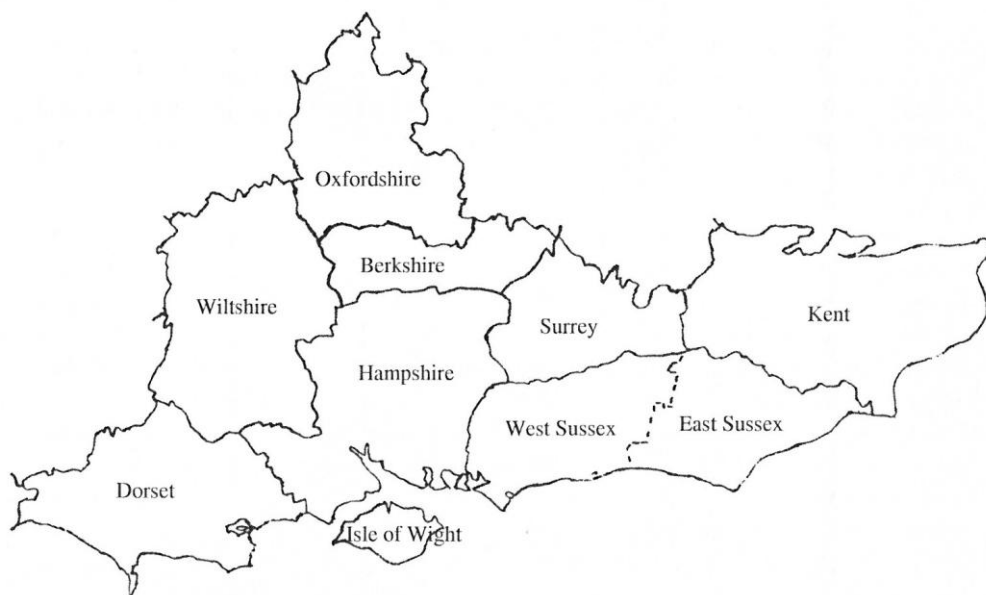


THE ALDERSHOT CHURCH OF ENGLAND SERVICES TRUST

(founded 1883)



This brochure includes much of the contents of one published in 1983 and brings the record of the Trust up to date. The purpose is to give new Trustees and potential applicants for grants some indication of the history of the Trust and how it comes to be administering the income of a fund of over one million pounds.

The Aldershot Church of England Services Trust

Registered Charity Number: 204018

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In 1883, when Queen Victoria still had eighteen years to reign and Gladstone was Prime Minister, The Church of England Soldiers' and Sailors' Institute was born in Aldershot. A number of civilian residents in the area had for some years been anxious about the lack of respectable facilities for members of the Armed Forces off-duty and the consequential resort to taverns, prostitutes and other undesirable pursuits. Many of the men had joined the Forces as an alternative to unemployment and were far from home.

As a result of numerous fundraising projects and offers of endowments, sufficient money was raised to purchase a parcel of land of nearly three quarters of an acre in Victoria Road, Aldershot, and to build an Institute to provide much-needed amenities, with an undertone of the propagation of the Gospel to be sympathetically and discreetly used.

On 28th September 1883 the purchase of the land was completed and the freehold conveyed to five gentlemen as nominees of those who had principally sponsored the project. A trust was set up. The contractors moved in and a huge building was erected, covering about a third of the site and with three floors. It included a refreshment room, kitchen, billiard rooms, a library, baths and showers, dormitories, office accommodation, living quarters for the resident Warden and a Chapel. Everything was in the vast proportions of the Victorian era. At the rear was a walled garden with trees, lawns, flower beds and garden furniture. A small part of the garden was reserved for the use of the Warden. It immediately became immensely popular, the facilities being far more luxurious and tranquil than the users had ever previously enjoyed. The opening ceremony was performed by the Bishop of Winchester.

Somewhat similar Institutes existed in other places where there were concentrations of soldiers and sailors. There came into being an Association in London later called the Church of England Soldiers' Sailors' and Airmen's Clubs (CESSAC). It seems the Charity Commissioners, who had responsibilities in such matters, felt there should be a parent body for such charities for administrative reasons. The five Aldershot Trustees in whose names the property was vested had no permanence, but an Association could continue in being indefinitely. Hence the five Aldershot Trustees in common with others agreed to convey the freehold title of the land and buildings to CESSAC.

A new Trust Deed was executed in 1895 defining the duties of CESSAC and of the Aldershot Trustees who were described as "The Local Committee". The latter were given complete control of the running of the Aldershot Institute, no less than they had previously enjoyed. There was, however, one proviso which was to cause an interesting situation some sixty years later. Article 15 provided that in certain circumstances the Parent Association could sell the property and apply the proceeds for other purposes. Under the wording of the Deed this could happen "if from want of funds or from any other cause it should hereafter become useless or impracticable in the judgement of the Association (to be declared by a formal Resolution in General Meeting) to continue the said Local Institute".

From 1883 and throughout more than half the 20th century the Institute admirably fulfilled its purposes, particularly during the two World Wars. There was a small paid staff and no lack of voluntary helpers. With the advent of the Royal



Flying Corps the word "Airmen" was added to its title. It was never an affluent Institute but it paid its way. Measures did have to be taken to improve the revenue situation however, the most important of which was to convert a major part of the frontage to Victoria Road into a large self-contained lock-up shop, which was let. It was occupied by Godfrey's, later by Boyd's, who sold pianos, radios, records, gramophones etc. Also important was the conversion of the garden at the rear to a car park and some lock-up garages were erected. The bathhouse was let to the Aldershot Borough Council for public use. The affairs of the Institute were governed by about ten Trustees who were a self-appointing, self-perpetuating body, civilians of standing in the locality, who of course gave their services voluntarily.

The early 1950's saw a period of recession. There were many empty shops and offices in the town. In 1953 Boyd's asked for a new lease. They were granted one for twenty one years expiring on 25th March 1975. In those days a twenty one year lease to a company of substance was good business and an insurance against having empty shop premises on one's hands.

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In 1954 the resident Manager reported a surprise visit by a retired Brigadier member (possibly the Chairman) of CESSAC. He made a lightning tour of the premises and declared himself satisfied that it had outlived its usefulness and that he would be calling a General Meeting to pass the required Resolution to sell up. He said the money was urgently required to assist other more deserving Institutes and mentioned Aden and Cyprus. A meeting of the Aldershot Trustees was called. It was accepted that the Institute was not fully utilised, a more modern NAAFI Institute in the town had taken a good deal of the custom and that the Brigadier might have a point, but on no account should the value of the assets be dissipated to other parts of the country and abroad. It belonged to Aldershot, they claimed. It was resolved to obtain Chancery Counsel's Opinion on the 1895 Deed and Article 15 in particular.

The outcome was unexpected and simple. It transpired that the 1895 Deed conveying the property to CESSAC had not been executed and enrolled in accordance with the requirements of the Mortmain Acts, rendering it void. The freehold still remained in the names of the five Trustees nominated in 1883.

Following this episode, the Institute continued in business but with increasing problems. But for a dedicated resident Manager who worked tirelessly for a low salary, it would probably not have survived for as long as it did. He died in 1968, by which time the income was barely sufficient to keep the premises wind and watertight. The Trustees considered the position in detail.

The site was clearly very valuable, being in the town centre with a frontage of 104 feet in Victoria Road, one of the main shopping streets. At the rear there was a frontage of 155 feet to Birchett Road where there were premises of a more

industrial nature. The depth was 243 feet. The most valuable part of the site was the frontage let to Boyd's. If the Trustees were still in possession when the lease expired, they could not refuse a new lease. If, when the lease ran out, a property developer were the owner and could genuinely show that demolition and re-construction was intended, then vacant possession of the whole could be assured. Such a developer would need time to put his house in order and give Boyd's the notice required under the Landlord and Tenant Act.

The first approach was made to the Charity Commissioners for permission to sell up and for the Trustees to administer a fund under the cy-pres doctrine instead of an Institute. The Charity Commissioners gave the Trustees excellent service. There were differences of opinion on some matters, two of which are worthy of mention:



Church of England Soldiers and Sailors Institute, Aldershot.

The Aldershot Trustees having the same view as in 1954, i.e. that this was a local affair, wished the area of benefit from the future fund to be the territory covered by the former Aldershot Command, maps of which were available. The Commissioners said this was too narrow and that it should be the whole of South East District of Southern Command. In the end it was compromised at South East District of Southern Command excluding the counties of Kent and Sussex. The Commissioners were ultimately proved right; but perhaps only because the sale proceeds were considerably more than could have been envisaged at that stage.

The Commissioners said there should be ten Trustees, one ex-officio being the Senior Church of England Chaplain in the area of benefit, which was wholeheartedly agreed. There should be six of the Aldershot Trustees who had been acting as such in recent years - this was also agreed. There should be three from CESSAC. Perhaps understandably this was queried. There had never been any contact with CESSAC apart from the 1954 incident and the Commissioners were reminded of this. The Aldershot Trustees were overruled. The Commissioners' reply was that the 1954 revelation was a matter of legal technicality only, and that the horizons of the Aldershot-orientated Trustees would be widened by the

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presence of three members of CESSAC in their deliberations. In this instance, later events proved the wisdom of the advice of the Commissioners.

The scheme was finally sealed on 17th November 1971, giving the required power of sale of the premises and defining that after the sale the clear income of the Trust should be applied for the moral and spiritual welfare of members of the Armed Forces resident or serving in the area of benefit and their wives, families and dependants.

In the meantime, with the object of boosting the value, the Aldershot Trustees appointed professional surveyors to apply for outline planning permission. On 21st October 1971 the Aldershot Borough Council gave outline consent to development consisting of shops on the ground floor with offices above, not exceeding 28,000 square feet in overall floor area.

The last hurdle before the sale was - who could sell? CESSAC had no title and the freehold was still in the names of the 1883 Trustees, long since dead. A possessory title could be obtained by twelve years open and undisputed possession. So four Aldershot Trustees who had served for more than twelve years were selected to act as vendors with a "Squatters' Title".

The new Trust was to be called The Aldershot Church of England Services Trust. The Charity Commissioners decreed that the sale should be by auction and no offers prior thereto could be accepted. The forthcoming sale was widely advertised by the Auctioneers and the date 27th June 1972 fixed for the auction to be held on the premises. This was the time when the boom in property prices was at its peak and development companies seemed to have unlimited funds. The auction took place in the refreshment room of the Institute which was packed to capacity.

The opening bid was £50,000; eventually, in a tense atmosphere, the property was knocked down to a bid of £355,000. Had the property been sold in 1954 when the well-meaning Brigadier wished it to be, it would probably have fetched about £25,000. Even in 1969 the Trustees were thinking in terms of £80,000 to £100,000, but those extra three years made all the difference. The bubble burst a year or so later and the purchasing company went into liquidation.

The first meeting of the newly-formed Trustees was on 7th September 1972 and from the outset the alliance between the Aldershot and CESSAC members was a complete success and they have worked as a team throughout. An early policy decision was that individual applications for grants could not be considered. Grants could be made only to units on application in a specified format through designated channels and this has been strictly followed. Otherwise a substantial part of the income was likely to be swallowed up in office rent, staff salaries and overhead expenses. The method adopted meant the employment of one part-time Clerk to the Trust who used his home as his office.



Altar screen funded by a grant from ACEST

The Trust Funds were to be invested in the name of the Official Custodian for Charities, but that body had no say in the selection of investments. The Trustees were subject to certain investment restrictions under the Trustee Act. The proceeds of sale were placed on Special Deposit at the bank while the Trustees considered the proposed portfolio and sought professional advice. This took a little time and in December 1972 the matter was still under discussion. Pressure was put on the Trustees to expedite. This was unfortunate because a month or so after the purchase of investments there was a severe slump in the Stock Market and a lot more could have been purchased with the money available.

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The Trustees have met quarterly, or more often if required, in order to deal with applications for grants, to review investments and other necessary business. Income began to exceed requests and unspent income started to build up. It became apparent that a need existed to extend the application of benefit to former members of the armed Services as well as those currently serving. Accordingly, in December 1976, representations were made to the Charity Commissioners for the scheme to be enlarged to this effect. The required order of the Commissioners was sealed on 7th July 1977.



A chapel window funded by a grant from ACEST



HMS Nelson

The extension enabled valuable financial assistance to be given to organisations caring for ex-Service personnel in the area of benefit. Even so, with high interest rates prevailing, surplus income was still accruing. In 1979 the Trustees agreed that the area of benefit should be extended if possible to (a) the Counties of Wiltshire and Dorset, (b) those parts of the County of Hampshire not already included and (c) Royal Military Academy Sandhurst. The Charity Commissioners were again approached and were prepared to co-operate.

At this point the GOC, South East District wrote to the Charity Commissioners questioning the propriety of these proposals on the following grounds:

- a. South East District was the successor to the former Aldershot Command and it included Sussex and Kent. It was more logical to extend the area of benefit to Sussex and Kent than Wiltshire and Dorset which were in South West District.
- b. There was a Trust based in Salisbury somewhat similar to the one in Aldershot which catered for Wiltshire and Dorset.
- c. On the abolition of Southern Command, South East District now included the Counties of Oxford, Buckinghamshire and Berkshire.

However, he approved of the inclusion of those parts of Hampshire not already covered and of the RMA Sandhurst.

The Charity Commissioners therefore called a meeting at their offices on 5th February 1980, with representatives of the Trustees and the Army. Four Trustees attended together with a military representative on behalf of the GOC. A lady Deputy Charity Commissioner took the chair. After discussion she proposed to recommend to the Commissioners:

- a. The area of benefit should be defined by Counties, not by Army Command areas.
- b. The area should be the Counties of Berkshire, Dorset, Hampshire, Isle of Wight, Kent, Surrey, Sussex, Wiltshire and Oxfordshire.
- c. That the objects clause could be reworded.
- d. That the ex-officio Trustee should be the Senior Church of England Chaplain, Aldershot Garrison.

The Commissioners upheld these conclusions. The rewording of the objects clause took a little time to agree and was

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finalised as follows:-

“The Trustees shall apply the clear income of the charity for the purpose of furthering the religious and other charitable work of the Church of England amongst members and former members of the Armed Forces of the Crown resident or serving in the area of benefit, and the dependants of such members, and the promotion of the efficiency of the Armed Forces of the Crown by the provision of benefits not normally provided out of funds of the Exchequer.”

The Commissioners set their seal on the new scheme on 2nd June 1981 which completely superseded the 1971 scheme as varied in 1977.

It will be seen that the Trustees were very actively involved with momentous changes in the 1969 to 1981 period. The situation then stabilised for some time when the duties of the Trustees consisted mainly of assessing applications for grants. Despite both the increased area of benefit as decreed by the Commissioners and lower interest rates, applications rarely exceeded funds available so the Trustees did not often have to defer grants or impose priorities. On the death of the part-time clerk, secretarial duties were assumed on a voluntary basis by one of the Trustees.

The Trust's investments are restricted funds totalling some £1.1 million and grants from the income thus generated amount to approximately £50,000 annually.

The nature of grants has changed over the years with changes in the size, shape and deployment of the Armed Forces. There have also been many advances in technology. Within the experience of current Trustees, most grants have been secular in nature, with few exceptions such as kneelers for Blandford Garrison Church, sanctuary improvements for the chapel in HMS Sultan, repairs to churches at Worthy Down, Thorney Island and Minley Manor garrisons and for exterior lights and reredos altar panels for the Royal Garrison Church, Aldershot. Latterly grants have been made for refurbishment of junior rank clubs, community centres and crèches, for fitness equipment and for electronic equipment enabling contact between families at home and Servicemen/women overseas.

Where Trust funds have been available grants have been made towards specific projects at the Royal Star & Garter Home, Richmond, and St Dunstan's in view of their strong support of ex-Servicemen/women.



A troops' club renovation



Renovated children's play park in Sandhurst (Nov 2010)