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The Edward Jeggins Trust A Brief History and Introduction

By Revd Robert Gill

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The name Edward Jeggins, together with his eponymous Trust, will probably be familiar to many members and friends of the New Church here in Great Britain. Few though will know much about the man or indeed the constitution and operation of his Trust. Its Trustees, as appointed and directed by Edward Jeggins's will, have "absolute and uncontrolled discretion" in the administration of the Trust and its funds. The Trustees therefore have no legal obligation to report to anyone other than the Charity Commission, to which body a report is submitted annually. This means that, even though there is a close association between them, the General Conference has no authority over the Trust and its Trustees. The Trust does however, as a matter of courtesy, make a short report to Conference each year. The purpose of this article is to expand on those short annual reports and provide some greater detail of the Trust and its work.

Edward Jeggins was born in 1801, at Hurley in Berkshire. He died, aged 80, on the 23rd March 1881. He was a bachelor residing at Bentley House, East Molesey, Surrey, where he had lived for many years. East Molesey is situated on the south bank of the Thames, across the river from Hampton Court. The 1871 Census lists Edward Jeggins as a retired schoolmaster and landowner. In 1881 his estate was valued at £35,000, of which the approximate equivalent today is £4,730,000. As to the rest of the Jeggins family, we know that he had two brothers, Charles and Samuel Jeggins. Samuel was married to Jane Amelia Ball whose, sister Emma Ball, is remembered in Birmingham in connection with the Emma Ball and Rollason almshouses, built adjacent to the Wretham Road church and later rebuilt on the Oaklands site. Edward also had a brother-in-law, John Kell, which means that, in addition to his two brothers, he must have had at least one sister.

In his will Edward gave instructions that his funeral should be *"in the plainest form possible"*. This rather suggests that he was a man of humble spirit, concerned less about his own reputation and more about the good uses to which his fortune could be applied. He made a number of financial bequests to his housekeeper, Sarah Tattersfield, relatives and friends. He also bequeathed all his personal and household effects to his housekeeper, together with an annual annuity and life rent of his property, Bentley House. The residue of his estate was then left to two New Church ministers, the Revd Dr Jonathan Bayley and the Revd John Presland, *"To be held by them in trust for such one or more of the several Societies or Congregations of the New Christian Church (Swedenborgian) worshipping in Great Britain.....for the benefit of each such Society or Congregation as the Revd Dr Jonathan Bayley and the Revd John Presland shall in their absolute and uncontrolled discretion think proper."* Thus was The Edward Jeggins Trust first formed.

There can be little doubt, from what we have already learned, that Edward Jeggins was by conviction a Swedenborgian. He had close friendships with the two aforementioned New Church ministers, the Revd Dr Jonathan Bayley and the Revd John Presland. Furthermore, his will reveals a genuine concern for the welfare of the "Societies or Congregations of the New Christian Church (Swedenborgian) worshipping in Great Britain." Despite all this, however, his relationship with The General Conference of the New Church remains a grey area. There is no record of him ever having attended a Conference Annual Meeting and there is some hearsay evidence to suggest that he was wary of any close association with the national church. Certainly his will was drawn up in such a way as to ensure that the Conference could not have any control whatsoever over his Trust Fund.

Although Edward Jeggins never attended the Conference Annual Meeting, in the 1881 Conference Year Book, minute 82 contains the following summary from the transactions of the Annual Meeting of that year:-

"The President having stated in his Report that the late Edward Jeggins Esq., of Bentley House, East Molesey, Surrey, by his will, dated January 1st, 1881, had bequeathed considerable property in trust to the Revd J Bayley and himself, which, subject to the life interest of the two sisters-in-

*law of the testator, will eventually be applied to the uses of the New-Church, - **Resolved**, That this Conference acknowledges with gratitude the overruling care of Divine Providence in disposing the heart of the late Mr Jeggins to provide for the wants of the New Church; and requests the President to forward a copy of this Resolution, with the expression of its respectful sympathy, to Mrs Charles Jeggins and Mrs Samuel Jeggins."*

Edward Jeggins also made provision for the continuation of the Trust after the death of the Reverends Bayley and Presland. Those first two Trustees, and all who succeeded them, were given the absolute authority to choose and appoint additional Trustees. This provision has ensured the continuation of the work of the Trust right down to the present day. The Jeggins will gives clear instructions that any new Trustee "*shall be a Minister of the New Christian Church*". A further condition requires Trustees to be resident in Great Britain and this has sometimes had unforeseen consequences as, for example, was the case in 1970 when the Revd Harry Hilton had to resign as a Jeggins Trustee when taking up the pastorate of the Jersey Society.

Over the one hundred and forty years of the Trust's history a total of twenty-four ordained Ministers have served in the role of Trustee. At no time has there ever been less than two Trustees and more usually there have been three or even four. At the present time, following recent appointments, there are four, namely: Revd Robert Gill, Revd Gillian Gordon, Revd Helen Brown and Revd Jack Dunion. Trustees receive no remuneration, but are personally responsible for the assets of the Trust. This being so, every decision or action requires the unanimous approval of all the Trustees, thus effectively giving the right of veto to each one. In addition to the Trustees on some occasions a lay person has served as Secretary. A notable case in point was Miss Barbara Nicholls MBE who served in this role for twenty years between 1989 and 2009. At the present time, however, the senior Trustee acts as Secretary.

The Trust does not engage in any fund-raising activities nor does it solicit donations. As long ago as 1906, the Trustees took the decision to keep the capital inherited from Edward Jeggins intact and to finance the work of the Trust solely from the income generated by that capital. This remains the policy of the present Trustees although, under the terms of the will, they have absolute freedom to change it. The Trustees keep financial accounts which are audited annually by an independent lay person. The Trustees have always sought to manage the funds with prudence; this has meant living within annual income in order to protect the invested capital. Within these constraints the Trust approves the payment of financial grants to Societies seeking help, always providing that the Trustees are satisfied that the application meets the criteria set by the Trust.

What are those criteria? In the terms of Edward Jeggins's will, anything that "*benefits the Societies or Congregations of the New Church (Swedenborgian)*" at the discretion of the Trustees. In addition, in the brief we have from the Charity Commission, our grants must be shown to be for the "*public benefit*". Balancing these two criteria requires the Trustees to make careful judgments about what can and cannot be supported. Traditionally,

therefore, the Trust does not give financial support towards day-to-day running expenses. It does, however, support the costs of renovation, repair, or new-build of church-owned properties. It also supports work that is essential for public safety, such as making safe boundary walls, felling trees that are dangerous, and repairing potholes in driveways or car parks. The purchase or replacement of essential equipment, such as boilers, cookers, new seating and music systems are also recognised as meeting the criteria. In order to encourage local initiative, the Trust never makes grants covering 100% of the costs. It does, however, seek to make a substantial contribution. This has often been on a “pound-for-pound” basis, with the Trust matching the sum raised by the local Congregation. However, each application is judged on its own merits and in accordance with local circumstances.

Applications for such grants are welcomed by the Trust. An informal approach is a good way of beginning so that the Trustees are alerted to a possible application and can give helpful advice. Once a formal application is submitted it should give a detailed summary of the work needed and be accompanied by at least two written quotations from independent tradesmen. A copy of the Congregation’s most recent accounts is also required as the Trust needs to assess what contribution can be realistically expected from the local members. The Trustees are anxious, wherever possible, to make grants of sufficient size to ensure that Congregations are not putting their own finances under too great a strain. This can only be done once the state of the local finances is fully known.

The past year has been a busy but difficult one for Jeggins Trust due largely to factors beyond our control. For a period of eight months the Trust was unable to function with any degree of normality. The first factor in this was a significant change of personnel, with a previous Trustee resigning and two new Trustees coming on board. There is a lot of legal paperwork required to bring these changes into effect and we all know what a length of time solicitors take to complete such business. Far worse, however, has been the trouble we have had with our high street bank. The Trust had held accounts with the same well-known bank for thirty-three years. Out of the blue, that bank informed the Trust that it would be closing our accounts in six-month’s time. Having landed that bombshell, it then proceeded to obstruct us at every turn as we tried to put a change of bank into effect. Endless paperwork was demanded, correspondence was always sent to the wrong address, each time we complied with the bank’s demands for yet more paperwork they found another reason to block us. At no point in the eight months were we able to speak to a human being. It was only when we reported matters to the Charity Commission that the bank finally issued cheques to return the Trust’s funds to us.

By this time, steps had already been taken to set up an account with a new bank. This in itself was a complex process requiring much form-filling and taking about ten weeks to be approved. However, the new account was opened in August 2022 and the Trust’s funds were deposited in it in September. At long last Jeggins Trust is viable once more; its constitution is in good order, its funds are available for use, and its Trustees are in good heart. We are delighted that after once hundred and forty years we continue to serve the

New Church in Great Britain. Enquiries and applications, from Societies of the New Church, for financial assistance are welcomed and can be made via the Senior Trustee, Revd Robert Gill. However, any of the Trustees are happy to have a preliminary talk.

We hope that this brief summary of the Trust and its work will help to dispel some of the ignorance that surrounds it. With the number of New Church Societies in Great Britain in steep decline it is becoming ever more urgent that the Trust should give some thought as to how it might be of use in the future. The Trustees are likely to be discussing, sooner rather than later, the possibilities for expanding the uses of the Trust but this will require careful thought as we have a duty to act in accordance with the terms of Edward Jeggins's will. In the meantime we continue to serve as we have always done. Finally, just as the members of Conference attending the 1881 Conference Annual Meeting did, today's Trustees place on record their deep appreciation of our benefactor's generosity.

Revd Robert A Gill (Senior Trustee)

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