



A History of Wades Charity

For almost half a millennium Wade's Charity has been providing for the improvement of the quality of life and welfare of citizens of the original town of Leeds. Thanks to the generosity of four individuals whose historic bequests laid the foundations for the trust 486 years ago, today many thousands of residents of all ages, backgrounds and circumstances enjoy life-enhancing facilities and opportunities they otherwise might not experience.

The Charity was borne out of lands and properties left in the 1530 will of Thomas Wade along with similar additions from the estates of Alice Lodge, who died in 1638, those of Henry Ambler, his namesake son, associates and of Richard Simpson. Originally titled the "Highways Estate", for 360 years it focused on providing and repairing roads and streets for the town which would grow into the great city we know today.

In the mid 19th century with the 1866 Leeds Improvement Act, the role of Leeds Corporation in such municipal matters was statutorily expanded creating a potential conflict and duplication of interest. Initially the trustees of the Highways Estate decided they should focus on street improvements rather than initial provision. However, the Corporation applied legal pressure to try to take control of the Highways Estate and to have its role redefined by the Charity Commissioners. As a result, in the late 19th century Wade's underwent a crucial metamorphosis. Under a 1893 High Court ruling the Charity remained independent of the Corporation, but was rededicated to addressing the vital needs of the residents of a continually growing industrial city, by providing and maintaining open spaces for the "benefit, recreation and health" of the residents of the "Borough of Leeds."

An important element of this brief was that where possible, consideration should be given to those parts of the city where "streets were narrow and houses small" - inevitably the poorer areas where opportunities for healthy recreation were less plentiful or likely. Subsequent fine tuning of the Charity's objectives to target the ever changing needs and structure of society in the 20th century saw major social needs further addressed by a widening of the scope of Wade's.

Today a huge element of Wade's financial support is channelled through hundreds of grants to help provide: "facilities for recreation, amusement, entertainment and general social intercourse for the inhabitants of every age of areas of population in the City of Leeds occupied in the main by the working classes" and including "the establishment of what are commonly known as Community Centres and Youth Centres."

In-line with the Charity's historic traditions its important work is overseen by a team of 18

Trustees which always include the Lord Mayor of Leeds, the Rector of Leeds, three city councillors, 13 volunteer elected Trustees and a Grants Adviser/Administrator who also acts as Clerk to the Trustees.

Wade's Charity owns a large number of areas of land across the city of Leeds as defined by its boundaries prior to the 1974 local government reorganisation and the establishment of the present Metropolitan District of Leeds. These properties are leased for hundreds of years to the City Council which maintains them for free public use. As a result the sites provide for recreational activities which in turn contribute to the health and well being of residents of those areas who use them. The Charity's close guardianship of these lands to preserve and improve them for continued public enjoyment has always been a key and fundamental responsibility of its Trustees and is so to this day.

Equally the Trustees, guided by professional advisers, also focus closely on the protection and enhancement of the Charity's funds to ensure that it can continue to carry out the other key element of its role - helping provide grants to beneficial schemes which will facilitate amusement, entertainment and local social interaction. Wade's approach to identifying such worthy projects is an all-inclusive one and designed to be easily followed. Though organisations are required to propose schemes on a sound footing and one not solely dependent on the Charity, there are hundreds of groups whose scope would be significantly curtailed without Wade's input.

Nearly 500 years of giving

While the objectives of building and improving public roads and streets are very different to those of Wade's today, the motivation of those whose bequests founded the Charity were arguably just as public spirited. The lands and properties of Thomas Wade which provided the seed funding for what for the last 120 years has been Wade's Charity, were sown in his will of 1530 - three years before the birth of Queen Elizabeth 1st. The growth in Elizabethan times of what for its first 366 years would be known as The Highways Estate, was boosted by further bequests later in the 16th and 17th century. The names and addresses of the sites and buildings left in the estates of Thomas Wade, Alice Lodge (1638) Henry Ambler Snr and Jnr and Richard Simpson evoke a very different place and time to the Leeds we know today.

Yet a mere glance at the ancient documents detailing those gifts will resonate with any Leeds loiner with a reasonable knowledge of the central area of their home city. Even in 2016 there are many of echoes of ancient Leeds to be found among the names of the thoroughfares and roads detailed in the bequests. Mr Wade's will speaks of leaving "all lands" purchased from a Peter Bell of "The Head Row" along with part of the ways going to "Wyke Bridge", "Newton Lane" and "Kirkstall Bridge" to cover the costs of "mending and upholding of the highways about Leeds."

It is known that part of the Highways Estate included 7,298 square yards of land in the Upper Headrow, Mark Lane and Woodhouse Lane, including houses, 20 shops, the Nags Head Inn and the Wheatsheaf Hotel. Indeed, Wade's sold this particular part of his legacy to Leeds Corporation 398 years later in 1928 to facilitate the widening of The Headrow into the major thoroughfare we know today and the building of the now defunct Lewis's department store.

Nearly 50 years after Wade's legacy, one Henry Ambler and his son Henry Jnr and others gave over land in a street near to Leeds Bridge known as Pitfalle measuring "17 yards in length by 14 yards in breadth, with edifices and buildings thereon" also for the "repairing and amendings of the high waies near Leeds".

Shortly after this further including "chapels, houses and lands" appear to have come to the Highways Estate in 1580 from Richard Simpson who was gifted them by the Duchy of Lancaster. These included a "New Chapel" at the Head Row, properties possibly near to Leeds Bridge including a "tenement or chapel at the bridge end", "two cottages at the north end of the bridge", a "garden at the east part of Leeds Bridge", "a cottage in Briggate", three cottages in Marsh Lane, "a cottage and a rood of land at Hill House Banks" and "three cottages and three gardens and one half an acre of land at the west end of Leeds.

Surprisingly one area of land "The Crimbles", a "close in the field of Leeds Woodhouse" took 178 years to join the Highways Estate despite its original owner, Alice Lodge, setting it aside in her will for public or charitable uses in Leeds in 1638. After her death the land remained in the possession of the family under the supervision of her son and executor William Lodge. Finally in 1816 the Highways Estate obtained possession of the land after taking legal advice and the rents from the close totally £16:16 shillings a year were from then on credited to the Estate.

At various appropriate times lands and properties were purchased by the Estate from surplus funds to pursue its role. It was way back in 1620 - 90 years after Thomas Wade's will – that a special group of trustees known as the Committee of Pious Uses was set-up to administer the Highways Estate. The Committee also administered two other estates: the Trust for the Free Grammar School and the Trust for the Poor. This august body originally numbered 13 including the Vicar of Leeds, but it was increased to 15 by a decree of Charles 11. Today's Wade's Trustees are the Committee's successors, though they are no longer responsible for any previous Trust for the Poor or indeed any Free Grammar School.

Still relevant today

While it would be wrong to state that the organisations supported by Wade's would not exist and their work not take place without financial support from the charity, it is true that at times many might find their output severely curtailed and even their continuance at risk. It is also perhaps true to say that with the impact of recent austerity measures on the mainstream provision of public services, it is the first time in decades that voluntary organisations have been under such threat.

This is why Wade's Charity has never been more relevant to helping those who seek to improve the quality of life of residents and expand their personal fulfilment. Trustees are committed to funding activities which may not otherwise get off the ground and which make a good impact on the lives of the participants.

By helping such public spirited organisations to do their work, Wade's is able to assist groups large and small with the same motivation and remit as the Charity. Normally to apply for a Wade's grant applicant groups are expected to be registered charities.

One of the frequent ways in which other smaller qualifying groups may benefit indirectly from a Wade's Charity grant is via the Small Grants Programme which has operated through Voluntary Action Leeds for many years. This avenue enables community based groups with annual incomes less than £10,000 and which may not be registered charities to apply for individual grants up to a ceiling of £300.

Sometimes grants are approved to organisations working on a city-wide basis and on many other occasions to very local community anchored bodies. Grants for youth activities take the larger share of grants, and cover play schemes, sporting activities, arts, uniformed groups and environmental projects alongside residential and day trips. Such groups benefiting included: Central Yorkshire Scout Council, Kidz Klub, Phoenix Dance, Friends of PHAB, Leeds Children's Charity and Hawksworth Wood YMCA. Community facilities and activities attract the second largest number of grants and include sporting activities, day trips, community cafes and community events amongst others. Groups which have benefited include: Friends of Middleton Park, Sikh Sports, Middleton Park Equestrian Centre, Hyde Park Unity Day and Trees for Cities. Activities and holidays for older people have also been well supported by Wade's for many years. This reflects the excellent coverage that the unique Neighbourhood Network scheme has across the city. Funding has been awarded towards holidays, entertainment, newsletters, parties, exercise classes, day trips and befriending services. Groups to benefit include OPAL, Contact the Elderly, Armley Helping Hands, Caring Together in Woodhouse and Little London and Burmantofts Senior Action. Wade's also supports many other types of activity including arts organisations, conservation projects and volunteer activities.

Applying for grants

One of the aims of Wade's Charity for dealing with applications for its grants is to make sure that the process is open to all sections of the community and is straight forward so that no group is excluded. A fundamental principle is that cash awards are restricted to schemes benefiting those living within the former Leeds City geographical boundary prior to the reorganisation of local government and the establishment of the current Leeds Metropolitan District in 1974. A rule of thumb guide to this is those areas falling within the current 1 to 17 Leeds postal districts.

The proposed projects must be aimed at either protecting space for public enjoyment or providing facilities for recreation and entertainment. Those applying are asked to submit a description of their group's operation, details of the activities for which they are requesting cash support and copies of their most recent financial accounts. The Charity's trustees consider applications three times a year and applicants would be wise to apply well in advance as there can be significant demand for help and grants cannot be made retrospectively.

Normally trustees prefer to focus on approving one-off grants towards the cost of particular projects. Trustees do sometimes consider applications from organisations in consecutive years, but they do not encourage them in order to avoid a risk of the group becoming too dependent on Wade's. Grants are not normally made for the entire cost of a scheme and the balance of the funding needed has to be provided by the applicants from their own finances or other sources. Only one grant application per year can be made by any group.

The Charity is unable to make grants to individuals or the salaries of people employed to run schemes. Applications for projects which are centred solely on education or health care cannot be accepted within the Charity's guiding principles. Successful grant applicants are asked to give a subsequent written report to the Charity on how its project developed. Many groups benefit from a member having an informal discussion with Wade's experienced Charity Administrator about their particular project prior to submitting their application.

Bruce Smith – May 2016