

Wander About Wednesday: Caring for our Elders in the Past - Almshouses Part 1

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Wander about Wednesday: Caring for our Elders in the Past - Almshouses Part 1, sharing our heritage from Bruce Castle Museum & Archive

As we salute each week our NHS workers and carers, we hear more stories about them putting those who are the most vulnerable and our elders at the heart of all they do.

The work of these exceptional people is all around us, in the midst of our neighbourhoods and in the buildings we might pass every day. Some of these buildings may be better known to us, but others might not and yet they have been based in our communities over the best part of two centuries or more - *still* caring for our elders or the most vulnerable today.

Let's put the spotlight on these often hidden stories, looking at the long history of caring and sense of community in our borough by offering safety and shelter through almshouses. Here's Part 1 of our tour of traditional almshouses - in Tottenham, brought to you by Valerie Crosby, Archives Assistant at Bruce Castle: 'It was considered a religious duty in medieval times to aid those in need. Religious houses cared for the old, the sick and the poor, providing social care at many levels, from supplying food and firewood, to medical assistance and end of life care.



All Hallows, Church, Tottenham – seen today

Unfortunately, Henry VIII failed to take any of this into consideration when he decided to dissolve the monasteries (1536-1541) and take the wealth for himself. This not only left the poor, sick and destitute without help, but the monks, friars and nuns who had been the carers of others were often reduced to poverty themselves.

This enormous deficiency in society was not addressed until the reign of Edward VI (1547-1553), when some hospitals and poor houses were founded. However, prosperous individuals began to realise that they could make a difference (or ensure their own 'salvation'?) by leaving bequests for the poor, and founding almshouses - a form of supported housing where poor men and women, probably with no families of their own, could feel secure. Some of these almshouses were founded in Tottenham, where many well-off people lived, but others were built in the City of London.

When the railways came along in the 19th century, many of these London institutions were forced to move out, to make way for the great railway stations centrally and growing urbanisation. Some moved to Tottenham, still not much more than a Middlesex village. When the only alternative for the poor and destitute was [the Workhouse](#), the relocation of these almshouses were very important for the area. Many are still here; some have changed their purpose; others are still providing support for those in need.

Without leaving your chair, come and take a look at a little of the fascinating history of almshouses in Tottenham. Along the way we will learn about some of the interesting characters who made Tottenham their home and left a legacy of aid for the poor – some of which continues to this day.

Alderman Staines' Almshouses

We start off our tour with these delightful [Grade II listed almshouses](#) tucked away behind Bruce Castle and the park, in Beaufoy Road. The area they occupy is set back off the road and is sometimes referred to as Beaufoy Square (if you click on the link above for Historic England's listing, you can see the map and the setting for these almshouses).



Two views of Beaufoy Square or Beaufoy Road almshouses, c.1970
From the collections and © Bruce Castle Museum (Haringey Archive and Museum Service)

Named after Alderman [William Staines](#), he actually had nothing to do with Tottenham! It was so-called because of his charity that was originally intended for the poor of the parish of [St Giles, Cripplegate](#) in the City. The almshouses he had founded there had to move out and away from the Barbican when they were sold off to make way for the Metropolitan railway. The houses in Beaufoy Road were built in 1868. The last residents of the almshouses were pensioned off in 1899 and the Cripplegate Foundation (who had taken over the charity) leased out the property, until it was acquired by the Borough of Haringey in 1965.

Crossing over Bruce Castle Park, past the Museum and arriving at the top of Bruce Grove, you will see on the east side of the road the open courtyard arrangement with gardens of the [Draper's Almshouses in Edmansons Close](#).

These picturesque cottages with their beautiful [Grade II listed chapel](#) complete with spire, occupy a large site on this side of Bruce Grove. The green space and garden in front of the chapel is full of gloriously blossoming trees in Spring, and the whole area exudes peace and tranquility.



View of the Drapers' almshouses, c.1905.

From the collections and © Bruce Castle Museum (Haringey Archive and Museum Service)

Built in 1869-70 on the site of a former large house called 'Elmslea', the almshouses replaced those at Bow, which had belonged to the Jolles, Pemel and [Edmanson Trusts](#). Most of the houses were occupied by those from Edmanson's charity for Sailmakers, and in the 1894 OS map (below) they are clearly called the Sailmakers' Almshouses.



Detail of 1894-6 OS map showing the Sailmakers' almshouses.

From the collections of Bruce Castle Museum (Haringey Archive and Museum Service)

We learn a little about one of the sailmakers who once lived there, from one of the oral histories in our collections - an interview in 1991 by **Walter Barnard** talking to his mother **Henrietta Barnard** (1897 – 1992):

“W: Tell me about the almshouses at the top end of Bruce Grove.

H: Oh yes. They are still there, I believe. Every Sunday morning my brother and I, and my cousin who was living with us (I think my sister must have been too young), used to walk through Bruce Castle Park to the Sailmakers' Almshouses and visit an old couple by the name of Parker. He was a sailmaker and all round the kitchen were big bills of the different lines he had made sails for. One in particular I can remember was called the Bibby Line. I don't know whether it is still in existence now. Anyway, he would say “On the field of Liberty stood the General. General who?” and we had to say “[Stonewall Jackson](#)”. I think he must have been in the [American] Civil War. Mrs. Parker always addressed him as ‘Parker’. “Parker likes a bit of ‘*spirrib*’ of pork”. **Spare rib**, actually. Afterwards she would go out into the garden and pick us all a buttonhole and we had a farthing each which would buy an ounce of sweets.

W: He used to dress like a sailor, did he?

H: Oh, yes. Parker was always in a blue jersey and a sailor hat. I never saw him without a sailor hat. A peaked cap. Whether or not he was bald we never knew because we never saw his head. And he liked a drop of rum. He was offered the Lodge, a little bit bigger house amongst the almshouses, it was detached, but Parker wouldn't take it because it was too much responsibility. They could have moved there but didn't. They came from Bermondsey which, of course, was quite near the docks and perhaps that's where he worked. “



The Master's Lodge, which was slightly bigger than the other almshouses, c. 1890.
From the collections and © Bruce Castle Museum (Haringey Archive and Museum Service)

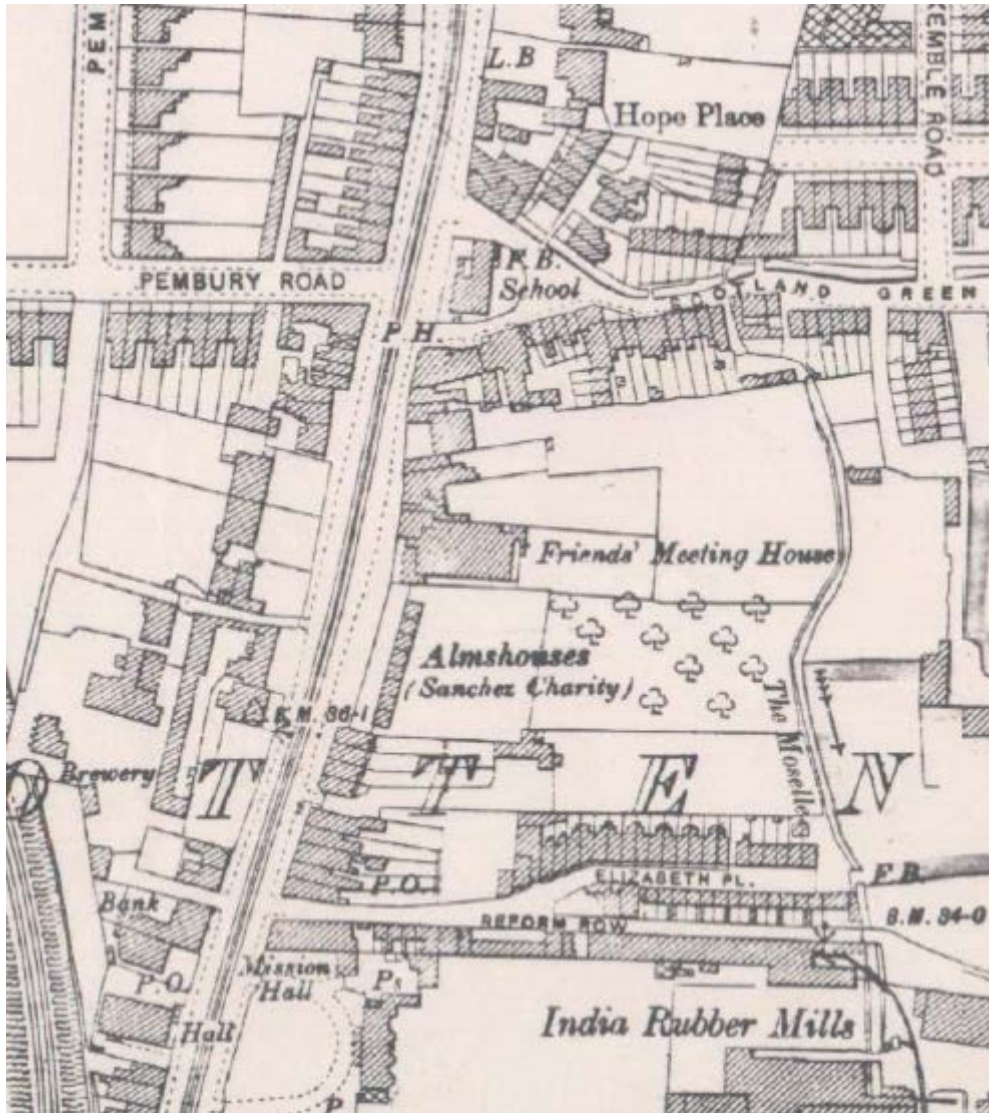
The complex is known today as Edmanson's Close. In the 1970s there were plans to demolish these pretty cottages but, following protests from local people, they were saved and renovated. A few extra ones were built, sensitively copying the same style, to bridge the gap between the cottages on the right side of the green and the Master's Lodge.

The Drapers' Company had already built a college and almshouses in the High Road in the 1860s which we will visit later in our virtual walk.



A Civil Defence warden's post, annexe and trench shelter in the gardens of the Drapers' almshouses in 1945. From the collections and © Bruce Castle Museum (Haringey Archive and Museum Service)

Walking down the rest of Bruce Grove, turn left at the junction where Bruce Grove meets the High Road. Proceed north and cross to the east side of the High Road. Crossing Reform Row, just before Scotland Green, we reach the site of the former **Sanchez Almshouses**.



Detail of 1894-6 OS map showing Sanchez almshouses on Tottenham High Road.
From the collections of Bruce Castle Museum (Haringey Archive and Museum Service)

Balthazar Sanchez was one of the most intriguing of Tottenham's residents. A Spaniard, born in the Moorish city of Jerez, he travelled to England in July 1554 with Philip II of Spain, who came to marry Queen Mary I. Balthazar was his '[comfit-maker](#)' or confectioner - an art at which he excelled. Once in London he seems to have decided he preferred living here. He stayed here when Philip returned to Europe, becoming a Protestant and buying the estate of Stone Leas in Tottenham.

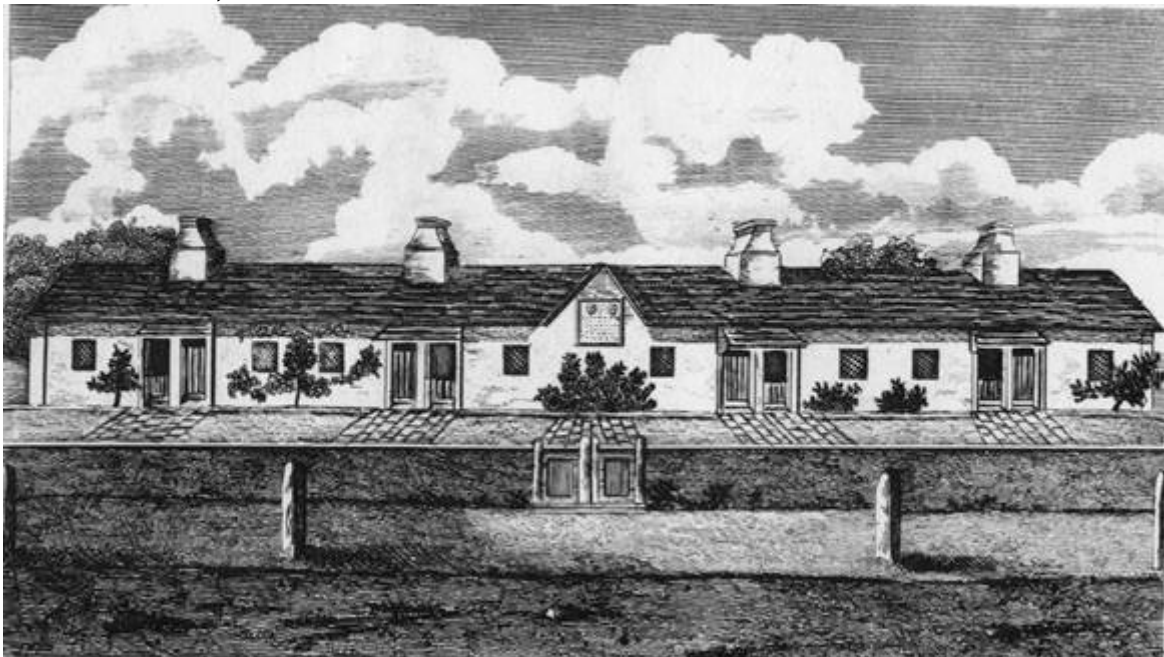
Sanchez owned a large and magnificent house on the east side of the High Road, almost opposite the lane which is now Bruce Grove. For years that lane was called George & Vulture Walk, after the name of the house. The house certainly became an inn known as the George & Vulture (see picture below) and it is possible that Sanchez himself ran an inn on the premises.



19th century artist's view of the George & Vulture Inn

From the collections and © Bruce Castle Museum (Haringey Archive and Museum Service)

A philanthropic man, Sanchez left money in his Will to provide dowries for poor girls and apprenticeships for young men. He also set aside part of his estate to build almshouses for eight poor men and women in Tottenham, and these were completed in 1600, before Sanchez's death in 1602.



From the collections and © Bruce Castle Museum (Haringey Archive and Museum Service)

The almshouses (as seen in the picture above) were single room tenements, brick built, each with a garden, and an inscription on a stone plaque. The plaque survives today and can be seen on the wall in Bruce Castle Museum's courtyard. The dwellings continued, with additional bequests from local benefactors, until the early 20th century.



The Tudor Sanchez almshouses, seen in a very poor state c.1907.

From the collections and © Bruce Castle Museum (Haringey Archive and Museum Service)

Re-building was discussed in 1868 as the buildings were damp and inconvenient, due to the raising of the road level. The sale of the buildings was agreed in 1919. In 1925 they were demolished to make way for Burgess's department store, whose building was named Sanchez House (as seen in the photograph of the store below). The Aldi supermarket, a gym and a row of small shops stand on the site today.



Burgess's Stores on Tottenham High Road, 1920s

From the collections and © Bruce Castle Museum (Haringey Archive and Museum Service)

From this point, we turn round and walk south down Tottenham High Road, past Asda, the site of Sanchez's George & Vulture Inn (poor Sanchez – both his house and the almshouses have been replaced by supermarkets and his name has been all but forgotten) until we reach Stoneleigh South, and the former site of the next set of old almshouses.

The Pound Almshouses, previously Pheasaunt's Almshouses

Three tenements (a house divided into separate, rented homes) were built on the east side of the churchyard of All Hallows church, founded by George Henningham (d. 1536). He lived at the Black House in Tottenham High Road (where Northumberland Row now stands, opposite White Hart Lane). He was referred to as '....friend and servant of King Henry VIII' and supplied horses to the court. Henry often stayed at the Black House and presumably Henningham was wealthy, although not a nobleman or a knight.

The Vicar of Tottenham, [William Bedwell](#), in his History of Tottenham says that the houses were built by a Mr Pheasaunt (Henningham's daughter Margaret married Jasper Pheasaunt). Over the years various bequests from locals were given to the almshouses.

At the turn of the 18th century, the [2nd Lord Coleraine of Bruce Castle](#) complained that one of the tenements had become a place for brewing and selling beer! In the mid-1740s the houses were demolished on the orders of the Vestry – the local authority at the time – and they were re-built on the east side of the High Road, between Stoneleigh South and the pound (where stray horses and cattle were taken for safe-keeping). [Priscilla Wakefield's](#) School of Industry for Girls was later built next door (it became known as the Green School and later [Holy Trinity Primary School](#)). You can see Priscilla's original school building in the photograph below, to the left of the picture neighbouring the almshouses.



View of the Pound almshouses, c. 1920

From the collections and © Bruce Castle Museum (Haringey Archive and Museum Service)



View taken from Robinson's *History of Tottenham* (1818)

From the collections and © Bruce Castle Museum (Haringey Archive and Museum Service)

The houses became known as the Pound Almshouses and were increased to seven dwellings in 1847. However, by 1893 the houses were cramped, and the inmates chose to move to Reynardson's Almshouses rather than receive increased pensions. The property was then sold in 1925.

We continue to walk south down the High Road, and cross over the road, passing the former Palace Theatre, and onto our next site, where part of the complex still stands.

The Drapers' College & Almshouses

The Drapers' College for boys opened in 1862 on land formerly occupied by a girls' private school called The Elms. The college itself was housed in the central building, and the almshouses formed two sides of a square in front of it, as can be seen in the photograph below – with two of its Victorian residents standing at their door.



Drapers' College & almshouses at the High Cross, seen c.1880-90.

From the collections and © Bruce Castle Museum (Haringey Archive and Museum Service)

The almshouses were demolished later, and the Church Schools Company established the High School for Girls in 1885. In 1887 the Drapers' Company took over the school, which they ran as a day school with over 100 pupils. It was taken over by Middlesex County Council, who purchased the building in 1921.

The modern Felvus Hall building was erected close to the High Road in 1926, named after the long-serving headmistress Miss Felvus. The new building contained a large hall with a stage, a full sized organ, plus two galleries above for additional seating, and both floors were equipped with cookery rooms and modern science laboratories - many pupils went on to study scientific subjects at university. Five hundred pupils were on the roll in 1949. The school amalgamated with Down Lane Girls plus girls from Risley Secondary Modern to form High Cross School in 1967. The school closed in the later 1980s. The main building has since been sensitively converted into apartments as [Old School Court on Drapers' Road](#) (scroll down through the link to see the buildings today), and the Felvus Hall building is now a church.

Opposite Old School Court on the east side of the High Road we find [Reynardson's Court](#), a Homes for Haringey block of flats today. This was once the site of more almshouses, bearing the name Reynardson.



View north west over the site of the former Reynardson's almshouses, looking towards the Tottenham Palace Theatre, during the Second World War.

From the collections and © Bruce Castle Museum (Haringey Archive and Museum Service)

[Sir Abraham Reynardson](#), (b. 1590), was a very wealthy member of the [Merchant Taylors' Company](#) in the City of London. A Freeman of the City in 1618, and Master of the Company in 1640, he was also a member of the [Levant Company](#), trading with the Ottoman Empire, and a Governor of the [East India Company](#). Reynardson lived in a large house on Philip Lane, and Nicholas was one of his sons.

Reynardson's Almshouses

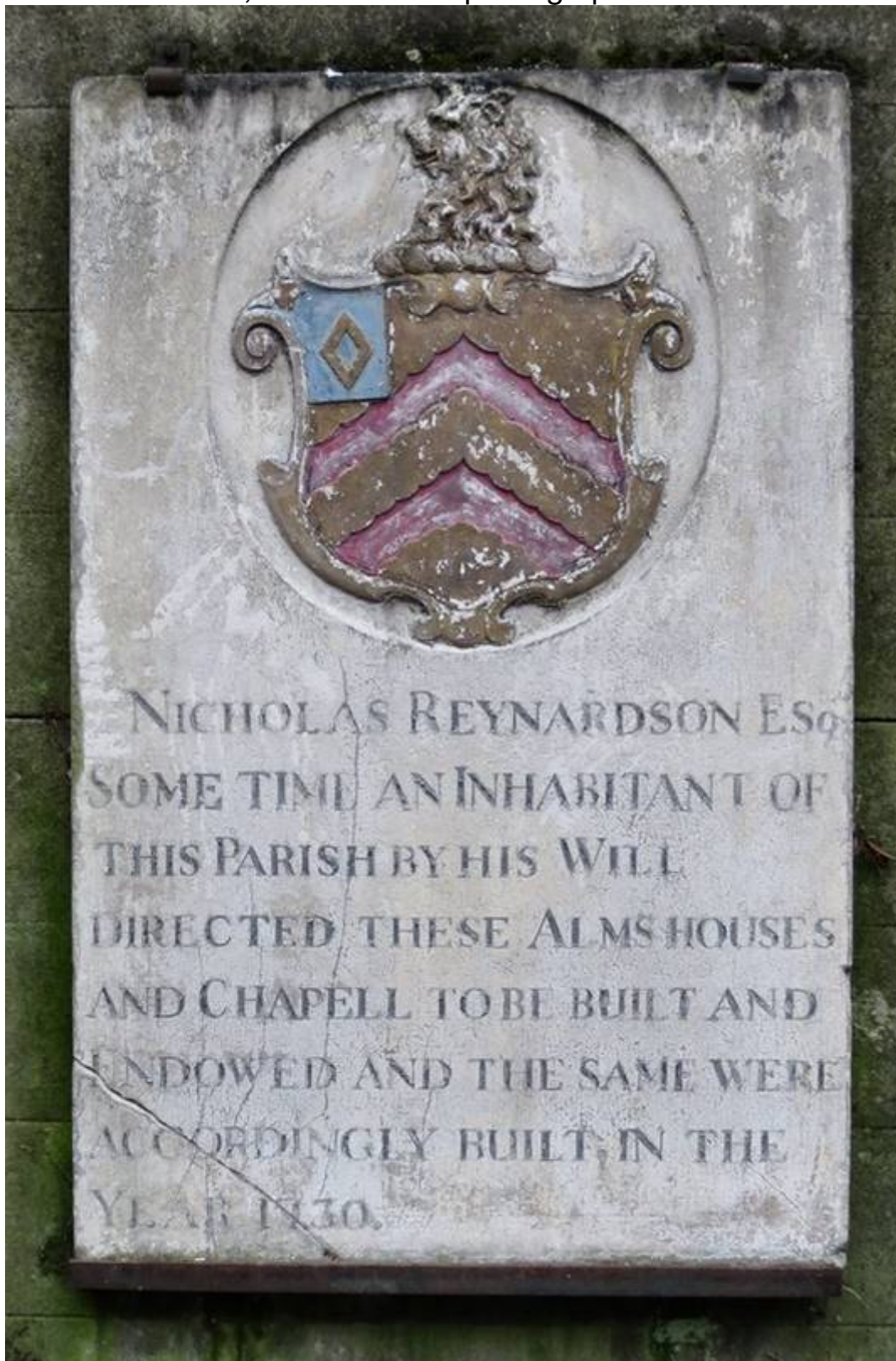
These almshouses were founded here under the terms of the [Will of Nicholas Reynardson \(1685\)](#) and were to be built and maintained with £2,000 from his estate. A central chapel was also provided, for daily prayers and for the instruction of 20 poor children.



Pen and ink drawing of the Reynardson's Almshouses by topographical artist [Dennis Flanders](#), drawn in October 1939. © The estate of the artist.

From the collections of Bruce Castle Museum (Haringey Archive and Museum Service).

Each alms-person was to receive £4 per year in quarterly payments, and a black gown each year. The houses were opened next to the Free Grammar School in 1737 for eight people, and offered each person a two-storey apartment. An inscription on a tablet over the chapel doorway detailed the founder. This plaque, like the one from the Sanchez almshouses, may be seen in the Museum courtyard at Bruce Castle, as seen in the photograph below.



From the collections and © Bruce Castle Museum (Haringey Archive and Museum Service)

Many rich people in the district left money to these almshouses. They were the best endowed in Tottenham.

The sale of the almshouses was authorised in 1938 but an auction in 1939 produced no buyers. The land was requisitioned for allotments and a surface air raid shelter amongst other things during the Second War. The site was finally sold in 1951. Today's block of flats was built on the site in the 1950s.

Now we cross to the west side of the High Road again, walk south to Philip Lane and make a short detour along the north side of Philip Lane to the west side of the railway line and [Forster's Cottages](#).

Forster's Cottages

These sweet little cottages [at 88 – 94 Philip Lane](#) were built in 1860, according to the inscription on the gable, on land enclosed from an orchard.



The Forster Cottages, taken from a stereoscopic view, c.1880-1890.

From the collections and © Bruce Castle Museum (Haringey Archive and Museum Service)

Two years later the well-known local Quaker [Josiah Forster](#) and his wife established the Trust, and conveyed the four cottages and £500 worth of stock to [William Forster MP](#) and others belonging to the Tottenham Quaker Monthly Meeting. The Trustees maintained the cottages and chose the residents from inhabitants of Tottenham. Preference was given to widows and spinsters over 55 (they did not have to be Quakers). Although expected to have some funds of their own, they were entitled to half a ton of coal per year.

You can read more about the history of the Quakers and other philanthropic activities in Tottenham in Rita Collie's '[Quakers of Tottenham](#)', published by the [Edmonton Hundred Historical Society](#).

The Forster Cottages have been repaired and renovated several times, the last in 2016, when the rear gardens were used to build modern bathrooms. The front gardens are well maintained and the effect is as delightful as it must have been in the 1860s.



The Forster Cottages as seen in 1907.

From the collections and © Bruce Castle Museum (Haringey Archive and Museum Service)

Our last set of almshouses lie further south, in [Vартry Road, N15](#).

The Aged Pilgrim's Friend Society Home

The Aged Pilgrim's Friend Society was founded in 1807 out of concern for the welfare of the '.....aged and infirm Christian poor.' They provided pensions and visited the elderly, and later developed housing and care schemes for older people. This particular building was founded and endowed in 1883 by Sarah Ward, as an engraved tablet on the building states:

*'The Aged Pilgrim's Friend Society Home,
built & endowed by Miss Sarah Ward 1883'*



The almshouses – 'The Aged Pilgrim's Home', c. 1905

From the collections and © Bruce Castle Museum (Haringey Archive and Museum Service)

Jenny Brown in her highly-recommended book '[Front Door To the Past](#)' (2016) extensively researched the history of her house, moving onto the neighbouring houses in Vartry Road in N15. Her fantastic work has drawn together so many sources for understanding the history of these almshouses here at [81 Vartry Road](#), N15.

From Jenny we learn that Sarah Ward was in her 80s and in poor health when she decided to take on the building of these almshouses. She lived not far away in Sydney Place, Stamford Hill and was able to oversee the work herself. She opened the almshouses in 1883; and passed away in January 1885. As Jenny notes, it would seem that no expense was spared by Sarah. The architect was William Henry Salisbury Gilbert. The building was faced with Portland Stone and red bricks from outside the area and the back was the more traditional yellow stock bricks of London. When it was built, it overlooked the original iron church of St John's and the fields nearby.

Pensioners received 10 guineas a year from the endowment and each resident had two rooms. If there were sisters being housed they would share rooms. There was a warden to look after them all.



The almshouses c. 1905

From the collections and © Bruce Castle Museum (Haringey Archive and Museum Service)

Although the Society sold the almshouse buildings to developers in the 1980s for apartments, the Society continues as the [Pilgrim's Friend Society](#), still providing care to many throughout the country.

Our tour of traditional almshouses in Tottenham is now complete. It is surprising how many of these institutions have survived, at least in physical form, adding character and interest to our streetscape today.'

Until tomorrow, take care and stay well
Best wishes from us all at Bruce Castle

Valerie Crosby
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Deborah Hedgecock
Curator

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