

## **HISTORY OF THE EXETER DISPENSARY from 1976 – 2023** by A J Eveleigh

What follows are some of my recollections of my time as a Trustee for the period above which I hope will be of interest particularly to those involved with the charity.

### **BRIEF HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

The Exeter Dispensary was established on 17 January 1818 by Dr Henry Blackall to provide relief for the poor suffering from fevers and contagious diseases and for children who were unfit to be admitted by the Devon and Exeter Hospital. Premises were rented for £31 p.a on Friernhay Street. Six physicians, six surgeons and three consultant surgeons offered their services for free and received patients and dispensed medicines.

In 1840 land was found to build a purposed designed dispensary on the corner of Northernhay Street and Queen Street and the building was opened in 1843. It had cost £2,300. (In March 2018 Mrs Sally Parkin, a Trustee, researched and produced a detailed background of the Dispensary up until 1900).

The Minutes in 1900 stated that 280,761 patients had been admitted since 1818.

When the National Health Service was formed in 1948 the charity was reconstituted as the Exeter Dispensary and Aid-in-Sickness Fund, the premises were let to the Health Authority and the rent and investment income were used ‘to provide monetary grants to relieve the suffering of sick and disabled residents in the city who are also in financial need after receiving all state benefits to which they are entitled’.

On 19<sup>th</sup> January 1954 the Charity Commissioners approved the establishment of the Exeter Dispensary, under the title of the Exeter Dispensary and Aid-in-Sickness Fund, and also the Exeter Lying In Charity. There were to be eight Co-optative and six Representative Trustees. The latter to be two appointed by the house committee of the Royal Devon and Exeter hospital, two by the Exeter branch of the BMA and two by the Council of the County Borough of the City of Exeter. A Co-optative Trustee had to be a person residing in or near the City of Exeter and be appointed for a five year term. However, the original Trustees, including Jim Michelmores, who was chairman from 1966, and Kenneth Rowe, the treasurer, who had been President in 1948, were entitled to be Trustees for life.

### **1970's**

Being appointed as a Trustee of the Exeter Dispensary and Aid-in-Sickness Fund in 1976 I filled the vacancy caused by the death of Thornton Willey ‘who had been a Trustee for a great number of years’ - in fact since 1925. The chairman was Jim Michelmores of Michelmores, solicitors, and the secretary was his clerk, David Fanson. In his initial letter Jim explained “*this is an extremely useful charity which has an income of around £5,000 per annum which is applied for the help of sick poor persons either through direct grants or the Exeter Council for Voluntary Service and the Medical Social Workers at the major hospitals in Exeter, besides making substantial grants to various hospitals and Associations for services not provided by the National Health Service. The duties are not onerous there being only two meetings each year, one in March and one in November, on Wednesdays at 6 p.m. The Trustees, beside myself, are Ken Rowe, R.W.Townsend, Dr Winifred Heal, Mrs Annette Dunsford, George Cornish and John Parkin, ( with six others appointed by different organisations*”. (George Cornish and John Parkin were both elected in 1972).

The other organisations were the Exeter branch of the BMA, represented by Dr W.Benson and Dr M.E.M Cook, the Exeter and District Community Health Council, represented by Lady Gaye and Mrs Whitworth, and Exeter City Council represented by Alderman Mrs Minnie Nicholls and Councillor Sam Honeywill (of whom we will hear later). It was further explained that the Trustees owned the Exeter Dispensary building on the corner of Queen Street and Northernhay Street which was let to the Hospital Authorities as offices at a rent of £4,500 p.a. and the Trustees meetings were held there. Appended to the Charity is a small Charity known as the Exeter Lying-in Charity ‘which is intended to provide extra comforts and benefits during confinement for poor married women’.

In the year to December 1975 accounts a total of £4,575 was dispensed. £2,000 went to the Housework/Visiting scheme (which was presumably later known as Convalescent Grants) and it is interesting to see the range of all the rest of the expenditure. Grants and donations to the Royal Devon and Exeter and Orthopaedic hospitals (separate establishments then), and donations to Digby, Exminster, Newcourt and Redhills hospitals, Rowcroft Convalescent Home, Devonian Orthopaedic Association, Honeylands Childrens hospital and St Nicholas Home as well as Exeter Council of Voluntary Service. The amounts were obviously small but it was quite a list.

At this time the largest grant was made to the Exeter Council of Social Services and guidance was sought from the Charity Commission whether these gifts were within the objects of the charity. The Commissioners confirmed they had no objection. It was also agreed that help would be more beneficially given to patients of the Royal Devon and Exeter Hospitals by making the grants to the Leagues of Friends instead of the hospital authorities. In the event special medical/social grants were made to the R.D & E and Orthopaedic hospitals and in addition separate donations were given to the League of Friends of the various hospitals

From 1978 meetings were no longer held at the Dispensary building in Queen Street but took place at the Exeter Postgraduate Medical Centre in Barrack Road.

In general Trustees were long serving and only gave up on health grounds or death. However, it was agreed acceptable that Mr R W Townsend wished to resign after some 60 years of service! He was replaced by a Miss Janet Wiles, a principal hospital social worker at the R.D & E (Wonford) hospital whose knowledge was understandably useful. I replaced Mr Townsend as Hon Auditor.

The Health Authority ceased to use the property at 26 Queen Street in 1979 and as it was proposed to be leased to Devon County Council as additional accommodation for the Photography and Graphics Dept of the College of Art and Design the Trustees accepted a surrender of the lease from the Secretary of State for Social Services on payment of £250. The lease to Devon C C, dated 1<sup>st</sup> May 1979, was for 21 years on a full repairing and insuring basis.

Grants and donations in 1983 were made to 8 hospitals and, for the first time a donation was given to Hospiscare (£500) which had started the previous year..

In 1989 Polytechnic South West, which became Plymouth University in 1992, assumed responsibility for the lease. A new ten year lease was granted in 2000 with a break option after 5 years and the tenants were required to keep the property 'in good and substantial repair' and redecorate inside and outside.

There was a Charities Act in 1992 which made substantial amendments to charity law. This stated:

1. The Official Custodian will transfer the COIF shares to the Investment Fund Managers
2. In future, income and expenditure accounts, a balance sheet and an annual report will have to be sent to the Commissioners, probably from 1993.
3. A professional Auditor or Independent Examiner will need to be appointed.
4. An annual return must be sent in a form supplied by them
5. Cheques will require two signatures.

At that time only one signature, normally by Ken Rowe as Treasurer, was the practice for the Dispensary. Similarly, I had been the auditor since 1979 but with the new, and understandable rules this would not be allowed and so Bush and Co were appointed as Independent Examiners, I think, in 1995.

In 1993 the Dispensary Bankers, NatWest, decided they were no longer prepared to operate the accounts free of charge as a result of which the account was closed and moved to Royal Bank of Scotland who confirmed there would be no management charges as long as £750 was kept in the current account.

## 2000

Jim Michelmore had decided to step down as Chairman in 2002 after 36 years in the post and John Parkin, a Trustee since 1973, was appointed in his place. The annual income at that time was just under £45,000 made up of Rent £27,000, Investments £8,500 and the John Dinham Trust £9,233. Just over £27,000 was paid out in donations of which half were Convalescent Grants.

By an order from the Charity Commissioners dated 7 December 2004 it was agreed that Trustees could from time to time amend the Trusts if they were satisfied it was in the interests of the charity to do so. For the Dispensary this was pertinent due to the winding up of the Exeter & District Community Health Council which was to be replaced by Exeter Patients Forum. If the latter didn't appoint Trustees the Commission agreed there could be twelve rather than the original fourteen. In due course a Mr Taverner was appointed by the Forum. He had a lot to say in the short time he served but, fortunately, this body was abolished after three years and so the Dispensary now consisted of twelve Trustees.

The Lying In Charity was annexed to the Dispensary after the NHS reorganisation and was originally set up to '*provide extra comforts and benefits during confinement to poor married women in the County Borough of Exeter*'. This had obviously become irrelevant in this day and age and the above Charity Commission order allowed the charity to be removed from the register which was duly done in August 2004. The Charity Commission said it would approve the transfer of the modest assets (income of £4,000) to the Exeter Nursing Association Trust (ENAT) providing they continued to follow the guidelines. ENAT said that they would not wish to discriminate against unmarried women who, in their experience, are more likely to need additional financial support. This was presumably agreed because the assets of the Lying In Charity were duly transferred to them.

The BMA appointed Professor Sir Denis Pereira Gray to replace Dr Wilkie as a Trustee in 2005. His grandfather had been elected as Honorary Surgeon to the Dispensary in 1907 and was also a Governor for many years and both his father and uncle were Honorary Medical officers in the 1930's.

In 2003 Plymouth University had expressed their intention to vacate the property in 2006. The building, with a basement, ground and first floor was approximately 2000 sq ft and was Grade 2 listed. It was in need of major renovation and there were serious dilapidation issues including potential contamination from photographic chemicals. The dilapidations were estimated to be in excess of £173,000. In the event the University in 2005 agreed a new rent of £33,500 but still wanted to vacate. Prospective new tenants were found in 2007 but pulled out the following year.

Around this time 2006/2007 the Charity Commissioners 'encouraged' charities with incomes of at least £10,000 to use their online services to \* update their entries in the Central register of Charities, ensuring that the most up to date information is available in the public domain \* complete and submit Annual returns online \* send documents, including accounts, securely to the Commission. This would become mandatory.

The income in the year ending December 2008 was just under £45,000 from which Convalescent Grants of just over £19,000, other grants of £6,500 and donations of just over £8,000 totalling £33,500 were paid out. Payments included Secretary's Honorarium of £700 and Application Secretary's expenses of £450. £5,150 of surveyors fees were also paid by Plymouth university. This emphasised the situation with the state of the property and foretold the problems with dilapidations that was to follow when the university gave up their tenancy.

## **2009 – 2022**

The years 2009/2010 saw considerable changes. I took over from John Parkin as chairman at the AGM in March and David Fanson, after forty years as secretary, retired at the end of the year. His successor was Mrs Carol Cathcart who, amongst many other attributes, had worked at Tiverton CAB as a debt adviser and trainer. She declined to accept an Honorarium. Certainly up until 1994 all the minutes were hand written and I believe it was not until Carol took over that the Trustees each received copies of the minutes of the meetings.

Up to that time the main income came from the rent of the property together with investment income. All grants were paid by cheque and the bank, RBS, made monthly transfers from the main bank account to the Convalescent account which carried a monthly float of £2,500 for payment of grants which averaged £1,500 per month. Payment of these grants were made by David Fanson who would write it, post it for signing to one of the signatories (normally Jim Michelmores) with a stamped addressed envelope which was then forwarded to the recipient. Apart from being laborious it also involved postage costs which was relevant when the grant was only for £25!

The tenants of 26 Queen Street, the University of Plymouth, had decided they wished to vacate at the end of their lease in May 2010. It was estimated that a considerable sum would need to be spent to bring the property to a lettable state and there were protracted and difficult discussions between the Dispensary's surveyors, Knight Frank, and the University over dilapidations. Prior to their leaving they had always paid the surveyors for work done without query but, once they had terminated their occupation, they refused to pay what Knight Frank felt they should pay for dilapidations. The Trustees were advised not to pursue the University but Knight Frank's surveyor felt it worth seeking the advice of an expert on the understanding there would be no cost to the Dispensary. The advice was it would be too risky to involve costs that the charity could not afford so we did not proceed but were surprised to be billed an excessive amount by the surveyor. This was refused, it became acrimonious and was finally settled after negotiation with his senior partner.

With the problems with the property and the efforts to simplify the banking and grant payment arrangements with the new secretary, Carol Cathcart, the Dispensary's officers were involved in many meetings at this time. Eventually James Gibbs of Strutt and Parker was appointed to market the property and a rent of around £40,000 was agreed to be sought. With the ongoing problem of the state of the property in the end the decision was made to try and sell it as it was. There were a couple of false starts until it was sold to Exeter College for £530,000 and it became their music department. The Trustees arranged for a plaque to be put up in the entrance hall stating the history of the building. It read

*EXETER DISPENSARY*

*Founded in 1818 by Dr Henry Blackall*

*to provide relief for the poor and suffering from fever and infectious diseases.*

*26 Queen Street was purchased and rebuilt and opened as a dispensary in 1843*

*until the inception of the National Health Service in 1947 after which the property was leased out.*

With the decision to sell the property a financial sub-committee was formed to decide on how to invest the proceeds of the sale of 26 Queen Street. The net figure was £515,545 which, together with existing investments meant there was £615,000 to invest. The committee comprised Trustees Steve Preston (Treasurer), Julia Charles, John Parkin, Jim Michelmore and myself. Eventually Heather Lamont of CCLA came to a meeting and it was agreed to place all funds in their COIF Charities Investment Fund the expected return being 5.0/ 5.5% expected to provide around £32,000 annual income. In 2011 the income from the Fund was £34,600.

There were three funds.

- a) The General Fund – the funds of the charity not subject to any restrictions regarding their use.
- b) Permanent Endowment Fund – Capital Fund comprising of investments with COIF which is not available to be spent.
- c) Expendable Endowment Fund which is Capital Fund comprising investments with COIF charity funds and is designated by the Trustees to supplement assets of the Permanent Fund to protect income generated in future years (none of the Trustees could recollect how this fund came into being).

With a view to streamlining procedures with the impetus from the Treasurer, Steve Preston, internet banking was explored with the Charity's bankers RBS. Having eventually got nowhere with them we turned to CAF Bank who were well used to dealing with charities and the Dispensary accounts were moved to them. There were three accounts: a Main, where the funds were credited and grants to charities were paid, the Convalescent where those grants were paid and funds were transferred from the main account as required. A third interest bearing account for surplus funds was created but was hardly if ever used. All transactions required the authorisation by two signatories.

It was around this time that the Postgraduate Medical centre became unavailable for meetings and they were moved to the Exeter Golf and Country Club who fortunately made no charge. The Trustees made a start of moving into modern times by creating a Risk Assessment Policy led by Sir Denis Pereira Gray and Dr Jane Richards which was finally agreed in 2013. It was also decided to invite Heather Lamont, the Client Investment Director of CCLA, with whom the Dispensary Funds were invested, to give a presentation to the Trustees at the November meeting which was met with general approval. This started in 2011 and she was quite happy to make a special trip down when requested which was normally every other year.

The Trustees decided in 2014 to change from the CCLA Investment Fund to the Ethical Fund. There was little difference in the income from the two funds.

John Parkin, who had been a Trustee since 1972 and Chairman from 2002 to 2009 died in 2013 and Jim Michelmores, who was a Life Trustee and Chairman from 1954 until 2002 died in 2015.

A budget had been set for Convalescent grants of £28,000 in 2015 but there was ever increasing demands for them and this figure was likely to have been exceeded that year which meant that there was less to pay out in other grants. The Trustees had decided that the Convalescent grants were more in keeping with the aims of the charity and should always take priority. We had come a long way from payments of £25! In 2016 it was agreed that these grants should now be called Supportive Grants which, it was felt, was more appropriate.

At a CCLA Seminar I had met a representative of the Norman Family Trust from Budleigh Salterton as a result of which we received a donation of £2,500 in 2016 to be put towards Supportive Grants and that Trust was to contribute further grants in the following years.

Sadly, our excellent Treasurer, Steve Preston, became ill during 2016 with a re-appearance of cancer and a tumour on the brain, and while I did my best he fortunately recovered sufficiently to prepare the accounts for the year and present them to the AGM at the same time admonishing me for not fully understanding his system! He was forced to retire in March 2017 after 20 years service as Treasurer. He had successfully taken the charity from posting cheques to online banking and a much more professional set up. Sadly he died not long afterwards. We were fortunate that John Claxton, who had worked with Steve and understood his system, was prepared to take over the mantle as Treasurer and he was appointed at the AGM in March 2017.

Also at this time Peter Coleman had decided to retire as Applications Secretary after 10 years of conscientious and efficient work. We were again fortunate in finding an excellent replacement in appointing David Bostock, a retired GP, also at the March 2017 AGM.

This March meeting was to prove an important one as, in addition to the change of personnel, the Trustees agreed to have a website. This was proposed and seconded by Angus McNicol and Julia Wilson, both of whom had been appointed in 2016. It is fair to say that there was argument for and against the proposal. In the event the future would prove it was definitely the right step and it enabled a much more professional system whereby all applications were to be made on an online form and everything was done by e-mail. This made life for the Applications Secretary much more satisfactory.

2018 marked 200 years since the Dispensary was founded in 1818. Trustee, Mrs Sally Parkin, spent many hours of research into the history of the Charity and she brought a comprehensive photographic record of documents held in the Devon archives to the March meeting. This included the old Minute book which covered from the 44<sup>th</sup> AGM in 1862 until 1994. The book was in a fragile state and the Trustees agreed that a suitable bookbinder be found to have it rebound.

One of the booklets related the story of Dr Peter Hennis, a physician to the Dispensary in 1830, who was falsely criticized by a Judge visiting from London and fought a duel with him on Haldon Hill in 1833 and became the last person to be killed in a duel in Devon. A plaque was erected in his name in the Sidwell Street churchyard to 'a hero of the Exeter cholera outbreak'.

The Charity Commission now required more reports to include with the annual return. As a result the following policies were instituted : Conflicts of Interest, Investment, Complaints and Risk Management as well as a Declaration of Interest Form. Angus McNicol, who was now vice-chairman, had kindly spent time in establishing these.

Reserves. It is the policy of the charity to maintain a balance of free reserves that equate to 3 months unrestricted payments otherwise all the funds are available to spend apart from the permanent Endowment Fund.

The Supportive Grants in 2019, amounted to over £37,000, £4,000 more than the previous year, which obviously restricted the payment of any other grants. There was no doubt that the introduction of the website had been of great assistance to the Applications Secretary and the agencies. Continued donations from the Norman Trust were very valuable.

In 2020 the country was affected by the Covid virus and, as a result of the restrictions, the annual meeting was held by e-mail. Prior to the AGM the Trustees were requested to vote on a proposal that the Dispensary should become a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO) and this was agreed by all who submitted replies. Henceforth, the Exeter Dispensary and Aid-in-Sickness Fund (EIDF) was to be known as Exeter Dispensary Charity. Having been formally agreed at the AGM all the assets were vested in the new charity on 30<sup>th</sup> June 2020. With the change there would not be the necessity to have 12 Trustees as before. There should be a minimum of 3 and not more than 12 and they should serve, subject to discretion, no more than three terms of 3 years.

The first meeting of the Exeter Dispensary Charity was held by Zoom on 18th November 2020. It was an appropriate time for me to retire from the chairmanship after 11 years and Angus McNicol was duly elected the new Chair. Julia Wilson became Vice-Chair. The EIDF was formally wound up at this time.

The Treasurer John Claxton retired at the annual meeting in March 2022 after 5 years of excellent service and Mark Stott was appointed in his place. Both identified the need for improvement in data protection going forward. A properly devised privacy policy to handle personal data was required.

The need to have such policies on account of the world we now live in is a far cry from the way the Dispensary did its business from when I joined 47 years ago.

I finally retired at the annual meeting on 29 March 2023.

#### **Chairmen**

J.F.G (Jim) Michelmore	1954 - 2002
John Parkin	2002 - 2009
Alan Eveleigh	2009 – 2022
Angus McNicol	2022 -

#### **Secretaries**

David Fanson	1969(?) - 2009
Carol Cathcart	2010 - 2024

**Treasurers**

The Treasurers have always been Trustees and Ken Rowe, an Exeter businessman, fulfilled this role in the 1970's perfectly well but it was the appointment of Steve Preston, who I think was a retired accountant, who put the finances on a more professional basis. He oversaw the change to online banking and set up his particular systems. Thankfully, after he sadly died John Claxton, who had worked with Steve, understood his systems and all was well. Mark Stott took over on John's retirement in 2022.

**Application Secretaries**

The grants to individuals, known as Convalescent Grants from 1973 were dealt with by Sam Honeywell, a former Exeter City Councillor. These he dealt with, in most cases, having heard from various agencies of those in need, by personally visiting each of the applicants. One can imagine how much time he must have spent doing this for which he was given a modest sum towards his expenses. He was replaced by Richard Gladstone and he, in turn, in 2006, by Peter Coleman, an ex Community Health Council Chief Officer. Peter updated the systems working with the Agencies and computerising. On his retirement in 2017 David Bostock, a retired GP, took over the mantle and further professionalised the procedure for the allocating of Grants which were now more appropriately called Supportive Grants.