

NEW ALRESFORD TOWN TRUSTEES

by

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In 1189 Godfrey de Lucv was consecrated Bishop of Winchester. He had formed a magnificent plan for improving the trade of Winchester and Alresford at his own expense. Because of this. King John granted to the Bishop and his successors, for ever, the charter of 1214 by which they had authority to collect, all fines, tolls, taxes and customs arising from goods, wares and merchandise which would be conveyed up or down the River Itchen, and such monies were to be applied for the proper use and advantage of the town either by the Bishop or his Bailiff. Alresford was demolished, remodelled and built in the form in which it now stands, i.e. East Street, West Street and Broad Street.

Soon after, de Lucy obtained a charter to create Alresford a free borough and to establish a corporation. It appears that in the reign of Edward I Alresford sent two representatives to Parliament. The corporation consisted of a Bailiff and eight Burgesses, the former being elected annually by a majority of the Burgesses, and were to be of the better and more honest, inhabitants.

About the time of the Reformation, Alresford was in a low state, the markets being deserted and commerce stagnant, resulting in poverty. To try and rectify this state, the Bishop of Winchester, by a charter dated 10th December 1570 committed the perpetual management and emoluments of the fairs and markets to the Bailiff and Burgesses. They and their successors were given the right to hold a sheep fair annually on the feast of the Ascension, a pleasure fair on the feast of St., John and a free market weekly on Thursday, abandoned for many years, but recently revived. All profits from these events along with the goods and chattels of felons and fugitives taken within the town and with certain rights over bread, beer and wine enabling them to put a baker or brewer in the pillory if found in default.

The Municipal Corporations Act of 1882 dissolved the Corporation of the Borough of New Alresford. namely the Bailiff and Burgesses. When Lord Rosebery's Bill was considered they resolved to send a representative to a protest meeting, and the subscription towards expenses was "not to exceed £10".

They were succeeded by two bodies, the New Alresford Parish Council, which would take over all administrative duties from 1894 onwards and New Alresford Town Trust, which would take over all the charitable duties of the Bailiff and Burgesses and be responsible to the Charity Commissioners. A trustee was defined as someone to whom property or activities were entrusted for the benefit of another. Property was to be administered with such due and proper care as the trustees would. devote to their own.

In March 1887 by direction of the Charity Commissioners a meeting was held at the Town Hall, the purpose of which was to obtain particulars of the property of the late corporation, how it had been administered, and to ascertain the wishes of the inhabitants as to its uses for the future. Mr. W.H. Hunt, secretary to the Bailiff and Burgesses reported that the only income had been from market and fair tolls, and that £120 had been expended on a fire engine house built in 1882 on a site donated by the late Mrs. Covey. It is now known as the Old Fire Station and seen at the bottom of Broad Street. The fairs were leased to Charles French at £80 per annum with the use of the fair field. The piece of land known as the Avenue had been given to them by the Bishop of Winchester in 1869 for an annual rent of sixpence. Mr. Bulpett believed it was intended as a recreation ground. There is in existence a photograph of a tea party being held on this land, probably to

celebrate the Diamond Jubilee of Queen Victoria Money was contributed to the County Hospital, the organ fund and the National and British Schools. A voluntary payment was made to the bell-ringers and an official called the deputy-hayward had to see that no cattle strayed on to the recreation ground. He also waited on the Corporation and had charge of an official box (which contained nothing), neither was there any mace or regalia. There was a sum expended every year from time immemorial for a Corporation and Borough Jury dinner and for providing a meeting place. This jury was attached to the Corporation and perambulated the town noting and reporting anything that was wrong in their opinion, like over-hanging windows.

The first meeting of the Town Trustees was held on June 10th 1890, and the town was administered by them until 1894 when the Parish Council was set up. Since then parts of the town have remained within their jurisdiction. The first trustees were J. Ridiey-Shield, W.H. Hunt, C.E. Hunt, C.E. Covey, W. Willis, J. Hall, S.L. Gladstones, J.F., Chapman, and J.H. Richardson. The Clerk was Mr. W.H. Kneller. Mr. Shield was appointed Chairman and remained in that post until his death in 1939. They met quarterly at the office of Mackness and Shield in East Street, later Warner Richardson, until 1990 when that firm moved to West Street.

At present the trust is responsible for the Avenue, Broad Street and the Old Fire Station, and sub-committees keep a watchful eye on things. The trust is represented on Perins Education Foundation, the Community Bus Committee and New Alresford United Charities Trust.

The Trust is empowered by the Charity Commissioners to spend money on projects which are considered, of benefit to the town, examples being, seats in public places, gates for Arlebury Park recreation ground, financial assistance towards a generator for public use; after storms causing power loss, rehabilitation, refurnishing and restructuring the Soke and many others. It is difficult to detail income, but the pleasure fair was charged £300 for the use of Broad Street in 1990, and the market charges are £3 per week for each of 14 stalls. The Old Fire Station is let to a local craftsman for an annual rent.

Responsibility for property such as Broad Street brings in other bodies such as Highway ("B" roads), Gas, Water and Electricity Authorities and the Police, which can lead to complicated situations at times. Broad Street and the Avenue are greatly admired by visitors and inhabitants especially in Spring when the bank along the Avenue glows with yellow and purple from thousands of daffodils and crocuses. The Trust used to be responsible for watering the streets to keep the dust down, in the days before tarmac.

During October 1893 it came to the notice of the Town Trustees that the bell-ringers were formerly supported by an annual contribution from the funds of the late Corporation. They had, since 1824 held an annual dinner at the Horse and Groom, and it was felt that lack of support might result in a reduction in the number of ringers. It was decided to make a payment for the ringing on public occasions, and for the maintenance and hoisting of the town flag on the church tower.

In the same year a scholarship was offered for competition among children who were bona fide residents of Alresford, had attended elementary school for three years and attained the sixth standard. The scholarship was for three years, tenable at Perins Grammar School, or any other school agreeable to the Trustees, It was to be awarded on the result of an examination and was a bequest in the Will of the late Susanna Covey. The first Covey Scholar was appointed in February 1894.

At the top of Pound Hill, adjoining the Avenue and Arlebury Park was the Old Hurdle House which was used as a 'wheelwright's' shop by one Isaac Gunner. He and his family lived in Rose Cottage, the white cottage nearby that lies back from the road. In 1902 the Hurdle House was demolished and the site used to accommodate two Edwardian villas, now numbers 44 and 46 Pound Hill. A small piece of land was purchased from the Arlebury estate of H.H. Watford Esq., to supplement

the site and George Gunner, son of Isaac, undertook not to erect any building within thirteen feet of the wall built as a boundary between Arlebury and the piece of land.

Some windows of No. 46 overlooked the land now bested in the new Town Trust, namely the north side of the Avenue granted in 1869 by the Bishop of Winchester. In 1903 permission was given, for George Gunner "to enjoy light and air through said windows without interruption or obstruction". In acknowledgment Gunner agreed to pay the Trustees one shilling annually on the 25th March.

By 1906 William Gunner, a son of Isaac appears to be domiciled in No. 46 and was under threat of having his windows boarded up if he failed to pay the annual shilling.

Speeding along the Avenue and through the town is nothing new. Modern motorists would not take kindly to the speed limit of 10 m.p.h. which the Trustees applied for in 1910.

Within the last three or four years the Town Trustees have had to make what is probably one of the most controversial decisions in their existence. On taking professional advice, it was found that some of the trees in Broad Street, were dead or dying, and the rest were in poor condition. They were planted more than one hundred and ten years ago, and were well overdue for replacement. In addition, the pavements were in a sorry state and much repair work needed to be done. Rather than put the town to the trouble of coping with two upheavals it was decided to plant new trees and to carry out large scale maintenance at the same time. A plan of proposed changes was exhibited to the public and at first viewed with dismay, but a committee of inhabitants co-operated with the Trustees, and a plan acceptable to most was drawn up and has been partly implemented during 1993.

In 1990, the Town Trustees of that year held a dinner at the Swan Hotel to celebrate their first, hundred years, the menu being roughly the same as that of the first dinner. In the same year their Constitution was revised and updated by the Charity Commissioners, so unless there is a great change in the Administration of Alresford and its Charities, those serving trustees of 1990 will have their signatures on a document that will pass into history.

It is believed that. New Alresford is unique in this country in having two statutory bodies, the Parish Council and the Town Trustees.

Long may it be so,

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Sources : Town Trustees Minute Books.