envisaged by the Act. To save money, instead of building a new almshouse elsewhere, it was decided to enlarge and update the existing accommodation in the east wing to house 16 almspeople. The long-term ambition of the board was to expand the number of almspeople to 32. This would be achieved by restoring and converting the west wing.

Initially, twelve men and four women would be placed in the enlarged east wing and the governors decided to find rooms for two more women to live out. In 1865 the brethren were moved out and offered an extra 10/- per week for payment of rent elsewhere while the work was being done. The opportunity was taken to fit new stoves into the kitchens of the accommodation. The cost of the expansion of the east wing was £4544.

One of the requirements of the 1857 Act was that the care of the almspeople should be overseen by the chaplain. The new chaplain, the Reverend John Oldham, was a conscientious cleric who assumed` responsibility for a number of important functions in Dulwich after his appointment, including taking over control of the Dulwich Local Charities, a collection of initiatives such as a thrift club, a coal club and a sick club, all

created to help make the life of the poor easier. He also facilitated the building of a new infants' school in the village. In effect, he became the vicar of an artificial parish. In respect of the almshouses, he made a half yearly report to the new board of governors, finding in the first few years all to be satisfactory.

The enlarged east wing was completed on 12th June 1866; the date may be seen on the north end of the building. The choice of rooms in the new building was accorded to seniority, although the four women were to have rooms nearest the Chapel. A medical officer was appointed at £35 pa to attend to both the almspeople and the 12 Foundation boys, who were being educated with the boys in the Lower School. The doctor's salary also included all medicines used. The local doctor, Dr. Ray, was appointed. He would soon be succeeded by his son. The doctor arranged weekly visits to the almspeople and the medicines were delivered directly to them.

In 1868 a library for the almspeople was started by Oldham's successor as chaplain, the Reverend Samuel Cheetham, initially with 85 volumes, second hand, but in good condition. The use of one of the rooms in the now partly vacant Dulwich Grammar Schoolhouse was provided and a lock-up case for the books given.

The almspeople were receiving £1 per

week with rent free accommodation. There seems to have been no provision for a heating allowance. This was still generous, not of course that it was living in the lap of luxury of earlier times, yet in comparison with many of London's poor they were well off. Twenty years or so later, a report published by the chapel committee found that 100 families in and around the village were managing on a weekly wage of this amount out of which they paid 6/- per week rent. The 1857 Act had also provided for out-pensioners, and in 1869 the governors, despite worries over the costs of the building of the new college, decided to implement this requirement and appointed eight local people to receive a weekly pension of 10/-. In the



The 'new' Dulwich College, completed in 1870

following year it was decided to extend these pensions to the four parishes, with the 16 recipients shared equally among them.

The building of the new College designed by Charles Barry jnr had been a resounding success. Such a success that the original plan to place the Upper School (later Dulwich College) in one of its blocks and the Lower School (later Alleyn's) in the other, leaving the great central block as a library and hall for common use, was soon abandoned, such was the demand for places in the stunning building and rapidly prestigious Upper School.

Around the estate, on roads like Sydenham Hill and Sydenham Rise, large new villas were rising. College Road, College Gardens, Alleyn Road, Farquhar Road and Kingswood Road were also being built up. Future funds were being generated. So pleased were the governors with these successes that they began seriously to contemplate increasing the number of almspeople to 32.

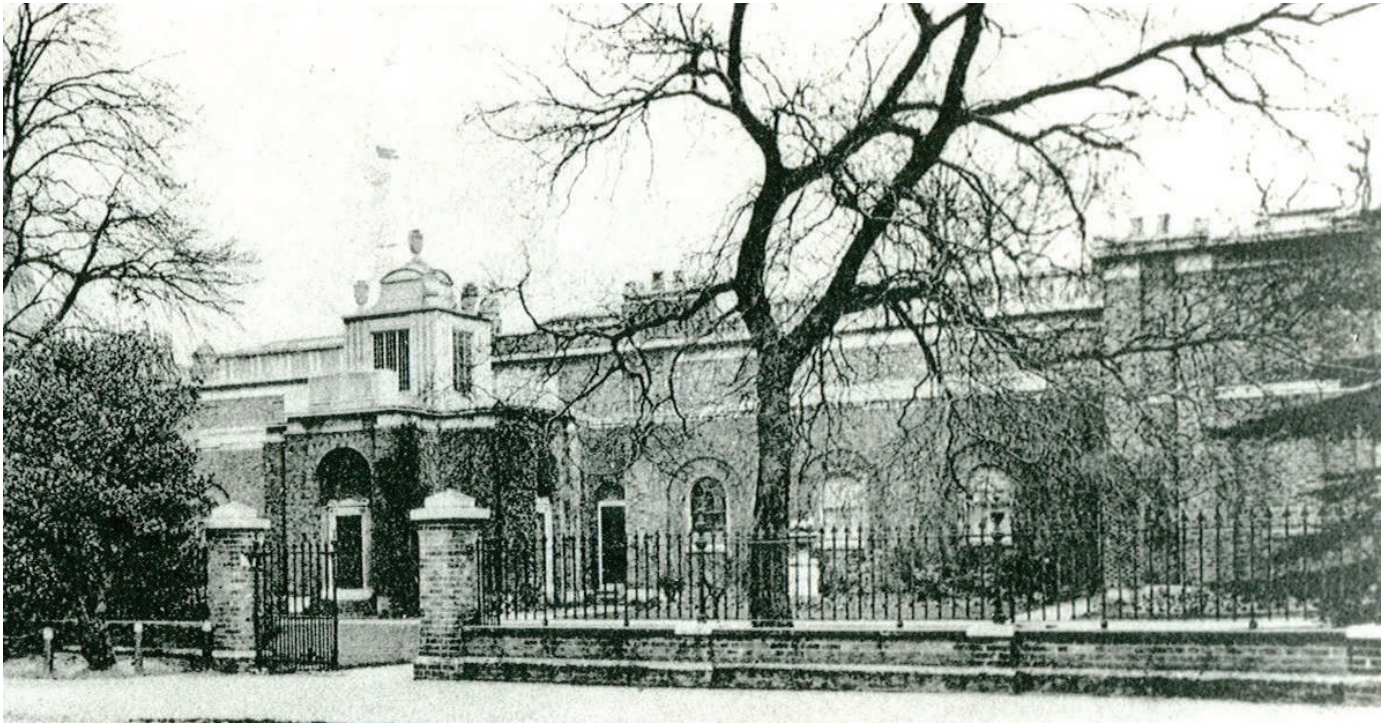
It had long been the ambition of the governors that, when funds permitted, the west wing should be returned to being almshouses. With so many new building leases being sold, this now seemed a possibility. It will be remembered that since 1816 the six poor sisters had been accommodated in the Picture Gallery. There, they had the use of a sitting room and a bedroom

each, one even enjoyed three rooms. They were of a good size, the sitting room being 18' x 12' and the bedroom 12' x 10'. There were out-offices and coal sheds in the forecourt. Having had this generous accommodation for well over fifty years, the six residents probably did not want to move.

Two courses appeared open to the governors to carry out the plan; either to rent houses already built and place almswomen there or build a block of cottages elsewhere for temporary purposes and let them out when they were no longer required. In May 1873 a committee among the governors was appointed to investigate and report generally on the condition of the almspeople. This was the first time such a direct interest in the care of the almspeople had been taken.

Fears began to be expressed, particularly by the College surveyor Charles Barry jnr about the danger of fire at the Gallery. He reported that it was undesirable to have six elderly people with fires so near the Collection. This all seems a little late in the day and perhaps Barry had grander plans. Although the report was noted, no action was taken.

The eleemosynary branch of the charity was largely unaffected by the intense hostility being experienced in the educational side. The success of the new College persuaded some of the governors to wish the school to



The western aspect of Dulwich College Picture Gallery, built by Sir John Soane in 1814 which also accommodated the six poor sisters in sets of reasonably spacious rooms. Their previous accommodation in the west wing of the college was in a ruinous condition and there were insufficient funds at the time to both build the gallery and rebuild the west wing. A few years later, however, George Tappen, the College's surveyor, repaired the west wing. The windows of the rooms of the six poor sisters can be seen in this early photograph, together with one of their entrances to the right of the mausoleum. The poor sisters remained in their rooms in the gallery for 73 years, moving to the east wing in 1889. The site of their former rooms is today used for the gallery's temporary exhibitions.

be a self sufficient public school and proposed raising the fees to bring them in line with running costs. This alienated other governors who considered access to the College should be open to all and not only to the wealthy. Two of

the parishes entered the fray in the belief that once again they were being denied the Foundation's wealth for their own pressing educational needs. Here they had a powerful ally in the chairman of the governors, the Reverend William Rogers, who had been appointed Rector of St Botolph's in 1863.

The outcome of these disputes was the intervention once again of the Charity Commissioners who in efforts to find a solution to the multiple problems at Dulwich, which now also encompassed a demand for education for girls comparable to that of boys, proposed seven different schemes in addition to several draft schemes.

The scheme which was finally adopted

greatly extended the Charity to encompass new schools to be built in three of the parishes. It also had implications for the Foundation almshouses at Dulwich. All ideas for expanding the number of almspeople were sunk without trace but the existing number living at the Old College and the Picture Gallery seems to have been maintained for the time being. An annual sum of £1443.13.8 was awarded to cover running costs, with income from an investment of £5105.5.9 and an annual sum of £1700.0.0 to cover the new range of pensions available to out-pensioners. The Dulwich almspeople would continue to receive a weekly pension of £1 per week, the fee to a medical officer would be capped at £20 per annum, inclusive of medicines. Eight out-pensioners called 1st Class pensioners would receive £1.6.0 per week and four (or any multiple of that number) were called 2nd class pensioners and would receive 10/- per week. All would still need to have lived in the original four parishes for a minimum of three years before being considered for a pension or an almshouse place. Preference would be given to those who had become reduced by misfortune from better circumstances. The parish vestries retained the right to appoint candidates.

The annual award of £1443 to cover running costs would, as expenses rose, inhibit the improvement of conditions, and the lack of access to other funds

completely hamper any efforts to rebuild the now ageing Dulwich almshouses.

Although the chaplain would still carry on as before and visit the almspeople regularly, the management of the almshouses now rested with the secretary of the Board of Governors of the newly created Dulwich Estate. The new Act of 1882 established two sets of governors. One board would administer Dulwich College and Alleyn's School, the other would raise money from the estate for the benefit of the eleemosynary branch as well as the beneficiary schools which included those in the three London parishes as well as in Dulwich.

It did not start well for the new secretary, Mr Taylor. Overcrowding in one of the almshouse flats was reported by the chaplain. A new resident, G E Shoobert elected by the Vestry of St Botolph's, was living with his wife and 3 children in 2 rooms. The vestry clerk at St Botolph's was hurriedly reminded of the conditions of occupancy and although Mrs Shoobert was allowed to remain, the children, who were probably grown up, were not. This example of overcrowding was however quite modest compared with the conditions being experienced at the time in places like Southwark. Later, when the wife of a married couple fell ill, permission was given that her niece might reside in the flat and nurse her.

A request arrived from the College governors asking if two sets of the rooms occupied by the almswomen in the Picture Gallery could be vacated. With Alleyn's School (formerly the Lower School) still occupying the west wing while waiting for their new school to be completed in Townley Road, this request was impossible to comply with. As soon as Alleyn's School was opened in 1886, the situation changed and it was decided to accept them. There was however a need to prepare rooms and at first two, later a third, poor sister from the Picture Gallery were accommodated temporarily in a house in the village named Stanley Villa. So spacious was the property that in 1889 the Surveyor reported that Stanley Villa could produce 12 rooms – or if divided, 7 sets of 2 rooms each. Some of the other almspeople may have been placed in the house or were given the option of making their own arrangements and received a total pension of £1.6.0 to cover rent of their chosen address.

The Reverend G W Daniell, who had succeeded as chaplain, became concerned about the welfare of the almspeople and pointed out that several aged pensioners lived entirely alone. He urged an attendant be provided to look after them, especially during sickness. Later, Daniell got even more distressed about this problem and said that in his opinion a resident attendant should be engaged. The chaplain was invited to put a proposal

together. The governors went some way to accommodating Daniell by allowing him, in cases of serious illness, to employ a nurse temporarily.

A few years later consideration was given to the idea of providing small garden plots for the almspeople to cultivate. It was the era of the arts and crafts movement when allotments and gardens for the working class were being widely prescribed by the upper classes. A small number of plots had previously been allotted (unofficially) to almspeople at the gallery which a few were allowed to cultivate on sufferance. The governors responded somewhat tartly; *“at present almspeople are not desirous of having gardens which from age or infirmity they would be unable to cultivate.”*

The limitations of the funding for the eleemosynary branch meant that by 1891 the practice of supporting the accommodation of a number of pensioners who could not be lodged in the Old College had to end and it was even found necessary to modify the existing scheme by reducing the number of out-pensioners as well. As there were 16 sets of rooms in the east wing, the number of almspeople was reduced to that amount and the number of out-pensioners reduced to twelve, each parish being able to nominate three.

The three Dulwich out pensioners were 1st class Susan Sharpe 4 Aysgarth Road

2nd class Charlotte Russell 9
Calton Avenue

Reuben Walker 2 Boxall Road

Among the almspeople was
Thomas Morris (see panel on
right)

The Reverend Daniell's
earlier concerns about a
resident nurse or matron were
now shared by the Estate
Governor's manager, the
new title for the secretary.
He drew attention to the
advisability of appointing a
residential female attendant
for the
almspeople,
nearly all of
whom were
aged and
infirm persons
requiring nursing
and general
assistance.
The governors,
handicapped
through lack
of funds, did
nothing. Things
came to a head
in 1906 when
Dr Blatherwick,
the medical
officer for the
almspeople
requested
powers to employ



Mrs Morris, the Dulwich
Milkwoman by by Thomas
Morris (South London Art
Collection) Mrs Morris was
the artist's mother.

a nurse in cases of extreme
need rather than such
help as could be given
by fellow almspersons. A
recent case had brought
the question up more
forcibly. In attempting to
prevent great distress to
one of the almswomen,
he had procured a nurse
and defrayed the expense
himself. He explained that
he could not, of course, do
this in each acute case.
Mr King, the manager,
reminded the governors
that he had brought up the
need of some



Old Dulwich Village by Thomas Morris in 1875, oil on canvas. (South London Art
Collection)

THOMAS MORRIS

In 1909, at the age of 79, one of the almspeople in Dulwich, Thomas Morris, published his memories of his and his family's life in Dulwich in a booklet entitled *A Short History of Dulwich Village*. He extended it and republished it in 1911. The title was a most appropriate one, not so much for describing the brevity of the booklet but rather celebrating the author's achievements in life which had triumphed over the fact he was a dwarf. Standing only 3' 4'' tall at the age of

17, he had been offered a role in Barnum's travelling circus as a companion act with the celebrated General Tom Thumb.



The Royal National Medallion for Art won by Thomas Morris was advertised for sale on EBay in 2016

be elected an out-pensioner and lived until the age of 103) rejected this offer and Thomas helped in the family dairy business. It was while tending his mother's cows in Croxted Road that he started sketching some old cottages. A



Thomas Morris (1830–1911?)

passer-by was so impressed with them that he suggested Thomas went to the School of Art, then at Marlborough House. Some well-wishers initially paid his fees but later he won a free place and he was awarded four medals as well as the Royal National Medallion for drawing in 1861.

After this boost he went on to give art lessons, undertake picture restoration and made a career from his art, some of which is in the South London Collection, and also from playing the violin. His contribution to Dulwich's history is also significant. Although his little book contains some fairly atrocious poems, his recollections of life in Dulwich and his description of many of the buildings and inhabitants going back to his grandfather's day in 1785, have been of great value to later writers of Dulwich's past by providing interesting human detail which they have added to the bare facts they have assembled.

*It is only those that feel that gift,
When it relieves them from their troubles,
Of pain and sickness that is left,
When old age and infirmity stop their travels.*

(From a poem commemorating the Old College of God's Gift, Dulwich by Thomas Morris)

arrangement a few years before, but nothing had been done. The manager said that "*if the governors sanction the employment of a nurse when he and I feel it absolutely necessary they would not incur serious expenses. In other cases where it is only neighbourly help that is needed the MO feels the matter could be left in our hands and such help could be received for a very small sum*". It was resolved that, if the manager and MO considered it absolutely necessary, they should have power to engage a skilled nurse at a salary not exceeding £1.1.0 pw.

What actually occurred was that the services of a nurse were found to be needed more often than anticipated and despite only paying her 7/6 per week, this, and other rising costs, pushed the eleemosynary account into arrears of £85.7.8. in 1906. The governors, in desperation, even considered charging the cost of nursing to almspeople themselves, but in the event applied for a reduction in the pensions paid to the out-pensioners, who, they considered, often lived with relatives. The Charity Commissioners suggested also reducing the pensions of the almspeople at Dulwich. This drew a protest from the governors, who pointed out that they often had to pay a relative to live with them in order to help them. Apparently unmoved by this plea, the Charity Commissioners applied a reduction from £1.6.0 to £1.4.0 for class 1 out pensioners and from £1. 0.0 to 18/6 to almspeople. The decade in which this

deficit occurred was one of economic downturn throughout the country and, like the country, the Estate's finances suffered because people were declining to take building leases on the Estate. The situation would recover by 1910, but the same reduced pension would remain in force for the next forty-three years.

In 1912 the Governors received a joint letter from the new chaplain, the Reverend A C David and the medical officer Dr C Carpmael which again drew attention to the increased age and infirmity of some of the almspeople and once again brought up the issue of a live-in full time matron. The manager reminded the governors that he had brought this matter up in 1902 but owing to the financial condition of the eleemosynary branch and difficulty of housing a nurse or matron, no steps had been taken. The governors decided, once again, that a small almshouses committee should be set up consisting of the chairman, deputy chairman, and a member from each of four parishes to consider the problem.

The committee was strongly of the opinion that the time had arrived to strengthen the administration of the eleemosynary branch of the charity and more especially to protect and provide for the old people placed under the charge of the governors.

Some might think this was rather overdue. Certainly the almspeople

had been very much left to their own devices with the result that the special permission requested for a person to stay had long been overlooked and, as a consequence, the almspeople were taking in people, relatives and friends, pretty nearly as they pleased and in such a haphazard way as to almost confuse the almspeople who actually

costs was actually met in rather an unusual way. The Chapel Committee offered to place a sum not exceeding £20 per annum at the disposal of the governors for the care and nursing of the almspeople. This generosity was warmly welcomed and the gift became a regular one for some years. The rapid rise in the cost of living after the war



Dulwich Village c1904

resided with them. Unfortunately, all these good intentions to have an Almshouse Committee drawn from the governors and the parishes and maintaining regular contact lapsed again after a few years.

The First World War did not directly affect the conduct of the almshouses, other than that the rising costs of drugs obliged the medical officer to request a rise in his annual salary from £20 to £30. The burden of increased nursing

did however bring other problems, especially as the almspeople were living on reduced pensions. To alleviate this it was resolved to give the almspeople a free supply of firewood.

In 1935 Mr Goddard, a governor, moved that consideration be given for modernising the interiors of the almshouses which had not had any significant updating since they were altered in 1866. When an inspection by a sub-committee was made the

almshouses were deemed unsuitable and the modernisation of the existing building impracticable. They were of the opinion that *"it was the imperative duty of the governors to continue the department of the eleemosynary"* and they recommended that *"new almshouses be erected on a site to be selected and the existing premises taken over for the purposes of the Estate."* It would be an exercise which would be repeated a number of times over the next eighty years.

A detailed scheme was prepared and in July 1936 the Surveyor produced a sketch plan for a block of single storey buildings to accommodate 16 almspeople with a nurse's house, *"to be erected on a site selected by the governors in place of the present building"*. The manager was of the opinion that the existing buildings could be utilised by Estate for office and storage purposes. The northern portion of a field in Gallery Road, then being used by the Alleyn Old Boys' Club, was earmarked to be reserved for the new building which was expected to cost £10,500.

Problems soon arose however. The chairman of the almshouse committee died during the planning process and then difficulties presented themselves over the choice of the site for the proposed new almshouses. It was now thought that the field adjoining the Old Grammar School might be more suitable, as building on the adjacent

Alleyn Old Boys' ground would break up the large field. Another candidate was a portion of land granted in 1882 to the Picture Gallery. Consideration of yet another site was given, but this was excluded because it was thought to be rather isolated.

It was decided that the Estate solicitor be instructed to approach the Board of Education with a view to using the Acquisition of Property Fund Deposit account to cover the cost of the rebuilding and the conversion of the existing building for storage and workmen's dwellings. The addition of the latter had caused the anticipated cost to rise to £15,000. The Board's reply was that the Acquisition of Property Fund could not be used as it was an educational fund but it might be possible to arrange a loan out of the fund over a period of 60 years, the interest being waived. The Charity Commission then entered the fray and said that funds for the Eleemosynary Trust had been fixed *"once and for all"* and they had no power of intervention. And so the first attempt at rebuilding the Dulwich Almshouses ended in failure and frustration.

On a happier note, It was finally agreed that a whole time nurse for the almspeople was required. In answer to the governors' advertisement, Sister Winifred Arathoon applied and was appointed matron at £4 per month plus quarters.

CHAPTER FIVE

War and its aftermath

In May 1939 with the threat of war looming large, arrangements were made to evacuate twelve of the almswomen to the Holy Rood, Findon, Sussex. Holy Rood was a nursing home founded a few years earlier by an order of Anglican nuns. It seems only women were accepted and a charge of £1 per week was made. The deputy chairman of the governors, McCulloch Christison, who had made the arrangements was still trying to find a billet for the three men. The Manager was authorized to make the necessary travelling arrangements.

When in September 1939 war did break out, nine almswomen, three almsmen, the matron and two women relatives



Holy Rood nursing home, Findon, Sussex

were evacuated by coach to Findon on Friday 1st September. Matron reported that they were expected to supply any eggs, jam and cake or anything extra they might require. The almsmen had all been billeted in the village at a charge of £1.2.6 per week which 'included everything'. Dr Carpmael had recommended that Mrs Henderson who was very frail and nearly blind be accompanied by her daughter. He also thought it advisable that the daughter of Mr A Harrison should be evacuated with him. Not all the almspeople went to Findon. Mr and Mrs Case residing at flat 16 did not wish to leave the Old College.

The winter of 1939 set in early and was very cold with plenty of snow so an extra 5/- per week for heating was allowed to the men who were living in the village of Findon. Miss E Patten, an almswoman, thought she would be better off in her native Bishopsgate and returned to London. One elderly lady aged 96 and one man were proving difficult, hardly surprising, considering the rooting up of their lives. Dr Carpmael got in touch with a Findon doctor to look after the almspeople, offering part of his salary to his colleague, and Matron was allowed 10/- every couple of months for train fares to go back to London, presumably to retain her sanity. There were other difficulties to be sorted out; when one of the almspeople, Mrs Snoad died, it was decided to give the next applicant the choice of remaining at home until the almspeople returned

to Dulwich, or go to Findon. Then Mother Superior wrote to point out that as there were only 7 occupants in the ward which held ten she had to request an additional payment of £9 to maintain service.

In April 1940, with no sign of the war occurring, the matron wrote to the chairman *"The almspeople are very anxious to know if they will be allowed to return to their homes soon. They are worrying as to the state of them. One has a husband in Dulwich Hospital and wants to be near him."* The matron had also received a number of letters from almspeople which told of depression and wanting to go home *"....anyway I feel that the almshouses will want a few weeks of sunshine after the long winter before they will be fit to go into."* It was recommended that the almspeople be allowed to return to the almshouses provided they signed a declaration that it was at their own request and on their own responsibility.

Although there were no actual air raids - it was the period known as the 'phoney war' - the almspeople at Findon complained about day and night air raid warnings and, according to the Matron, they thought they would be safer in London. *"They would like to return to their own homes or stay with friends. They say they will be responsible for putting up the black-out at night."*

In July 1940 Matron made arrangements for the transport of bedding and



Findon Village, Sussex during World War 2, note the concrete- block tank traps.

luggage back to London. The almspeople were advised to stay with friends. It is uncertain how many took this advice. The final departure from sleepy Findon back to London took place at the end July 1940, paradoxically just in time to experience the London Blitz which was about to begin.

Although the Old College was not hit by any bombs during the Blitz, Dulwich certainly was and the effects of landmines falling in Court Lane Gardens weakened the ornamental chimneys over the almshouses in the east wing. As a result all the chimneys were taken down and refixed securely. Of course the Old College's luck could not last forever, considering the rain of bombs, incendiaries and, from the summer of 1944, rockets falling around it. The Manager reported 21 V1's exploding in Dulwich between 5th June – 20th July 1944. The One, which exploded on 9th July in the cricket field in Dulwich

Park, further damaged the almshouses. On 22nd July a V1 a 'flying bomb' exploded in Gallery Road, creating a crater '15 deep and destroying the Picture Gallery and severely damaging the Chapel and the almshouses. By some miracle there were no casualties among the almspeople and no fatalities among other residents in this incident.

It appears that the almspeople vacated the almshouses after the attack and resumed the occupancy when the repairs were completed. The bill for War Damage to the almshouses amounted to £600 (subsequently revised upwards because of roof



A V1 'Flying bomb', exploded in Gallery Road on 22 July 1944 causing massive damage



damage). An inspection of the building in 1947 revealed a significant fire risk. The fireplaces in each flat had a York stone hearth over a wood floor but while in former times the fire was 12 inches above the hearth, the new grates were only 3 inches above thus creating a serious fire hazard. Because of the nature of the emergency, funds of £1500 were released. The final bill for the reconstruction of fireplaces was actually £432.

The residue of this amount was to come in very useful, especially as the eleemosynary account had been in deficit for many years. Everyday expenses had also continued to rise, and to keep up with the cost of living the matron had to be given an increase – to the princely sum of £3 per week. Finances had become so critical by 1951 that a letter was sent by the governors to the Ministry of Education seeking to readjust the distribution of income *“in the light of the financial position”*. The letter explained it all: *“The almshouses are out of date and in need of capital expenditure for installation of electric lighting, provision of a bath and other facilities. In addition the present annual*



Christ's Chapel east window (detail). Designed by Russell Vernon MBE it depicts the figure of Edward Alleyn kneeling in prayer. Behind him are the figures of a poor brother and poor sister. This window replaced the existing window which was destroyed in July 1944 during World War 2

expenditure exceeds annual income and there is a growing deficit in the Eleemosynary account. The contemplated appointment of a fulltime resident matron is urgently necessary for the proper care of the almspeople.”

It was understood that there might be legal difficulties in obtaining an increase in the annual sum received by the charity but money for major work on the almshouses might be met out of the Acquisition of Property Fund established by the Board of Education in 1928. The annual payment to the eleemosynary account had been unchanged since 1891 and the pension paid to the almspeople was still only 18/6, the same reduced amount since 1908. Clearly an increase in the pension was well overdue

but to avoid the almspeople's Old Age Pension being penalised, any increase would have to be in excess of 10/- per week to be of any benefit.

In July 1951, Mrs Halls the matron retired at the age of 70 having served through the evacuation and war years. Her successor was Mrs Atwell who was appointed as the new resident matron.

In November, Mrs Atwell issued a detailed report of what she found.

Mrs Atwell's long and detailed list covered aspects of the almshouses and their residents ranging from the apparent loneliness of the residents to practical difficulties such as cleaning and curtaining the high windows. However, her report also carried a number of sensible suggestions to either mollify or solve the problems.

To rectify the loneliness, often caused by being distant from relatives which made visiting difficult, she suggested installing radios in the rooms. The difficulty with cleaning and covering the high windows could be solved by fitting rollerblinds and having the windows cleaned by contractors.

Several other fresh ideas were offered, ranging from a proposal that the Women's Voluntary Service supplied hot meals to any resident who fell ill, to social events which the almspeople could look forward to, such as a Christmas party and a summer outing. She also suggested taking up the St John's Ambulance Brigade's offer of helping in cases of long term illness, obtaining use of the Council's home help service and even paying the pensions in shilling pieces for use in the gas meters.

Russell Vernon, the Estate Surveyor, had also carried out a survey of the condition of the almshouses themselves

and reported that the buildings had been brought to the present standard in 1866 and had remained more or less unaltered since that time. There were no baths or washing accommodation. There was 1 WC between 4 almspeople. Those apartments in the middle of the building were only ventilated by a skylight. Lighting was still by gaslight. Heat was only obtained from a fireplace in the living room (except the four larger flats where there was a small fireplace in the bedroom). The rooms were lofty. The internal decorations were dingy and generally unattractive.

Vernon suggested that new sinks and drainers and 'bungalow baths' (with lids) and new gas water heaters be fitted in the kitchens, and that a ventilated food cupboard be provided and the old method of storing coals in a cupboard should be superseded by a metal bin. He said that the gas board would fit new cookers free of charge. He also suggested taking out and replacing the fireplaces, fitting cupboards in the bedrooms and supplying electric light.

He noted that the stairs were old and worn and therefore dangerous and needed retreading and that the apartments were generally very unpleasant. His suggestion was to construct new porchways with entrances projecting on to the walk, part of which would be used as a WC for residents on the ground floor. The walls had been distempered in 1947

under the war damage compensation scheme but no painting of the stairs had been done. The roof, damaged in 1944, needed replacing. On the plus side, he reminded the governors that the sum of £1500 for fireplaces fitted in 1948 had not all been spent and there was a balance of £1189 remaining.

Of course, such housing conditions were the norm for many people living in houses built in the Victorian period and such houses comprised a great deal of South London. It was the anticipation of having a separate bathroom, an indoor toilet, even central heating and electric lighting, that made the idea of living in the flats being built by Camberwell Council less than a mile away so appealing and which generally stimulated the idea of improving housing standards.

It was all a lot for the Committee to digest. The matron's report was considered first and her idea of supplying a wireless to each almsperson was agreed upon, as was the supply and hanging of new curtains. The potential danger of the elderly residents cleaning the very high windows was also addressed, and it was decided that it should be done by contractors. The tradition of a Christmas party for the almspeople commenced with a £15 donation. Lastly, the matron was to be provided with overalls and a mackintosh with hood to conduct her rounds.

The committee then swallowed hard

and decided that the architect's report be recommended in principle and the Board of Education should be approached for funds to pay for his recommendations. The reply from the Board of Education which arrived in February 1952 was short and to the point. The application for the highest estimate of **£17,000** for costs of upgrading the almshouses could not be entertained. The funds allocation established in 1882 could only be altered by Act of Parliament, Just when all seemed hopeless an unexpected ally arrived on the scene in the person of the District Surveyor.

He warned of the dangerous state of the almshouses, especially the internal wood staircases. His opinion clearly carried more weight than that of the governors and suddenly events began to move rapidly. A meeting with the Board of Education's legal branch produced a solution. The amount of the lowest estimate of £14,000 could be found, provided the educational beneficiaries did not object, by means of an interest free loan from the Capital Reserve Fund of the Estate. It was to be repaid by means of a Sinking Fund payment over 60 years with a moratorium for the first 5 years. The interest on this being 2½% - £136 pa. With surprising confidence, the governors anticipated that there would be agreement from the beneficiaries.

All the beneficiaries did indeed agree and the architect was instructed to

proceed. Unfortunately, like most such projects, unexpected problems arose. In the case of the east wing the architect found that the existing wood floor had been made from second hand timber. It was worm eaten and infested with mice. A new concrete floor would have to be installed. Revised estimates were made and the cost rose from £14,450 to £18,386. The lowest estimate, which had been supplied by the local builder, W J Mitchell & Company, was accepted and gradually the almspeople were moved into temporary accommodation across the road at 7 College Road which was at the time vacant.

In December 1954 Mr J E Goodwin of Jasper Road, the managing director of Television and Radio Relay, generously offered to supply a projection type TV *'for use of the almspeople this Christmas'*. Another enjoyment for the almspeople was the opportunity of attending a whist drive every Friday afternoon just across the road in the Old Grammar School which the Dulwich Hamlet Old Scholars' Association used as its headquarters.

Works to the almshouses were completed in April 1955. The final account was £18,233 including war damage compensation received for the roof repairs. The moratorium on the start of repaying the loan was increased by a further 5 years.

By 1958, if it was not already obvious,

it was now clear that the annual endowment established in 1882 was insufficient to pay the pensions of the almspeople in Dulwich and the out-pensioners in the other parishes and certainly not the running costs of the almshouses in Dulwich such as Matron's wages, repairs and heating. There was by now an accumulated deficit of over £2500 which had increased by over £300 in the current year alone. In four more years it would rise to £4536.

Once again, since the building works had been completed, the regular visits by governors had lapsed. By 1962 these had recommenced. It was soon reported that whereas earlier difficulty had been found in complying with the requisite number of male almspeople for admission, now there was a problem in appointing any almspeople from the parishes of St Botolph's and St Saviour's to fulfil the conditions of entry to the almshouses. The reasons for this may have been that in those heavily bomb damaged boroughs, the younger residents were moving further out of London to council housing in the suburbs and taking their older relatives with them. Whatever the reason, as a consequence one flat had been empty for a year and another for 6 months. The two parishes' representatives suggested that two elderly ladies from Camberwell who had been strongly recommended by their local GP, Dr Mann, should be admitted instead. The ladies were living in accommodation which had been condemned and they were to



Edward Alleyn House. The new porch entrances were added in 1953.

be evicted. This sensible action was agreed upon.

To conform to the new Clean Air Act, the practice of burning logs for heating had to be abandoned in favour of smokeless fuel. There was also a suggestion made about fitting refrigerators into the kitchens. What were termed cool cabinets and shelves (but not refrigerators) were supplied at a total cost of £160. This took that year's

deficit to £900 but an increase in the endowment had been applied for and there was some optimism that this might be granted. In hopeful anticipation therefore, consideration turned to supplying water heaters for baths.

It soon transpired that the almspeople, with one exception, actually did not want water heaters. They were fearful of the costs of receiving electricity quarterly bills and most preferred a wash down with water boiled on a gas stove. Although they did not actually say it, it is probable that the more infirm felt unable to climb unaided into a bath. A visit soon after by two governors led to the sensible observation that it might be a good idea to fit a sitting bath when a flat became vacant. In the meantime they suggested grab handles be fitted to existing baths.

The compulsory purchase of a great deal of Dulwich Estate land by the London County Council and Camberwell Borough Council after World War 2, to house the thousands of London's homeless, generated unexpected income. Some was spent on major works at the schools such as a replacement science building at the College for the one destroyed during the war. This inflow of funds allowed the 1882 scheme to be amended and the endowment was increased from £1700 to £3500 per annum.

Another change was also sought because of the continuing difficulty of the London parishes of St Botolph's and St Saviour's to fill their allocation of places in the almshouses. The Board felt that to accept substitutes from Camberwell would put them in breach of the regulations and they proposed to seek an amendment to the Scheme of 1882. The Charity Commissioners confirmed their agreement to this in 1963. A thoughtful suggestion which was taken up at the time was that when almspeople went into hospital, a small gift (sweets, flowers, cigarettes, papers, books) be sent. It was also agreed that a Christmas Box of £1 for every almsperson should be given at Christmas.

In the summer of 1964 the question of rebuilding the almshouses arose yet again. The Almshouse Committee, after the successes noted, had the bit between its teeth and recommended that consideration be given to rebuilding the almshouses as a single storied unit and the existing building for the present be utilised for Estate purposes. It was also proposed that the pension be paid quarterly in advance to save time and administrative costs, although this was also well received by the almspeople themselves.

The governors, Engineer Rear Admiral Goodwin and Mr Charles Pearce, concluded their report of their latest visit with the following: *"Finally we would like to make a suggestion that*

the use of the word 'almshouses' should be discontinued as far as reasonably possible and they should be named 'Edward Alleyn House' which we consider more appropriate to the present day whilst also reflecting the Founder's original intention." It was resolved that this suggestion be adopted and application made to the London County Council for approval in renaming and numbering the almshouses. The LCC speedily agreed.

Now that the almshouses, or Edward Alleyn House as we should call it, was making a modest surplus from its increased endowment the question of fitting water heaters arose again. One resident had fitted a water heater at her own expense and it was decided to reimburse her and offer a fitted heater to others who wished it.

The idea of rebuilding was revisited – ideally on a site 'not cut off from the comings and goings of daily life'. A wish list was made which included some form of community room as well as a pleasant garden for summer use. Sites were suggested at Lake House (which had already been conveyed to the LCC for use as the site for a school), the ground adjoining the Old Grammar School, 102-104 Dulwich Village (although that would be a long wait as the lease was not due to expire for another 40 years), the corner of Calton Avenue & Gilkes Crescent, No 2 Dulwich Village (on the grounds that Sainsbury's did not appear to use it).

In the end the governors concluded that probably the only site viable was the Old Grammar School. The old buildings could be altered to provide 4 houses or 8 flats possibly suitable for selected older people or retired masters from the College.

It all sounded wishful thinking and wiser heads recommended that 'there be no removal at the present time'.

The arrival of the Leasehold Reform Act in 1967 brought increased income to the estate as leaseholders queued up to buy their freeholds. It prompted the almshouse committee to press for a further increase in the annual endowment, from £3500 to £4000. St Luke's also proposed that the out-pension be raised from 10/-pw to £1. These proposals were agreed upon and another application was made to the Charity Commissioners. To the almspeople's delight, the governors decided that the estate would pay for the television and radio licences. At the time only one resident had a television although five had a radio.



Christ's Chapel and Edward Alleyn House from Dulwich Park

The age of the almspeople was increasing and the average age was 85. The social scene for residents was improved by the commencement of a monthly tea in the chapel vestry. A cordial atmosphere had developed

between the 'office' and the residents and the Estate's Mr Patterson, who looked after the administration, was well liked. The matron took the opportunity afforded at one of the annual fairs held in the Grammar School field to buy four second hand, but good conditioned, fur coats and offer them to those residents that would like one.

As the 1970's arrived, other ways were looked for to improve the almshouses and Formica tops were fitted to the baths in kitchens to provide extra working space. The governors gave an extra 30p per week to help with electricity bills.

Several years later the architect and surveyor informed the governors that the dwellings were poor by modern standards and that there was a problem with rising damp, there was no

permanent ventilation to bedrooms, living rooms or toilets in the staircase lobbies. Most of the doors had warped in consequence and there was difficulty in closing them. There were also potential fire hazards; although some heating was obtained by radiators, the use of gas fires was dangerous and they should be replaced by electric fires. He also suggested that carpeting should be fitted throughout. He estimated that to carry out essential maintenance and bring the almshouses to a modern standard would require £80,000 of which half could be recovered from grants.

Rising costs and rapid inflation in the 1970's had quickly turned the annual modest surplus since the endowment was increased fifteen years earlier in 1963 to a substantial deficit. In 1978, the general manager (Gerald White) presented a report on Edward Alleyn House which showed that while income from the Scheme was £9000, annual costs had risen to £12500 pa, leading to a deficit of £5739. What was worse, the Charity Commissioners warned the Estate Governors not to try to make up the deficit from other sources within the Estate, even if other beneficiaries agreed, because if they did the Charity Commission would veto any such attempt.

The Commissioners suggested that the governors take advantage of the benefits available through the State. They advised charging the almspeople a rent to cover maintenance and

heating costs. They also suggested that the £1 weekly pension be withdrawn. The residents might, according to their means, claim back from the State most but not all of the rent they would be called upon to pay. There would be no allowance for heating (£3 pw approximately). To obtain these State benefits would require the almspeople to submit to a Means Test. They proposed that discreet enquiries be made to show how many would have to pay out of their own pockets. At the time four of the sixteen flats were vacant.

The Establishment Committee, as the small committee of governors which oversaw the almshouses was now called, held four meetings to discuss the implications of the Charity Commission's directive and still could not reach a conclusion on a way forward. They were upset that the Charity Commissioners could dictate to them, but apparently they could. Concerns were raised over carrying out the suggested recommendations. Exasperated, Gerald White said *"We shall simply be acting as landlords providing accommodation and collecting rent and the charitable aspect largely disappears. In that event do we want to run almshouses at all?"*

Discussion then centred on whether the almshouses should be handed over to the local authority or even to the Abbeyfield Society. Other questions were asked; if some of the residents did not qualify for National Assistance to

help with rent could they be classified as 'poor'? The deputy chairman of the Estate Governors, Charles Pearce OBE, seized the initiative by proposing:

1. Go along with the Charity Commissioners' recommendations to make the almshouses self-supporting but phase it in with a 'topping up' of rent for existing residents.
2. Set up a separate body of Trustees for Edward Alleyn House from the Estate Governors.

He concluded that Edward Alleyn House was an integral part of the Old College and it was unthinkable to allow it to go into disrepair. The Charity Commissioners should be asked to agree to £40,000 towards refurbishment and modernisation out of existing funds. In proposing a quite separate body of trustees for the almshouse, he was almost twenty years ahead of events.

By 1979 the Establishment Committee had decided to seek Counsel's opinion on the Charity Commission's ruling. The Counsel (Leonard Bromley QC) believed there was a case for applying to the Court to vary the Scheme to increase the annual grant and allowing some application of capital funds to improve Edward Alleyn House. Encouraged by this opinion, the committee considered appealing to the Attorney General. The advice recommended that a new scheme should be drafted. The Counsel

stated "*One part of the original single foundation is now flourishing and the other is languishing*". He did not regard this as conforming with the original purpose of Edward Alleyn.

Still undecided on how to proceed, the assistance of Mr Scott of the National Association of Almshouses was sought. He advised the governors to agree to the Charity Commissioners' recommendation of charging the residents a rent in order to make the almshouses self-supporting. Meanwhile the architect's proposed alterations to modernise Edward Alleyn House had proceeded, although inflation had raised the estimate of the cost of improvements then taking place to £70,000 for the four flats completed and another £130,000 for the remaining twelve.

As the position of Matron was now full time, the question arose if she should be called a Warden to more accurately describe her function. The term 'matron' seems to have been preferred. Mrs Atwell had retired and she was succeeded by Mrs Warner. The new matron raised the problem which had been constantly testing the governors and was of course inherent in running accommodation for older people: the care of ageing residents. Mrs Warner echoed the many earlier warnings when she said that some residents required a daily call from a nurse and that hospitals were finding it very difficult to admit those needing nursing. On the

bright side, the residents were largely active, despite their age, and went to day centres and social events. They relied on home helps, assistance with bathing and shopping.

The manager also highlighted his concern about the ageing residents (who were now living longer) and the charity's ability to care for them. He considered a new approach was required, indeed should Edward Alleyn House continue to exist in its present form? Normally an ebullient person he was clearly depressed by the situation. He seemed almost ready to give up when he suggested not replacing any vacancies when they occurred and instead awarding higher pensions to out-pensioners at the highest rate permitted by the Inland Revenue without incurring tax (the existing payment was £1- £1.30pw). The premises could then be offered to retiring or deserving employees of the Estate who needed housing (it had a direct labour force at the time). He repeated his suggestion that one of the large charities take it over and receive help with an annual sum.

The committee itself was still undecided whether to charge rent as recommended by the Charity Commissioners and the National Association of Almshouses or apply to the Court. In the event the full Board of the Estate Governors decided to accept the Commission's recommendation of charging rent,



providing it would only apply to new residents and that the current residents would not be required to pay.

The Board decided to go ahead with the modernisation of Edward Alleyn House. At a meeting with the Charity Commissioners in June 1980 it was agreed that the cost should be borrowed from the Capital Reinvestment Fund and repaid at 9½% interest. The Estate Governors then realised that this rate of interest would drive up rent to an intolerable level if it was included. Charles Pearce's suggestion of forming a separate and self-sufficient Trust was reconsidered and thought workable, providing it was awarded a capital sum of £350,000. The Charity Commissioners rejected this plan for a new Scheme and also refused to contemplate the transfer of capital, as it 'would denude the other beneficiaries'. The proposal for a new scheme thus

became a 'dead letter'.

It appears, however, that the governors were determined to press ahead with the modernisation of Edward Alleyn House with or without the blessing of the Charity Commission and the work was put in hand in 1981. The modernisation was quite drastic as it involved dividing the kitchens of each flat, where, it will be remembered, there was a bath covered by a cover, into a separate bathroom with a toilet. Finding alternative accommodation for residents while this major work was in progress was made easier by the fact that there were six vacant flats. The question of how the work would be paid for remained unresolved.

Other issues emerged, with security becoming an issue with several break-ins. It was also decided that there ought to be a deputy warden on duty at weekends and for holiday cover. Even the question of residents' laundry arose. During the old order, from Edward Alleyn's time until the first reorganisation of the College in 1857, the almspeople's laundry seems to have been done in or near the kitchens, indeed the matter of laundry was covered in the Statutes when the almspeople were cautioned not to do laundry in their rooms or put it out to dry in the courts. Now that the service side of the college had long since gone, the almspeople were obliged to do their washing in their rooms and hang it up to dry there as well. There was simply nowhere

else. As a consequence, there was condensation in the rooms contributing to damp because the question of ventilation had not properly been dealt with. This was how the concept of a laundry room began, when the manager was asked to find space for two tumble dryers.

It would in fact be the issue of a drying room which would act as a bargaining chip in negotiations some twelve years later. What became known as 'the laundry room' was previously a storeroom used by Dulwich Picture Gallery to store chairs and was near the matron's flat. The Gallery found that they could use some alternative space for their chair storage in a room which once housed the heating system, so the laundry room became, to this day, a real asset.

The number of nominations for places from the City parishes was dwindling to a point of almost non-existence. In 1985 St Botolph's had one resident and St Luke's had a married couple, Mr and Mrs Blum. There were another ten residents from St Saviour's and Camberwell.

Finances had begun to take a turn for the better with even a healthy annual surplus after the Charity Commissioners approved an increase in the annual allotment in 1983 and also backdated permission for the Estate to pay for the repairs carried out to Edward Alleyn House by converting the charge on the

Estate into a loan to the eleemosynary branch. As the decade moved on however, it was clear that in a few years time this surplus would change to a huge annual deficit as costs rose but income remained static. Major roof works were scheduled to take place and a deficit of £221,000 was estimated to accumulate by 1996/7. Thus, the new Scheme to reform the Foundation in 1995 was not entirely for the benefit of the educational side of the charity.

Cuts in Southwark Council's budget in the early 1990's had the effect of depriving those residents of Edward Alleyn House who relied upon it, use of the home help service. To plug the gap in this useful function, the governors decided to employ a local cleaner and defray the costs, although those residents who used the service each paid £1 per week. Another change contemplated at this time was the provision of a community room where visitors might be entertained and even put up for the night, as well as acting as a venue for small social events like coffee mornings. One of the two bedsits was suggested for this purpose. The community room continues to be a useful amenity at Edward Alleyn House.

In 1994, rather belatedly, the Diocese of Southwark was invited to comment on the eleemosynary element of the charity which to its surprise it knew nothing about! The archdeacon, while thanking the governors for consulting the diocese, also tartly observed

that it found the fact that Southwark Council nominated almspeople from St Saviour's and St Giles', Camberwell, unsatisfactory. Instead, the diocese proposed that St Saviour's lost its nomination, and representation should go to the parishes nearest the almshouses: St Stephen's, South Dulwich and St Barnabas, Dulwich. It agreed that the rights of nomination be retained on behalf of St Giles' because of the great deal of poverty in Camberwell but they should be at the discretion of the vicars of the two Dulwich churches plus St Faith's, North Dulwich. The governors approved these suggestions, except that they declined (presumably on historic grounds) deleting St Saviour's as a beneficiary. In practice, Southwark Council continued to carry out its previous task of representation and nomination in the Dulwich area but through its Director of Housing.



The Warden, Carol Wilson, with Edward Alleyn House resident Helen Penfold.

THE PARISHES

The new Local Government Act which had abolished the vestries of the London parishes in 1899 and replaced them with elected borough councils had consequences for the Alleyn Foundation. Although in principle the new councils now had the authority to appoint both recipients and governors of the Alleyn charity, in practice they either did not assume this role or delegated it. In 1902, at St Saviour's, soon to become the cathedral church of the new diocese of Southwark, the task was given to the St Saviour's ward of the new borough. At St Luke's, the selection was to have been made by Finsbury Council from nominations from councillors of the five wards comprising St Luke's parish. In practice, the responsibility passed in 1903 directly from the Rector and



Southwark Cathedral, formerly St Saviour's, Southwark



St Luke's, Finsbury. Opened in 1733 to accommodate some of the crowded parish of St Giles' Cripplegate. The weight of the stone obelisk spire designed by Nicholas Hawksmoor caused part of the church to subside and it was closed in 1958 when the parish was amalgamated with St Giles'. It is currently used as rehearsal rooms for the London Symphony Orchestra.

churchwardens to the trustees of the St Luke's Parochial Charities. At St Botolph's, partly in each of the new boroughs of Islington and Finsbury, it became the responsibility of the new Bishopsgate Institute, at Camberwell, the selection was to be made by Camberwell Consolidated Charities.

All of the parishes suffered extensive damage during World War 2. Camberwell was the fourth heaviest damaged borough in London and Dulwich itself had received over 500 high explosive bombs as well as countless incendiaries. Later in the war it was also hit by 37 V1 flying bombs and three V2 rockets. In the City, the bomb damage at Cripplegate in 1940 was so extensive that barely any buildings remained standing. By 1951, only 48 people remained registered as living within the ward. It was this widespread devastation which led to planners envisaging and eventually building the Barbican estate and arts centre, starting in 1965. The site of Edward Alleyn's theatre in Golden Lane was still owned by the Alleyn Foundation at the time and was sold off to become part of the Barbican scheme.

On 23rd June 1945 with the war over, it was suggested that Southwark United Charities'



St Botolph's, Bishopsgate



War damage in Cripplegate. This area, destroyed during the Blitz, was built upon by the City of London's Barbican estate in 1965.



St Giles'. Cripplegate, was badly damaged during World War 2. Now restored, it stands in the middle of the Barbican complex.

almshouses in Hamilton Road which had been badly bombed should amalgamate with the Dulwich almshouses to provide accommodation for 100 persons, the proportion being Dulwich 16, Southwark 84. The plan was that Dulwich would provide the land and Southwark the finance for the buildings. A site

was suggested, occupied by a house called The Chalet, at the southern end of what is today the Horniman Play Park at Sydenham Rise. This clever idea was submitted to the Charity Commissioners. The Commissioners naturally wanted more information, including the likely costs. Although there was a meeting between Dulwich and Southwark representatives, nothing more came of the proposal.



Stained glass window in St Giles' church designed by John Lawson, depicting the figure of Edward Alleyn, benefactor of the parish, and a representation of his Fortune Theatre, which stood nearby, in the left cartouche.

CHAPTER SEVEN

The way we are now

In the early 1990's the Dulwich Foundation schools began to be discontented with the fact that the Dulwich Estate controlled far too much of what they considered 'their' inheritance. All had plans for the expansion of their facilities and they felt that the Estate Governors were retaining excessive balances which they could use for their own development. At the same time, the trustees of Dulwich Picture Gallery wished to shake off the



Edward Alleyn House residents 2015



control of Dulwich College and establish the independence of the gallery, not least to assist their fund-raising efforts. This was all well and good, but the interests of the other Foundation schools also had to be considered. To satisfy these interests and to attempt to accommodate the demands of all the interested parties, a Joint Commission under the chairmanship of Sir Robin Butler (later Lord Butler of Brockwell) was formed.



Any excuse for a party at Edward Alleyn House!

The Scheme of 1995 was the product of several years of negotiations between all the interested parties. The Scheme may indeed have gone further than those seeking reform originally expected. Both Christ's Chapel and Dulwich Picture Gallery became charities in their own right. The reforms also extended to establishing Edward Alleyn House as a separate charity called The Dulwich Almshouse Charity.

The Scheme provides for Dulwich Almshouse Charity to have six trustees. Each trustee is appointed for a term of five years and may be reappointed for

new almshouse trustees certain land and buildings, naturally including the east wing of the Old College but also the Old Grammar School and the field adjacent as well as the gardens and parking area of the Old College. The Old Grammar School and other pieces of land were later conveyed to the Estate for a consideration of £110,000. The transfer of the parking area appears to be a quid pro quo for the use of the laundry room.



Myra Bailey trying out the new stair lift 2005

The fact that the administration of the almshouses is supported by staff of the Dulwich Estate greatly assists the



Christmas partytime (L to R) Sonia Poulson, Jesse Callaghan, Carol Edwards (Relief Warden), Carol Calver, Bridget Tyre.

smooth running of the charity. The day to day administration is conducted by Veronica Edwards in consultation with the warden Shelley Miles. The maintenance of the building is in the hands of Simon Hoare. These members of the Estate staff have many years' experience working with the almshouses and their residents. .

A programme of considerable improvement was embarked upon at Edward Alleyn House by the new trustees. In 2001 'walk-in' baths or showers were fitted in the bathrooms. Kitchens were refurbished and new appliances supplied. In 2005 stair lifts were fitted to three of the staircases and one of the bed-sits, which was proving difficult to let, was finally converted into a useful, if

cramped, common room with the additional facility of providing accommodation for the residents' visitors.

Today, only one or two of the longest serving residents have any connection with those areas of London so familiar to Edward Alleyn. Even Camberwell has not nominated a resident for more than ten years. Inevitably there will be less contact with the parishes in years to come and this may lead to difficulties in attracting trustees from these parishes. The connection with St Saviour's is now confined to the educational side

of the Foundation which supports St Saviour's Girls' School near the Elephant & Castle, and St Olave's Grammar School, at Orpington. However, what is termed 'the area of benefit', those parts of London to which Edward



Dulwich Picture Gallery visit



Knit and Natter session with Rose Howell (left) and a visitor.

Alleyne particularly directed his charity, still includes the parish of St Saviour, Southwark, so it is possible for residents of that parish to apply for entry to Edward Alleyne House, although in practice this has not happened for many years. Instead, most residents tend to have lived locally.

Generally speaking, applicants today hear of vacancies either through word of mouth, through local churches, Link Age Southwark or through Southwark Housing. To qualify for admission, applicants have to satisfy the requirements that they are resident in the area of benefit, are aged 60 or over, and are in need, hardship or distress. Deciding who should be admitted is delegated to a sub-committee of two trustees. There continues

to be a demand for places. At the present time the board is reviewing its applications policy, the aim being to build up a list of applicants who are known to meet the admission criteria.

Instead of solely providing pensions to a set number of out-pensioners as had historically been done, an annual grant is made which in 2015 amounted to £43,000. This is shared among the three bodies mentioned: St Luke's Parochial Trust, the Bishopsgate Foundation and Camberwell Consolidated Charities. If there is any money surplus to the requirements of the three beneficiaries, then this is distributed, at the discretion of the trustees, to charities like St Christopher's Hospice, Link Age Southwark, DeafBlind and the Ashton Edwards Trust, all of which provide a service to local older people.



Rose Brooks, Elsie Taylor and Imelda Kennedy try their hand at art in the Gallery's Sackler Art Centre.



other things, their health and maintenance of the flats.

The outreach scheme envisaged in 1995 has been found to work more satisfactorily within the local area and has been in operation in Dulwich for 15 years, begun by Shelley's predecessor Carol Wilson. Initially it was anticipated that all the parishes might be included but this was found to be impractical and today long standing tenants of the Estate usually form part of this

Christmas lunch in the Old Library, Dulwich College 2011

Today, the almshouses are not classed as sheltered accommodation, but warden assisted housing. As in the past, residents must be able to care for themselves although, if necessary, a care package can be applied for, to cover aspects like shopping, cleaning or personal care. This may, if necessary, be subsidised by the charity. Residents are encouraged to be independent. A useful facility operates once a week, when, accompanied by Shelley Miles, the warden, a Dial a Ride service allows residents to visit local supermarkets to do their own shopping. Shelley will also accompany residents to GP and hospital appointments if requested. A relief warden covers weekends and holidays, so ensuring cover over 365 days a year. The warden continues to conduct a daily round, visiting each resident checking, among

number. It is seen as a way of the charity extending its role to people who meet the criteria but are not residents. The warden maintains regular contact with them and they are invited to join the



Vestry tea (L to R) Bridget Tyre, Carol Calver Sonia Poulson and (far R) Canon Dianna Gwilliams



Carol Calver and Warden Shelley Miles on the Tenterden steam railway.

almshouse residents at events arranged by the warden. Other local elderly people may also be befriended and similarly invited to attend events at the almshouse and outings.

Life today at Edward Alleyn House is decidedly jolly. The traditional Christmas party has remained a feature but, as Shelley expresses it, any excuse, St Valentine's Day, St George's Day etc. is used for a party! The Charity funds outings several times a year and visits to Chartwell, Eastbourne, Denbies Vineyard and the Tenterden steam railway have all been enjoyed over recent years. Regular events also include a 'knit and natter' group and coffee mornings. All are well attended. Dulwich Picture Gallery has for many years invited the residents to view their exhibitions and talks and visits are made several times a year. The

Gallery's programme for older people has included residents from Edward Alleyn House. Residents have also been regular members of St Barnabas' Wednesday Friends for over thirty years. These numerous social events provide the opportunity for the residents to meet and a friendly atmosphere is very evident.

Although Edward Alleyn House is situated in an enviable position in a tranquil part of Dulwich and both the interior and exterior are maintained to a very high standard, there is no ignoring the fact that most of the rooms are on the small side and are not always suitable as a permanent home for elderly people, especially for those using walking aids. As a consequence, some recent applicants have declined an offer of a place.

There are other, equally pressing, problems: there are three high steps



Art class in Dulwich Picture Gallery (L to R) Joan North, Elsie Taylor



Coffee morning in the community room (L to R) Elizabeth Wellington, Ann Ramsey, Ellen Pickersgill, Imelda Kennedy

addition, there is the matter of security. There are four entrances, all of which require the residents to securely shut these doors. Finally, there is the question of the viability of employing a warden and deputy warden to maintain a fulltime service. Most almshouse charities argue that the minimum number of residents required to make the provision of a warden viable is at least twenty.

The current building is Grade 2* and externally cannot easily be altered. To extend it, if such a course was contemplated and always assuming it was permissible, would undoubtedly

to gain access to the heavy front doors, the community room is far too small for comfort if all the residents turn up for a coffee morning or social event (as most do), the laundry room is some way distant and the route is mainly open to the elements. In



Christmas lunch 2015



Taking the sun 2016 (L to R) Michael Killgallon, Maureen Taylor, Wendy Powell, Rose Brooks.

attract considerable local resistance. To address all of these problems, the trustees say that the only solution is to build an entirely new almshouse elsewhere. As we have already seen, the question of rebuilding has arisen several times in the past and each time apparently insoluble problems have prevented such a course. Even now, in the 400th anniversary year of the opening of the original Dulwich almshouses, problems over a new location arise. Although it is proposed



The Edward Alleyn Statue by Louise Simson

that the Dulwich Estate, with the consent of its other beneficiaries, will provide the resources for the planning, construction and commissioning of the new almshouse, actually securing a site remains elusive. Nevertheless, the trustees have moved forward in hope and commissioned a design for the provision of a block of twenty almshouses with a community room and other facilities including a garden. Each flat will be of a generous size and include an appropriately designed bathroom and kitchen and the welcome feature of a balcony for the residents to enjoy.

The fact that Edward Alleyn's benefaction, and the Dulwich almshouses in particular, have existed for four hundred years is an

amazing legacy and an occasion for celebration. Countless men and women have given their time, talents and efforts to provide a comfortable and secure home for well over a thousand needy older people over four centuries.

And what of the elderly people who have dwelt here? If there is an element missing in the history of Edward Alleyn House it is the individual stories they might have told. Occasionally we do have a glimpse. What would seem a reasonable conclusion is that the present residents are typical of those who have lived in this place before. Here they have found comfort and companionship, care and love in their closing years. Edward Alleyn could not have hoped for more.

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