

Whilton Charities

Our November meeting was based on the Whilton Charities, and we heard something about the three people who founded them.

John Murcott was a gentleman of Warwick Square, London, who died in 1833 leaving £100 to the Rector and Churchwardens of Whilton. The interest was to be used for *"the benefit of the Poor of the said Parish in purchasing clothing and night covering, except a few shillings to be given to each poor person to commemorate the name of the donor."*

John Murcott was born in Whilton in about 1772, and was possibly the brother of the Methodist, Thomas Murcott, of Inglenook. If so, he was one of the eight children of Thomas and Elizabeth Murcott, and may well have had memories of not enough bedclothes to go round, leading to his bequest towards *"night covering"*. It is interesting that he left some money to be given as gifts to the poor *to commemorate the name of the donor*. This suggests he hoped some people would remember him, and in a way we are commemorating him now.

Over the years the use of his charity changed and it became the coal charity. In providing coal, it continued to fulfil the aim of helping to keep people warm.

Rev Langton Freeman was the fifth son of Richard Freeman and the first son of his second wife, Elizabeth Langton, after whom he was named. He was born in Whilton in 1710, but in contrast to John Murcott, seems to have lived most of his life here.

Langton was destined for the Church and was educated at Pembroke College, Oxford. As Rev Langton Freeman, he became Vicar of Hellidon in 1735. He kept this position until 1760, but this did not stop him also becoming Vicar of Long Buckby in 1738 and then Rector of Bilton. He was never Rector of Whilton, but he did hold property here and in 1749 inherited his position of Lord of the Manor of Whilton.

Langton was a wealthy lifelong bachelor, but gained the reputation of a miserly eccentric. It is even claimed, probably correctly, that he stayed the night with someone and unpicked the threads from his host's blankets to mend his clothes!

He ended his days in the house known today as the Manor House in 1784. The strange terms of his will were adhered to, and his body was sealed up in the summerhouse in the garden, surrounded with evergreens and a fence, painted dark blue. Perhaps by his death he regretted some of his mean actions, as in his will he bequeathed a recompense to those whom he had robbed in his lifetime! However, in the charity he founded, he showed little sign of generosity, leaving only £20 to the poor of Whilton. This was such a small amount that in later years it was amalgamated with John Murcott's coal charity.

Mrs Ann Rose was the widow of Rev William Lucas Rose, who had been Rector of Whilton until he died in 1814. During her many years in the Rectory she had helped the poor girls of Whilton with clothing and wanted this to carry on after her death.

In 1823 she set up a trust deed, founding her charity. The trustees were to use the income from the £400 she gave *"to purchase once in every year for ever twelve pairs of shoes and twelve pairs of stockings and once in every two years for ever the several articles of clothing hereinafter mentioned, that is to say, twelve bonnets, twelve tippets, twelve pairs of mittens and twelve gowns."*

The clothing was for girls who lived in Whilton and who were aged between six and fourteen. This was a charity which had the double benefit of providing apparel for girls and work for dressmakers and shoemakers. During our meeting we dressed Katherine Waterhouse in clothing of the 1820s, as was probably worn by the first charity girls. We now have an idea of how they all looked when they arrived at church on Sunday mornings.

As the years passed, the fashions changed. We heard memories of about 1930, when the girls trooped down to Miss Tomlinson, the dressmaker at the Locks, to be measured for their dresses, and how when all the straw hats arrived at the Rectory, there was no choice of hat: you just had to wear

the one that fitted your head! Later on girls were given money and could go to Northampton to purchase a coat, and we saw a photo of Susan Gardner wearing hers in about 1951.

By late Victorian times the coal charity was being distributed at Christmas once every three years, to about 40 households. The trustees *"considered this the best course to adopt, the coals being then equally divided between the poor inhabitants of Whilton, whereas if it was distributed every year all the poor persons could not participate in the Charity."*

The modern regulations of the Charity Commissioners no longer allow such general distribution, but the Whilton Relief in Need Charities continue with new definitions in the 21st century.