**PETER LATHOM’S CHARITY**

Historical research appears to show that Peter Lathom of Bispham was born in 1651, the son of William Lathom of Haigh, and died in October 1701 unmarried and with no apparent heirs. Of the present day Charities for the county of Lancashire, one of the most widely operative, and to have retained its original identity, is that known after its founder as Peter Lathom's Charity.

Growing up during some of the most disturbed periods of English history he saw the confiscation of the Parbold, Wrightington and Allerton estates; he witnessed the extremes of poverty into which this confiscation had thrown the Lathom family and he saw some of them practically worthless both as to goods and lands, constantly harried by religious and civil strife.

Although little is known of the founder’s life and much is shrouded in a degree of mystery, Peter Lathom's choice of Executors - 6 described as gentlemen and only two as ‘husbandmen’ appears testament to the fact that he had made his mark in society and amassed a considerable estate by the time of his death, represented in the main by land, no doubt acquired through shrewd investment of his profits.

The main thrust of Peter Lathom’s Will was to direct his Executors to apply the rents and profits from land and premises which he owned at the date of his death situated inter alia in Mawdesley Bispham Lathom Burscough Wrightington and Parbold for the benefit of the poor in specified townships in West Lancashire. The current Scheme of the Charity specifies the areas of benefit as **Ulnes Walton, Eccleston, Newburgh, Lathom, Welch Whittle, Heskin, Wrightington, Dalton, Parbold, Bispham, Mawdesley, Skelmersdale, Bickerstaffe, Ormskirk, Scarisbrick, Rufford, Croston and Burscough.**

Interestingly in a report of the Charity Commissioners of 1828 distributions to the poor, in accordance with the terms of Peter Lathom's will made between 1826 and 1827 were set out in some detail and include the distribution of linen “*amongst such poor persons belonging to the Township as are considered proper objects and who have not received parochial relief within 12 months.”*

The discovery of coal under lands owned by the charity in Skelmersdale, in the late 1820s and into the 30s proved to be a milestone in the history of the charity. Leases were granted to two companies to work the mines namely Crow Orchard Colliery and White Moss Colliery. The mines were successfully worked for many years until they became either unworkable or exhausted in value, toward the end of the 1890s, beginning of the 1900s. Revenue from the extraction of coal and in consequence the income of the Charity increased dramatically.

The work of the Charity continues to the present day; the current trustees endeavour to identify and provide assistance within the terms of the Scheme, to apply the Charity’s income in relieving persons resident in their respective districts who are in need, hardship or distress. Yearly distributions also include benefits to schools and to individual pupils meeting the eligibility criteria under the Scheme.

**Applications** are invited at anytime throughout the year for consideration by the Trustees and should be directed, preferably by email to the Clerk:

*Applications/General enquiries to be addressed to the Clerk to the Peter Lathom Charity c/o 71-73 Hoghton Street, Southport PR9 0PR or via email* ***karen.thompson1624@gmail.com***