

12. Conclusion

A complete version of the twelfth chapter has been written, covering the Earley Charity from 1990 to 2000, but there are several reasons why it is best not included at present. Above all, there is a constant overlap between any attempted historical account of these years and discussions about current practice, which should remain private to the present trustees. Even the story of the purchase of three new vehicles for Readibus in 1990-91, following a proposal by Deborah Jenkins, introduces the question of trustee-led grants, which is a matter of evolving current policy in 2009-10. The discussions which led to the creation of the innovative Earley Charity Workers scheme, and the step-change in scale of thinking which led to the decision to fund in full the Earley Crescent Community Centre, are similarly closely linked to current policy formulation. The opening by Douglas Chilvers of Liberty of Earley House; reasons for the home's success and excellent reputation; discussions about its ways of operating; management decisions and arrangements; various reports touching on the very future of residential care; all of these bear upon decisions still to be taken.

We should, however, note that the new scheme for the Earley Charity was sealed on 10 May 1990. The first nominated trustees are identified in the scheme as David Christopher Sutton and Deborah Gwendoline Jenkins for Reading Borough Council (to serve until 1993) and John Busby and Valna Joy Santon for Earley Town Council (to serve until 1994). The first co-optative trustees were Cecil Alvan Nichols (to serve until 1995) and Douglas Alan Chilvers (to serve until 1992). Pressed, as we have seen, by the Charity Commissioners both to increase their numbers and to reduce the proportion of local authority nominees, they added Ray Hadfield and Ian Robertson as trustees later in 1990. The new scheme gave very wide powers to the trustees by establishing "relief of need" as the charity's principal purpose, without any constraining definition of "need".

On 28 June 1990, the Charity Commissioners further sealed an "Authority for expenditure, subject to directions to recoup". This document authorised the new trustees to release up to two million pounds from their capital for the purpose of "the construction of sheltered housing in furtherance of the Objects of the Charity". The release of the capital was made subject to recoupment over a period of sixty years, with one-sixtieth of the sum released to be set aside each year. The trustees resolved to use this authority to the full, and two million pounds was put towards the design and construction of Liberty of Earley House on the basis of a recoupment of £33,333 per year.

The authority from the Charity Commission referred to "sheltered housing", not "residential care", indicating that the change of approach, which was driven by Help The Aged and supported by the two senior trustees, and which is reflected in Liberty of Earley House as it exists today, happened after the middle of 1990.

Some documents from around this time may be considered to have been superseded by current public papers of the Charity and hence of historical

interest only. For example, in 1989 the trustees agreed to a public statement and a private statement on grant-making policy, drafted by David Sutton and looking ahead to 1990. The documents strove to combine elements from the histories of the predecessor charities with new approaches to grant-making, and, unsurprisingly, soon had to be rewritten. This is the 1989 Public Statement:

EARLEY CHARITY: PUBLIC STATEMENT

Area of Benefit

The “area of benefit” of the Earley Charity is defined as “the Ancient Liberty of Earley and the neighbourhood thereof”, i.e. Earley, Lower Earley, Winnersh, Shinfield, Whitley and East Reading. In exceptional circumstances grants may be made to persons or institutions in adjoining areas.

Object of the Charity

The Charity’s object is “to relieve either generally or individually persons resident in the area of benefit who are in conditions of need, hardship or distress, by making grants of money or providing or paying for items, services or facilities calculated to reduce the need, hardship or distress of such persons”. The trustees intend to meet this object firstly by building and maintaining a residential home for needy elderly people from the area of benefit, and secondly by making grants of money in response to applications.

Current Priorities of the Trustees in Assessing Applications

The trustees wish to maintain the historical traditions of the Earley Charity and its predecessor charities. The predecessor charities operated in three main ways:

- (a) provision of food and fuel for the poor;
- (b) support for widows;
- (c) support for apprentices.

In recognition of these traditions the trustees will:

- (a) continue to provide a Christmas-time distribution of fuel or food vouchers to needy persons in the area of benefit;
- (b) give priority to widows and widowers in need, and to needy persons who are living alone;
- (c) give priority to suitable individuals who apply for assistance in order to undertake vocational training.

In addition, the trustees will give priority to applications for the following purposes:

- ▶ to provide assistance for disabled persons;
- ▶ to make small one-off grants to homeless persons and others in severe housing need for the purchase of household items;
- ▶ to provide assistance to enable those providing care in the home (e.g. looking after elderly relatives) to have periods of rest and release;
- ▶ to make grants to associations, societies or other charities whose purpose, or part of whose purpose, is to provide assistance in any of the above circumstances.

The private statement suggested spending guidelines for the trustees (e.g. £75,000 per year on organisations; £60,000 on vocational education; £60,000 on grants for disabled persons). The statements served a useful purpose in providing the Charity with a starting-point in grant-making policy, but it quickly became apparent that they needed revision. In particular, the suggested balance between personal grants and organisational grants clearly needed to be rethought. By 1992, revised guidelines suggested spending on organisational grants which could be up to £120,000 per year, with special grants in addition to this. In addition, trustees soon recognised that they would need much wider terms of reference to include, for example, leisure activities and support for artistic and cultural projects. By contrast, the number of applications received from widows and widowers and from people undertaking vocational training was much less than the original statements had anticipated. The emphasis on historically-based criteria had been perhaps a little romantic and unrealistic.

A list of the main grants made between September 1990 and September 1992 gives a sense of the new level of grant-making activity:

09.90	East Reading Adventure Playground Association	£5000
12.90	Tools for Self-Reliance	£2307
12.90	Reading Victims Support	£3500
12.90	RELATE Reading	£10750
01.91	Churches Together in Reading Drop-in Centre	£2500
01.91	Reading Central America Week / <i>Momotombo</i>	£800
03.91	Reading Association for the Blind	£1980
03.91	East Reading Adventure Playground Association II	£1500
03.91	Berkshire Women's Aid	£9500
03.91	Reading Citizen's Advice Bureau	£15000
03.91	Reading Emergency Accommodation Project	£5000
04.91	Newtown Primary Nursery Project	£1000
04.91	Readibus	£48000
04.91	St John's Ambulance Reading	£1870
04.91	Rainbow Centre, Winnersh	£2000
04.91	<i>The Newtown Diamond</i>	£783
04.91	Reading Single Homeless Project	£1500
04.91	St Andrew's Family Meeting place	£1850
04.91	Earley Community Bus Project	£5000
04.91	Berkshire Family Conciliation Service	£5500
04.91	Volunteer Reading Help	£1000
04.91	Reading Lodgers	£1000
04.91	Maiden Erleigh Bowling Club	£3000
04.91	Reading Women's Information Centre	£3831
06.91	Reading Rape Crisis Line	£3090
06.91	No. 5 (Sackville Street, Reading)	£2500
06.91	Oxfam (San Francisco Libre bursaries)	£2400
06.91	Museum of Reading	£5350
06.91	Reading Voluntary Action	£4150
07.91	Reading Mental Handicap Teams N & S	£1500
07.91	Wokingham Citizens Advice Bureau	£2000
07.91	Reading Survivors	£910
09.91	Open Hand Studios	£350

09.91	Reading Youth Theatre	£500
09.91	Silverdale Centre, Maiden Erlegh	£3700
09.91	Reading Community Welfare Rights Unit (2nd grant)	£32412
09.91	Reading Industrial Therapy Organisation	£9200
10.91	Progress Theatre	£1000
10.91	Kushyali Toy Library, Sun Street, Newtown	£911
12.91	RELATE Reading (2nd grant)	£3957
12.91	Harry Tee Foundation	£500
12.91	Berkshire Family Conciliation Service (2nd grant)	£2600
12.91	Reading Emergency Accommodation Project (2nd grant)	£5000
12.91	Reading International Solidarity Centre (2nd grant)	£9959
01.92	Nepalwatch UK (Reading branch)	£2000
01.92	Friends of Prospect Park	£4172
01.92	Reading Visual Arts Week	£2500
01.92	Reading Association for the Blind	£5000
01.92	Wokingham Citizens Advice Bureau (2nd grant)	£10000
03.92	Reading Council for Racial Equality	£5000
03.92	Ridgeway After School Club	£1065
03.92	Reading In Bloom	£500
03.92	Geoffrey Field School Parents Centre	£2000
03.92	Trunkwell Park Project	£3000
03.92	Museum of Reading (2nd grant)	£18500
04.92	Reading Victims Support (2nd grant)	£5000
04.92	Real Time Video	£12279
05.92	International Institute for Black Research, Reading	£2790
07.92	Well Woman Association	£6000
07.92	Apollo Youth Club	£4700
09.92	South Whitley Community Centre	£6000
09.92	Reading & Wokingham Citizens Advice Bureaux	£14420

The scale and variety in this list of grants indicates that the Earley Charity had moved rapidly to become the largest single independent resource for voluntary sector support in the area. Comparable listings could be given for virtually any three-year period since 1990.

It is not proposed to list all the trustees and their interests and contributions since 1990. It would be wrong not to record, however, that the years 1998-99 saw major changes amongst the group of trustees and perhaps we can draw this Conclusion towards its own conclusion by noting some of these changes and reflecting a little upon them.

At the beginning of 1998, Ray Hadfield stood down as a trustee and this provided an opportunity for Leslie Norton to retire as Clerk to the Trustees and to be immediately co-opted to resume as a trustee himself after a gap of ten years. Leslie Norton had been the helmsman who steered the “sleepy little charity” of 1985 into its present position as a major player in the local community and one of the largest local charities in southern England.

In June 1998 an unremarkable meeting of the trustees was held (trustees present: D. Chilvers (Chair), R. Ames, M. Eastwell, D. Jenkins, L. Norton, I. Robertson, D. Sutton). The meeting awarded small grants to the Friends of

Newtown School, the Alfred Sutton Primary School artwork gates project, the Bicycle Helmet Initiative Trust and the Reading Alternative School activities week – an unusually educational cluster of beneficiaries. The main reason to note this meeting, however, is that Nick Nichols was away and the meeting was chaired by Douglas Chilvers, ending his own boycott: his first time in the chair for ten years. Unfortunately, it was also to be his last time. Douglas Chilvers died in October 1998, and the Earley Charity lost not only its longest serving trustee but also the trustee who above all others had driven the sale of the poor's land and the consequent transformation of the charity.

And equally sadly his successor in the chair and long-time sparring partner, Nick Nichols, did not long survive him. He died in June 1999. With the passing of the two senior trustees, meetings of the Earley Charity certainly became less argumentative and contentious, but they also lost a deep fund of experience and charity history.

Although there were to be several more changes of trusteeship in the next decade, with Bob Ames installed in the chair and Leslie Norton restored to the body of trustees, the Charity assumed from 1999 the stable and productive format and style which have seen it flourish in the 21st century. And it is time to round off this narrative. We have seen that the history of the Earley Charity spans almost three hundred years. For almost all of that period the charity and its predecessors were, in all senses of the word, parochial. At some periods they were almost a nuisance to their administrators; at other periods they were almost moribund. From 1820 onwards, however, they owned an asset, in the poor's land, whose value would one day result in their complete transmutation. For 150 years that potential value was beyond anyone's imagining. But from the time of the start of the Lower Earley development in the 1970s, the trustees of the Earley charities began to be aware that the poor's land could have a financial value that no-one (and certainly not the enclosure commissioners of 1816) would have believed possible. Even so, it was crucially important that the chair of the trustees at the critical time should have been one of Reading's leading estate agents. Douglas Chilvers did not have a vision for the future Earley Charity; indeed, during the 1990s he often appeared bemused by the scale and ambition of the new charity which he (more than anyone) had helped to bring into being. But Douglas Chilvers understood property values and property opportunities, and through that understanding he was able to open up a wonderfully exciting future for his successors as trustees of the Earley Charity.