

WORCESTER MUNICIPAL CHARITIES (CIO)

Registered Charity 1166931 Housing Association 4855 Almshouse Association 159



A Short History of Worcester Municipal Charities Helping the poor/homeless 1559 - 2023



Berkeley's Hospital Chapel and Almshouses - Grade 1. The Charity's office, old chapel & community meeting room; 7 residents' sheltered housing

WORCESTER MUNICIPAL CHARITIES - THE EARLY YEARS 1559 - 1899

ALMSHOUSES WERE THE FORERUNNERS OF AFFORDABLE SOCIAL HOUSING

- **Worcester's first social housing provision** for the poor/homeless was the nineteen **ancient hospital almshouse trusts** founded by the Church then Worcester Charities between the 13th and the 18th centuries. The word "hospital" was used in the non-medical sense that they offered hospitality to the homeless. Worcester Municipal Charities originally owned four of the sites, now three, due to lack of repair.
- **After Henry VIII dissolved the monasteries** (1536 - 40) local philanthropic people wishing to leave money in their wills for the poor, were not impressed by the King's dishonest behaviour and the new Church of England's complicity, and they began leaving money in trust to the local Municipal Corporations instead.
- **In 1559 Katern Heywood, a member of the Spetchley Park based "Berkeley" family, left 100 marks** (about £66) "for the poor" to the Worcester Corporation. The money was used by Robert Youle to buy a number of properties, the rental income from which was given to poor families, once a year, in doles of two shillings each, on St. Thomas's Day; and a charity by the same name was then created.
- **Over the Two Centuries that followed**, about 30 other local generous donors left legacies, including four wealthy citizens, who founded almshouse trusts in their own names, and between them left the equivalent of £millions to the Charity :- **Richard Inglethorpe 1618, John Nash 1661, Robert Berkeley 1692 and Michael Wyatt 1725.**
- **The old Worcester Corporation**, like all the others in the Country, was run by "Freemen" some of whom were corrupt. Recognising this, the Government passed the "Municipal Corporation Reform Act of Parliament" in 1836 transferring all "public trusts" to local independent trustees.
- **In Worcester, a body of 17 local "independent" Worcester Trustees, was appointed in 1836** by the Lord Chancellor. The new Trustees continued investing in properties and handing out doles on December 21st, "Winter Solstice", the appointed day. The money was distributed indiscriminately, without reference to assessed need, (other than thirst!) and it was always possible to re-join the disorderly queue outside the Guildhall. The new trustees eventually found this practice "very objectionable" and it was discontinued in 1867.
- **By 1899 as a result of its legacy donations the Charity was very wealthy.** The fixed asset income producing property **comprised a total of 50 properties**, of which 34 were commercial, 9 were agricultural, plus **64 units of rent free almshouse living accommodation** :7 blocks of almshouses viz. Inglethorpe's 13, Nash's 24, Berkeley's 15, Wyatt's 6, and Hebb's 6.
- **However, between 1900 and 1985 the Charity was not well managed.** In the absence of a strategic business plan it was in a serious financial situation with insufficient income to meet ongoing needs.
- **The Charity was on a steep downward slope heading for bankruptcy. 32 of the original income producing properties had been sold off just to balance the books, and 32 of the 64 almshouses had been lost due to lack of repair.**

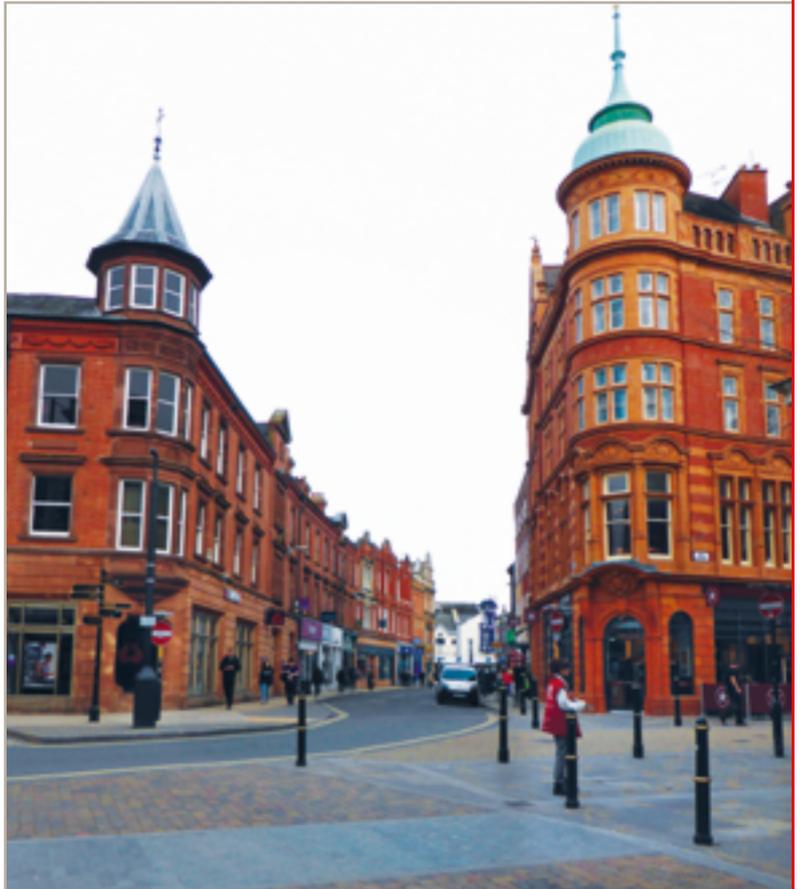


Throckmortons/Frogmortons now Nash's and Wyatt's Almshouses first described in 1531/2 as "Thorgmortons Almys hous" next to the tenement of Thomas Walker. They received bequests from the wills of James Jordan in 1525 and Robert Youle in 1561. They were apparently still in use in 1623. The site was bought by John Nash In 1639 from Brome Whorwood of Sandwell, Staffs. They then comprised 'fourteen cottages, more or less, with the little gardens thereunto..' which were pulled down and rebuilt in 1664. They were condemned as uninhabitable and rebuilt again in 1959/60. Wyatt's 6 almshouses in Friar St were also condemned as uninhabitable and 4 Wyatt's Almshouses were rebuilt on the Nash's site in 1964 and the whole was renamed "Nash's and Wyatt's".

1985 ONWARDS – THE RECENT HISTORY OF THE CHARITY

ISSUES FACING THE NEW BOARD OF TRUSTEES

- Despite the existence of the Welfare State, the almshouse residents all lived rent-free because the Trustees thought they “might feel that instead of owing gratitude to them they were in the almshouses as of right, like normal tenants.”
- As a direct result there was little or no money for routine maintenance and charitable purposes generally.
- Due to lack of modernisation and maintenance, 32 of the 64 almshouses had fallen into disrepair and were demolished, or had been sold off to private developers.
- Of the remaining 32 retirement almshouses, due to a faulty “points” selection process by three individual Trustees, about one third of the residents were property owning and relatively wealthy, not poor.
- Commercial and agricultural rents were not being reviewed systematically, and full repairing and insuring rents were not in common use. There was no Charity property “terrier” in existence.
- Farm rents provided a poor return on investment with the Charity, as landlords, also paying for repairs, insurance and development, unlike most commercial landlords.
- Considerably less than adequate advice was available about commercial leases generally, and 32 of the 50 Commercial Properties owned had been sold off just to balance the books.
- In this disastrous case, apparently due to a disadvantageous “internal repairing only” lease, the Cadena café was sold in 1979 for £130,000 when the “book value” was £170,000. The Charity Commission spotted this and “fined” the Charity £40,000 which had to be repaid from its annual income into its endowed property fund. The Nat. West is of similar size and is still owned by the Charity. It is now valued at £2.3 Million with a rental value of £170,000 p.a. on a full repairing & insuring basis. The overall loss has been an eye watering one.
- The Grade 1 Chapel was in virtually terminal decay, and in practice almost unusable with negligible congregations.
- There was a Diocesan appointed virtually non-functioning chaplain, occupying a 4 bed house, who eventually resigned following concerns being expressed about ill-health, low attendance and lack of home visits.
- There were seemingly insufficient staff to manage the administration of the Charity effectively. The Charity was a small “department” in a large solicitors’ office with inadequate basement office accommodation for 2/3 Charity staff, with files covering most of the floor and no proper holiday or sickness cover.



*The Nat. West Bank on the left and the Cadena Cafe on the right.
The Charity owned both properties.*

WORCESTER MUNICIPAL CHARITIES - UNDER NEW MANAGEMENT

The original 17 trustees were gradually replaced, and In 1984, with a change of control at the Guildhall, the Council Leader, George Randall, and his Deputy, Rosanna O'Connor, appointed Paul Griffith as a Trustee. He was elected Chairman in 1985 and remains in post, having been re-elected annually.

Over the next 30 years, with a new body of very supportive trustees, he led a gradual incremental change in financial governance and charitable activities including :-

- **Charging the almshouse residents “affordable rents”**, and replacing those who left, with poor people in receipt of State Benefits. This brought new income of c. £100,000 p.a. which immediately halted the Charity's financial decline.
- **Appointing a replacement valuer** (Philip Jones) on a fee paying basis, to advise on property investment matters generally, with regular rent reviews introduced.
- **Employing an experienced part-time Chartered Surveyor** (Adrian Robinson) who introduced a routine maintenance programme for all owned properties.
- **Selling off all the farms, farmland and cottages**, and replacing them with offices, warehouses and commercially viable properties, with all transactions managed successfully by the new valuer.

Purchased with proceeds from the agricultural sales

1990 22 The Cross, Worcester (shop & flat)

*1994 Shaw Street, Worcester offices, since converted to 25 homeless flats

1994 Units G & H, Perrywood Trading Estate (sold – replacement bought - Crown Lane)

1996 6A Checketts Lane Industrial Estate (offices)

1996 6B Checketts Lane Industrial Estate (Armchair, furniture re-cycling & van garage)

1996 2 Mealcheapen Street, (Shoe shop) (sold since)

*1997 Castle House, Castle Street, Worcester (offices)

1997 20 Church Street, Evesham (day centre)

1997 Wargrave House, Hereford (GP Surgery and offices) (sold since)

1997 23A St. Owen's Street, Hereford (offices) (sold since)

1997 48 Gaol Street, Hereford (offices) (sold since)

*2000 – 2013 Crown Lane, Unit 1 (offices, warehouses, extensions & car park)

*2001 Crown Lane Units 2/3 (4 NHS units built)

The new purchases, with higher rents, especially those *asterisked, effectively and gradually quadrupled the Charity's rental income from £120,000 p.a. in 1985 to £1,045,000 p.a. in 2018 an average increase of 6.35% p.a. over 33 years compared to the Bank of England inflation rate of 3.4%.



Crown Lane, showing the aids to daily living store and the offices with 30 new car park spaces at the back

Most significant of the new income producers were Crown Lane Wychbold bringing c.£139,000 p.a. Castle House £52,500 and 3-4 Shaw Street worth £150,000 p.a. subsequently converted into flats for the homeless with no loss of income.



Castle House



3-4 Shaw Street

The new “surplus” money was used to give increased grants and buy rent-free properties to like-minded charities that helped the greatest number of poor/homeless people :- i.e. Citizens Advice, Armchair and Maggs.



The Charity purchased “The Old Glove Factory” in Lowesmoor in 2004 at a cost of £368,500 for charitable use, mainly now occupied by Citizens Advice, including SmartLets and Maggs for services to the homeless. The property was then refurbished at a cost of £1 million and Princess Anne is seen here performing the official opening ceremony in 2007. The occupying charities pay “peppercorn rents.” The two street shopfronts are let commercially.



Citizens Advice, SmartLets and SmartMove offices are housed in the Old Glove Factory providing help and advice for the homeless including managing the 68 one bed flats for the homeless belonging to Worcester Municipal Charities. Maggs have also moved some of their outreach staff into the building in September 2023.



- **The Charity paid £326,100 in 2016 for Maggs** to provide new offices at 59/60 the Tything with a clothes store and a free clothes and bedding shop for the homeless, and let it to them for a “peppercorn”. The building replaced an unsuitable leased admin. office and an unsatisfactory clothing store in a terraced house which was then turned into two flats for the homeless.
- **In 2009 the Charity paid £47,500 to Worcester Diocese** for a 150 years’ lease of their redundant St. Alban’s Chapel for use by Maggs as a day centre for the homeless. The background was that Maggs had paid for the chapel’s original refurbishment but, after about 20 years’ rent-free occupation, was suddenly required by the Diocese to pay £10,000 p.a., apparently because the money was said to be needed for the clergy’s pensions. The Charity immediately sub-let St. Alban’s to Maggs for a “peppercorn”.



Maggs Day Centre for the Homeless

- Between 2013 – 2022 the Charity created 68 new City Centre “affordable rent” almshouses for the single homeless. Commercial property worth £1,512,000 was sold to help finance the project. Homes England awarded housing grants of £1,529,633. Citizens Advice, as partners, are paid 15% of the rents to manage all the properties. All the flats had white goods and carpets provided, unlike all other City Housing Associations who provide no white goods and dusty concrete floors. When re-housed, the homeless need much more than just the four walls! (“Affordable rent” means no more than 80% of the “market rent”.)
- In 2018, due to the loss of County Council funding, Home-Start surrendered “Goodrich House”, originally purchased for them by the Charity in 1996 as rent-free offices and car park. It was then built on, turned into 10 flats for the single homeless, and re-named “Sir Thomas White Court” in memory of one of the Charity’s original founders.
- 2019, 8 Sansome Place, 2 one bedroom flats. The property was owned by the Charity since 2002 and used by Maggs as a “free clothes store” for street sleepers until 2017. The Charity replaced it with a city centre building also providing administrative offices, two flats for the homeless, then created two new flats in this old building.
- 2020/21, “Stillingfleet House”, 3-4 Shaw Street. 25 one bedroom flats were created in 2020/21 from this former Probation Office, owned by the Charity since 1994 and empty following the tenants’ departure as a result of the privatisation of half the Probation Service.
- 2022/23, Inglethorpe Court, 4 one bedroom flats at the Hopmarket in memory of Richard Inglethorpe 1618. Including 32 retirement almshouses this brings the total of affordable flats for individuals to “100 not out”.



2013 - 9 Sansome Place
6 studio flats



2014 - 16/17 St. Swithin's Street
6 one bedroom flats



2016 - 21 The Cross
3 one bedroom flats



2017 - 15 St. Swithin's Street
4 bedroom HMO



2017 - 19 Foregate Street
5 one bedroom flats, 1 studio flat & a shop/office



2017 - 59-60 The Tything
2 one bedroom flats on the top floor



2018 - Sir Thomas White Court
10 new one bedroom flats



2019 - 8 Sansome Place
2 one bedroom flats.



2020/21 - "Stillingfleet House", 3-4 Shaw Street. 25 one bedroom flats.



2022/23 - Ingleshorpe Court, 4 one bedroom flats.

The Chapel was refurbished in 1997/8 as a Community Room and Board Room for the Trustees, with pews and false ceiling removed, toilets and kitchen facilities added, all at a cost of £150,000 from the new money.



Berkeley Court Chapel 1703-1708



Inside the Chapel after work was completed

- **The Charity moved out of the Solicitors' offices in 2013** and into the Charity's own premises at Berkeley Court.
- **The Charity ceased using Solicitors as the Charity's Clerk and administration in 2014** and employed its own administrative and finance staff. (The old salaries and almshouse rents collected previously attracted VAT as they were part of a "service" provided to the charity)



The Charity's old office at the Solicitors



The new offices were officially opened by Miss Juliet Berkeley, a direct descendant of the founder Robert Berkeley

- **2008 Regular inflation linked educational** payments are also made to “All Sorts of Performing Arts” and “Dancefest.”
- **In 2012 the Charity purchased the former Medway Scout Hut for £1.00** and then let it on a peppercorn rent to community organisations. The current occupant is “All Sorts of Performing Arts”, who also receive annual grants from the Charity.



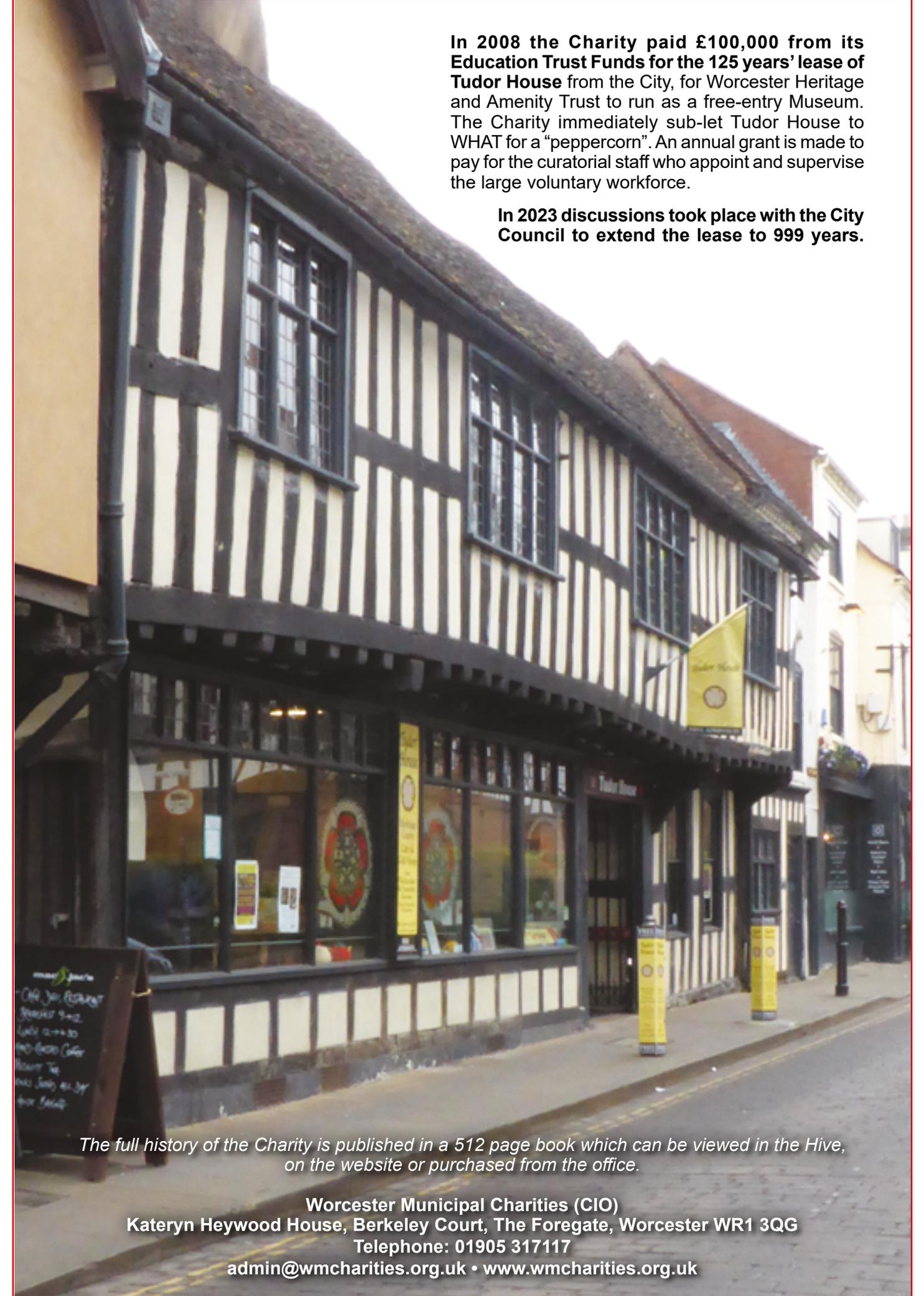
- **The two former Municipal “Relief in Need” and “Educational Foundation” charities were registered in 2016** as a single “Charitable Incorporated Organisation” (CIO) making it more manageable and removing individual trustee personal liability.
- **The Charity was registered as a Housing Association in 2017**, and also ceased using the “Official Custodian” to legally own all its properties, saving on legal fees, and Land Registration administration.
- **The Charity joined the “Almshouse Consortium” in 2017** in order to access grants from “Homes England”, eventually receiving £1,529,633 for the last tranche of homeless one bed housing developments.

DWAS White Goods



WMC Carpets

- **The Charity embraced “DWAS”, the City’s Discretionary Welfare Assistance Scheme.** The Charity originally won the DWAS contract with the City Council in 2013 to manage the purchase and distribution of white goods in Worcester. The Charity does not charge the Council for this service in recognition of the relief it brings to the Charity’s own grants’ budget. The contract has been rolled over to the present day. The Charity pays for carpets as concrete floors are dusty and impractical.
- **The WMC present Trustee Board of 17** consists of :- Nine Independent trustees who are appointed by the Board for 5 years; four trustees for 3 years are nominated by the four Main Beneficiary Charities; and four trustees are appointed by the City Council for 4 years.



In 2008 the Charity paid £100,000 from its Education Trust Funds for the 125 years' lease of Tudor House from the City, for Worcester Heritage and Amenity Trust to run as a free-entry Museum. The Charity immediately sub-let Tudor House to WHAT for a "peppercorn". An annual grant is made to pay for the curatorial staff who appoint and supervise the large voluntary workforce.

In 2023 discussions took place with the City Council to extend the lease to 999 years.

The full history of the Charity is published in a 512 page book which can be viewed in the Hive, on the website or purchased from the office.

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