

8. The Englefield Charity

The first seven chapters have dealt mostly with the origins of the Earley Poor's Land Charity, and the nineteenth-century community which it was established to serve. The other charity which eventually became part of the Earley Charity has a history which is far more difficult to trace. This is surprising as it bears the name of one of our "big families".

The obscurity of the origins of the Englefield Charity is the source of the mystery stories about an "anonymous benefactor", which caused some controversy in the local newspapers in the mid-1980s. Neither the founder nor the founding date of the Englefield Charity can be established with any certainty. When the Charity was formalised by an Order of the Charity Commissioners sealed on 4 July 1911, the date of foundation was given as "before the year 1819". This is certainly a very cautious estimate.

The benefactor, unknown rather than anonymous, does appear to have been a member of the Englefield family. There is one compelling piece of documentary evidence, however, which indicates that it was not Sir Henry Englefield, who has been mentioned several times above in connection with the Sonning Inclosure Act, despite the fact that Sir Henry appears rather a plausible charity-founder and may have been presumed by some, in Victorian times and later, to be our founder.

Sir Henry Charles Englefield, the 7th baronet (1752-1822), was an antiquary, a committed and campaigning Roman Catholic, a scholarly writer, a scientist and an eccentric. He wrote many descriptions of churches and cathedrals for publications by the Society of Antiquaries, of which he was vice-president and, briefly, president. He also wrote extensively about Roman archaeology and achieved some fame as a collector of vases (a book was published in 1820 entitled *Vases from the collection of Sir Henry Englefield*, and it ran to a second edition in 1848). Sir Henry was also a Fellow of the Royal Society; a writer on astronomy; sometime secretary of the Dilettanti Society; a translator of Latin verse (his translation of Terence was published in 1814); and the author of *Observations on the probable consequences of the demolition of London Bridge* (published in 1821). He was not, however, the founder of the Englefield Charity.

As long ago as 1836-37, the Charity Commissioners made a sustained attempt to discover the origins of the Englefield Charity, as part of a survey conducted at that time of Berkshire charities.¹ By 1837, Sir Henry Charles Englefield had been dead for fifteen years and the heirs of the Englefield family no longer had much direct involvement with Earley. The Commissioners were in contact with the then representative of the family, Mr Francis Cholmeley, who was the late Sir Henry's nephew and lived in Yorkshire, but this does not appear to have furnished them with much useful information. The Commissioners also, however, found a "table of benefactions" in Sonning Church which stated that the Englefield Charity had been founded by an ancestor of Sir Henry Englefield, who left "by will" a rent-charge of £6 annually on lands in the Liberty of Earley,

of which £4 was to be spent on the apprenticing of a poor boy from the liberty and £2 to be distributed annually by the churchwardens among four poor widows in the liberty. The Commissioners were not able to obtain a copy of the will, from Mr Cholmeley or from any other source, and they neither established, nor guessed at, its date.

In 1836, the land producing the rent-charge comprised a cottage, a garden and two closes of land which had been rented since 1816 to Mr Joseph Goddard. As we shall see, this Englefield Charity land remained leased to the Goddard family until 1902, when it was sold off. The rent which Mr Goddard paid to the churchwardens (until 1844 the churchwardens of Sonning, thereafter to the churchwardens of Earley St Peter) had been fully used in the case of the widows, but not of the apprentices. In the years up to 1836, Mr Goddard had been paying his £2 for the benefit of local widows at around Michaelmas, and the Sonning churchwardens had decided to distribute the money to sixteen, rather than four, widows. The sixteen thus each received half a crown (2s 6d) each year, and the Commissioners found no fault with this. As regards apprentices, however, they noted that only two had been employed since 1816, one in 1821 with a premium of £15 and one in 1830 with a premium of £20. The Commissioners calculated that by 1837 Mr Goddard owed the Englefield Charity a balance of £45, and Mr Goddard expressed himself willing to pay this sum if suitable boys for apprenticing could be found in the Liberty of Earley. The Commissioners concluded their brief report with a suggestion that the Goddards were themselves in some way beneficiaries of the charitable intentions of the Englefields:

An impression prevails in the parish that the above premises were themselves the subject of a devise to charitable uses, which would seem to be fortified by the circumstance that the Goddard family, who have upwards of a century been tenants of land belonging to the Englefields, adjacent to the closes in question, have never been possessed of any other land; but beyond the fact that the above allotments were awarded in pursuance of a claim made to that effect by the churchwardens to the trustees at the Earley Charity estate, we have been unable to obtain any satisfactory evidence that can dispel this doubt. The improved yearly value of the land is stated to be 12*l*.

(Joseph Goddard died in 1867 at the age of 94 and is buried in the churchyard of Sonning Church. The graves of his children and other members of his family can be found in the churchyard of Earley St Peter.)

The Englefields were one of the longest-established families in Berkshire, able to trace their land-ownerships back to Saxon times. Their original home was not in Earley, but in their ancestral village of Englefield, to the west of Reading. They were a family with strong Roman Catholic and recusant traditions. Sir Francis Englefield, who had been High Sheriff of Berkshire and Oxfordshire, as well as Lord of the Manor of Englefield, at the end of the reign of King Henry VIII, was a close personal associate of Queen Mary and one of her privy councillors. He was directly involved in some of the more hideous inhumanities of her reign - witchcraft trials, burnings at the stake, and interrogations of

suspected heretics - and soon after the accession of Queen Elizabeth he fled to Spain and settled in Valladolid. After declining the Queen's summons to return, and being accused of consorting with her enemies - which was clearly true - all his lands and goods were ordered to be seized. His attempts to resist the orders from his Valladolid exile, including an attempt in the 1570s to transfer the ownership of Englefield Manor to his nephew (also called Francis), all failed, partly because of the direct involvement of the Queen in the matter (as recounted in the original *Dictionary of National Biography* and by Lord Coke in his *Reports*). The treasured Englefield estate was thus lost to the family. It was to pass quickly through a number of ownerships, including those of Sir Francis Walsingham and the Earl of Essex, before being bought in 1635 by the Marquis of Winchester.

Sir Francis Englefield was convicted of high treason, in his absence, in 1585, and never returned to England. He died in Valladolid in 1596 (there is an account of the Spanish certification of his will which can be consulted in the surprising location of Buckinghamshire Record Office). His heir was his more prudent brother, John. John Englefield had remained in England and, despite problems about his recusancy, had managed to remain Lord of the Manor of Wootton Bassett in Wiltshire. The family also retained a large house in Englefield village. Under the less severely Protestant regime of King James I, they began to thrive again. In 1606, the family acquired the manor of Earley Whiteknights. The manor was purchased for £7500 from the Speke family, initially by John Englefield's son Francis and his relative William Wollascot. Soon afterwards, Francis Englefield became the sole proprietor. It is doubtful whether this new manor, on the boundaries of Earley and Reading, was ever regarded as full compensation for the loss of the family estate in Englefield village, but the Englefields became one of the great families of Earley. Francis Englefield, whose uncle Francis had tried and failed from Valladolid to make him Lord of the Manor of Englefield, was created the first Englefield baronet in 1612. He lived as Sir Francis Englefield bart., Roman Catholic Lord of the Manor of Earley Whiteknights, until his death in 1631.

In the period of the Civil War, the property of Catholic recusants was especially vulnerable, and on 26 August 1644 the manor of Earley Whiteknights was sequestrated from its occupant, who at that time was Anthony Englefield, the fifth son of the first baronet. The sequestrated manor was restored to the family in 1660 by the Catholic sympathiser King Charles II.

With this interruption, the Englefields held Earley Whiteknights from 1606 to 1798, when Sir Henry Charles Englefield was one of the largest landowners in the area. He was also, however, as our local historian Ernest W. Dormer has described, to be the last of the Earley Englefields:

Englefield succeeded Englefield at Whiteknights until Sir [Henry] Englefield, sixth Baronet, died in 1780. He left the manor of Whiteknights to his two sons, Henry Charles and Francis Michael, in fee-tail successively, with remainder to his daughter Teresa Ann, who married Francis Cholmeley, of Brandsby Hall, Yorks. Sir Henry was a well-known antiquary and astronomer, and in 1779 he

made a survey and plan of the ruins of Reading Abbey. His portrait was painted by Sir Thomas Lawrence, and two bronze medallions of him are preserved in the British Museum. He never married. He died at his house in Tylney Street, London, on March 21st, 1822, aged 69 years. Before his death he suffered from total or partial loss of sight. He was interred in the ancient burial place of the family in Englefield Church. By his death the title became extinct. The other brother, Francis, died without issue, and in 1798, “disgusted at the offensive prejudices of the neighbouring gentry”, Sir Henry conveyed Whiteknights to William Byam Martin, who released it to George, fifth Duke of Marlborough [at that time Marquis of Blandford].²

Unfortunately it has not proved possible to find out more about these intriguing “offensive prejudices”, but they are likely to have been religious. In 1790, Sir Henry had published a tract entitled *A letter to the author of the “Review of the case of the Protestant dissenters”*, in which he expressed forthright views about the relations between Protestants and Catholics.

Sir Henry Englefield, as we have seen, was one of the principal beneficiaries of the Sonning enclosure of 1820 and held the largest share of any landowner of the previously enclosed Earley Mead common land beside the River Thames. He owned several of the fields adjoining the Earley poor’s land, one of which is described on the 1820 enclosure map as a Manorial Allotment and another as “Sir Hy Chas Englefield Bart sold to Wm Shackel” (see the next chapter for more on the Shackels).

On Sir Henry’s death in 1822, the Englefield family, in its own name, died out. All its rights and properties passed to the Cholmeley family. Sir Henry’s sister Teresa Englefield had married Francis Cholmeley, and their son and heir was also called Francis Cholmeley. We learn from a curious private Act of Parliament, entitled *An Act For Appointing new Trustees for carrying into execution the Trusts and Powers contained in the Will of the late Sir Henry Englefield, Baronet* (royal assent, 13 July 1819) that Francis Cholmeley senior died before 1819. It was Francis Cholmeley junior who was consulted by the Charity Commissioners in 1837. One of the principal roads in Newtown, constructed later in the nineteenth century, is named Cholmeley Road after this (Yorkshire-based) branch of the family.

We now need to examine the genealogy of the Englefield family between Sir Francis Englefield, the first baronet and first Englefield to live in Earley (1562-1631) and Sir Henry Charles Englefield, the last baronet (1752-1822), for it is a safe assumption that the founder of the Englefield Charity lies in the Englefield family tree somewhere between these two.

There are a few scraps of evidence which suggest that, within the family tree, we should be looking especially around the early eighteenth century. The rent charge of £6 on which the Charity was based is in the right range for the late seventeenth or early eighteenth century. Then, it is important to note that certain acts of early eighteenth-century legislation, and in particular the law of “mortmain” introduced in 1736, would have made the establishment by bequest

of such a charity much more difficult later in the century. It must be taken strongly into account that the benefactor is described in the Sonning table of benefactions as an ancestor of Sir Henry Charles Englefield rather than his father or even his grandfather; and the history of the Goddard family (who had been tenants on Englefield land for “upwards of a century” by 1837) also points in the same direction (although the deliberately vague phrase “upwards of a century” could possibly take us back closer to the acquisition by the Englefield family of land in Earley in 1606). Without genealogical evidence, a tentative estimate would probably put the foundation date of the Englefield Charity around the second decade of the eighteenth century - “before 1819”, as the Charity Commissioners had it, by about a hundred years.

Before we move, however, to any assumption that the charity must have been founded in the 1720s or earlier, we should look at the genealogical evidence which is available. Consideration of the genealogical evidence is made much easier by the very high rate of early mortality amongst the Englefields, and especially amongst the males. One prominent member of the family, for example, Anthony Englefield of Earley Whiteknights (1637-1711) had sixteen children, eight girls and eight boys, but only two of his sons lived to adulthood and only one of them had issue to carry on the family name.

In fact, if we look at the Englefield family tree in detail (as laid out in Figure One at the end of this chapter), we find that of all the male descendants of the first baronet who died between 1665 and 1822, only ten attained the age of 21. Since one of the ten is probably the founder of the Englefield Charity, it is worth listing them in full:

- Francis Englefield, 3rd baronet, grandson of the 1st baronet, who died in 1665 aged about 41;
- Thomas Englefield, 4th baronet, son of the 1st baronet and uncle of the 3rd baronet, who died in 1678 aged about 80;
- Anthony Englefield of Whiteknights, son of the 1st baronet and younger brother of the 4th baronet, who died in 1667 aged about 61;
- Charles Englefield, 5th baronet, grandson of the 1st baronet and son of the 4th baronet, who died in 1728 aged about 58;
- Anthony Englefield, the younger, of Whiteknights, grandson of the 1st baronet and son of Anthony, who died in 1711 aged 75;
- Thomas Englefield of Whiteknights, oldest son of Anthony the younger, who died in 1691 aged about 35;
- Henry Englefield of Whiteknights, youngest son of Anthony the younger, who died in 1719 aged 49;
- Henry Englefield, the younger, of Whiteknights, 6th baronet, youngest son of Henry, who died in 1780 aged 74;

- Henry Charles Englefield of Whiteknights, 7th baronet, older son of the 6th baronet, who died in 1822 aged 69;
- Francis Michael Englefield of Whiteknights, younger son of the 6th baronet, soldier, who was killed in 1791 aged about 33.

Most of the ten are buried at Englefield village church; probably nine of them, if we assume that Francis Michael Englefield was buried where he died, in Austria. Their gravestones in the side-chapel, however, whilst of some historical interest, do not include information about any charities.

If we begin on the process of elimination within our ten adult male Englefields, we can very quickly reduce the number to eight. Sir Henry Charles Englefield could hardly have been described as his own ancestor, and his soldier younger brother can be quickly discounted for the same reason. We should pause, however, to consider their father, Sir Henry Englefield the 6th baronet, who held the baronetcy for some 52 years.

It appears unlikely that the 6th baronet would turn out to be the “ancestor” of his son whom we are seeking, but there are precedents in the period for such loose use of the word, and we should certainly seek some more information about the 6th baronet. With the help of a little palaeography, this is not too difficult to do, as Sir Henry made a huge and long-winded will in 1778, supplemented by a codicil in 1779, and the thirteen handwritten pages, previously held in the Family Record Centre, can now be consulted in the National Archives in Kew. The will is a tedious and obsessional document - among its principal obsessions being property, legal niceties, primogeniture and interest rates - but it contains no reference to charity or charities. For those who have read all the way through Sir Henry’s testamentary effusions, it is ironic to discover that he managed to overlook certain potential legal niceties (notably the possibility that the only son of his last surviving trustee would be certified as a lunatic) and that his son and grandson would have to procure a private Act of Parliament in order to disentangle his estate. (This is *An Act For Appointing new Trustees for carrying into execution the Trusts and Powers contained in the Will of the late Sir Henry Englefield, Baronet*; 1819, already mentioned).

If we can, then, remove from our calculations the last three male Englefields to die in adulthood, namely the 6th baronet, the 7th baronet, and the dead soldier Francis Michael Englefield (and reduce the shortlist to seven), we find ourselves returning to our previous tentative preference for the early part of the eighteenth century, for the strange fact is that no other adult male member of the Englefield family died between the death of the 5th baronet in 1728 and the death of the 6th baronet in 1780. Our attention is therefore turned next to the colourful figure of Sir Charles Englefield, the 5th baronet.

In the 1720s, as related with relish by both contemporary and more recent historical sources, we find the extraordinary image of Sir Charles as a constant hostile presence in and around Englefield village, haunting and watching over

the ancient ancestral home which Queen Elizabeth had confiscated, and tormenting at every opportunity the 1720s owner of the Englefield Estate, who was called Mrs Anne Wrighte (or Wright). No doubt Sir Charles's hostility was heightened by his awareness of the very different backgrounds of himself and Mrs Wrighte. Whereas he was a scion of one of the oldest aristocratic families in the realm, she had begun life as Anne Braymore of Tidmarsh, a kitchen-maid at Englefield House, who had come into her inheritance by marrying the son of the Marquis of Winchester, Lord Francis Poulet. After the deaths of both Lord Francis and their two sons, she had assumed ownership of the great house, with her second husband, the Reverend Nathan Wrighte.

It appears very likely that the presence of the Englefield family in Englefield Park dated back before the time of King Alfred the Great, and there is plenty of evidence in Sir Charles's case both for family pride and for bitter resentment against the low-born usurpers who were occupying the old family home:

By the time of Sir Charles Englefield in 1723, there had been 150 years of grievance and over 900 years of ancestral right. Sir Charles appears as a backwoods baronet, loyal to the old faith, faithful (if not to his wife) to his mistress, a 'person of no reputation' called Margaret Bye, who 'hath had several bastards 4 of which were born in [his] house at Englefield'. He amused himself by feuding at law with the usurpers of the family estate. In September 1722 Anne Wright forbade Sir Charles to set with dogs and nets within Englefield Park. At about that time John Cannon, a local blacksmith, called on Sir Charles and found him in an ill humour about Mrs Wright: he said 'he would get some good honest fellows to destroy her deer'. Cannon said he knew a few fellows of that sort, and Sir Charles said there was half a guinea waiting for such men. Cannon assembled a good party, mainly from the neighbourhood: Tilehurst, Sulhampstead, Theale and (another blacksmith) from as far away as Newbury. They had three guns (one borrowed from a carpenter), two dogs, quarter-staffs, two hangars, powder and shot. They got their deer, carried their spoil through the broken park gates, and took it to Burghfield Mill (where it was probably sold to an unknown venison dealer). Seven of them met later at an alehouse, got two shillings apiece as a share in the sale of the deer; they then went on to John Cannon's house where they drank Sir Charles's health with Sir Charles's money.³

Both the authors and the originator of this exploit were discovered (one guesses that Mrs Wrighte had few doubts from the start), and the matter ended at the Assizes, with John Cannon turning king's evidence and Sir Charles issuing a notably graceless apology and perhaps eventually bribing his way out of trouble. (Cannon alleged that Sir Charles had offered him the huge sum of five guineas to hold his tongue at the Assizes.)

(The *Dictionary of National Biography* tells us that the house in Englefield village which was the base for Sir Charles's operations - and the birthplace of his four illegitimate children - and which had been in the family for several generations was eventually sold by Sir Henry Englefield in 1792.)

Sir Charles died fairly young (aged about 58) in 1728. He is said to be buried at Englefield Church, although if this is so his is not one of the more prominent gravestones. He left no legitimate issue, and his successor as baronet was his fairly distant cousin, Henry Englefield of Whiteknights. Is it possible that, bitter and disillusioned with the situation in his preferred locality of Englefield village, Sir Charles decided to found a charity for the benefit of his cousins' home territory in Earley? Could he have been the ancestor in question of Sir Henry Charles Englefield?

Certainly he would be a splendidly eccentric founder for any charity to claim; but unfortunately there is no evidence to link Sir Charles with the Englefield Charity, except for the fact that he was the senior member of the Englefield family at around the likely period. On the contrary, such evidence as can be gathered, by inference or by documentation, tends to point away from him. It is not difficult to infer that Sir Charles was far more interested in Englefield village than in Earley and that if he had been inclined to found a charity it would more probably have been for the benefit of the vicinity of Englefield and Theale. Documentary evidence supporting this view is furnished by Sir Charles's will, which can also be consulted at the National Archives.

His will is strewn with tiresome religious vapourings, but makes no mention of any form of charity. Difficult to read and random in its spelling, its business is principally with family and property matters, mostly relating to Englefield and Theale. His hatred for Mrs Anne Wrighte and all connected with her crackles through from beyond the grave:

I do earnestly desire that my said Trustees shall not nor will Sell or dispose of my said Estate at Englefield and Theal aforesaid unto Mrs Anne Wright of Englefield aforesaid Widow or to her Mother or to any of Mrs [Wrighte's] children or to any other person or persons that shall be any ways related to them [...]

In the absence of any legitimate issue, the principal beneficiary of the will is the man who is to become the sixth baronet, described by Sir Charles as "my cousin Henry Englefield eldest son of my cousin Henry Englefield", and it is made clear that these "cousins" (in fact, they would have been second and third cousins) are regarded as the Earley branch of the Englefield family.

So we have found reason to discount, with varying degrees of reluctance, the fifth, sixth and seventh baronets as potential founders of the Englefield Charity. This would seem to take its latest possible date of foundation back to 1719 or earlier, and calls our attention to the next three possibilities, who are all described in documents or on their gravestones as "of Whiteknights". They are Henry Englefield (1669-1719, father of the 6th baronet); his older brother Thomas Englefield (ca.1656-1691), and their father Anthony Englefield (1637-1711).

The documentary source which can help us a little here is the archive of the Prerogative Court of Canterbury, which is the main location for information

about wills and estates, especially for the south of England, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

For the period 1690-1750, the records of the Prerogative Court of Canterbury include seven entries for our Englefield family. These can be listed as follows:

Thomas Englefield, 1691, administration
Henry Englefyld (sic), 1720, administration
Martha Englefield, 1727, administration
Mary Englefield, 1728, administration
Charles Englefield, 1728, sentence
Charles Englefield [same man], 1728, will
Mary Englefield, 1744, administration

It will be noted that there is only one Englefield will in this sixty-year period in the Canterbury court. The word “administration” usually means that there was no will, but that there was some reason to establish the future of the estate at law.

The fact that the estates of Henry Englefield (died 1719) and his older brother Thomas Englefield (died 1691) were subject to administration (because they left no will) makes it unlikely that either of them would have been the founder of the Englefield Charity. It appears that our latest likely founding date must therefore retreat to 1711, the date of death of Anthony Englefield the younger.

Anthony Englefield the younger (1637-1711) emerges in fact as perhaps the most likely founder of the Englefield Charity. There is no will recorded for him in the records of the Prerogative Court of Canterbury, but it is possible that his will was proved elsewhere.

For much of the early part of his life, Anthony Englefield the younger must have assumed that he was going to become the 5th family baronet and to bring the baronetcy back to Earley. His senior cousin Charles was born around 1670, when Anthony was about 33 and Charles’s father about 72. The fairly natural notion that Anthony will have resented the new family heir (who became a boy baronet in 1678) appears to be borne out by the fact that in January 1692 he went to law against Sir Charles Englefield over the ownership of certain lands in Leicestershire.⁴ It may be that a disappointed Earley landowner who had hoped to become a baronet will turn out to be our founder.

Unless his will can be traced, however, this will remain no more than a best guess - albeit a best guess which fits fairly well with the information which we have collected. Anthony Englefield the younger was the great-grandfather of Sir Henry Charles Englefield. A founding date of 1711 would match the reported history of the Goddard family; would fit with what we have noted about eighteenth-century legislation; and would sit comfortably with the history of other charities of the parish of Sonning. In particular, the Charity Commissioners’ report of 1837 notes that Barker’s Charity was founded by a will dated 1697, with a 1701 codicil, and that Payne’s Charity was founded by a

will dated 1709. We shall see in the next chapter that Barker's Charity was quite closely linked in the nineteenth century with our Earley charities.

A provisional conclusion, then, is that the most likely founder of the Englefield Charity is Anthony Englefield the younger and the most likely founding date 1711. It is possible, however, to identify a number of other possible solutions to our problem, each of which could represent an area for further research. I list five, in descending order of probability:

1. that the Englefield Charity was founded in 1667 by Anthony Englefield the older;
2. that the Charity was founded by a woman member of the Englefield family;
3. that the Charity Commissioners in 1837 were misled and the Charity was founded by a deed of gift and not by a will;
4. that the Englefield Charity was founded in 1631 by Sir Francis Englefield, the first baronet and the first Englefield owner of Earley Whiteknights;
5. that the Englefield Charity was founded in 1656 on the death of the 2nd baronet; in 1665 on the death of the 3rd baronet; or in 1678 on the death of the 4th baronet (this is last in order of probability because none of these baronets appear to have lived in Earley).

The absence of any other male Englefields who lived to adulthood does not appear to admit any alternative solutions. The founder of the Englefield Charity may never be discovered with complete certainty, but it is unlikely that the date of foundation of the charity is later than 1720, and all of the circumstantial evidence fits very well with our suggested date of 1711.

NOTES

¹ *Report of the Commissioners for Inquiring Concerning Charities ...* London: HMSO, 1837.

² Ernest W. Dormer: *op. cit.*, p.40. For an unusually wide range of sources on the Englefield pedigree one can consult the inscriptions at Englefield Church; the manuscript in Reading Public Library entitled "Harrison: *Englefield*"; and also the (former) website at: <http://freespace.virgin.net/david.ford2/engped.html>.

³ E. P. Thompson: *Whigs and hunters*. New ed. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977, pp.102-103. See also the handwritten account in "Harrison: *Englefield*".

⁴ University of Reading Archives MS 145/EN1/5/4 1692 January.