125 Years of Charity Organisation

LCOS to Leicester Charity Link

Leicester Charity Link

Helping People Pull Together

By Caroline Wessel

FOREWORD

by Mr Tim Brooks, JP,
Lord Lieutenant of Leicestershire

President of Leicester Charity Link

I am very pleased to introduce you to this remarkable piece of Leicester's History. It indicates from the early beginning of the **LCOS** the endeavours of notable people to address the problems of poverty, deprivation and sickness, which have afflicted the society in which we live.

They have done this with a dedication and sense of justice, always trying to identify issues where the need is greatest and avoiding false claims and causes. They have identified specific charitable trusts and organisations to which they can refer people seeking assistance, and administered other funds on behalf of societies and trusts when asked to do so.

125 years has inevitably brought enormous changes to the world in which we live and the extent of the challenges which LCOS has had to face. Sadly, in spite of an ever increasing standard of living, these problems are still with us. Form filling has become a necessary adjunt to any search for financial assistance and help with that is regrettably all too necessary on occasions, and an endeavour to reduce bureaucracy.

I would like to pay tribute to so much voluntary effort and generosity, both in time and funding, that is evident from the following pages, and to the executive staff and volunteers who have been dedicated to the aims of the Organisation.

Special thanks go to Caroline Wessel, who agreed to up-date this piece of social history. She is particularly well qualified to have done so, as her forebears have been such strong supporters of LCOS over the years.

Also grateful thanks to Olwen Hughes for her specially commissioned drawing of LCL's present office, 20A Millstone Lane, displayed on the front cover.

My best wishes go to **Leicester Charity Link** in their work continuing this valuable service to the County and City. Where would we be without them?

Front Cover. Leicester Charity Link offices, 20A Millstone Lane, Leicester by Olwen Hughes © 2001

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

PAGE NO.

LCL's offices at 20A Millstone Lane,
from an original drawing by Olwen Hughes — Front Cover

Victorian Leicester, — 4
photograph by kind permission of Malcolm Elliott

Mr W.E. Hincks, as Lord Mayor of Leicester
from Hartopp, Henry (1936) *Roll of the Mayors and Lord Mayors of Leicester 1209-1935*. Edgar Backus — 7

Mr Percy Gee,
family collection — 10

LCOS office 8 Highcross Street, (1917-1920),
by G.M. Henton (1861-1924), by kind permission of Leicester Museums and Art Gallery — 14

Mr V.E. Warner,
from LCOS Annual Report 1969 — 16

Mick Marvell commencing his sponsored walk from the *Leicester Mercury* offices,
photograph by kind courtesy of the *Leicester Mercury* — 20

LCL staff outside the offices at 20A Millstone Lane, 2001 — 22

LCOS office, 8 Highcross Street (1976), prior to demolition.
photograph by kind permission of LL&R Record Office. — Back Cover

CONTENTS

PAGE NO.

FOREWORD — 1
LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS — 2
CONTENTS, ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS — 3
1. BEGINNINGS — 5
2. EARLY YEARS — 6
3. EXPANSION — 7
4. CHANGE AND WAR TIME — 9
5. THE 1920s AND 1930s — 10
6. THE SECOND WORLD WAR & ITS AFTERMATH — 12
7. THE ORGANISATION OF CHARITY — 15
8. THE LAST THIRTY YEARS — 17
9. ACHIEVEMENT, CHALLENGE, TRADITION AND THE FUTURE — 21
APPENDIX 1 – PRESIDENTS — 24
APPENDIX 2 – CHAIRMEN — 24
APPENDIX 3 – SECRETARIES — 25
APPENDIX 4 – PREMISES — 25
CHARITIES ADMINISTERED BY LCOS/LCL — 26
IMPORTANT DETAILS ABOUT LCOS/LCL — 27

Thanks are acknowledged to Janet D. Martin, whose booklet *The Leicester Charity Organisation Society, 1876-1976, A CENTENARY REVIEW* (1976) has formed the basis of chapters 1-5 of this publication.

Thanks for help with illustrations to John Aston, Malcolm Elliott, and the Lord Mayor's Secretariat, Leicester City Council. And also very sincere thanks to Olwen Hughes for donating her specially commissioned drawing.

Printed by Barker & Co (Leicester) Ltd.

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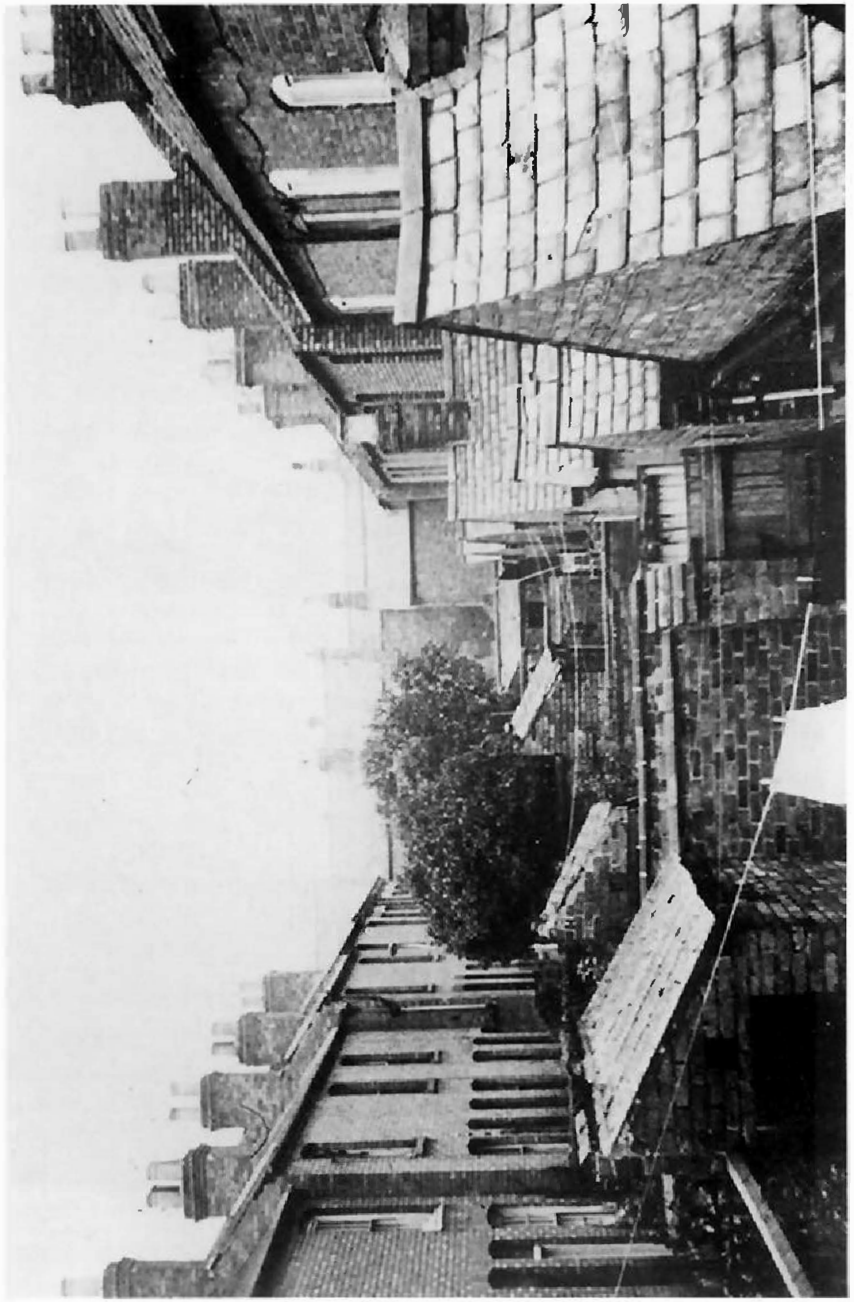


Housing in Victorian Leicester, photograph by kind permission of Malcolm Elliott

1. BEGINNINGS

The year 2001 saw the 125th anniversary of the Leicester Charity Organisation Society, and this is a cause for celebration. Its role has changed, developed and expanded during that span of time, for society itself, and the needs of those in distress, have changed. But many of the values, aims and ideals of that early organisation remain the same for those working at LCOS today – for human nature does not greatly change.

The Charity Organisation Society was founded in London in 1869, when massive migration of populations to the rapidly developing towns had resulted in appalling living conditions and poverty, made even worse by the new harsher Poor Laws. By 1891 there were around seventy-five similar Societies in provincial towns throughout Britain, linked with the London COS but acting independently. The original concept of the organisation was to give the poor just sufficient – either financially or in kind – to assist them, but not to discourage them from helping themselves. There was some opposition to this principle by those who felt it was unfeeling not to give unconditionally to beggars, but the COS way was to also consider a poor person's future by empowering them to earn their own living. The system devised by the COS of investigating the needs of the poor was an important step forward in the progress of social work.

In Leicester on 24th April 1876 a letter appeared in the local newspapers proposing the formation of a Charity Organisation Society for the town, and on 29th May a public meeting, chaired by the Mayor, Alderman Barfoot, was held at the County Rooms. Members of the London Society were prominent, but local clergy and businessmen were also present; the principles of Charity Organisation were approved and a Leicester Society committee formed. At a second meeting on 21st June, the rules of the London Society were adopted and an annual subscription of 8½ guineas agreed, and in July three joint honorary secretaries were elected – the Misses Charlotte and Hannah Ellis and solicitor, Mr G.H. Blunt.

By November promises of £200 a year had been acquired, and the LCOS appointed its first paid officer, agent Mr Henry Brice, who was selected from one hundred applicants. He was to receive an annual salary of £65, together with a house, coal, gas and water, and must agree to spend some time being trained by the London Society. At the same meeting Revd. Lewis Clayton, Vicar of St Margaret's, was appointed Chairman and a permanent committee elected, who agreed to rent 39 Charles Street, which would serve as both the Society's office and Mr Brice's house. At a meeting a month later a Decisions Committee was formed that was to meet weekly on Mondays at 4 pm, and would supervise the work of the officer and scrutinise all applications for funds. The office was furnished, stationary bought, and the Society opened for business in January 1877. It made tickets available for householders to give to people seeking help, and authorising them to go to the Society's office.

2. EARLY YEARS

During its first twenty-five years the Charity Organisation Society was not altogether popular in Leicester, the two opposing factions continuing to disagree as to whether poverty, unemployment and mendicity were truly involuntary. The London branch tended to overstate its point of view, but of course there the poor were in much greater number and the problems more acute. In Leicester in times of extreme unemployment, or epidemic, the LCOS associated itself with schemes organised by the mayor, or local newspapers, thus gaining favour by involving itself in community affairs.

Between September 1877 and December 1878 the Society handled 653 cases, 'excluding vagrants and enquiries', though it is not clear how many of these were actually given assistance. By 1883 the 3,000th case was recorded, and a fair proportion of these must have been on behalf of other charities, for until about 1902 the LCOS only handled direct about three or four hundred cases a year. There are no surviving case-papers before 1904, nor annual reports before 1890, to give an overall picture of the Society's work, but two areas of support stand out – convalescent care of the sick poor, and help to the unemployed.

Almost from the outset, the Society acted as agent for the Sutton Charity, established in 1858 to provide help for needy patients being discharged from the Infirmary, especially those requiring convalescence. A special committee was appointed to deal with this, and five sets of private lodgings were allocated for convalescent stays, this being considered a better option than trying to finance the Society's own convalescent home. As the number of such homes at seaside resorts grew, the LCOS was increasingly able to help convalescent poor people re-gain strength and health, in restful and pleasant coastal surroundings.

Whilst maintaining its general principle that unemployment was most often caused by a disinclination to work, the Society nonetheless advanced its own remedies for this. One of its first projects was in 1880, when three ladders, one long and two short, and three washleathers, were purchased to set up an unemployed man as a windowcleaner. It also acted with the Town Council to find work for labourers in poverty in times of acute unemployment. Another of its short-term schemes was to give out plain needlework to be done by 'women of distressed circumstances of trustworthy character', that was then given to the Infirmary, the Fever Hospital, or sold in aid of the Provident Dispensary.

A crisis occurred in 1903, when the agent, Henry Brice, was relieved of all financial and secretarial duties and office opening hours reduced, possibly because of his being ill. He was sent away on holiday, paid £25 in lieu of notice, and given a pension for two years. At this time the number of cases dropped considerably and there was even some doubt as to whether the Society could survive. But the arrival of a new agent/secretary saved the day.

3. EXPANSION

Mr William Edwin Hincks, aged 33, was appointed Secretary to LCOS in March 1903, and during his 34 years of service he built it up into one of the strongest and most efficient organisations of its kind in the country. Apprenticed as an engineer, whilst secretary of the Amalgamated Society of Engineers, the young Hincks' talents were noticed by the treasurer of LCOS, Mr J.M. Gimson, whose firm was in 1897 involved with the Leicester engineers strike. At that time the LCOS was declining almost to the point of collapse, but from the moment that Hincks took over it began to pick up, and within a year he had introduced a new system of office management, using case-papers instead of report books; the number of direct applications had increased; an assistant secretary was appointed; and Hincks' salary was increased from £2 to £3 a week. With his expansion of the Society's operations, the LCOS gradually became established as an effective and well-supported body, and its initial unpopularity was dispelled.

The Society changed its premises a number of times during its early years. It started life at 39 Charles Street, then in 1891 moved to 25 Humberstone Gate. But in 1897 Mr Brice, the agent, had made it clear that he no longer wished to live above the office, so LCOS moved to 2 Highcross Street, where it remained for seven years. Then it moved to 10 Highcross Street, but these offices were found to be 'inconvenient and unpleasant', so through the generosity of the President, Mr H. Simpson Gee, the Society was able to lease the next door premises at number 8. It purchased the freehold in 1919, thanks to a gift from Lady Wright, and remained there until 1962. (see Appendix 4).

Mr W.E. Hincks

During the period up to the First World War, consumption (tuberculosis) amongst the poor was one of the Society's main concerns. This grew directly out of its earlier efforts to provide convalescent facilities, taken over in 1903 by Leicester's expanding Saturday Hospital Society. Consumptives required lengthy periods of rest and treatment, and ordinary convalescent homes often refused such cases. But the LCOS established a special fund, and a scheme was devised by a Miss Mackennal, whereby individual subscribers were matched to a particular patient, whom they would help with either a small pension or special food. The Mackennal Scheme, as it became known, was expanded beyond those with consumption, to help others who were terminally ill; some were sent to the new Gilroes Sanatorium, and LCOS helped many 'special cases' not covered by its general fund, encouraging family, church or employer to contribute.

With the Society's philosophy of achieving through one's own efforts, Mr Hincks was also especially keen to assist those, whose only prospect in England was dependence upon poor relief, who wished to emigrate. Between 1905 and 1907 about 250 people were helped, many of them wives with children wishing to join husbands already making a new life in Canada or Australia, and grants were given to them for fares. But those poor people who did not work – for whatever reason – continued to be treated harshly, usually being recommended for admission to the workhouse, where in 1909, 1,000 of Leicester's population of 250,000 were living.

Even though some unemployed poor tried to support themselves honestly by hawking goods door-to-door, the LCOS was not sympathetic to begging, and through this it earned a reputation for harshness. The Society would investigate cases of child beggars claiming to have sick parents, often finding their stories to be false, and its policy on mendicants remained firm even fifty years later. In this period it also received many begging letters, some of them fraudulent, and the celebrated case of Mr Todd-Potts, a bogus poetry-writing Doctor of Literature with a pregnant wife, troubled the Society for more than twenty years, Mrs Todd-Potts being "in an interesting condition for a longer period than any other woman in the history of the human race."

4. CHANGE AND WAR TIME

In the first decade of the twentieth century, the government's introduction of State provisions such as free school meals, old age pensions and national insurance alleviated those in direst poverty. But the London Charity Organisation Society believed that these benefits would degrade the poor, and encourage them to remain idle, and it bitterly resisted the State scheme for free dinners to needy schoolchildren. In Leicester, however, the Society never voiced such opinions, though it did suggest that the free meals should be administered in conjunction with the NSPCC, so the expense would not fall on the rates. In 1907 the Town Council accepted this scheme, but the following year it was reconstituted as the Children's Aid Society, a fund that subsequently broadened its scope, and has been administered by LCOS until the present day.

When war broke out in 1914, the Town Council formed a Relief Committee to help alleviate the distress caused to those families of the many poor wage-earners who had enlisted. Mr Hincks, an energetic town Councillor since 1900, was the Relief Committee's first chairman, and drawing on his experience as Secretary of LCOS, he was noted for his great fairness. He was also involved in recruitment campaigns and appointed chairman of the Prisoners of War Fund. But Hincks' greatest achievement was his work on the War Pensions Committee, and in 1918 he was awarded the O.B.E. for his war work; He also received an illuminated address and £1,000 from the citizens of Leicester, on which occasion a silver tea service was presented to Mrs Hincks.

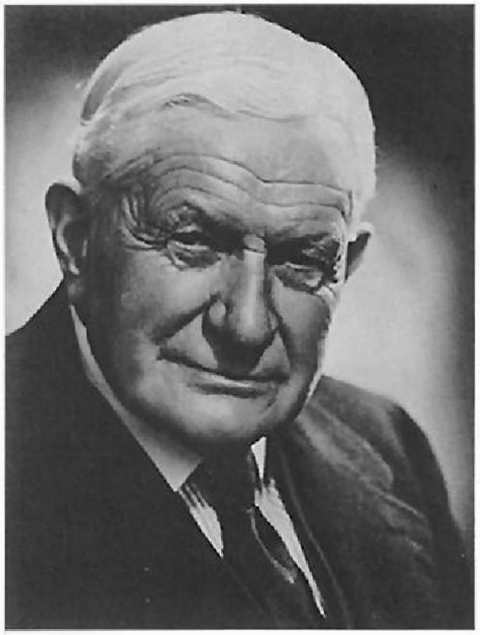
The fairness and efficiency demonstrated by the Leicester Charity Organisation in its work for the wartime Relief Committee established it as a proven body, and dispelled earlier misgivings about its reputation. The Society also continued, of course, to administer its own cases, with Assistant Secretary, Mr J.B. Smith, taking over Mr Hincks' role during the War, and its volunteers working with renewed energy and enthusiasm. Although unemployment had for the time being largely disappeared, there were still always plenty of sick and poor to be visited, and fraudulent cases to investigate.

After the War, the twin problems of unemployment and a severe housing shortage had to be addressed. Charity Organisation worked closely with the fund for discharged servicemen set up by Sir Jonathan North, Leicester's Mayor during the War, who served as President of the Society in 1920. Great numbers of discharged ex-servicemen were unemployed, and a new problem arose, when many of them, unable to settle down after the traumas of war, took to the road as destitute vagrants. At first, none of them were refused help, and those whose families wanted them back were helped to return home. LCOS worked together with the British Legion, but by 1923 the two organisations jointly decided that now only disabled men would be given assistance, though this provoked threats and abuse from some of those refused aid.

5. THE 1920s AND 1930s

In 1923 the Society's annual report described the local housing shortage as "Leicester's worst and gravest social danger," although it was never as bad as in the larger industrial towns. Between 1919 and 1929 the Town Council built 4,500 new houses on its various estates, and the same number in the ten years that followed. Because the road surfaces on the new estates were much rougher than in the town, the Society observed a new problem; its 1929 Report found that estate children were wearing their boots out much more quickly than previously, and the provision of boots and shoes by the Children's Aid Society increased considerably at that time.

Due to unemployment there was a considerable increase in vagrancy, but the LCOS stuck to its policy and opposed moves to provide lodging houses for vagrants, declining to assist the Salvation Army in its efforts to open a hostel in Leicester for the homeless. But because of unemployment, the pressure on the Society was so great that in 1932 the paperwork system collapsed altogether for a short while. So by 1935 staffing levels had been increased to a paid visitor, a typist and two other office staff, in addition to Mr Hincks and his assistant. The Society acted as agent for the many funds set up to aid the needy, especially for toys and dinners at Christmastime, and in 1935 Mr Hincks estimated that 10,000-15,000 children had been assisted, with the help of his many new volunteers. More funds were required, and Mr Percy Gee, Chairman of footwear firm Stead & Simpson, and LCOS's Financial Secretary from 1904 to 1961, successfully extended contacts with local businesses, who helped with 'special cases', often their ex-employees who had fallen on hard times.



Mr Percy Gee,
Financial Secretary 1904-1961

There now developed an increasing problem of fraudulent collectors, particularly those preying on people made vulnerable through the War.

For example a man professing to be from the Ministry of Pensions talked widows into contributing to a bogus 'Roll of Honour', while others dishonestly begged on behalf of ex-servicemen, for neglected children, or for spurious religious organisations. Throughout the 1920s the LCOS waged war on an army-style group, known as the Christian Volunteer Force, that professed to provide free breakfasts for poor children, but whose funds did more for its organisers than for starving youngsters. Societies collecting for cancer patients were viewed with suspicion, because it was felt they preyed on public fears, and took too much of the money for themselves. And after twenty years the redoubtable Mr Todd-Potts was still hoaxing the public!

By now the Charity Organisation Society was also administering a number of local funds: the Douglas Haig Memorial Homes at Braunstone for disabled ex-servicemen; the Leicestershire Disabled Warriors Fund; the Soldiers', Sailors' and Airmen's Families Association (SSAFA); and various regimental aid societies. In 1910 the administration of the Water Bed Association, founded around 1860 to provide sickroom appliances, was handed over to the Society, and in addition to running the Sutton Charity and Children's Aid Association, it administered a fund formed from a legacy left by Sir Edward Wood in 1917 to assist poor widows with young children. And from 1927 for eight years the LCOS acted as almoner to the Public Trustee, regarding a very difficult and often abusive family, for which it received no payment at all.

In 1926 the Society celebrated its fiftieth anniversary, though its planned conference for other Charity Organisation Societies had to be abandoned because of the General Strike. However the following year it gave a dinner at the Oriental Café in the Market Place, costing 3s. 6d. (an economy on the 5s. one planned in 1926), held a reception in the Art Gallery, arranged lectures and excursions, and the Bishop of Leicester preached at a special Cathedral service.

That same year Mr Hincks went to America, where he met some of the emigrants he had formerly helped. He observed that the USA had many more highly-educated professional social workers than Britain, so that on his return he arranged for Social Studies students to come to Leicester to gain valuable practical experience at LCOS, thereby marking the Society's professional status. And Hincks' method of systematic case-work became a model for the newly-emerging profession of social work, both at home and in America.

When Mr Hincks died in 1937 he had successfully established the highest possible reputation for the Society. His astute handling of cases and problems, his tremendous energy, his connections with the government of the city, his ability to select and inspire a body of dedicated colleagues, his ruthlessness with the deceitful but ready sympathy for the genuinely distressed, all meant that for nearly 35 years William Hincks had personified Charity Organisation.

6. THE SECOND WORLD WAR &ITS AFTERMATH

Hincks'assistant, Mr J.B. Smith, succeeded him as Secretary, but he died unexpectedly just two years later, and was followed by his deputy, Mr John Stamps, with Mr V.E. Warner assisting. The Society also lost another stalwart that year with the resignation of Miss Margaret Gimson, who received the M.B.E. for her voluntary services during World War I. Between the two of them, Hincks and Gimson had laid the foundations of stability for the Society.

In 1941, after 65 years, the Society in its annual report re-stated its principles – to assist the family unit; to encourage family responsibility and a spirit of independence, even in adversity; to further child welfare and conditions in the home; to work for co-operation between voluntary and statutory bodies; and to prevent and suppress mendicity. It aimed to provide a bureau for interchange of information regarding assistance; a clearing house for the co-ordination of other charities; an office for dealing with applications, visits and grants; immediate relief to those in distress; hospital and convalescent treatment; and investigation of fraudulent appeals for money.

With the outbreak of war unemployment decreased, but the LCOS, representing SSAFA and other forces' charities, once more turned its attention to the problems of servicemen's families coping alone. Initially, inadequate allowances had meant many families were in desperate poverty, with increased expenses but no way of making up the difference between peace-time and war-time incomes. SSAFA helped women throughout the whole war period to combat changing conditions and circumstances. It also arranged compassionate leave for 943 Leicestershire servicemen, and wrote letters to aid clearer understanding between husbands and wives, estranged through long periods of separation. In 1943 LCOS assisted Leicestershire's War Comforts Fund in the aftercare of 52 repatriated prisoners and prepared to help another 1820 servicemen known to be prisoners abroad. At the end of the war the Society had succeeded in arranging help or advice for around 14,664 service families, and by 1948 SSAFA recorded a welcome 10% decline in its applications for aid.

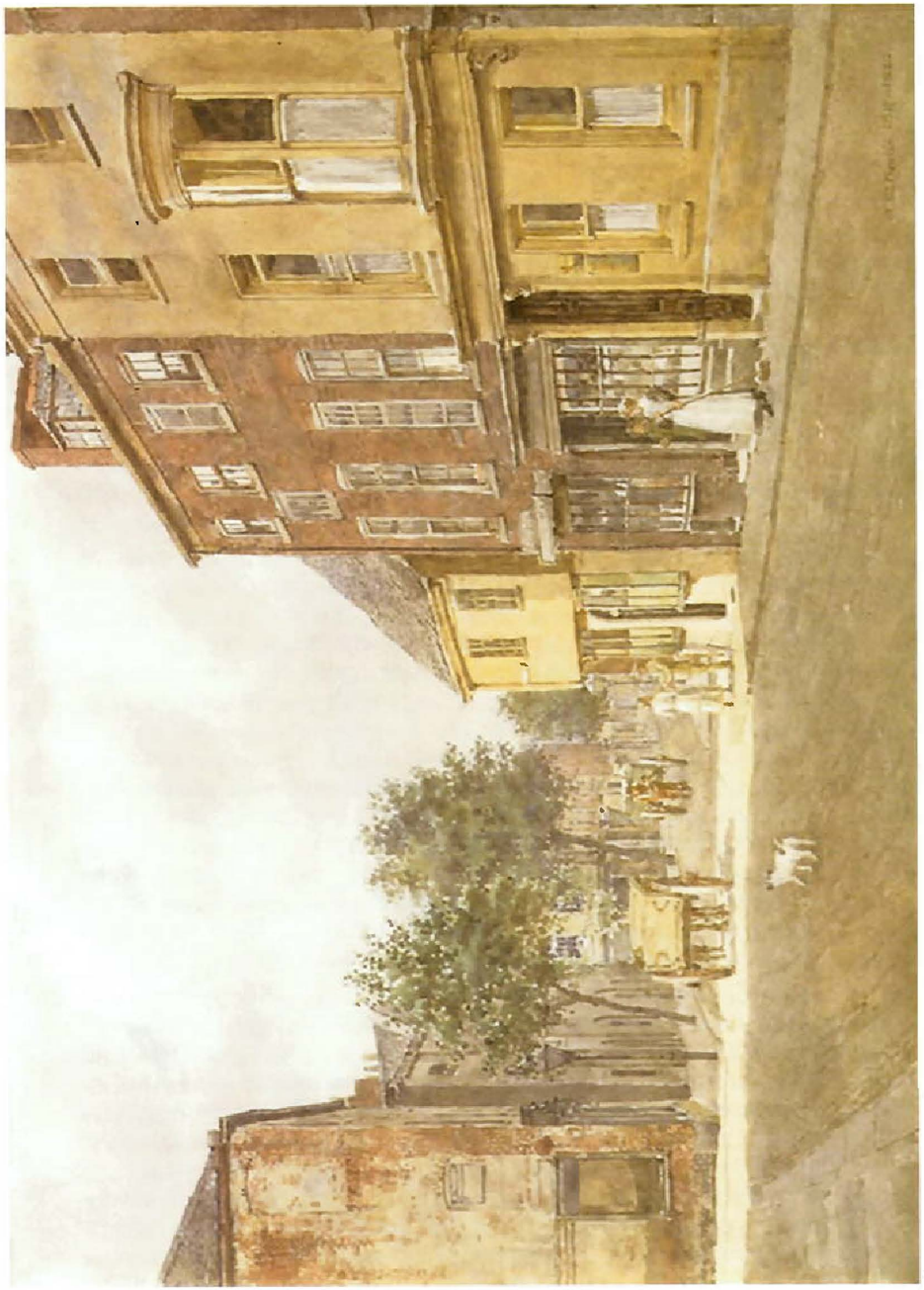
After the Victory jubilations had died away, newly re-united families had to try and readjust, and advice, guidance and counsel by Charity Organisation trained family case workers were sorely needed. A new problem was that of the young woman who had made a war-time marriage to a foreign serviceman and now found herself deserted, with children to maintain. Men returned home to family disintegration, housing shortage and consequent overcrowding, resulting in domestic strain, and psychological and mental breakdown. One case history reported that "After some years in the Far East, a serviceman arrived home at 11.30 at night, unexpected by his wife. She was absent, her three children, quite unattended, lay huddled under one blanket in an

indescribably filthy house. His wife returned about midnight in an intoxicated state and in a condition of pregnancy." The serviceman spent most of his money in clearing arrears of rent and accumulated debts, and there being no clothing coupons, could not obtain the necessary clothing for his children. LCOS provided him with second-hand clothing, and a later visit to the home found matters much improved.

Mr Warner joined the RAF in 1942, but returned as Secretary in 1946, when Mr Stamps left to work as Deputy Secretary at the London Organisation; and in 1947 the post of Assistant Secretary was abolished to save money. In 1948 Mr J.A. Hopps retired after 42 years as Treasurer, his wife having served LCOS for 45 years, from 1898 until her death in 1943. Many of those working voluntarily for the Society are names still well-known in Leicester today – Pochin, Ellis, Martin, Hazlerigg, Corah, Gimson, Herbert, Bennion and Gee. The *List of Subscribers* reads like a 'Who's Who' of Leicester, with prominent local industrialists like Barlow, Briggs, Byford, Faire, Fielding Johnson, Frisby, Goddard, Hilton, Oliver, Osborne, Russell, Stibbe and Wilford; and the firms of British United, Chilprufe, Corah, Hart & Levy, Liberty and Stead & Simpson.

During this period various new Acts of Parliament affected the work of the Society; in 1944 the Disabled Persons Employment Act and Education and National Insurance Acts; then in 1947 legislation for Workmen's Compensation, Old Age and Retirement Pensions, Health and Unemployment Insurance and Family Allowance. During this period of transition, new problems arose, as many people found that they could not understand their entitlements, and became despondent after fruitless visits to government offices. In 1947 monetary grants were made to 1,127 people, but advice or information to 2,147, demonstrating the Society's changing role; for it was now giving advice to almost double the number of clients than those who received money. But the result of this service was a great increase in administration costs, so in 1948 an Appeal was launched. In particular it encouraged support from those who had previously given money to hospitals, the Health Act now rendering that need obsolete. The Appeal was successful, resulting in a favourable credit balance for that year.

During the 1940s the LCOS worked with around seventy other local and national statutory or voluntary bodies, whilst itself administering the affairs of at least ten local charitable funds. One of these latter was the Leicester Children's Aid Society, started in 1907 (it changed its name to Children's Aid Association in 1908), which found that the main causes of need in families were ill-health or desertion of a parent, widowhood, size of family and ill-health of a child. In 1947 its committee decided that, because of the extension of State aid, CAA would be incorporated with LCOS, but that its finances should remain separate. In that year it assisted 116 children, mostly under school age, by supplying boots and shoes, warm underclothing, invalid foods, medicaments and convalesence; it gave toys to 93 poor families at Christmas and, through the Pearson Fresh Air Fund, enabled 30 children to have a happy summer holiday.



Highcross Street, (including no. 8) Leicester, at Peacock Lane, Southgate and Redcross Street 1917-1920, by G.M. Henton (1861-1924)

7. THE ORGANISATION OF CHARITY

Several annual reports of the 1950s summarise the Society's work at this time by dwelling on the meaning of its name – "As our name indicates, one of our main tasks is the *organisation* [Report's italics] of charity, that is we deal not only with those whom we ourselves can help, but we try to put applicants into touch with other societies which are specially concerned with them...very often those who most need help from them do not not know of their existence." The growth, improved efficiency and variety of this work of organisation is self-evident in the period of the 1950s to early 1970s, and the 1966 Report reiterates "As our name implies we 'organise' charity by enlisting the aid of other bodies which we know to have funds available for the relief of distress."

Many families were still not aware of the full scale of statutory benefits to which they were entitled, or did not know how to apply; and whilst helping them, the LCOS maintained cordial relations with the various government services. A period of great social change was in progress, revealed through seemingly small details recorded in the daily life of the Society. Signalling the end of the war period, The Leicestershire Prisoners of War Comforts Fund was finally closed down in 1950, and its assets transferred to SSAFA; but in the same year the Society changed its policy on debts incurred through hire-purchase agreements, now accepting them as part of 'modern life' and acknowledging that "a little financial aid...may save a family from cruel hardship." In 1960 vicars were still asking for help in dealing with casual beggars, but the Society stood firm on its old anti-mendicity policy. One-third of applicants to the Forces' Help Society was not assisted, because many had bogus 'hard luck' stories or excuses, and "when it is made obvious to them that they are not to be given money, they pass on, some abusive and some sarcastic."

Some of the agencies assisted by LCOS sound rather modern, such as Samaritans and Marriage Guidance Council, but its reference to the Infantile Paralysis [poliomelitis] Fellowship is a reminder of the epidemic of a crippling disease that is now almost wiped out. In 1953 the Charity Organisation Society was very forward looking in its support of the School of Social Studies Department of Leicester University College, whose students had collected a large amount of material about local Social Services and associated organisations. LCOS undertook to publish this important pioneer work, which sold for 3/6d a copy. The Society's accounts showed that at this time expenditure was exceeding income, so in 1952 subscribers, and later on businesses, were asked to sign a covenant form for reclaiming tax. A donation of nearly £50 from Leicester Football Club, part of its share in the receipts from the Middlesex Seven-a-Side matches, was gratefully used to enable some very poor parents to equip their children with clothing for grammar schools, which they would not otherwise have been able to attend.

The year 1962 was of great importance, for the Society received a compulsory purchase order from the City Corporation, as part of their radical development scheme, and they were obliged to quit the premises of 8 Highcross Street that had been their home for 64 years. The move to the rather smaller ground floor office rooms at 10 East Street was undertaken with some sadness.

By now LCOS was acting on behalf of many additional charities – the Catherine Brown, Acham's, Clara Alexandra Jelly, John Heggs Bates and the Sarah Barlow Trust, and it also assisted the Leicestershire War Memorial Foundation in selecting tenants for its Scraptoft Memorial Homes. In 1965 it took over the administration of the Leicester Indigent Old-Age Society (founded 1828) whose trustees were struggling to run it; and gave assistance to the T.S. Shipman Trust (1963), the J.R. Corah Foundation (1968) and the Buttle Trust (1968). Leading this successful expansion was Secretary, Mr V.E. Warner, whose "common sense and good judgement led him to seek for practical and constructive solutions to the problems before him," as the words of his obituary said. For he passed away in March 1969 after a serious operation. A Justice of the Peace, an active member of Oadby church, and a participant in many branches of social work, Mr Warner's twenty-nine year's work for the LCOS was oustanding. With the succession of Mr A. Tweedie as Secretary, the death of Mr Percy Gee, Financial Adviser 1904-1961, and the appointments of Mr Douglas Astbury as Chairman, and newcomer, Mr Mick Marvell as Assistant Secretary, the Society moved on to the next phase of its history.

Mr V.E. Warner

8. THE LAST THIRTY YEARS

"It would appear that only the most poverty-stricken are without a family car, a washing machine and other items formerly accepted as luxuries..." stated the annual report of 1970. Social change had brought about higher aspirations for many, and in the following thirty years this was to bring new problems – inflation and unemployment; temptation through high pressure advertising; debt from too readily available credit; a greater focus on the terminally ill and their financial problems; the single parent family (by 1991, 30% of LCOS total referrals); the growing costs of caring for the elderly; needy ex-servicemen, some still itinerant, but now at retirement age; a £150 million reduction in State benefits (1987); increased fuel and heating costs; the implications of the Children's Act (1989) and the Care in the Community Report (1992); the growth in mental illness and psychiatric disorders; a move towards information technology; the uncertainty of statutory funding and of local government unitary status – and, through all this, the Society's continuous struggle to match income with spending. For example, in 1973 LCOS's annual expenditure on relief had leapt in a decade from £6,612 to £33,000, and in the seven years from 1974 to 1981 administration costs rose from £11,714 to £55,903. Mick Marvell, now Secretary, was to lead the organisation through this period of great change, with his characteristic blend of hard work, dedication, energy and vision.

In 1972 the LCOS was obliged to move to new premises because its present home at 10 East Street was to be demolished. It was at first hoped that the new offices at 18 Friar Lane would also house the embryonic charity Age Concern, newly developed out of the former Leicester Old People's Welfare Association. Although this proved impossible, LCOS gave Age Concern much support during the following year, as it worked to establish itself.

In its centenary year of 1976, the Society did not indulge in any elaborate celebrations. Apart from commissioning a booklet from Janet D. Martin on the history of its first hundred years, it seemed more interested around this time in the development of three important new projects, all highly significant for the future of the county. The first was in 1974, when the Society started extending beyond the city of Leicester to the county areas, the extra burden of travel expenses being eased by a grant from the Social Services Department.

Secondly, the 1977 annual report refers to the Society's long history of the motivation of many new ideas. "In each case we have let the idea grow into a separate organisation, as the need expanded." Since at least 1960 LCOS had worked alongside the National Society for Cancer Relief (NSCR), and from this partnership emerged the idea of the Leicester Organisation for the Relief of Suffering (LOROS), which would "develop the expertise and the facilities to tackle a neglected area of

need." A committee was soon formed, following an initiative by the Leicester Council of Churches, and LOROS's first home was at the LCOS office. Thousands of people supported the 1981 Appeal and the 6,000 letters sent to local firms bore rich fruit. By the end of that year LOROS was seeking its own offices, and the fledgling organisation bade farewell to LCOS.

The third initiative started in 1978 after an LCOS member of staff had attended the Birmingham Settlement and Money Advice Centre's first ever debt counselling course. The Society realized that pressure on its time and money would not allow it to take on this much needed branch of work itself, but led to its seeking statutory funding and sponsorship. This was successful, and in October 1980 LCOS proudly opened the doors of its own Money Advice Centre (LMAC) and Debt Counselling Service – only the second such Centre in the whole country. During the 1980s the service was expanded, training courses run, education about debt for young people undertaken, and for a time LMAC ran surgeries at New Parks, Hinckley and Loughborough.

But the old-established groups were not forgotten either; a Children's Aid Association's Appeal in 1980, boosted by a grant from Leicester Lions, purchased a brick-built holiday chalet at Chapel St. Leonards where needy families could have holidays, with a surplus to buy a further chalet the next year. Many elderly were befriended by LCOS volunteers through the Leicester Indigent Old-Age Society and Forces Help Society – "old soldiers do like the opportunity to reminisce," states the Report! The shortfall between Income Support payments and the fees for the elderly in residential care was an acute problem tackled by LCOS. A link with the CARE village for the disabled at Shangton resulted in them printing the LCOS Annual Report, and the Society also administered the local cases of the national charity 'Wireless for the Bedridden', when "without fail, in every case, the provision of a radio or television has added significantly to the beneficiary's quality of life."

In an attempt to gain more grants, help was increasingly sought from trade and benevolent funds, and amongst those who responded were British United, Wolsey and Metal Box. To assist with the Society's escalating running costs, in 1977 a handful of the larger local charities, such as The Leicestershire County Nursing Association, started to give regular money for administration purposes, in addition to their grants for the needy; and LCOS also encouraged the new payroll system of charitable giving. By the late 1980s LCOS was responding to modern business practices; it changed its Council to a Finance & Executive Committee, and the Secretary became Director; the Society produced a larger, fuller, smarter-looking Annual Report, and by the end of the decade it had converted the top floor of its premises into much needed extra office space, made possible through a generous grant from the T.S. Shipman Trust.

The end of an era occurred in the 1970s/80s with the deaths of a number of stalwarts from old Leicester families, who had worked tirelessly for LCOS in a voluntary capacity over a period of many years – Mr Victor Pochin (1972), a Vice President since 1943; Mr Christopher Gimson (1975), President and a Council member since 1947; Mr Raymond Moore (1976), who gave more than 40 years service; Lady Oliver (1978), a committee member for many years; and Mr Douglas Astbury (1987), whose outstanding work for LCOS spanned almost thirty years, during which time he was both Chairman and President.

The last decade of the century saw LCOS once again spearheading new and exciting initiatives, both within and outside LCOS. The first of these was born in 1988, 'Europe against Cancer Year', when the Cancer Relief Macmillan Fund (CRMF), with whom the Society had already worked for over twenty years, awarded a grant for a Welfare Rights/Resource Worker to be based at LCOS, who would give advice and information to cancer patients, assist them in accessing appropriate benefits, and produce a training package for cancer care professionals. As the staff increased to three, it became known as the Palliative Care Team (PCT) who by 1993 had obtained £57,000 from charitable grants for its clients, and developed great expertise in welfare rights matters.

In 1992 the T.S. Shipman Trust, founded in 1969, was looking for a new home, so the opportunity was taken to accommodate it, together with its administrator, Andrew York, at the LCOS offices. York became Trust and Finance Officer for the Society's new Trust Administration Department, essential because the new Charities Act had imposed such strict responsibilities on trustees, and over the next few years York took various other charities under his wing, including county ones based in Syston, Groby, Rotherby and Wigston.

Leicester G.P. Dr Angela Lennox, based at the inner-city estate of St Matthew's, had an inspiration – to develop a Centre that combined all the facilities that would benefit and enhance the lives of a disadvantaged population of diverse ethnic origin. LCOS worked very closely with Lennox to achieve her dream, accessing appropriate funding for her, and giving advice and support.

The work of Leicester Money Advice Centre was rapidly expanding and now offered a very high level of expertise, a free telephone 'Debtline' and a Consultancy Service. It opened a Lay Advocacy Scheme, assisting and representing those facing court action for debt, which moved in 1994 to the new County Court premises at Wellington Street. The same year LMAC developed its own Mental Health Project, aiding those suffering from mental ill health, and also put in an application for a Legal Aid Board franchise, a pilot project for non-solicitor agencies, and was successful in this bid in 1997.

Deputy Chief Executive Jim Munton, who joined the staff in 1988, has used his computing skills to bring the Society up to date – casework and administrative procedures, and then a seventy year old accounting

system, were all converted to information technology, using the additional help of some De Montfort University students. A comprehensive Children's Charities database, funded partly by the Nicholson Memorial Fund/Rosehill Trust, has been compiled and is also available for use by outside agencies.

As the end of the century approached, the LCOS could now boast that the annual grants it administered were over £1 million. However the lease on its offices at 18 Friar Lane was up, so a Sub-Committee commenced its long search for new premises, and a Building Appeal was launched. In 1997 LCOS Director Mick Marvell, supported by his family, undertook a gruelling sponsored walk from John O'Groats to Land's End. They raised a staggering £43,000, that was split between the LCOS Building Appeal, the *Leicester Mercury* Action Trust, and Life Education, a charity delivering health and anti-drugs education to young people, of which Marvell is a director. Finally in August 1999 the Society moved to its newly refurbished offices, with all modern fittings, state-of-the-art IT and full disabled access, in 20A Millstone Lane.

Mick Marvell, commencing his sponsored walk from the Leicester Mercury offices

9. ACHIEVEMENT, CHALLENGE, TRADITION, AND THE FUTURE

In 2002 we apparently live in an affluent society, enjoy better health, education, and life-style. And yet the need for grant giving is as great as ever. The problems of poverty, sickness and unemployment experienced in 1876 remain with us; and mental illness, disfunctional families, materialistic values, credit-based debt, and the multi-cultural disadvantaged, are additional sources of distress. In 1995 the Society published its newly formulated objectives: "to relieve poverty and distress through the effective giving of charitable grants; provision of debt and welfare rights advice; and the efficient administration of charitable funds." At last the Victorian clause "repression of mendicity" had disappeared! And LCOS defined its four departments: 1) Grants to individuals in need, 2) Money Advice Centre 3) Palliative Care & Welfare Rights project and 4) Trust Administration. However after twenty-one years of success in assisting the people of Leicestershire, LCOS's Money Advice Centre was in 2001 merged with the City Council Money Advice Unit and formed into a new independent charity. The Society has now incorporated to become a limited company, in the process winding up its ancient very small charities and placing them within LCOS. It has modernised its image by a change of name to 'Leicester Charity Link'; and runs a thoroughly modern computerised office system. But its heart is still in the same place – to assist those in need, whilst encouraging them to help themselves. For LCOS, people still count the most.

The Society has always been good at pioneering new ventures and still continues its tradition of leaping at fresh challenges. For in 2001 it has taken on the local network distribution of central government's new 'Children's Fund'; £220,000 p.a. for grants to children and young people, especially small and embryonic hard to reach groups. Led by Aileen Bedford-Stradling, an outreach worker helps the more inexperienced to make their application, formalise their organisation, and put in place suitable child protection. The Children's Fund's four themes are Aspiration & Experiences; Economic Disadvantage; Isolation & Access; and Children's Voices – all familiar strands in LCOS's long history.

LCOS is also good at forming strategic partnerships: with national charities like NSCR, from which grew the now thriving Palliative Care Team; and at local level – LOROS, the St Matthew's project, Life Education, and the one that got away, Age Concern. It delights

in working in partnership with other groups, such as Leicester Lions, who made possible the purchase of seaside holiday chalets for needy families. It enjoys good relations and works in harmony with the city and county councils, and its Chief Executive and Deputy are pro-active on many local and national committees in the charitable field.

Leicester Charity Link, even though it has shed its Victorian name, still values its links with the past and its traditions, aims and values that go back to the late nineteenth century. Hincks set a tradition in 1907 when as Mayor he chaired the Society's AGM, for still today its Annual Meeting is held in the Town Hall's Council Chamber and is chaired by each year's Lord Mayor.

In the 1880s LCOS joined forces with the Town Council and the local newspaper, to help find work for the unemployed, and nowadays it continues its good relationship with Leicester City Council, and its partnership with the *Leicester Mercury*.

LCL staff outside the offices at 20A Millstone Lane, 2002

The Society has always focused on convalescence, from the time when it acted as agent for the Sutton Charity (est. 1858), sending needy Infirmary patients to seaside lodgings, up until its 1980s successful project with the Children's Aid Association chalet at Chapel St

Leonards. And the 1903 Miss Mackennal's scheme to assist consumptives is echoed in the present day Palliative Care Team's work for the terminally ill. Hincks set up revolutionary systems for casework; the computerised Children's Charity database was also a new concept. Hincks assisted those wishing to leave the country; nowadays help is given to many of Leicester's incoming multi-racial residents, with Nisha Khalifa and Shabnam Jagot in the office assisting as translators. In 1947 many people found they could not understand the new-fangled benefit system; LCOS is still today sorting out clients' State aid, which betters their quality of life.

Several old Leicester families are part of the LCOS tradition; the Gimsons' support spanned over a century, from 1876 until Mr Ben Gimson's retirement from the Council in 1981, with the remarkable Miss Margaret Gimson laying the Society's foundations, and her nephew, Mr Christopher Gimson, being a notable President for twelve years until 1975. Lady Oliver was a great supporter of the Society for over thirty years, serving on its committee until her death in 1978; and her daughter, LCOS caseworker Rosemary Freer, has been with LCOS for over twenty years. The Gee family's involvement has been unbroken throughout the Society's history; Mr H.Simpson Gee was its President in 1908; Mr Percy Gee served as Hon. Financial Adviser from 1904 to 1961; Mr Harry Gee joined as a volunteer in 1941, was a Council member and President for ten years until 1997, and his daughter, Caroline Wessel, continues the link by serving on the present Executive Committee.

Chief Executive Mick Marvell has been the inspiration behind much of the Society's work during the last thirty years, and he has come to personify its name and reputation, much as Hincks did early last century. As regards the future, Mick believes that poverty, in one form or another, will remain with us. Changes in family makeup and values over the last few years have resulted in more people living alone. This is unlikely to change very much, and in addition the present pension system will lead to two groups of pensioners; those who are reasonably well off, and others who are significantly worse off, and as a consequence are disenfranchised from many of the activities pensioners expect to enjoy in their retirement. The many people who will continue to miss out on the benefits of our generally affluent society will still need the work of Leicester Charity Link. Many of its aims, objectives and activities remain the same as those of 125 years ago, and its concern for those in need endures.

APPENDIX 1

PRESIDENTS

1920	Sir Jonathan North, JP
1923	Mr G.E. Hilton, JP
1925	Sir Arthur Grey Hazlerigg, Bart, JP
1929	Mr W. Bastard, CC, JP
1932	Mr H. Percy Gee, JP
1939	Lt. Col. Sir Robert Martin, CMG, DL
1941	Mr Victor R. Pochin, CBE, DL, MA, JP
1943	Mr Claud Bennion
1946	The Very Revd. H.A. Jones, Provost of Leicester
1953	Mr D.E. Cameron
1956	The Very Revd. Merwyn Armstrong
1958	Mr Norman D. Ellis, MA, JP
1961	The Very Revd. R.J.F. Mayston, CBE, MA
1963	Mr Christopher Gimson, CIE, BA
1975/6	none
1977	Mr Douglas S. Astbury, TD
1987	Mr Harry E.G. Gee
1997	Mr Timothy Brooks, JP, Lord Lieutenant

APPENDIX 2

CHAIRMEN

1921	Mr C.S. Biggs, MA
1947	Mr Norman D. Ellis, MA, JP
1958	Mr Christopher Gimson, CIE, BA
1963	Mr Douglas S. Astbury, TD
1982	Mr Brian Thompson
1990	Mr Jon Noakes, FCA
1996	Mrs J.Margaret Lee
2000	Mr Stan Vaughan
2001	Mrs Ann Brennan, BA

APPENDIX 3

AGENT/SECRETARY/DIRECTOR/CHIEF EXECUTIVE

1876	Mr Henry Brice (Agent)
1903	Mr William Edwin Hincks, JP (Secretary)
1937	Mr J.B. Smith (Secretary)
1938	Mr J. Stamps (Secretary)
1946	Mr V.E. Warner, JP (Secretary)
1969	Mr A. Tweedie (Secretary)
1970	Mr M. Marvell (Secretary, title changed to Director in 1987 and to Chief Executive in 2000)

APPENDIX 4

PREMISES IN LEICESTER

1876	39 Charles Street
1891	25 Humberstone Gate
1897	2 Highcross Street
1904	10 Highcross Street
1908	8 Highcross Street
1919	LCOS purchased the freehold of 8 Highcross Street, with a gift from Lady (Thomas) Wright
1962	Leicester City Council compulsorily purchased 8 Highcross St
1962	10 East Street
1972	18 Friar Lane
1998	20A Millstone Lane

LEICESTER CHARITY LINK CURRENTLY ASSISTS THE FOLLOWING CHARITIES, EITHER BY ADMINISTERING THEM, PROVIDING CLERKSHIP, OR ACTING ON BEHALF OF THE TRUSTEES

Leicester Aid-in-Sickness Trust

Leicester Children's Aid Association
(changed its name from Children's Aid Society in 1908)

Leicester Church Charities

The J.R. Corah Foundation

The Cotton Trust

Leicestershire County Nursing Association

The Catherine Gregory Education Foundation, Rotherby

Leicester Indigent Old Age Society

The R. Daphne Plunket Charitable Trust

The Nicholson Memorial Fund (Rosehill Trust)

The Richard Raynes Foundation

T.S. Shipman Charitable Trust

The Mrs Smith and Mount Trust

The Thomas Herbert Smith Trust Fund

The H.A. Taylor Charitable Trust

The Triangle Trust 1949 Fund

The Florence Turner Trust

The Bruce Wake Charity

Wigston United Charities

LEICESTER CHARITY LINK INFORMATION

PRESIDENT:

Mr T.G.M. Brooks, JP, Lord Lieutenant of Leicestershire

CHIEF EXECUTIVE:

Mr M. Marvell

20A Millstone Lane, Leicester LE1 5JN
Tel: 0116 222 2200 Fax: 0116 222 2201

Opening Hours: 9.00 am – 5.00 pm Mondays – Thursdays
9.00 am – 4.30 pm Fridays

LCOS office at 8 Highcross Street in 1962 –
a sharp contrast to Henton's view in 1917 (see p.14)

In the late nineteenth century there were around seventy Charity Organisation Societies assisting the poor and needy of England, but in 2002 the Leicester Charity Organisation Society (now Leicester Charity Link) is the only one that remains.

Caroline Wessel's account of the Society in Leicester and Leicestershire reflects on the many economic, social and cultural changes that have taken place during its unbroken 125 years of history, and explains how the LCOS has itself changed and adapted to meet those challenges.