

Charities

Our first records of charities date from the will of John Unwyn of Clough in 1641, which left £20 to St. Martin's church for 'charitable purposes' showing that not all humanity was lost during the terrible strife of the civil war. In 1693, the will of William Thrush of Talke containing a legacy for purchase of bread for six poor inhabitants of Talke, although the poor often had to go to church and say prayers for their dead patron before they were allowed to collect the bread, ensuring that William would be remembered much longer than had he given it all out in a lump sum.

Later, it became common for rich villagers to leave money in their will to a charitable trust, for example William Lunt and others left a total of 60.1 (libres, old fashioned pounds) between 1752 and 1754. The trust would look after and invest the money and would then use the interest to give the poor bread at Talke chapel on Sunday. This particular trust had Rev. Mr. Cradock of Audley as one of the trustees. Land and property, such as Moss-House, were also given to these charitable trusts, and the rent paid by those who lived on these and church land was also given to the poor. Talk-o'-the-Hill Chapel received rents of £31 18s a year. Mrs. Dickens of Hollinswood also had a charity where 8 shillings worth of bread was distributed to the poor on Christmas day. These charities were vitally important as there was no state support, especially after the 1834 Poor law got rid of outdoor relief or money hand-outs, arguing that it made people lazy. Families had to enter the workhouse if they wished to receive bread, which meant that they would be separated from each other in cold, crowded dormitories and forced to do work that was hard, unpleasant and often pointless, to encourage them that any kind of life without help would be better than this. However, Kelly's directory of Talke states that £4 8s were collected each year for Talke charities, so hopefully not many villagers had to resort to this. We also have a record of a 1907 Lunt's charity- was this the William Lunt mentioned above or was it another school charity?

It seems that between 1819 and 1827 Talke also had a friendly society. This was where members paid into a common fund, which they could take out of in times of ill health or unemployment and avoid both charity and workhouse. In the 19thC the government believed in a laissez faire philosophy, that the best thing for both the economy and society was for the government to leave people alone, which benefited the powerful capitalists but left ordinary people without any form of national insurance or pensions until the liberal government 1905-1915 and without national health care until 1947. Self help went further; Talke colliery had its own accident relief fund in the 1870s.

