

Wargrave Local History Society

Latest News - May 2024

Polehampton School - Twyford's New Library

- Andrew Cardy and James Fort

Edward Polehampton left his significant wealth to the village of Twyford, establishing the Polehampton Charity about 300 years ago, which built the old Polehampton Boys' School there. For Wargrave Local History Society's May meeting, Andrew Cardy and James Fort recounted its history through to the present, when it has been adapted to form Twyford's new library.

James began by explaining that he had been chairman of the Polehampton Trust for 20 years, after which Andrew had taken over, Amy Goodall-Smith being the current chairperson.

The charitable trust owes its existence to the will of Edward Polehampton, who had died in 1722. Although the name Polehampton is well known in Twyford, surprisingly little is known about Edward himself. It would appear that he was born in about 1650, but his birthplace is not recorded. It has been suggested that this might have been Inkpen, in west Berkshire, where the surname is relatively common.

According to a legend, when he was aged about 9, Edward was making his way to London in order to seek his fortune. In freezing cold weather, he was found on the doorstep of the Rose and Crown public house in Twyford - the building now a private house alongside the London to Bath road in the village. The kindly landlord took him in, and fed him until restored to a good state of health Edward then continued to London, where he took up a career as a painter - especially of carriages. He successfully completed his apprenticeship in 1676, and became a member of the Worshipful Company of Painters and Stainers - one of the longest established of the City Livery Companies. Over time, he rose in prestige, being selected for various offices within the Livery Company. His business was clearly successful, as by the 1680s he was taking on apprentices to learn the trade, and by 1690 he is being known as Captain Edward Polehampton, rather than just Mr as in earlier times. Little is known of his private life - he did not marry, and had just one descendant when he died - a niece, who received a substantial legacy in the will.



*Portrait of Edward Polehampton
made circa 1718*

Edward made his will on 27th July 1721, in which he left a large part of his assets to the benefit of the people of Twyford. His assets included property in various places, including Smithfield, in the City of London, some land held copyhold at Hampton, and parcels of land at Twyford (copyhold tenure was somewhere between freehold and leasehold - on the death of the occupier, the land reverted to the lord of the manor, but could be inherited by a legatee on payment of a fine to the manorial court). Amongst the specific provisions was the payment of £40 per year as the salary for a schoolmaster to teach 10 poor boys in reading, writing, etc, up to the age of 15, and the land where the old Polehampton Boys' School was built (close to the Henley railway branch line) still belongs to the Polehampton Trust. Very little else happened, however, after Edward's death in 1722, as legal wranglings in the High Court lasted from 1734 into the 19th century. The school was able to carry on, but at that time the Trust income did not enable much else to be done.

150 years or so had passed from Edward's benefaction to the village of Twyford when the Verey family became involved. Sir Henry Verey was a distinguished lawyer and judge, and set about getting Parliament to pass the Polehampton Estates Act, in 1885. This resulted in the charity being given a proper legal basis upon which to work. Land and property away from Twyford was sold, and the proceeds invested in securities and Government stock, and this became the foundation for the present Polehampton Trust. The building of the Victorian school building on land owned by the Trust was paid for by the charity, who also owned a Queen Anne house, dating from the 1720s, on the other side of the road. This was used as the home for the schoolmaster - now converted into 2 flats, it still belongs to the charity, generating some income. The Victorian school building provided education for boys up to the age of 13, and remained in use until the early 1970s, after which it had various uses, including storage for the Twyford Theatre Group.

The Act of Parliament set out the way in which the charity's affairs were to be run, and that still forms its governing principles. The income is used to make grants for 3 main purposes - the advance of education, the relief of poverty and other purposes that the trustees consider will be for the benefit of the people of Twyford. In both 1967 and 1981 parts of the land were sold to Wokingham District Council, which used them for a library, a car park and Polehampton Court - the proceeds being added to the endowment fund. The investments now are worth around £2 million, so generate a good income. As a result, the Trust has been able to increase the grants it can make.



The Trust also still owns various pieces of land in Twyford. Andrew recalled that during his time as chairman, it was suggested that the Trust also owned the land and buildings of the Polehampton Infant School, although none of the then trustees had any memory of it belonging to them. After a lot of research, however, he had been able to establish that the Polehampton Trust had purchased the land, and paid for the building of the school, in 1886 - but that the legal paperwork had not been done properly. The trustees were able to have this put right, and the school is let on a long-term lease to the academy that now runs the school - adding to the charity income. Nearby is the caretaker's house - a 4-bedroom home also dating from 1886, which had been leased to Wokingham council, although is now to revert to the charity's possession. On the old boy's school site, part has been converted into two flats (to the left in photograph - the right being the back of the new library).

For many years, the trustees had looked after the beautiful listed building - but the purpose of the charity was to provide for the community, rather than spend large amounts of money on the structure. The idea to adapt it into a village library came in 2012. The building has therefore been leased to Wokingham Borough Council. The work has had to respect its listed building status, so many features, have been preserved, whilst modern amenities include under floor heating. As well as the main library space, (*awaiting the bookcases in the photograph*), there are 2 other rooms which can be used by the community - one is to be named after the late Dave Turner, a former pupil of the old boys' school who was keen that the premises be made available for community use, whilst another Twyford resident, the late Gordon Storey, will be remembered with a Storey Corner.



The roles of the trustees are "not to go rattling a tin on a Saturday outside a supermarket", but to administer its funds for the benefit of the people of Twyford. The grants come into 3 basic categories - firstly, to help those in need in a time of crisis. Most people do not wish to put themselves forward, but there are 'associates'

around the village (such as the Citizens Advice Bureau) who are in a position to know if there is someone needing help. Secondly, there are grants made for educational purposes. These may be given as grants to the schools - Polehampton Infants, Polehampton Juniors, the Colleton School and The Piggott School, or to individual students. In time past this would be towards books, but more typically now-a-days would be for providing a computer. The third category of grants is to community groups such as the village football teams, the Brownies or the local branch of Age Concern. The Polehampton Trust has also widened the area it is able to care for to include Ruscombe and Charvil as well as Twyford itself. There are some restrictions on what help it can give - some imposed by the Charity Commissioners, and others self-imposed by the trustees. Andrew also pointed out that applications for assistance are always considered in strict confidence, and anonymity. The Trust can be contacted at polehampton.applications@gmail.com

For more information about the society, visit our website at <https://www.wargravehistory.org.uk>
