

## *Two hundred years of help for the poor of Tilehurst.*

An Act of Parliament which received the Royal Assent on 31st. May 1811 changed the face of Tilehurst forever. In so doing, it led to the founding of the Tilehurst Poor's Land Charity, which aims to help those in need of hardship and distress.

Before the Act, Tilehurst farmers, like those in many other parts of the country at that time, had strips of land in common fields, and rights, including grazing and collection of fuel, on the commons. The 1811 Tilehurst Inclosure Act changed all this, and by 1817, the fields and commons had been divided up into private fields, each belonging to an individual owner and occupier. This is the pattern we see in the English countryside today.

The Act also set aside land to be held in trust to provide fuel for the poor of the Parish, which in those days included Calcot, Theale and parts of what is now West Reading. The Trust later became a formal Charity. Over the years, some of this land was sold, and the receipts invested to provide an income. Sales included a compulsory purchase order in 1947 to build Council houses in the Holland Rd. area.

Fuel continued to be provided until the 1970s, by the issue of 'coal tickets'. However, the increasing use of electricity and gas for fuel made this impractical, and gradually grants for a wide variety of goods and services were provided. At one time, the Charity owned an electric wheelchair, which was lent out, and it also had a mortgage on a bungalow lived in by a disabled couple.

Unfortunately, today, the value of the Charity's investments has declined and grants cover such items as furniture, electrical goods, decorating materials, flooring, school uniform, and nursery fees. Each year, some 70 or 80 families and individuals receive grants totalling about £13,000.

The Charity still owns land – The Victoria Recreation Ground, which is let to Reading Borough Council, allotments at Armour Hill, Polsted Road. and Chapel Hill and further land at Kentwood Hill which includes a builder's yard. The long term aim of the Trustees of the Charity is to sell the Kentwood Hill land for development, and thus provide funds to offer more help to the poor of Tilehurst in the future.

For further information:

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Website: [www.tilehurstPLC.org.uk](http://www.tilehurstPLC.org.uk) (This contains copies of the Annual Report and of a history of the Charity).

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