



THE EWELME TRUSTS

Anyone living in the vicinities of Marsh Gibbon in Buckinghamshire or Penton Mewsey, Weyhill and Appleshaw in Hampshire may have heard of the Ewelme Trusts, which were endowed with Estates in those areas by William and Alice de la Pole in 1437. She was the grand-daughter of Geoffrey Chaucer and he became the Duke of Suffolk shortly before he was killed whilst crossing the Dover Straits on his way to exile. Their principal residence was in Ewelme in south Oxfordshire.

What are the Ewelme Trusts?

Originally called “God’s House in Ewelme”, the Ewelme Trusts are now a group of three separate charities, each of which has very specific objectives strictly regulated by the Charity Commission. They were founded as a Chantry Foundation by William and Alice to provide almshouse accommodation in the village of Ewelme for “thirteen poor men and two priests”. They were endowed with land in Marsh Gibbon, Buckinghamshire, Ramridge, near Andover in Hampshire and Conock in Wiltshire. In addition to almshouses, the Trusts were originally required to provide for the free education of the children of their estate tenants. They have continued to meet those objectives ever since, adapting as necessary to meet contemporary social and educational needs and legislation.

What are the three charities?

God’s House in Ewelme (working title ‘Ewelme Almshouse Charity’) – Charity No 200581 maintains and manages the Charity’s three almshouses which in total consist of 23 separate flats. They are The Cloisters and Suffolk House in Ewelme, and Suffolk Court at Marsh Gibbon, near Bicester in Buckinghamshire.

The Ewelme Exhibition Endowment - Charity No 309240 provides educational grants and bursaries for the benefit of young people who are in need of financial assistance.

The Ewelme Elementary Educational Foundation - Charity No 309281 Owns the Grade 1 listed Ewelme School buildings and manages the structural and external maintenance.

What does God’s House own in Ewelme?

Under the gift of the original endowment ‘Gods House’ owns the historic Cloisters almshouses and School in Grade 1 listed buildings, their gardens and the surrounding Green. Five additional almshouses were subsequently built in the 1970s in the village on land purchased with Ewelme Manor in 1868. The Charity owns a further seven small properties in the village. The Charity has maintenance and repairing responsibilities for St John the Baptist’s Chapel, adjoining the Chancel of Ewelme Church, which was built by the de la Pole family and houses the magnificent cadaver tomb of Alice, Duchess of Suffolk.

What properties does the Charity own elsewhere?

‘God’s House’ owns Suffolk Court, the almshouses in Marsh Gibbon which were built in the 1980s , also a number of farms, residential and commercial properties in that village, and farms, land and commercial properties in the Ramridge area, near Andover in Wiltshire. The 28 stone-faced residential terrace properties owned in Marsh Gibbon were built for village families under the direction of Sir Henry Acland, who, as Regius Professor of Medicine in Oxford was the ex-officio Master of the Charity between 1858 and 1894. Sir Henry was particularly involved in public health issues and had been appalled at the dreadful living conditions of many villagers in the mid-19th Century.

How does the Charity generate its income?

From its residential and commercial rents from the above properties, from almshouse maintenance payments, and from its investments.

What does the God's House Charity use its income for?

For the heavily subsidized operation and maintenance of the almshouses in The Cloisters and Suffolk House in Ewelme and Suffolk Court in Marsh Gibbon.

For the maintenance and repair of St John's Chapel and the South Aisle of Ewelme Church.

For the maintenance of its many other residential, commercial and agricultural properties in Ewelme, Marsh Gibbon and Ramridge.

What else does the God's House Charity use its income for?

After meeting its other commitments as above, the God's House Charity's greatest expenditure is the provision of a substantial annual sum to its associated charity, the Ewelme Exhibition Endowment (£250,000 in 2019) for the provision of educational grants and bursaries to young people in need of financial assistance in Oxfordshire, Buckinghamshire, Berkshire, and the endowed estate areas in Hampshire and, formerly, in Wiltshire. The Exhibition Endowment is required to give preference to young people resident on the endowed estates and also provides sizeable annual grants to the schools in the areas of the those estates, namely the primary schools at Ewelme, Marsh Gibbon and Appleshaw (serving the Ramridge Estate). Primary schools in deprived communities within the areas of benefit are invited annually to apply for grants towards the enhancement and enrichment of educational opportunities for disadvantaged pupils.

God's House also provides the necessary funding to its second associated charity, the Ewelme Elementary Educational Foundation, which owns the historic Ewelme Primary School, for the ongoing maintenance of the external and internal structure of the ancient buildings and the attached Schoolmaster's House. In 1986 it funded the provision of the two new classrooms and, in recent years, internal alterations to the Master's Flat and the Schoolmaster's House to provide more teaching and administrative space to increase the very restricted area for school use.

The Charity has also been able to provide grants to local entities which provide assistance considered to be of specific benefit to the residents of the almshouses.

Are there any restrictions on what the Trusts can do?

Yes, the Trusts are bound to operate very specifically within the limits of their Governing Documents (Schemes). Their income must be used exclusively for (i) the management of almshouses for those in need, (ii) for the upkeep and maintenance of their originally endowed properties, (iii) for the provision of education as per the Exhibition Scheme, and (iv) for the upkeep of their other non-endowed properties from which the necessary income is derived to support these activities. It is not within the Charity's power to provide funding for any other purpose than the above.

How does the Charity manage its activities?

The God's House and Elementary Educational Foundation Charities are managed by a Board of Trustees. The ex officio Chairman (called The Master) of both is the Regius Professor of Medicine in Oxford – currently Professor Sir John Bell. The Rev Dr Patrick Gilday, the Rector of Benson with Ewelme, is also an ex officio Trustee. There are seven co-opted Trustees who are local to Ewelme and Marsh Gibbon. Trust Meetings are held quarterly at Christ Church, Oxford. Please see www.ewelmealmshousecharity.org for further information.

The separate Ewelme Exhibition Endowment is managed by a Board of Governors, four of which are appointed by the God's House Charity. For more details on the grants and bursaries that it provides, please see the website www.ewelme-education-awards.info.

James Oliver, Trust Manager, is responsible for all administrative and executive actions. The Charity's properties are managed by the Receiver (of Rents), Andrew Robson, senior partner of Sidleys of Oxford, who act as agents. The Trust Chaplain, the Rev Stephen Cousins, is Associate Priest in the Benson with Ewelme Benefice, residing in Ewelme and Mrs Dee Rosier is employed as the Almshouse Warden for both Ewelme and Marsh Gibbon (with Mrs Anne Critchley acting in her absence). Contact details are on the websites.