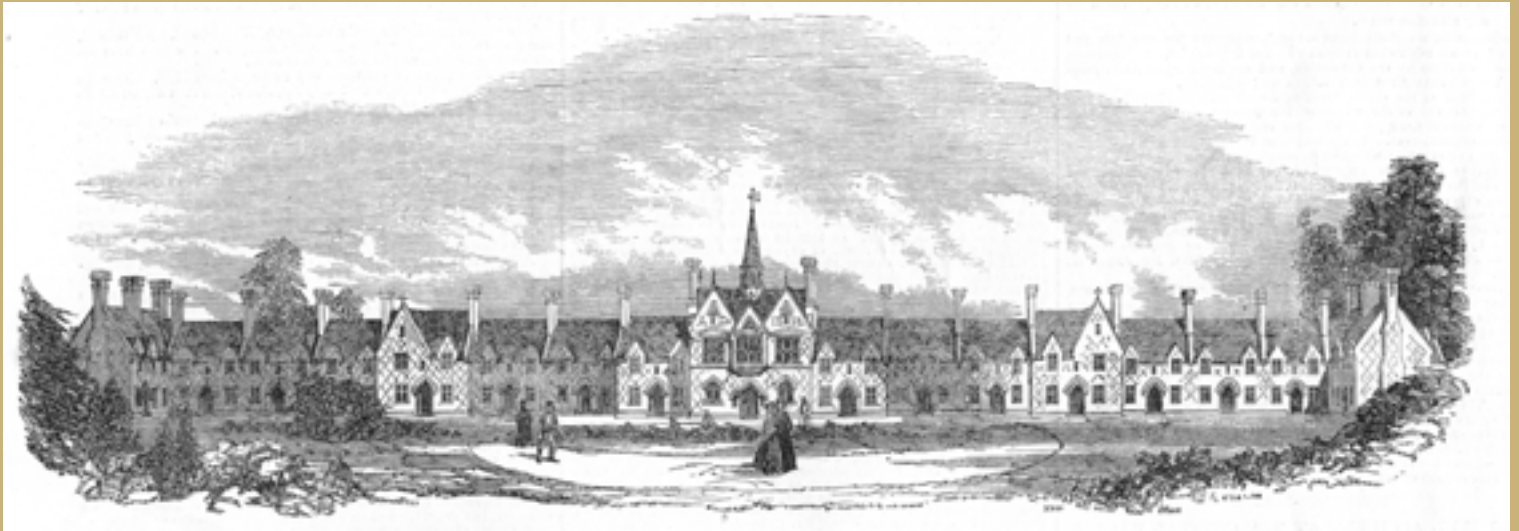


1 The founding fathers & the first St Pancras almshouses



Original Almshouses engraving, Wilkin Street, 1853



Original St Pancras Almshouses

Dr Fraser's house in 1850



Angela Burdett-Coutts, c.1840



St Pancras Almshouses Annual Report, 1851

First meeting

Highlighted on the map of 1849 is Oakley Square, near Mornington Crescent in Camden Town. This is where a Dr Donald Fraser lived, and where the story of the St Pancras Almshouses begins. Dr Fraser, a Scot born in Edinburgh, was a member of the Royal College of Physicians and, more importantly for the poor of the parish, the senior churchwarden of St Pancras church. At his home, in 1850, he brought together for their first meeting a group of local worthies. Their philanthropic purpose was to found:

Almshouses for about one hundred of those decayed, but respectable parishioners who, at the close of lives spent in arduous but unsuccessful struggles for maintenance, find themselves reduced to the alternative of sinking want or privation or of accepting the painful and humiliating position of inmates of the workhouse.

The St Pancras Almshouses Committee was formed as a 'parochial institution' and the Marquis of Camden elected as its President.

Annual Report

£1,500 was collected, and in the following year the names of the donors were recorded in the Charity's first Annual Report. A parcel of freehold land directly behind the Governesses' Asylum in Prince of Wales Road was chosen as the site for the St Pancras Almshouses.

On the 1849 map this area is shown as being on the fringes of the Middlesex forest, and previously used as pasture. The names of the original Managing Committee, Honorary Counsel and Secretary are recorded above.

Location

£1,000 was paid for the land, which stretched from the north side of what is now Wilkin Street to the current Weedington Road and Grafton Road. At the time there would have been clear views to Hampstead and Highgate, and the ancient trees of Kenwood.

Donors

The Duchess of Kent, the Duchess of Buccleuch, and the Earls of Dartmouth and Mansfield all contributed to the fund needed to build on the chosen site. Among 'significant donors' were Lady Burdett-Coutts and Henry Baker Esq. Angela Burdett-Coutts later became a Baroness in her own right in recognition of her great charitable works, and she continued in her commitment to the Almshouses long enough to be given the title 'Lady Patroness'. Sir Horatio Regnard became another important benefactor later in the Almshouses' history when he left a portion of his estate to the Charity in his Will (see portrait of Sir Horatio).

Design

The first St Pancras Almshouses were designed by Mr James K Colling and built by Messrs Hopkins and Roberts of Islington. There were 18 houses arranged on either side of a central building with accommodation for 100 residents. They moved into their new home in 1852, but they were not to find shelter there for long.

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St Pancras parish map, 1849