

## THE SPARKE CHARITY : WHEPSTEAD

By his Will of 10th June 1721 Thomas Sparke of Rougham left property in trust to fund books and schooling for poor children of Whepstead. Thomas's brother Edward, also of Rougham, had earlier provided for Thurston children at Rougham Thrifty School, and Thomas, having inherited most of his brother's property, set up separate trusts in his Will in several villages including Whepstead, Brockley and Hartest.

Thomas Sparke's Whepstead property, not given a name in the Will, consisted of a farm of 24 acres, a farmhouse and a barn on the Rede Road called Waste Farm, or sometimes the Charity Farm. The Will, proved at Bury in 1724, specified that after maintenance costs, profits from the farm were to be used to teach the children "well to read, and say the Church Catechism and also to write and cast account", and neither the Rector or his Wardens could remove them until this was achieved. How the children were to be chosen, and where and to what standard they were to be taught was left to the Rector and Trustees. A long list of names of children dated 1729 has survived, with details of Bibles and other books provided, but this now appears to be the only record of names, though the Will stated that the Rector and Church Wardens were to record the names of all children who were helped, and to present annual accounts. By 1748 the trustees had acquired a cottage and garden in a meadow called Monkestofl, which was part of a tenement called Algores, adjoining the Whepstead to Chevington road, for the use of a schoolmaster, where about 10 children were to be taught. The purchase was funded from the sale of 90 trees from Waste Farm. The thatched cottage, now known as Cromwell's Cottage in Old School Rd., was maintained by the Charity and let to the schoolmaster initially for £3.10s, later £5 pa. The schoolmaster was not otherwise paid for his services.

A hundred years after the Charity was set up, the Report of the Commissioners for Inquiring into Charities (1827) described Waste Farm as "suffering considerably in value, from the circumstance of its being nearly surrounded by woods which are kept as a preserve for game". Gage's map of Thingoe (1838) places what it calls School Farm between Plumpton Wood and Hay Wood. Repairs to the large farmhouse and ancient barn were consuming much of the £21 p.a. rent, the farm being then let on a yearly tenancy to Abraham Payne, and later to Robert Copsey. Some 19th.c repair accounts have been found, but whether they relate to Waste Farm or to the schoolhouse is not clear. On average only £16 p.a. was left for "books and firing for the school". The number of pupils varied from 8-12, and needlework was taught as well as the subjects listed in the Will.

The Charity School was not the only school in the village in the early 19th c. In 1833 the school had 11 pupils including the free children, and, as well as the Sunday School, there were also two daily schools for 43 fee-paying children, but their location is not known. These schools are not listed in the 1841 census, and the 1851 census includes only a schoolmistress, two pauper scholars and three school boarders at a house near the White Horse, whereas over 40 children in the village are described as scholars.

The charity's schoolteacher was Joseph Pask from 1841 if not before, until he died in 1859. He was succeeded by Miss Susan Mead by 1861 and Miss Alcock was the last recorded teacher in 1874. In 1873 Whepstead School Board, chaired by Revd Steele, was formed under the Elementary Education Act 1870, and opened a schoolhouse in 1874. George and Emma Phillips were headmaster and mistress of a school for 120 pupils with a daily attendance of 95-100. It appears that the Charity school then closed fairly quickly. Waste Farm continued to provide rental income, though neither the farm nor occupants are listed after the 1861 census, which, together with the fact that no buildings are shown on the 1884 Ordnance Survey map, suggests the farmhouse may have been demolished or at least become uninhabitable. Directories from 1874 onwards still record the Charity as supporting 10 children, but without reference to the school or teacher. The Accounts from 1890-1902 indicate that the Charity transferred its surplus funds, varying from £5 to £30 each year to the School Board, presumably to support poor children or for religious education within the school. The Charity's schoolhouse was rented for a time to a Mr Musk, and then to the Police Authority as the village police house until July 1914. Meantime in 1906 Waste Farm became part of the Plumpton Estate when it was sold for £500 to Mr Thornhill who lived at Plumpton House. The proceeds were invested in Consols by the Official Trustee of the Charity Commissioners. After 1914 the schoolhouse was rented out and finally sold in April 1919 to Miss Rix for £130. The income from both sales was available to the Rector and Wardens, but little use was made of it until from 1925 Canon Bird and after him the Revd Sayer used the fund to hire a school room for the Sunday School and to buy books and prizes of educational value for children who learned the Catechism. It was also used to fund the church choir which consisted mainly of children.

There is no longer a school or Sunday school in the village, and the fund, currently worth £3781, produces a small income now distributed along with other village charities to needy families. The charity's remit remains as in Thomas Sparke's Will, though the need it met has changed along with educational costs. However that may be, in the 150 years before the advent of state schools, Thomas Sparke provided some basic education for perhaps as many as 300 poor children of Whepstead, and probably about 1000 in all counting the other villages where the Charity operated. Without the children's names we can only surmise the effect on their lives.

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