

## **Bexley Cottage Hospital, 1884-1978**

**The story of the Bexley Cottage Hospital centres around a donation of William Kendall in 1588.**

Kendall belonged to the Wax Chandlers Company, was its master 1554-1556, and owned land in Bridgen. In his will he left an annual trust, totalling £8, to St. Mary Magdalene Parish, and 2s.0d for churchwardens. Trouble arose over the exact interpretation of the section of the will which left houses to his son and, in default of issue, to the company on condition they yearly dispersed the £8. This they dutifully did and members of the company journeyed to Bexley each November to distribute the gifts. By the middle of the eighteenth century the expense of this journey to the company was 5s.0d while presumably the churchwardens paid a Mr Pennel 5s.0d for drawing up a list of recipients (1840-50).

By the nineteenth century all the livery companies had accumulated considerable wealth and aroused jealousy. They were considered to have ceased to fulfil useful functions and the money could be better employed. For this reason in 1853 a Charity Commission was set up by the government to overlook the disposal of the charitable trusts. Inspectors were sent out but Thomas Hare, who came to the Wax Chandlers Company in 1864, disagreed with their interpretation of Kendall's will. As there had been no issue, the company had managed all of the property. Every year £2 (as well as £6) were distributed to Bexley but the company's gross receipts amounted to £310 p.a. in 1844 and in 1864 to £330. The company contended that it was entitled to spend the net residue for its own use and refused to compromise. Years of litigation followed and in 1873 the House of Lords found in favour of the Charity Commissioners.

Meanwhile, in Bexley, church members had been following the case with great attention. It was felt that now Kendall's bequest was to be increased the money could more usefully be spent on a cottage hospital. A public meeting was called on 8 May 1875, which was well attended. It was agreed unanimously that a proper site for the hospital was better than a collection of cottages. Churchwarden Layton said that money would have to be raised to provide half the expenses. They would probably need £1000 but £500 would help. A plea for subscriptions could be made from the pulpits. Fuller, Vicar of Bexley,

tried to find out how much money Bexley would be allowed. Clabon, secretary to the Attorney General thought about £120. p.a. Fuller indicated that the House of Lords had seemed to suggest that recipients of the will had been defrauded for ten years. So presumably Bexley would receive £1,200. Clabon soon disabused him of that idea. Rent varied from year to year and litigation was costly. (The company had had to pay the Attorney General £1,176.4s.4d on 23 January 1876). No money was likely to be received before the next year and Fuller must remember the condition that £500 had first to be provided by the parishioners themselves. Fuller angrily commented that the parish did not like to be told that if they raised £500 they could have the money that was legally theirs.

Another public meeting was held on 13 November 1877. It was not well attended. Layton said he knew nothing about a £500 subscription and Dann, another churchwarden, did not think a hospital so near to London was now needed. (Both men had been at the 1875 meeting). While no actual resolution was passed it was agreed to abandon the hospital scheme and let the money now accumulate. The meeting felt that all the numerous charities run by the parish could be amalgamated. Both suggestions were sent to Clabon (19 November). However, several ladies led by Mrs Ann Bean petitioned for a hospital. The Attorney General's scheme was published unaltered in 1878.

In the meantime the Charity Commissioners who were to administer the Wax Chandlers' charitable funds must have studied Bexley's wishes, and on 23 May 1879 a new scheme was drawn up. All the charities were to be amalgamated under the Bexley United Charities, which would be run by six trustees, three ex-officio ones like the Vicar of Bexley and his churchwardens, and three non-official ones who should be competent persons living within a convenient distance. One of these was Alfred William Bean Esq., from Danson Park, Welling. Monies given to these trustees should be invested in consols 3%, and the interest should be spent in two ways, (a) Eleemosynary and (b) Educational. Under section (a) came the establishment and maintenance of a Cottage Hospital and Dispensary.

The Trustees tried to be patient and await sufficient accumulation of money. Fuller did write to the Wax Chandlers Company in September 1880 asking for their support but the company only ordered the letter to lie on the table. The next year came wonderful news that A.W. Bean

Esq., was willing to give a site in Upton Road measuring 110' by 160' provided the Trustees agreed that nothing save a hospital would be built on the site without approval of Bean, his heirs and assigns.

The Charity Commissioners were now asked if the Trustees could borrow £1000. They had £4,636.16s.5d to their credit. The hospital was likely to cost £1400 and the Trustees could only deposit £400. The commissioners were puzzled. Only £2243 was available for Eleemosynary grants yet the Trustees were spending £260 on almshouses and pensions. So how could they deposit £400? The Trustees cheerfully informed the Commissioners that the division between (a) and (b) had never been observed. They were well aware that the money should be put aside for a library. Such a venture had been a failure at the Working Men's Institute. A hospital was far more necessary and consent was urgent since the donor might withdraw his offer. The Commissioners strongly disapproved of the rejection of their planned division but gradually approved of the hospital provided they were given details of the cost and the Trustees realised the borrowed money must be repaid in annual instalments. To Bexley's hint that a period of 50 years would be helpful the Commissioners retorted that 30 years was the longest time allowed.

From now on the Trustees took no step without the Commissioners' knowledge and permission. When in June 1882 Harston, a London architect, submitted plans and supported the price of £1400, the Commissioners agreed to the building but said the money must come from the Consols held in the name of the Eleemosynary Fund. In addition a further sum, namely £666.13s.4d, had to be set aside as an investment to produce £20 p.a. to replace the amount borrowed. Moreover, by Act of Mortmain (9 Geo II cap 36) a deed must be drawn up twelve months before the death of the grantor. This deed was to be enrolled in the Chancery Division of the High Court of Justice. It was this period that held up operations until 1883.

In the meantime Harston was asked to submit a Surveyor's report and state how much he wanted for his superintendence. Harston wanted 5%. For legal security the Commissioners suggested that the Trustees pay Bean £100 for the site, which sum he would then return to the Trustees. By April 1883 R.J. Butler, a local builder, offered the lowest tender for building the hospital, namely £1,296. As no building was possible without the Commissioners' permission there was a sigh of relief when that was given in September 1883. On advice the Trustees

had informed the Local Board of their intentions as regards the hospital. By December 1883 the main structure had obviously been completed since a Mr. Hood was prepared to plant out the grounds for £47.6s. This offer was not taken up but an estimate by a Mr. Wheeler regarding the furnishing of the two wards was accepted. The cost would be £35.10s while surgical appliances would cost £30. By January 1884 Harston had been paid £70.7s.8d, £70 had been set aside for furniture and the Trustees had agreed to send an annual subscription of 25 guineas to the hospital. (This lasted until 1894). Also they agreed to give £5 towards an ambulance, being recommended to look at Mr Furley's ambulances at The Health Exhibition at South Kensington.

The hospital seems to have prospered. In 1905 the Trustees from being mainly clerical and private could be representatives from the urban district council. Also it was announced that all the money had been repaid. In the Annual Report of 1934 those in charge were worried that the increasing population was too much for the size and accommodation of the hospital. With relief, certain alterations to the Mortuary building could be made since an agreement with the Bexley Urban District Council had terminated. Now it was divided into two rooms, one fitted as an up-to-date Mortuary Chapel and the other used as a storeroom. In March 1940 the Charity Commissioners decreed that the hospital should cease to be administered by the Bexley United Charities and become a separate charity hospital. The Vicar of Bexley, Charles Moore, was moved to utter a protest. He accepted the separate entity of the hospital but since the B.U.C. had always given considerable help to the hospital, he suggested the present Trustees should have the right to nominate two Trustees on the newly appointed committee. The Commissioners accepted his plea and also appointed him as Chairman so long as he remained Vicar. There were by now several Provident Dispensaries to be found in Upton and adjoining roads.

The hospital was closed during the war and reopened in 1950. Eight years later it had 26 beds. In 1960 there was a Day Room for patients while a radio system was fitted in 1970 through the energies of Bexley Rotary Club and the Bexley Inner Wheel. In 1978 the hospital was closed for good, probably due to the growing importance and widening compass of Queen Mary's Hospital, Sidcup. It is now known as "The Upton Centre" run by Oxleas NHS Trust to provide community mental health services.

