

Charity in Congresbury

St Paul said "*and now abideth faith, hope and charity ... and the greatest of these is charity*". This article hopes to show what charity consisted of in Congresbury from the 11th to the 21st century.

St Congar's s shrine

In 1995 several pieces of carved stone were discovered in the floor of a Congresbury barn. The carvings have been dated as between 1033 and 1060 and are now thought to have been part of a shrine to St Congar, erected in the period when Congresbury was in the hands of local clergy (1). St Congar's tomb, which has not been found, was probably a place of worship in Saxon times and is certainly mentioned in medieval pilgrim guides. It seems likely that the shrine was moved to the chancel of St Andrew's after the old church was demolished, and the present one built in the early 13th century. As late as 1513 a Richard Cokkes of East Harptree asked his wife in his will to "*do or cause to be done, in dischargeing of my soule, Certaine pilgrimages*", one of which was to Congresbury (2). The shrine was almost certainly erected to increase the status of the church and to raise the numbers of pilgrims and the money and trade they brought with them. Perhaps some of those pilgrims' money helped to build the present church.

The statue of Jesus from St Congar's shrine.



Purgatory

In the medieval period charity was very much tied in with the church. This was the age of purgatory, created in the 12th century, although without scriptural basis. Purgatory was the waiting room from where souls were sent to heaven or hell depending on the sort of life they had led before death. A "good life" included doing good deeds, such as giving alms to the poor and money and religious items to the church. The time spent in purgatory could also be shortened by the prayers of the living, so those who could paid a priest to chant prayers for themselves and their families after death - the more prayers the better. The wealthiest, including many bishops and other clergy, had chantry chapels built for them for that purpose and left money to pay priests to chant prayers for them. The extra clergy and the gifts and bequests made by the living and the dead continued to increase the wealth and importance of the Church for over three hundred years.

This was also probably the only time when the poor and indigent were in demand - the wealthy needed them to be seen accepting the alms, the gloves and cloaks and other items given them to attend at many of the funerals of the great and good!

Congresbury, although quite prosperous, did not have the trappings of a wealthy parish because there was never a resident lord of the manor to shower money on the church and help the poor. The present church, consecrated in 1215, is thought to have been built on or near the previous one. In the period before the Reformation Congresbury's lords were either the king or the bishop.

Apart from the vicarage, built in the second half of the 15th century (now known as the Refectory and probably financed by a bequest from Bishop Beckington), there is nothing to indicate help from the manorial lord. Indeed, in the 14th century the Bishop of Bath and Wells, in financial difficulties, had to ask Congresbury for help (3)!

St Andrew's church was consecrated on 11th July 1215 when there was just a chancel, nave and probably, St Congar's shrine. There is some confusion about when the aisles were added - Pevsner (4) says the south aisle was added in the 13th century with the north aisle later in the same century. The roof was raised in the 15th century, clerestory windows were added, and the tower and spire were built. Where the money and materials came from is

not recorded but St Congar's shrine, as mentioned previously, may have provided much of it together with Congresbury's parishioners who would have seen it as an opportunity to shorten their time in purgatory.



*St Andrew's church
from the south.*

Photo by Pete Hughes

Church-ales

Churchwardens had long been responsible for the maintenance of their churches. They were the ones who raised the necessary funds which provided, besides maintenance, books, furnishings, vestments, vessels for the mass and the adornment of the building.

Congresbury has no surviving medieval churchwardens' accounts but those of neighbouring Yatton survive from 1445 to 1547 (5). These show that funds were raised in ways similar to today. Collections were made for candles and other necessities. Church-ales, equivalent perhaps to church fetes, were organised about four times a year, with specially brewed ale and music, sport and general merry making. They raised considerable sums of money especially as all parishioners were expected to attend! In 1446 Yatton's Whitsun ale raised £4 1s 8d - a huge sum then. There were also about 50 saint's days a year when services

and processions around the parish would raise funds and, of course, all parishioners were urged to give to the church as part of living a “good life” and so minimise their stay in purgatory.



St Andrew's church, Congresbury, from the north. Photo by Bob Rowles

Early wills

Despite the loss of churchwardens' accounts Congresbury's early wills give some indication of what provision the parishioners made to shorten their time in purgatory. The original early wills were destroyed in the Second World War (WW2) by an incendiary bomb, but, fortunately, most of them were copied before the war. Many bequests show the wealth or otherwise of the testator, but bequests to the church also indicate the priorities of the testators. (Land holdings were seldom mentioned at this period as most were copyhold, which were dealt with by the manorial courts not the church courts.)

The first period is that up to the Reformation in the 1530s. In 1411 William Felawe, rector of Portishead, included several bequests to Congresbury - he gave 15d [6.5p] to the light of the Holy Cross of Congresbury. (A light was a candle, oil lamp or a taper.) He also gave 6d [2.5p] each for lights before the statues of St Katherine, St Nicholas and St Congar. Finally, William gave 2d to each "decrepit person" in Congresbury - an obvious case of

giving alms to the poor (6).

John Venables in his will made in 1415 asked to be buried in St Katherine's chapel (on the north side of St Andrew's chancel). He gave 40d [16.5p] to the vicar "for tithes forgotten" and a trental, 30 requiem masses, was to be said by the chaplain, who was presumably paid for it. John also gave a chalice to Congresbury church and a moiety (half) of the residue of his goods for pious uses (6).

In 1493 Thomas Overey of Wells, a precentor of the cathedral church of Wells, and vicar of Congresbury from 1479 gave 20s [£1] to the fabric of Congresbury and in 1498 Dame Isabel Newton of Yatton, widow of Sir John Newton, gave, among other bequests, 6s 8d [33.3p] to Congresbury church (6).

In 1501 William Nedys gave 2s [10p] to the high altar; a bushel of wheat to the high light (which would be on the rood screen); a bushel and a half of barley to the small lights; two whole clothes (cloths) of white to St Michael's chapel, and to St Congar, a heifer to find (fund) a light. [It is not known where St Michael's chapel was built but by the time of the Reformation it was in disrepair (7)].

In 1503 John Bellowe gave 8d [3.5p] to Wells Cathedral and 16d [6.5p] to the high altar of St Andrew's for tithes forgotten. He gave 10s [50p] to the parish priest to pray for the health of his soul and the souls of his benefactors. To the high light before the cross he gave a bushel of corn and to each of the other lights one bushel of barley. To St Michael's chapel he gave his best cow and to Puxton church a heifer. Unusually, in this period, John also left 20d [8.5p] for the repair of one "way" or road (7).

Robert Nedys made his will in 1505. He gave 10s to St Andrew's church, 2s to the high altar and 1s to the high light. But, more importantly he left the rent of a house in Easton in Gordano for a period of 20 years to fund a priest to sing for the "brethren" in St Michael's chapel, suggesting that the chapel was a chantry chapel built especially for praying for the souls of the departed (7). The brethren were a self- help guild which ensured that members had a proper funeral and that obits (prayers for the dead) were said for their souls to help them through Purgatory. There were many such organisations throughout England. [Dr Michael Costen, MA (Oxon), PhD(Bristol), DMS, FSA, FRHistS, Associate Teacher and Research Fellow at Bristol University, suggests that this chapel was a mortuary chapel, a

building in which corpses were stored temporarily, but Robert's will clearly shows that it was then in use as a chantry chapel, where prayers for the dead were said.]

It is clear from the above that Purgatory had had a huge effect on the population in the late medieval period and the wills of Congresbury people, and others, show that they gave money and goods for specific purposes - for "tithes forgotten", which should have been paid to the priest, for the upkeep of the church, for lights for the saints' statues and gifts, such as the chalice and cloths specifically mentioned. In addition, there was money given for the parish's poor. Congresbury people had also got together to ensure a good funeral with prayers for their souls by setting up an association - the Brethren - to provide mourners, bell-ringing, candles at regular "obits" and a "bede roll" listing all benefactors, however small the donation. This roll would be read out in church and prayers said for them on a regular basis. The contributions of the living were made to help the dead in the expectation that future generations would do the same for them after their deaths.

This preparation for purgatory fell apart with the Reformation. Henry VIII started it by repudiating the Pope's authority in England in 1534. The Pope refused to allow Henry to divorce his Queen so Henry declared himself the extreme head of the Church of England and diverted money that had long been paid to the Pope, to himself. An Act of 1536 began the dissolution of the smaller monasteries. In 1538 Henry ordered the destruction of the religious shrines and saints' relics and confiscated all their accumulated treasures. In 1539 the dissolution of the larger monasteries was ordered and the monks and nuns were made homeless. The treasures and lands went to Henry and the lands were later given away or sold.

1539 also saw the publication of the Six Articles, the first statement of the doctrines of the English Church. The reformers in the Church said that Purgatory was unnecessary - when sinners repented they were immediately adopted as children of God's family, eliminating the need for saints and the waiting room. Clearly with no Purgatory to worry about there was no need to have prayers said for the dead, no need to give alms to the poor and no need to give money and goods to the church, except perhaps for maintenance.

The immediate effect of this on the parishes was probably not particularly worrying, since the Church had come under some considerable criticism and needed to change its lucrative

practices. There must have been some consternation in many towns and cities where pilgrims were a constant source of money.

Of the 18 wills of Congresbury people made from 1539-1547, fourteen left bequests to St Michael's chapel, often a bushel of wheat or barley, and eleven gave money, but just a few pence, for lights. Unusually Joan Ford in 1546 left 18s to help buy for the church some unspecified ornaments (8).

Not long before Henry died, in 1547, he ordered the removal of all religious statues and images from walls and windows in all churches as there was no need for them - parishioners would pray directly to God. Statues were destroyed, walls were lime washed and windows smashed. The effect must have been devastating - congregations saw their efforts and their ancestors' efforts to beautify their churches destroyed before their eyes. Clearly with no Purgatory to worry about there was no need to have prayers said for the dead and no need to give money and goods to the church, apart from its maintenance.

In 1547, following the death of Henry, Edward VI ordered all remaining "idolatrous" statues and pictures not previously taken down to be destroyed. In Yatton, the churchwardens paid a painter £3 14s [£3.70] to obliterate all the wall paintings. The churchwardens, with some foresight, sold their silver cross and used the money to repair the village's flood defences. Congresbury's churchwardens also did as they were ordered - the results can be seen in St Andrew's east window which contains just a few remaining scraps of medieval glass. In 1547 Edward also ordered the dissolution of the chantry chapels. The 1548 survey of chantry chapels shows that St Michael's chapel was *"now in decay and unkevered wherein lyme is stecked, leade molten and other necessarie busynes"* was done for church repairs (9).

His father having destroyed the monasteries, Edward now destroyed the wealth of the parish churches, taking all their treasures and leaving them with just the bare minimum of equipment necessary for the services. Edward died in 1553 and, with his death, the changes were revoked when Mary came to the throne and ordered a return to Catholicism. Much of what had happened could not be immediately replaced - statues, wall paintings, stained glass windows and other items could not be easily reproduced. Parishioners may also have been reluctant to replace many of the items in case they were confiscated at some later

date. Mary died in 1558. Elizabeth came to the throne and England became a protestant country once more.



The niche close to the church roof (above), no doubt once held an idolatrous" statue, taken down by order of Henry VIII. Fortunately, the lovely figure on the right of the north door (right) was spared.



Effects of the Dissolution

The dissolution of the monasteries was a disaster for the poor and indigent as many of the monasteries had regularly helped such people. The almoners provided for the needs of the poor and infirm, who could not leave their homes, and gave food, clothing and money to beggars, pilgrims and lepers. Now there was little help except for begging on the streets. The responsibility for the poor passed to the parishes. To discourage vagrancy, able bodied vagrants were required to work - and from 1547 they could be branded with a V (for vagabond) and suffer servitude for two years if they refused. Private alms giving was also made an offence - the fine was ten times the amount given! However charitable donations could be collected by the parish priest on Sundays. In 1563 the office of overseer of the poor was created and they were to collect alms from all parishioners. Poor boxes were installed in the churches and the congregation was exhorted to "remember the poor" (10).

Bequests to the church became just a few pence - and sometimes nothing at all. However, Congresbury parishioners were leaving bequests to the poor - which was presumably not turned away despite the ban on private almsgiving - and money for mending the parish's roads. Henry Irishe, in 1563, bequeathed 30s for the poor of Congresbury, 10s for the Yatton poor, 10s for the Banwell poor and 3s 4d for the Puxton poor, 6s 8d went to St Andrew's Congresbury and 6s 8d to Puxton's church. He also left 40s for Congresbury's roads (11).

In 1569 John Cade gave 6d to Wells Cathedral, and to the "*poor men boys*" ¹ of Congresbury, Puxton and Churchill, 6s 8d for each parish. He also gave 40s to the repair of the highway from the New Bridge to Olde Bowe and another 40s to the repairing of the West Brynsey Lane (12). John Sprudd bequeathed 10s to the poor people "dwelling in the parish of Congresbury" in 1570, and John Hardwell gave 5s to the poor people of Congresbury in 1574. Robert Willett, in 1575, left 3s 4d to the poor men's box ² of Puxton; 6s 8d to that of Congresbury; 20s to repair the south highway by Gosey, and 20s to repairing the highways in Puxton "*where the most need is*". In 1576, Isabel Cade left 4d to Wells Cathedral, but 6s 8d to the poor men's boys of Congresbury, 3s 4d to the "*poor men's boys*" of Puxton and 10s to the repair of the highway between her dwelling house and new

¹ The terms 'poor men boys', 'poor men's boys' and 'poor boys', refer to 'poor young men'; these are accurate transcripts from the original documents. ² This probably refers to an actual box, possibly in the church?

bridge. In 1579 Robert Atwill left 6s 8d in ready money to the highways and 10s to the poor of Congresbury. In 1580, William Avery gave 13s 4d to the poor boys of Yatton, 20s to the poor boys of Congresbury, 6s 8d to the poor boys of Puxton and 10s to repair the road between his house and the Bowe (13-18). Edmund Wattes of Congresbury gave 20s to the poor of Congresbury and 6s 8d to the poor of Banwell in 1583 (19). John Hardwell gave 5s to the poor of Congresbury in 1587. In 1590, Thomas Keene gave 20s to the poor of Congresbury to be divided at the discretion of his overseers. Thomas Usswell, of Congresbury, a husbandman, gave 2s to the poor of Congresbury and 16d to the poor of Marksbury in 1592. In 1602, William Knight of Congresbury, husbandman, gave 6s 8d to the poor of Congresbury. This was the last Congresbury will made in Elizabeth's reign (20-24). Clearly the poor and the highways were benefiting from the disappearance of purgatory, but the parish churches were not.

Throughout Elizabeth's reign there was a continuing increase in England's population; thus, between 1540 and 1600 there was an approximate increase of 1.75 million (to 4.5 million) from 2.75 million in 1540 (25). Furthermore, the churchwardens and all parishioners were urged to give money for the poor and many did so, as shown above.

In 1563, two able persons in each parish were to be appointed collectors of the charitable alms. In 1572, the office of the Overseer of the poor, an elected parish official, was created to supervise charitable funds within the parish. There were usually two or more of them, who were answerable to the parish vestry and the Justices of the Peace. Acts of 1597 and 1601 empowered the Overseers of the poor to raise money from parish rates specifically for the poor. These could be supplemented by local charities (10).

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George Owen's charity

Congresbury, so far as is known, had no such charities until 1557 when the wardens were granted, by George Owen, Lord of the Manor a cottage, called the Wring House, and garden plus four acres of land in a close under Kingswood; 16 acres of land called Pill Haye and one

warthe [flat meadow] of 12 acres. This was for the use of the poor people of the parish, repairs to the body of the church and the highways of the said parish. The wardens were granted a 21- year lease to follow on after a lease, granted on 13 November 1557 (probably for 21 years), had expired. The property was presumably rented out and the rent, mentioned as 41 s 4d [£2 .06], was to be paid annually at Christmas to the churchwardens who would then use the money as they saw fit (26). In the 1596 survey the property was described as "*The parishioners of Congresbury hold for certain years to come 20 acres and the Wring House*". The rent was still 41s 4d. There is also a memorandum to demand 20s of the parishioners for the heriot due at the end of the lease - the Lords of the manor were not, apparently, very charitable! (27)

John Carr's charity

By the late 16th century, Congresbury Manor, which included Wick St Lawrence, was owned by John Carr, a wealthy soap maker of Bristol. He died childless in 1586 and bequeathed the Manor to help found a hospital for poor boys of Bristol and the manor of Congresbury. Although named Queen Elizabeth Hospital, now known usually as QEH, it was in fact a boarding school. The Trustees, until the 19th century, were the Mayor and Aldermen of the city of Bristol and such was their enthusiasm that the school was opened in 1590.

Congresbury School Boys at QEH

The earliest mention of a Congresbury boy being sent to QEH was in 1606 when Mr Forse paid £4 a year to keep an unnamed boy there (28). No early regular system for recording pupils appears to have survived, but each boy sent to QEH had to have £2 found for him, to clothe him, before being accepted - that sum appearing in the QEH accounts. In 1666 six Congresbury boys went to QEH: the sons of Sarah White, Widow Hollier, Richard Bush, Ann Phillips, Francis Bodman and Kathren Feare. In 1668, another eight were sent but only one can be identified - Edward Griffin's son. In 1685, John Ford paid the fee of £2 for William Reeve "a poor boy of Congresbury" (29).

Eighteenth century accounts show that William Walter of Congresbury was admitted to QEH in 1704 or 1705, and Joseph Hurditch in 1706 (30). In 1716, the sum of 40s, demanded before a poor boy could enter QEH, was discontinued making it more difficult to pick out Congresbury boys (31).

In 1724 there were just 24 pupils and eight boys, supported by John Carr's bequest, were to have "IC" on their coats, for John Carr [I and J were interchangeable]. John Nead, admitted in 1724, would have been one of the first pupils to wear the new badge.

William Badman, son of Joseph Badman of Congresbury, went to QEH in 1734 (32). There must have been many more Congresbury pupils than are now recorded. Pupils were, generally, found an apprenticeship when they left and those Congresbury boys were very fortunate to have such an education - most of their contemporaries probably had little or none.

Regular lists of pupils survive from 1790, but those from 1801-16 are missing. Several Congresbury boys are specifically mentioned. John Filer of Congresbury, admitted on 23 Jun 1792, was apprenticed to a mathematical instrument maker in 1798 - something he would probably never have thought of without his education at QEH (33). By 1822 there were 44 pupils of which eight were funded by John Carr's bequest.

In the years 1833-62 twenty-one boys from Congresbury manor were admitted to QEH, but not all were happy. Harry Laurence and George Poultney absconded in March 1841 along with three other pupils. Another three absconded not long after - conditions in the school must have been dire and an enquiry was to be made. However, further 'defections' were recorded - Robert Baker on 22 December, 1842, and James Parsons on 12 October, 1847. Two Congresbury parents withdrew their sons the day after they were admitted in 1855 and another was dismissed for theft! Henry Parsons and Henry Amesbury were both described as "very good" and Newman Young as "uniformly excellent" (34). From 1853 to 1878 pupils were awarded certificates; seventeen Congresbury pupils were named, but only Frederick Ledbury, in 1860, and Edwin London, in 1866, had 1st class certificates. Several were very backward and there was another thief (36)!

From 1896 boys were divided in two groups (36):

Class A were poor orphans who had been born, or resided for 3 years within the Parliamentary boundaries of Bristol or within the parish of Congresbury (including one such boy of the parish of Netherbury, Dorset), and had either lost one or both parents, or whose parents were incapable of maintaining and educating them because of mental or physical problems. All such boys between the ages of 8 and 10 years were eligible for admission.

Class B was for boys who attended a public elementary school, for at least year, within the above boundaries; such boys having been resident for 3 years within the same boundaries and aged between 10 and 12 years.

Boys continued to be admitted under John Carr's charity into the mid-20th century, with the last orphan pupils admitted in 1950. The last Congresbury boy was admitted in 1947 and left in 1953. He still lives in the village (37). In 1974 it was noted in the Annual Parish Meeting that there was an opportunity for any Congresbury boy who had lost a parent to have an assisted scholarship (38). In 1977 the parish council wrote to QEH about the foundation scholarship for one Congresbury boy, which was reported had been discontinued. The response explained that a new scheme of management had been drawn up by the Charity Commissioners as a result of the discontinuation of the Direct Grant from the Government. Financial assistance was to be given in the form of assisted places related to the income of the scholar's parents (39). Many Congresbury boys were given the chance to have a trade and to do something different from just being an agricultural labourer. They were the lucky ones.



Above

Pupils at QEH c 1950.

Left

Dining room and dormitory at QEH. C1950.

Photos courtesy of Ivor Standen.

Court House

Queen Elizabeth Hospital school was not the only means of education in the village. The first public school in Congresbury was held in the Court House. It is recorded as the school house on the 1840 Tithe map and remained a school until 1873 when the new, (now the old), School Rooms were opened in Station Road.



The Court House - left on the photograph above.



The front of The Court House

1602 Agreement by the Lords of Congresbury manor to pay £10 per annum to the parishioners of Congresbury manor as compensation for the loss of the right to take "spars and stretchers" from Kingswood for the repair of their houses (40).

This is not strictly a charity - but following John Carr's bequest, in 1586, of Congresbury Manor to found QEH in Bristol, a considerable part of the land was sold by 1601 to pay off other bequests and debts, leaving less than half the original area. Amongst these were 142 acres of woodland which had belonged to the Lord of the manor. With the sale, all customary rights ceased. The tenants did not take this loss of rights lying down - they had long had the right to collect spars and stretchers from the woodland to repair their houses. Even the Rectors of Congresbury (the Dean & Chapter of Wells) supported the villagers and donated 20s towards the costs of litigation (41).

It took until 14 April 1602 for the Chancery Commissioners to hear the case - by which time one of the villagers named and two of the Lords' representatives had died.

The conclusion was that *"In lieu and Recompence of the said common Sparres and Stretchers there shall be one yerely rent charge of Tenn pounds granted and assured by the Defendants or the right owners of the said Manner of Congresburie presentlie to commence unto certain persons and their heirs [to be] nominated"*.

The money was to be paid half yearly - £5 at Michaelmas and £5 at Lady Day - at the parish porch in Congresbury. The Chancery Commissioners

"did certifie the said Court that they did think it veriefytt an covenient and did fynde it Agreeable and Acceptable unto the myndes of all said parties well plantifs s defend-aunts for the Avoydinge of further sutes and controversies herein."

This £10 has been paid annually ever since - but according to the Charity Commissioners' Report, (1819-37), about the year 1618, the two payments were divided, so that £3 6s 8d went to the church, £3 6s 8d to the surveyor of the highways and £3 6s 8d to the overseer of the poor, which was added to parish rates.

With the loss of most of the churchwardens' accounts, little more is known until the creation of the Parish Councils in 1895. In the minutes of the Parish Council Meetings, 1896, Mr Petvin requested an account of the £10 from the Bristol Charity Trustees, but there is no note to say that he received that account (42)!

In 1934 the Bristol Charity (£10) is mentioned as distributing £6 13s 4d in 1.5 cwts of coal to 30 of the second poor (those not receiving parish relief) and continued to pay in coal and groceries until 1943, when firewood was given instead of coal (43). (The other £3 6s 8d was presumably paid to the Parochial Church Council for church repairs).

Christmas Tea Party

In 1972 The Parish Council organised the distribution of tea to elderly residents "under the 370 years old charity" (44) and in 1982 it was noted that a tea party had been held in 1981 instead of the packets of tea which were distributed amongst the elderly (45).

This tea party is now a regular event and in 2004 the parish council invited Congresbury's senior citizens over 60 years old to a Christmas tea party on December 11 at 2.30pm for 3pm (46).

Poor Relief

By the end of Elizabeth's reign the problem of an increasing population with a large proportion of vagrants needed drastic action. In 1597/8 an act ordered the overseers to be appointed by the justices, laid down their rights and duties, and allowed them to levy a rate on the wealthier parishioners. Paupers were to be set to work with materials provided by the parish. In 1601, the most important poor law made between 1601 and 1834, the churchwardens and 2, 3 or 4 overseers of the poor were ordered to provide a stock of materials - flax, hemp, wood etc which would provide work for the able bodied poor. The poorer parishioners now had to produce evidence that they had a legal settlement to which they could be returned to if they wished to move parishes - a device that today's family history seekers find very useful! The lame, the old, the blind and others unable to work, were to be given relief, and some parishes built them Poor Houses.

What did the church officers actually do? Unfortunately, Congresbury has no surviving overseers' accounts, but they must have collected the poor rate from the wealthier parishioners - how much we shall never know - and used it do as the law allowed. So we must turn to the wills again to see how Congresbury people were prepared to help their neighbours.

From 1603 to 1650 there are thirty six surviving wills of Congresbury men and women. Of these, 11, (31%), gave nothing to either the church or the poor. There were eight bequests to St Andrew's church, ranging from 4d [about 2p] to 10s [50p] and twenty

bequests to the poor of Congresbury from 1 s [5p] to £5. There were also bequests to churches and parish poor other than Congresbury.

The two largest and most interesting bequests:

In 1627 Edmund Hobbes bequeathed £5 to the poor of Congresbury

"to be a stock forever and the benefit and increase thereof to be distributed amongst the said poor every year at the feast of Easter and in 1645 Richard Allott also bequeathed money to the poor of Congresbury - "£5 in money for a stock for the poor to be employed for them and they to have the benefit thereof which I wholly leave to dispose of it for the best use he shall think fit" (48).

The intention of these bequests was to provide some help for the poorest of the parish - the money was, perhaps, to be invested in government bonds or used to buy land which would provide a regular income. There is no knowing what actually happened to the money - no further information has been found - the money would probably have been dealt with by the overseers of the poor but their records have also been destroyed. In many parishes there are charity boards showing who gave what to the poorer parishioners, but no such board has survived in Congresbury.

In the period 1650-1700, 26 wills of Congresbury people were proved, but only 8 gave to the poor - from 5s to £5 - and only 2 to the church - 5s and 2s. Parishioners were certainly not as generous as they had been - but with the poor rate, many may have thought they had given enough in their lives. Congresbury inhabitants may have also given to people in distress around England and elsewhere.

Briefs

Not all charity was inward looking - there was a system by which collections could be made for disasters - fire, flood etc. Some lists made by parish clerks and/or vicars have survived and show how much was collected - or not - for a variety of problems. No such list has been found for Congresbury. However, the following are just a few examples to show the wide range of requests:

In West Harptree (49)

17 Oct 1658 Collected in this parish by a brife that came for fire in the town of St Marie Blandford & Brimston in Dorset 6s 8d.

No date but probably 1659 Collected in our parish for and & towards the relief of the

distressed inhabitants of Southwold in the Co of Suffolk 10s 7d.

Collected 10 May 1672 sugar house in London 7s 10d

1686 Collected for the French Protestants £4 8s 1.5d

In 1728 Kingston Seymour (50)

7d for St Swithuns Worcester

1 s 4d to Gravesend for loss by fire

St John Wapping loss by fire 1 s 1 d

In 1730 *Protestants at Copenhagen in Denmark, loss by fire* (Sum not given)

18th century charities

From 1701 the indices to the Prerogative Court of Canterbury (PCC) wills in London do not mention the parish of the deceased, only the county, so it is difficult to be sure that a testator was of Congresbury. The only wills easily available are copy wills made before WW2, of which there are not enough to draw any conclusions.

Lancelot Appleby's Will

However, there were two Congresbury charities set up in the 18th century - the earlier being that of Lancelot Appleby, mariner of Congresbury. However, the Charity Commissioners, 1819-37, were unable to locate Lancelot's will for their Reports. It is possible that they only looked in the Somerset courts. The will was proved at the PCC on 26 Nov 1711, with probate granted to Grace and Catherine - the mother and sister of Lancelot.

Among many legacies, Lancelot left to the parish church of Congresbury £25 for the poor of that parish as follows:

"on every 5th March the churchwardens and overseers of the poor shall deliver to 20 of the poorest people 6d in money and 6d in bread after a sermon and £20 more to purchase some land or otherwise for the minister or curate of Congresbury so that the churchwardens can give him 20s on every 5th March after a sermon"

And there was this - All legacies were to be reduced proportionally if the money available should not be sufficient! However, much was actually put aside for the poor, there was still enough to purchase a small field, which was called Poor Ground or Little Honey Mead, shown on the tithe map c1840 (51).

The Charity Commissioners Reports 1819-37 state:

"There is a piece of meadow or pasture ground called the Poor's Acres of about an acre in quantity.. in Congresbury.. which is well known as to its boundaries ... said to be derived to the parish by the will of one Lancelot Appleby ... now let for 50s a year by the churchwardens of which 10s is paid to the clergymen for a sermon preached by him on the 5th March & 40s distributed annually in bread to the second poor" (52).

The sum of 6d in bread and 6d in cash was, in 1711, not an inconsiderable sum.

Congresbury's tithe map and award, c1840, shows that there had been enough to purchase a small field, of an acre and ten perches, number 324, called Poor Ground or Little Honey Mead, which was owned by the Trustees of the 2nd Poor and had as tenant a William Palmer.

The 1909 valuation of the parish shows that the same field - owned by the "Trustees of the Congresbury's second poor" - had John Moore as a tenant (53). The parish magazine of February 1909, stated that the distribution of £3 10s was made annually, by the Vicar and Churchwardens, in the Church after morning service before Easter.

According to the parish magazine of March 1949 the land was sold in 1921 in two parts - 27 perches to the County Council for road improvements for £20 and the remaining 3 roods 29 perches went to the tenant for £85. With these amounts, less a £2 2s fee, the Charity Commissioners purchased 2.5% Consols to bring in an annual £6 5s 8d.

The April 1949 edition of the parish magazine shows that the Appleby Charity Account expenditure in 1948 was £5 13s 0d and that the balance in hand at 31 Dec 1948 was £5 15s 7d Even then that was only a very small sum. Alex Cran says in his History of Congresbury, published in 1983, that "the income from the sale of the land still services the Appleby

Charity at Congresbury Church" (54). In 1978 the total assets were £39.29 which accumulated to £191.56 by 1995 when the PCC received permission to close the charity. The Parochial Church Council decided that as the original money had been intended for the benefit the poor they would give it to the Julian Trust in Bristol, which provides bed and supper for those in need of them (55).

Hannah Marshman's charity

In February, 1786, Hannah purchased from Samuel Burges an acre of land in a meadow called Ryding Mead "under the hedge there" (56). That meadow was therefore south of the Yeo and west of Iwood lane - but there are several fields there called Ryding Mead, so the exact area has not been identified. She then gave this land to Wadham Piggott and four others, to administer for the benefit of the poor of Congresbury. The rents and profits were to be distributed annually, as bread, among such poor persons of Congresbury who were not receiving parochial alms - usually called the second poor - on the Sunday after Christmas Day.

The Enclosure Act of c1814, however, caused the original field to be exchanged for a smaller field of 2 rods 21 perches, (no 493 on the tithe map of c 1840 and only 2r 9p) which produced only £ 1 p.a, in rent, whereas, the original field had produced £2. Also by this time the churchwardens had taken over the management of the charity. A list was usually made out prior to the distribution of the bread, of those "*such as appear to be fit objects of the relief*".

With no surviving churchwardens' accounts there is nothing to show what payments were made until the Minutes of the Parish Meetings were kept following the introduction of parish councils in 1896 - as already mentioned. There are regular items detailing how much was spent - usually £2 - on bread for around 40 people each year - about 1s [10p] each. However, in 1920, a tithe payment of 6s 8d was deducted from the £2, reducing the number of recipients to 25. But the rent went up in 1925 - less tithe - so a few more benefited.

The charity continued after WW2 but the Parish Clerk had been worrying about it for some time. He had had no less than seven bakers to deal with on one occasion (57). (Quite why there were so many bakers, presumably wanting to supply the loaves, is unknown). There had been so few applicants in the past years that the Charity Commissioners were asked to approve the distribution of the benefit by other means. Distribution of the money in small sums was approved in 1950 - if £2 was the total divided between 20 applicants, each would result in just 2s (10p) per person. Hardly worth having!!

In 1982, however, the Trustees of the field were hampered by the smallness of the Trust and it was taken into the care of YACWAG [Yatton and Congresbury Wildlife Action Group] in 1993. It is now managed as a wild flower meadow.

Bad Winters

The winter of 1847 was exceptionally severe and the usual parish relief was not enough. Sixty one Congresbury people, plus the Bristol Charity Trustees, donated £84 6d to provide subsidies on staple goods - bread, dried peas and rice. With a population of about 1320, just 4.5% donated an average of £1.38 - not the most generous relief - but better than none. The first purchase of bread was on 12 February and the last on 9 July - between 105 and 142 were helped by a discount of approximately 26% (58).

In 1895/6 the weather was again severe - £13 7s was collected - £7 was spent on bread and coal to the most deserving poor. The balance was deposited in an Axbridge bank for use in future need.



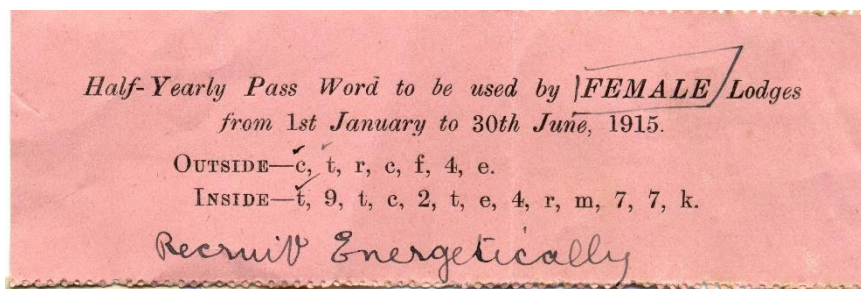
A cold snap at the cross c1900.

Reverend Joseph Haythorne

Without the generosity of Revd Haythorne, from 1838 for many years, there would probably have been no school in Congresbury - he paid the rent of the Court House with its garden and orchard to provide the parish's school, and its teacher, a home.

Self Help

During the Victorian period several friendly societies were set up in Britain. In Congresbury, the Loyal Rose of England Lodge, a branch of the Oddfellows of Manchester, was set up in 1844 to help their members when sick, or in distress, and also to have a decent funeral - something that was of great importance then. (The History Group has some notebooks with lists of members etc.) The local Burial Society had, presumably, the main aim of helping members to save for funerals.



The password used by the female lodges of the Loyal Rose of England Lodge, Congresbury, in 1915. Note the addition "Recruit Energetically."



Loyal Rose of England Lodge, Congresbury, Secretary's sash

Clothing, Blanket and Coal Clubs

The school log book of 1863 (59) shows that there was a Clothing Club - members made regular small payments so that there was money available when needed. From the mention in the school log book, it would appear that parents were encouraged to join so that their children could have adequate clothing and would, therefore, go to school regularly. In 1884, the Bristol Charity Commissioners, the owners of Congresbury manor, had agreed to pay 2 guineas annually to the club and was still honouring that in 1909. In 1908, £49 13s 1d was paid to Jones & Co.; £6 16s to Mrs Wear, and 14s 3d to Mr Inglis - all for "goods". The money available in 1909 was £59 2s 11d (60).

There was also a Blanket Club and a Coal Club which, in 1908, paid out £45 1s for coal from a total collected of £52 8s 6d.

District Nursing Association

In 1908 a District Nursing Association was set up to cover Congresbury, Huish and Puxton. The association was run by the members who paid a regular fee which gave them access to the services of the district nurse when needed - whose salary was initially about £60 a year. In the first year, 1908, "159 householders joined - about 2/3 of the total population". In 1912 Nurse Lamb required a new bicycle - a sub-committee looked into it. The association was dissolved with the introduction of the National Health Service in 1948, having been a great success with many involved in fund raising throughout the years (61).

Congresbury's greatest donor - Bristol Charity Commissioners who owned much of Congresbury until 1921. (62)

This list includes many subscriptions and donations made by the Commissioners:

- 1841 Subscriptions to the schools increased to £10 pa for the boys and £5 for the girls
- 1846 £10 to pay the debt from the girls' school & to increase the subscription to £10 pa
- 1871 £100 to help with the new school plus the land and the stones donated
- 1873 £50 for the new school
- 1874 £50 to the building fund of a new chapel and Sunday School
- 1875 £10 more to the chapel and Sunday School
- 1880 £100 to reseat the church
- 1884 £2 2s pa subscription for the Blanket Club

- 1886 £3 3s granted towards an American organ for the Methodist Free Church
- 1887 £10 to the Queen's Jubilee festivities
- 1889 £2 2s for Congresbury Parish Club & Reading room
- 1890 £5 for the renovation of the Methodist Church
- 1891 £5 for coals, blankets and other necessities for the poor of Congresbury during the inclement weather of the present season
- 1893 £2 2s to repair the United Methodist Sunday School Room
- 1893 £100 to repair & enlarge Congresbury's National Schools - later increased to £150
- 1893 £10 towards the festivities in Congresbury for the marriage of the Duke of York to Princess Mary of Teck

Conclusion

Charitable activities in Congresbury continued into the 20th and 21st centuries.

Congresbury is a caring community and this is evidenced by the continuing action of village organisations and individuals in ensuring that those in need are provided for. May this continue.

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