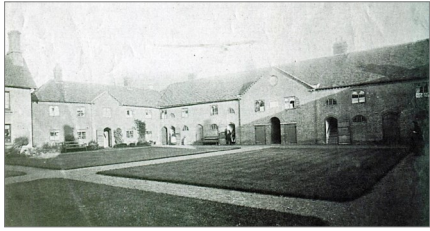


HISTORY OF OUR ALMSHOUSES



Almshouses Park Lane (Prime's Close) 1782–1950
(Photo ©Saffron Walden Museum)

There are approximately 5000 almshouses in England, many dating from medieval times and each with its own set of rules and regulations, as laid down by the founders (often monastic orders). The quirkiest that we know of is in Nantwich, where the founder Edmund Wright ruled that preference be given to local candidates with the name Wright!

Our own Almshouses began in 1400 when the Guild of Our Lady of Pity was established in Saffron

Walden by Charter from Henry VI following a bequest of £40 from John and Eleanor Butler. The purpose of the Guild was to provide Almshouses for “the succour and sustenance of XIII poor men such as be lame, crooked, blind, bed ridden, and most in need”. Many local benefactors gave gifts of land and money, as well as the famous Mazer Bowl, donated by the Butler’s daughter, and later used by Samuel Pepys when he visited the Almshouses.

In 1547 Edward VI decreed that all lands and estates should become his property, but, after considerable negotiation the King sold the Almshouse property to either John Smyth, or to his elder son, Sir Thomas Smyth. A second son, also John Smyth, succeeded in negotiating further with the King which resulted, in 1549, in the granting of a charter to set up what was the first Town Council, which gave many rights to the town. This charter also gave the right to administer and maintain the Almshouses and the Grammar School [situated in Castle Street], provided they included ‘Edward VI’ in their titles.

In 1694 new Almshouses were built between what is now Park Lane and the Slade, but by 1782 some of these tenements had become so dilapidated that they had to be pulled down and replaced (shown above). However, the new buildings faced north, were sunless and provided inadequate accommodation, so the Trustees felt that the only solution was to build a new Almshouse on the Almshouse Meadow to the north of the Slade.

In 1834 this new, main Almshouse building (front cover top), providing homes for 30 old people, was completed at a cost of £5,000. In 1840 the eastern wing on this main site (front cover centre) was built by Wyatt George Gibson and his family, who also provided the Almshouses in Park Lane (now 1, 1a and 9, 9a Prime’s Close) in 1847 (shown on page 3). The block at the western end of the main site was added in 1881 by George Stacey Gibson who, in the same year, paid for the demolition of two dilapidated cottages in Freshwell Street, owned by the Trustees, and erected two semi-detached tenements similar to the ones in Park Lane.

A bequest from The Revd Joseph Prime, who died in 1942, facilitated the building of the bungalows in Prime’s Close in 1950, once the war was over. It is these buildings, now beset with problems, that we are planning to redevelop as homes fit for 21st-century living.

ALMHOUSE TALKS

If your local organisation would be interested in having a free talk about the Almshouses please contact the Estate Officer, as shown below.

T: 01799 513914 E: estate@swalmshouses.org W: swalmshouses.org

Member of the Almshouse Association: www.almshouses.org



King Edward VI & Reverend Joseph Prime Almshouses, Saffron Walden



GENERAL INFORMATION AND HOW TO APPLY

**Affordable homes
for local people
of modest means**



WHAT ARE THE ALMSHOUSES?

King Edward VI (Saffron Walden) Almshouses consist of 43 dwellings in Abbey Lane and Prime's Close, a mixture of flats and bungalows, and four flats in Freshwell Street, two of which are suitable for mobility-impaired occupants. Our Almshouses have a long history going back to their foundation in 1400 and continue to offer housing to residents of the "Old Borough of Saffron Walden", who are "of good character" but whose financial situation makes it impossible to find affordable housing.

Historically, residents were elderly and retired. In the 21st century, however, our residents are a mix of ages, mostly retired but many younger and in employment, and we take single people, couples and, occasionally, families.

For older people we provide a home for life, whereas for our younger residents being granted an almshouse is usually a temporary bridge to help get back on track and a stepping stone to the next stage of their life.

GENERAL INFORMATION

King Edward VI Almshouses is a charity administered, in accordance with its Charity Commission Scheme, by a board of volunteer Trustee/Directors, assisted by the Estate Officer who is responsible for the day-to-day management of the dwellings, and the Business Officer who deals with financial matters.

Legally, residents are beneficiaries of the Charity, not tenants, and they pay a Maintenance Contribution (MC) rather than rent. The MC covers payment for the dwelling and also contributes to the cost of running the Almshouses including:

- Repairs and maintenance
- Administration
- Insurance of buildings (but not contents)
- Upkeep of the grounds
- Cleaning of communal areas

There is an additional service charge for mains water supply.



Applicants on a low income may be entitled to Universal Credit or Housing Benefit to help with housing costs and are encouraged to apply for this. For further information about Benefits, and an application form, contact Uttlesford District Council (call 01799 510510 or go to www.uttlesford.gov.uk/benefits). Uttlesford Citizens Advice can also provide benefits information.

As a guide, from May 2022 the Maintenance Contribution is £606.95 per month for a one-bedroom unit and £698.02 for a two-bedroom, plus a water charge. Gas, electricity, telephone/broadband/TV and Council Tax are the responsibility of each individual resident. MC rates are reviewed annually.

The Almshouses, which are situated within easy walk of Saffron Walden town centre, are not sheltered accommodation and all residents must be able to live independently (with help from family and/or Social Services if necessary).

Residents can apply for a designated parking space, for which there is an annual charge, but there are only a few of these as parking on-site is limited. However, residents are eligible for a parking permit in nearby Swan Meadow at approximately the same cost as residents' parking.

HOW TO APPLY

Vacancies are advertised in the local papers, on the Almshouses website, and on our social media. There is also a Vacancy Alert sign-up form on our website. For each vacancy a shortlist of applicants most closely fitting the qualifying criteria is drawn up, followed by interviews. The available dwelling is assigned to the most appropriate applicant, subject to satisfactory references and credit checks. The Charity does not hold a waiting list as such, but suitable applicants who are unsuccessful will be contacted when further vacancies arise.