

# THE HOLY GHOST GILD AND THE BECCLES TOWN LAND FEOFFEES IN THE SIXTEENTH AND SEVENTEENTH CENTURIES

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DURING THE CENTURY preceding the Reformation, many parish gilds in Suffolk received bequests of land and goods, but the most substantial gifts were made to gilds in the towns. Much property was lost when the gilds were suppressed in 1547, but many parishes managed to retain at least part of the endowment of these institutions. How this was achieved is seldom known, but at Nayland money raised by the sale of the church plate and a bell was used to buy back the gild lands.<sup>1</sup> Land and buildings rescued from the Crown in this and other ways were generally known later as town land and town houses, although this is not the only source of property so-named.

Beccles, in north-east Suffolk, was until the 19th century the third largest town in the county, and the most substantial between Ipswich and Norwich. The town stands on a navigable river and, until the construction in 1758 of the turnpike from Blythburgh through Lowestoft, the main route from London to Yarmouth passed through Beccles. Its market was one of the seven in Suffolk listed in Domesday Book, and by 1302 there were at least eighty-two stalls in the market place (*C.P.R. 1301-07*, 83). From the late 16th century, the Quarter Sessions for the north-eastern division of Suffolk, which had previously met at Blythburgh, were held at Beccles. There were seven gilds in Beccles before the Reformation, but little is known of most of them. The possessions of St Michael's Gild included the 'gild books', which contained the yearly 'accustomable rekenynges' of the gild, so it is not unreasonable to assume that other Beccles gilds also kept accounts before their suppression.<sup>2</sup> One, called the Halfpenny Gild, was presumably for the poorer people of the town, who could afford no more than a halfpenny admission fee. The charter of the Corpus Christi Gild, founded in 1354, has survived,<sup>3</sup> but only for the Holy Ghost Gild does a substantial body of records exist and, apart from one document, they all date from the 17th century or later; and so, long after the legal suppression of gilds.<sup>4</sup>

The Holy Ghost Gild is not listed among the gild certificates of 1389, so was probably not founded until the 15th century (Redstone 1906, 24). Only two of the gilds of Beccles are mentioned in the 1524 subsidy return: the stock of St Michael's Gild was valued at £6 and that of the Holy Ghost Gild at £5. This seems a surprisingly low figure for the latter. At Nayland the stocks of the gilds of St Thomas and the Holy Trinity were valued at £5 each, while at Hadleigh the possessions of the two richest gilds, those dedicated to St John and St Thomas, were both valued at £10 (Harvey 1910, 155). The wealthy Candlemas Gild of Bury St Edmunds does not appear in the 1524 subsidy return, but in 1568 the stock of the town house of Bury was worth £20 (Harvey 1909, 87).

The earliest document in the possession of the Feoffees of the Beccles Town lands, as the Holy Ghost lands are now known, is an indenture, dated 23 December 1544, by which various lands in Norfolk and Suffolk were demised by two Beccles priests to John Thorne, alderman of the Holy Ghost Gild for 1544-45, and to twelve other named persons; in other words to thirteen feoffees. These men may well have seen which way the wind was blowing and have decided to take action to preserve the land belonging to the Holy Ghost Gild, particularly in view of the difficulties the town had already experienced over its common. From 956 until 1539 Beccles manor belonged to the Abbey of Bury St Edmunds. Since the reign of Henry VI, the town had been in virtual control of its common or fen, for which an annual rent of £6 13s. 4d. was paid to the Abbot.<sup>5</sup> This very large area of rich, riverside

grazing lies within a great loop of the River Waveney. The dissolution of the monasteries clearly caused fears that this common of some 1,400 or more acres might fall into private hands and be lost to the town. Determined to avoid this disaster, the townspeople in 1540 chose William Rede, a member of a Norwich family, but himself a resident of Beccles, as well as a citizen and merchant of London and a Suffolk J.P., to negotiate in London on their behalf for the purchase of the Fen.

Rede turned out to be a disastrous choice, for he soon showed himself more concerned with his own profit than the needs of Beccles. The first patent he obtained gave him virtual ownership of the Fen, although the town had provided a considerable sum of money for its purchase. Rede contended that the money was insufficient, and that he had expended a considerable amount of his own funds. The people of Beccles compelled Rede to sue out a second patent in 1543 and, although this was more satisfactory to them than the first, it still left the surveyorship of the Fen and its deeds in the hands of the Rede family. The quarrel between the Redes and the town of Beccles continued for nearly sixty years. This is not the place to discuss what has been called 'the main cause célèbre of Tudor Suffolk' (MacCulloch 1986, 326–27), but it does help to explain the determination of the town to preserve the property of the Holy Ghost Gild.<sup>6</sup>

In view of the above, it is interesting that the indenture of 23 December 1544 records an earlier demise of precisely the same gild property by William Rede to John Thorne and fourteen others on 24 October 1542. As no other documents from this period have survived, it is impossible to indicate how William Rede came to be involved in the affairs of the Gild. The 1544 document, because it stands alone, is baffling, but it appears to represent a manoeuvre, with perhaps an element of fiction, which is part of an attempt to protect the Gild property from implied threats to its ownership.

The property demised in 1544 consisted of three closes near Ingate church at Beccles, six other enclosures, one of which was in Gillingham in Norfolk, and a house and garden with half a well, lying to the south of the gildhall in Beccles. This building stood in Smallgate on the site next to that now occupied by the Public Hall, and its garden backed on to Newgate. The area of five of the enclosures is given, and totals forty-two acres.

Each year at Whitsun the Feoffees were to elect an Alderman and four Gildholders, who were to manage the Gild's land and give an account on the Sunday after St Andrew's Day (30 November). The indenture set out how the income from the land was to be employed for twenty years from 1544. Nine marks a year was to be paid to a secular priest to say mass at the Trinity altar in the parish church and to pray for the Feoffees, the members of the Gild and the souls of the departed. Another 6s. 8d. was to be spent on the Monday after the feast of St Peter and St Paul (29 June) to mark the anniversary of eight persons to be commemorated then. This sum had to be divided among the clergy taking part in the commemoration, and any remainder was to be given to the poor scholars who had made most use of the choir. There is no indication of where the scholars came from, but it is believed that Bury Abbey supported a school in the town in the late 14th century and it may have continued to do so until 1539.

After payment of tenths and fifteenths to the Crown,<sup>7</sup> the rest of the Gild's income was to be used to relieve the poor and infirm inhabitants of Beccles, who were assessed at five pence or less in taxes. Whenever the number of Feoffees was reduced to five or six, seventeen new ones were to be nominated by the Alderman of the Gild, the surviving Feoffees and the rector of St Michael's, the parish church. Once the period of twenty years was ended, the Feoffees were to apply the income at their discretion for the good of the inhabitants.

By thus putting the emphasis on the inhabitants of the town rather than on the members

of the Gild, the last clause of the indenture shows that those who drew it up had in mind the possibility that the Crown might strike at gilds and their property, as had already happened to monasteries. If at any time it became illegal to carry out the purposes of the Trust established in 1544, then the Feoffees, with the consent of the Alderman of the Gild, the rector of St Michael's and four of the better disposed inhabitants of the town might sell the Gild's property to the highest bidder and dispose of the proceeds for the benefit of the Gild.

No documents have survived to explain how the Holy Ghost lands were saved for the town, but the Statute of 1547 which dissolved chantries and gilds allowed for redemption of property used for 'superstitious purposes' by payments to the Crown. This may well have been the method used by the Feoffees, and in any case not all of the purposes set out in the indenture of 1544 could be described as superstitious. It is also probable that the last clause in the indenture of 1544 was used in some way to preserve the Gild's land.

The eight individuals, whose souls were to be prayed for on the Monday after 29 June, were three married couples and two men. The wills of five of these, and of the widow of one, have survived. John Chever made his will on 16 May 1471, requesting his feoffees to give his large close and other adjacent ones, lying next to Ingate church, to the alderman and brethren of the Holy Ghost Gild. In return the Gild was annually to commemorate him, and all his relations, in Beccles church with a solemn mass, at which the brothers and sisters of the Gild and its alderman were to be present.<sup>8</sup> The property near Ingate church is called Chevers closes in the deed of 1544. John Chevers specified that the income from his land left to the Gild was to be used to pay the fifteenths for all poor people living in Beccles and assessed at 4d. or less. John's widow Alice made her own will less than four months after her husband, but left no gifts to the Holy Ghost Gild.<sup>9</sup>

Two of the other persons to be commemorated annually were Adam Pareys and his wife Margery. His will has not survived, but she made hers in March 1473, bequeathing to the brethren of the Holy Ghost Gild all her land at Ringsfield Green. The Gild was requested to have annual masses said for her soul, and those of her husband and her relations.<sup>10</sup> Also surviving are the wills of Edmund Crowe and Robert Quaynte, but there is nothing to indicate why they too were commemorated annually. The former left a comb of barley and the latter 20s. to the Holy Ghost Gild.<sup>11</sup>

Beccles was not unique in having charitable provision for the payment of taxes for the poor. The account book of the Nayland Feoffees records such payments, for instance in 1597 and 1598.<sup>12</sup> At Bury St Edmunds, a bequest to the Candlemas Gild was used, after the Reformation, to pay the task and subsidy (Statham 1987). The Beccles Task Books do not list persons assessed at 5d. or less. At the back of the 1593 book there is the following note: 'Note that the poor folkes tenements that owners due dwell upon them that paie iiiid to the Taske when it is gathered and not above are to be allowed out of the holygost lands as of old tyme have been used if they require it and soe allowed and payde.'<sup>13</sup> Such provision may have encouraged poor people to migrate to towns like Bury and Beccles.

Nearly a century separates the two earliest surviving documents of the Beccles Town Land Feoffees. In 1636 3s. 4d. was spent on a new account book, and this volume, which continued in use until 1757, is in excellent condition. It is a paper book, of approximately A4 size, measuring just under three inches in thickness. Until the mid-1670s the accounts presented each year by the Collector are very detailed and full of interest, but the latter part of the book is much less informative. The next two Order Books, which cover 1765-1827 and 1826-57, merely list recipients of the Feoffees' charity and the sums paid. They also include leases of property belonging to the Feoffees. These books could be used to study fluctuations in the numbers of poor in Beccles, but are far less valuable than the

earlier volume. It is unfortunate that no account books survive for the 16th and early 17th centuries.

The remainder of the Feoffees' pre-20th-century records consist of 18th- and 19th-century deeds and leases; bundles of vouchers; lists of persons relieved in the 19th century; 19th-century accounts of blanket and coal charities, including names and addresses of recipients; and a bundle of title deeds and leases, dating from the 17th and 18th centuries. This last bundle also contains holograph feoffment lists, with the signatures or marks of the feoffees.

The earliest list of feoffees forms part of the indenture of 1544, and consists of seventeen names, headed by that of John Thorne. He was assessed at £48 on goods in the 1524 subsidy (Harvey 1910, 378), and was one of the four Beccles men to pay the Anticipation in 1523. When he made his will on 13 May 1559, he described himself as a draper. No wife or children are mentioned. He owned land and houses in Beccles itself and in two neighbouring parishes, and his cash bequests totalled nearly £90. The religious preamble to his will is conservative, and he asked his executors to buy 'for the honour of almighty God a cross of silver and gold, price £20, to be used in Beccles church if the law of the realm will suffer it'. If this were not possible, the executors were to sell the cross and dispose of the money for the profit of his soul. He also requested them to spend £40 on 'the pathing and stoning' of part of Blyburgate.<sup>14</sup> In the following century, paving streets was one of the concerns of the Holy Ghost Feoffees.

When the first account book begins in 1636, it opens with a new feoffment made on 6 May of that year. There are twenty names on the list. Later feoffments were made in 1659, 1674, 1688 and 1717; the numbers range from twenty in 1636 to thirty-one in 1717. All of these appear in the account book, and also on separate sheets of paper, on which it is noted that the new feoffment was made with the consent of the then rector. The paper lists separate the old and the new Feoffees. In addition to those mentioned above, there is one earlier feoffment, that for 1599, surviving in a damaged condition. This list contains seven old and thirty new Feoffees. All but the two earliest feoffments give the occupations of the Feoffees; they always include a few gentlemen and usually one esquire, and in 1688 a baronet, Sir Robert Rich. Most of the rest of the Feoffees were engaged in the richer trades, such as tanning and malting.

The occupations followed by the Feoffees were similar to those of the Beccles Portreeves,<sup>15</sup> amongst whom tanners and maltsters were most frequently found in the period 1670–1720.<sup>16</sup> Many of the Feoffees were also members of the Corporation of Beccles Fen, and perhaps more significantly of its superior body, the Twelve.

TABLE I: FEOFFEES WHO WERE MEMBERS OF THE CORPORATION OF BECCLES FEN

<i>Year</i>	<i>Corporation members</i>	<i>Members of Twelve</i>
1674	11	8
1688	15	8
1717	23	11

As in so many towns, the affairs of Beccles were largely in the control of an oligarchy, composed of a small number of families, which provided the majority of the office holders.

The passing of the Test Act in 1673 led to the resignation of six members of the Corporation, who were members of the Independent Congregation in Beccles.<sup>17</sup> Three of

these men were also Feoffees, but the members of this body were elected for life, and it seems clear that the Test Act did not apply to private corporations.

The remainder of this paper is based on a study of the first forty years of the earliest of the Feoffees' account books. The accounts were presented annually on the Sunday after St Andrew's Day by the Collector, whose successor was then chosen from amongst the Feoffees. The Feoffees still hold their annual meeting in early December.

Between 1636 and 1660 the annual income at the disposal of the Feoffees ranged from £47 9s. 4½d. in 1637 to £94 14s. 2d. in 1650. The variations in income are in part due to rent arrears, but the general trend is upwards, reaching £102 1s. 0d. by 1757. All the income was derived from the rents of the Holy Ghost lands, although by the mid-18th century an additional £22 a year was being received in subscriptions. There were only three years, between 1636 and 1660, when expenditure exceeded income, and these shortfalls were presumably covered by reserves built up in earlier years. In 1640 for example, the Feoffees' income was £39 greater than their expenditure.

The Feoffees spent their considerable income in a number of ways for the benefit of the town of Beccles, and their work can be analysed under various headings: poor relief, regular annual payments, maintenance of their own buildings, repairs to other public buildings, payment of taxes, expenses in connection with the militia, and miscellaneous. During the period 1636-76 the accounts of the Feoffees throw light on many aspects of life in a mid-17th-century town.

Expenditure on various kinds of poor relief was a major item, which varied considerably over the period under consideration. Six years have been studied in detail: 1635-37, 1646-48 and 1666-68. Beginning in early December, the Feoffees' accounting year very nearly coincides with the modern calendar year.

TABLE II: FEOFFEE'S EXPENDITURE ON POOR

<i>Year</i>	<i>1635-37</i>	<i>1646-48</i>	<i>1666-68</i>
Overseers	£12 2s. 0d.	£21 9s. 0d.	£6 0s. 9d.
Churchwardens	Nil	Nil	£8 17s. 2d.
Individuals	£16 5s. 10d.*	£8 17s. 4d.	£2 14s. 6d.
Apprentices†	£8 3s. 4d.	£5 9s. 7d.	£4
Clothing‡	Nil	£9 9s. 2d.	£10 7s. 1½d.
Keeping children	Nil	10s.	12s.
Medical attention §	Nil	£4 10s. 0d.	17s. 6d.
Burial expenses	Nil	8s. 2d.	2s.
Total	£36	£50 3s. 5d.	£36 9s. 5d.

\* This sum includes £14 paid for the 'general good of the Inhabitants of Beccles but more especially for the poorer sort'.

† In the 1630s and 1640s masters were paid £2 for taking an apprentice, but by the 1660s the figure had risen to £4.

‡ In 1635-37 the expenditure on apprentices includes £2 3s. 4d. on their clothing, and nothing else was spent on clothing in those two years. In 1646-48 £1 9s. 7d. was expended on clothes for apprentices. The figure for 1666-68 does not include 70 yards of cloth used to clothe the poor; no price is given for this.

§ In 1646-48 medical attention included £4 for a leg amputation, and in 1666-68 the whole sum was spent on Richard Todd, who was intermittently lunatic over a period of years. In these last two years, £2 18s. 0d. was also paid at 6s. per month to persons who looked after Richard Todd during his mad fits.

Not included in the above table is £3 14s. 0d. in 1646-48 for lodging the man whose leg was amputated.

During the period under consideration, the sums raised by poor rates and spent by the Overseers of the Poor increased considerably, but during the same time the Feoffees' expenditure on the poor fluctuated rather than showing a steady rise. Higher levels of expenditure by the Feoffees in the late 1640s may have been due to disruption caused by the Civil War and its aftermath.

TABLE III: INCOME AND EXPENDITURE OF THE OVERSEERS OF THE POOR

<i>Year</i>	<i>1647-48</i>	<i>1668-69</i>
Raised by poor rates	£86 7s. 11d.	£191 4s. 2d.
Spent on occasional relief	£30 9s. 11d.	£180 2s. 7d.
Numbers receiving weekly relief	61	77
Amount spent by Feoffees on poor	£11 2s. 2d.	£4 12s. 7d.
Note: in 1636-37, 28 and in 1637-38, 18 persons received weekly relief.		

It is not possible to make exact comparisons between the expenditure of the Overseers and the Feoffees, as the former's financial year began at Easter and the latter's in early December. The above table suggests that the Feoffees' contribution to occasional relief of the poor had declined sharply between 1647 and 1668; in the earlier year the figure is just over a third of the amount expended by the Overseers, while in the later one it is only a minute fraction. Selecting individual years gives a false picture of the Feoffees' support for the poor. For instance in 1646 they expended approximately a third (about £20) of their income on the poor, but only seventeen per cent (just over £12) in 1668. Yet in 1660 just over thirty-nine per cent (£30 16s. 0d.) of their income was spent on poor relief, or if the cost of apprenticing two poor boys (£7) and of buying linen and beds (£7 15s. 6d.) for the workhouse is included, as much as fifty-eight per cent. Unusually, in this last year no payments were made to the Overseers by the Feoffees. In most years a varying subvention was paid to the Overseers.

Beccles was divided into four wards, each of which had its own Overseer, who presented separate accounts. These very detailed accounts cover 1636 to 1668. There are clear differences between the types of poor relief provided by the Overseers and the Feoffees. The former spent a considerable proportion of the rates on regular weekly payments to paupers, while the latter never did this. Large sections of the Overseers' accounts are taken up by 'extraordinary', as opposed to regular, payments, but most of the expenditure on the poor by the Feoffees could come under this heading. The Overseers of the Poor in Beccles relieved those suffering from long-term poverty, which was commonest among the elderly and children, while the Feoffees concentrated their assistance on persons affected by short-term poverty, into and out of which people drifted. Those who lived on the economic margins could be pushed into temporary pauperism by illness or some other crisis.

Many of the Feoffees' payments were made to people who were ill or in temporary distress, and who were often described as being in 'sick and sad' or 'poor and sad condition'. In 1645 and again in 1651 unusually large numbers of sick persons were assisted 'for reliefe of their necessities in tyme of their sicknes & great extremities'. It seems likely that there were epidemics in these years, but not fatal ones, as burials in these two years are not unusually high. Others were helped because they were very poor and were overburdened with children, or were unable to work and thus in want. Some poor were given money to buy items of clothing, but it was more usual for the Feoffees to buy

materials and have them made up into garments. Much of this type of expenditure was for children 'kept by the town' or for those about to be apprenticed. House rent was paid for poor persons, and repairs were made to the houses of others. Expenses of burial and medical attention were also covered. Most of the latter was unqualified, although a surgeon was paid for amputating a soldier's leg in 1647, and two doctors were consulted over the lunatic Richard Todd in 1668. One of the unqualified practitioners most often called on was Mrs William Elmy, who specialised in curing sores.

Small sums were loaned, sometimes on bond, and usually to enable the recipient to work. In 1638 Widow Makins was lent £1 to buy a horse, so that she could continue 'her trade of fetchinge of fish'; and in 1656 William Wake received 10s. to relieve his family in their sickness and for 'a stock for him to butcher with'. The person who appears in the accounts for the longest time is the lunatic Richard Todd, who was given relief when 'in his distracted condicion' on numerous occasions between 1659 and 1680. In 1663 the Feoffees obviously hoped to get him off their hands, as he was loaned £2 'for a stock to trade with all which he is to repay againe when he is able'. It is very unlikely that this loan was ever repaid.

No firm estimates can be given of the numbers of poor persons living in Beccles, but the hearth tax returns for 1674 list 204 taxpaying households and another 175 (46 per cent of the total number) which were not chargeable (Harvey 1905, 18–21). Reading the account books of the Feoffees and the Overseers suggests that both bodies gave relief, with very few exceptions, only to poor people who were Beccles residents and thus likely to be known to the officers. The language used, particularly in the Feoffees' accounts, suggests that the recipients of their charity were seen as deserving poor. It seems not unreasonable to conclude that the poor of Beccles were unusually well looked after in the 17th century. In addition to the charity of the Feoffees and the expenditure of the Overseers of the Poor, the Churchwardens and the Corporation of Beccles Fen also spent some money on poor relief. Part of the money paid out in this way by the Churchwardens was reimbursed by the Feoffees. In addition, all inhabitants of the town were entitled to graze one beast on the extensive common.

A number of regular annual payments were made by the Feoffees. These included the expenses of their meetings; rent due to Beccles manor; legal expenses, such as settlement cases and coroner's expenses; bell ringing on 5 November, coronation day and other such anniversaries; and an 'exhibition' to an unbeneficed preacher. This last could be seen as a Protestant version of the pre-Reformation payments to priests, who said mass for the souls of the departed, although the emphasis had changed to preaching sermons on particular days.

Until his death in 1641, the annual exhibition of £10 was paid to Thomas Daynes, who had a long and turbulent record as a Puritan (Evans 1978, 170–72). In 1641 John Shardelowe, the then rector, received £7 10s. 0d. for preaching on twenty-five lecture days at 6s. for each sermon; these were given on Saturday, which was market day. For the next two years unnamed preachers were paid, and then this payment disappears from the accounts until 1666, when the recipient was Thomas Armstrong, the newly appointed rector. He continued to receive £10 a year, paid quarterly 'according to the former order'. A curious entry, dated 2 November 1667, records that £3 was 'paid then to Mr Roger Lone by order and consent of the Feoffees for reading of divine service 18 months together when there was no settled minister in the towne'. The change, from supporting an avowedly Puritan preacher in the 1630s to paying the Anglican rector thirty years later, may mark a change in the views of the Feoffees, but it must not be forgotten that at the later date at least three of them were leading members of the Independent congregation in the town.

The Feoffees owned a gildhall in Smallgate, almshouses in Puddingmoor, the workhouse to the east of the gildhall, a smith's shop and a mysterious building called Redcap. Repairs to all these buildings were frequent; thatching, for example, was undertaken almost annually. At various times there are references to a pound, a house, a lower house, a shop and a chamber at or in the gildhall. Coal for the poor was kept in the house at the end of the gildhall, and the building contained a chamber in which the Feoffees met, a jury chamber and a hall. Quarter Sessions were held in this building, although in the later 16th century they had met in the Tollhouse in the New Market.<sup>19</sup> The accounts for 1658 include 6s. 8d. spent 'about settinge upp a deske for the Judge of the Courte in Sessions tyme to leane uppon at the Guildhall'.

In 1644 the gildhall windows were broken by soldiers and repaired at the cost of 7s. 4d. Six years later major repairs were carried out to the gildhall, including thatching, new groundsills, daubing and glazing. Altogether in 1650 £25 12s. 10d. was spent on repairs to the gildhall, the workhouse and the almshouses. In 1657 a cellar was dug underneath the gildhall, and lined with 8,000 bricks. The floor was paved and timber was bought for beams and joists and for a new staircase out of the cellar. Yet in 1660 the gildhall was described as being in an unfit condition, and was beautified by whitewashing and repairs before being washed and cleaned.

In addition to letting their land, the Feoffees also let out the house next to the gildhall, the new cellar underneath it, the smith's shop and the workhouse. From the opening of the account book in 1636 until 1660 the workhouse was let at a rent of about £6 a year. There are no earlier references to this building amongst the Beccles records, so it is impossible to say whether it was purpose built or a conversion. In any case it is a very early example of an urban workhouse, and was perhaps connected with the Poor Law Act of 1597, or even 1576. The Feoffees' almshouses had seven chimneys, so it is likely that they housed seven paupers, but this was very little accommodation for a town the size of Beccles. The Overseers' accounts record numerous payments to persons who kept poor children and other paupers. Presumably, this method of housing the poor was considered to be cheaper than using a workhouse. In 1660 the Feoffees paid £3 17s. 0d. to Thomas Munnes, a linen weaver and himself a Feoffee, for ten pairs of sheets 'towards the settinge upp of a workhouse', and £3 18s. 6d. to William Fenn for ten bed ticks to make beds for the poor. The accounts record that setting up a workhouse will 'tend to the good and benefitt of the Towne in generall and the pore in particler'. In the next year expenses were paid for two of the Feoffees to go to Norwich to 'seeke out a fitt person to keepe the workhouse', but this decision to return the building to its proper use was frustrated by its destruction by fire in 1662. Not until 1680 was Beccles provided with a replacement workhouse, to the cost of which the Feoffees contributed £90. From 1680 to 1690 their accounts record an annual payment of £20 to the Portreeve for the workhouse.

In addition to maintaining their own property, the Feoffees also made considerable contributions to the repair of public buildings in Beccles. These included the cross in the market place, the watchhouse, the church and the town pump. On more than one occasion they paid for gravelling the plains, the open areas of the New Market, and in 1660 paved the Old Market at the cost of £16 9s. 9d. Forty tons of stones were purchased, brought to Beccles by water and laid by stonsetters from Norwich. Trenches were dug and timber laid in them, perhaps as drains, and small stones were laid in 'sincke places' in the Old Market. Kent the boatman was given 6d. to warn carts coming to the fair that their way was blocked by the laying of stone paving in the Old Market. The watch house was by the bridge and its windows were glazed in 1653; three years later four great posts were set against it to keep off carts. In 1657 the area round the town pump, perhaps that in the New

Market, was paved and the pump itself covered over. The largest sums were spent on repairs to the market cross, which were carried out at the Feoffees' expense in 1639, 1654–55 and 1668. In 1639, 1,300 bricks were brought from Barsham, and in 1654 1,000 common bricks and 1,500 bricks were purchased from Barsham kiln. In this latter year new groundills, measuring 8ft × 15in × 15in, were also provided. Major repairs to the cross, costing £22 16s. 3d., were carried out in 1655. A new 'great stalk and armes' were raised with the assistance of scaffolding, and the lead roof was recast. There were a spire and a vane on the cross, so it may have been similar to the rather later butter cross at Bungay, and was probably seen as a symbol of the prestige of the town.

Taxation was a major call on the Feoffees' income, particularly during the period of the Civil War and Commonwealth when they paid £9 4s. 0d. a year towards the rate levied on the town for the maintenance of the Parliamentary army. In 1651, for example, Parliament and other taxes amounted to £17 15s. 9d.; these included the subsidy and other taxes due on the Holy Ghost lands. In 1639 the Feoffees made up a shortfall of £1 15s. 7d. in the ship money due from Beccles. All this was in addition to the payment of task or rates for the poorer inhabitants of the town.

The Civil War, and the two Bishops' Wars of 1639–1640, involved the Feoffees in considerable expense. They paid allowances to men who attended the musters, and supported the families of those who went away to fight. Soldiers were clothed, arms and armour repaired, and officers entertained, all at the expense of the Feoffees. In addition payments were made to various people who had soldiers quartered on them, and in 1649 £2 was given to Theophilus Vaughan 'to speed the billeted soldiers out of Towne'. The total cost of sending one soldier to Scotland in 1639 was £4 16s. 3d. This man, whose name was Burton, was given £2 10s. 0d. 'at his goeing into Scotland to serve in the Towne Armes' and another 8s. on his return because he came 'home sicke & not able to worke & for his sword hee bought, his owne being taken awaie'. In 1640 the cost of clothing six soldiers was £8 0s. 7d. The families of some of these soldiers continued to receive assistance for some time. During the years 1646 to 1648 the Overseers of the Poor were paying rent for Burton's wife, and giving her one shilling a week.<sup>20</sup>

Much of the Feoffees' expenditure cannot be neatly classified, and some of the items which come under the heading miscellaneous are amongst the most interesting in the account book. What is one to make of this entry from 1656: 'received 3s. 6d. of the horse dauncers for the use of the Guildhall and some damage'? Were they hobby horse dancers, and why were they welcomed during the Commonwealth? Payment of 1s. in 1654 to 'a poor sequestered minister' shows sympathy with dispossessed Anglican clergy. During the Civil War, small sums were often given to soldiers, sailors and poor Irish passing through Beccles, and in 1658 'a pore Oxford scholler plundered at sea by the dunkurks' was one of several poor persons given relief 'at the request of some of the Townesmen their neighbors that knewe their necessities'.

The Restoration saw considerable sums laid out by the Feoffees. The bell ringers were paid on three occasions: on the day news came that the King was sent for, on the day he was proclaimed and on the thanksgiving day, which was 28 June 1660. On the day the gentlemen 'of the cuntry' came into Beccles to proclaim the king 11s. 6d. was spent on wine, beer and tobacco 'to shewe the Townes thanckfullnes for their favours and love to the Towne'. Possibly the Feoffees and other townspeople were anxious about their previous support for Parliament. Another £4 5s. 9d. was spent on repairs to the King's arms; the work was carried out by Mr Parrys of Yarmouth, from whence they were brought back by water before being hung over the justices' seat in the gildhall. Thomas Base was given 2s. for preserving the Queen's arms from destruction 'in the tyme of the Armyes rebellion'.

They were 'now sett upp fayerly in the Guildhall', and a painter was paid for putting them into an oil frame. The arms of Queen Elizabeth I in plaster are now in Beccles Town Hall. Originally these were in an upper room with a fine late 16th-century plaster ceiling in a house in the New Market, but have been moved at least twice. It is just possible that these are the Queen's arms referred to here, but it does not seem very likely. On 27 September 1671 Charles II came through the town, and the Feoffees paid the ringers and also for two loads of gravel.

Many East Anglian towns suffered at least one major fire in the 17th century, and Beccles is no exception. Between 1586 and 1700 the town suffered at least five serious fires. The Feoffees made themselves responsible for the expenses of providing fire fighting equipment as well as paying those who assisted in putting out fires. In 1656 they bought fourteen leather buckets in London, and paid for the cost of putting up rails and ironwork in the church from which to hang them; they were described as 'the towne buckets'. Three years later they purchased two cromes 'to be used when any danger of fyere' in the town. These long-handled hooks, used to pull burning thatch off roofs, were made in Yarmouth at a cost of £4 14s. 6d. and transported to Beccles in a keel, a type of flat-bottomed boat used on East Anglian rivers.

On three occasions the accounts record quite large sums of money spent on fire fighting. When the workhouse burnt down in 1662, £2 10s. 0d. was paid to the men who put out the fire, and another £1 11s. 6d. was spent on bread and beer on the same occasion. In 1669, £12 19s. 6d. was 'disbursed about the quenching of the sad and lamentable fyre that happened among us uppon the 23 of October in this present yere, videlicet to quenchers and watchers of the fyre which continewed above a weeke and to the carters that brought water, for payles taken to carry water and for beere given to the helpers'. It is difficult to see how the fire could have lasted for over a week, but it may have been necessary to watch that long to make certain that there was no danger of the flames bursting into life again. The diarist, Philip Skippon, mentions seeing this fire on Saturday 23 October 1669: 'I was at Beckles and about 12 of the clock at noone was a Spectator of a fire that in few houres time burnt downe about 30 houses' (Hood 1924, 168).

Two years later another serious fire occurred in Beccles, and on this occasion the Feoffees spent £11 12s. 8d. in paying 'the severall persons under named which helped to quench the last fire as alsoe for watchers & other incident charges'. There follows a list of about 100 names; some appear more than once and it is not always clear whether the same person is listed twice. The payments ranged from 6d. to 2s., and on this occasion men were paid for watching for at least three nights after the fire. Many of the firefighters were poor; forty-two per cent either received poor relief at some time or belonged to families too poor to pay the hearth tax in 1674.

The Beccles Holy Ghost lands and Feoffees are not unique, but what is unusual is the survival of such a detailed and interesting record as their first account book. The earliest account book kept by the Feoffees of the Nayland town lands covers the years 1553 to 1651, but ceases to give details after 1607.<sup>21</sup> As at Beccles, the income rose and by the end of the period had reached a figure comparable to that from the Holy Ghost lands. In 1651 the income of the Nayland Feoffees was £81 and at Beccles £74; both bodies overspent their income in this year. Expenditure at Nayland was very similar to that at Beccles. At the former money was spent on repairs to the church, scouring armour, keeping and clothing poor children, medical attention, apprenticing, burial expenses, and cash relief for the poor and sick. In the 1640s the Nayland Feoffees, like their fellows at Beccles, were paying contributions to the Parliamentary armies. Their income came from rents of town land and the sale of wood and timber.

The Bury St Edmunds Guildhall Feoffment owned far more property and received a very much larger income than either the Beccles or Nayland Feoffees, but its pattern of expenditure between 1570 and 1625 was very similar. Bury was, of course, a much bigger town, with a population of perhaps around 5,000 in the early 17th century (Statham 1982). At the end of that century there were still fewer than 2,000 inhabitants of Beccles, while Nayland was smaller still. In 1674 there were 379 households in Beccles and 164 in Nayland (Harvey 1905, 18–21, 216–17). Most of the endowments of the Candlemas Gild at Bury, the forerunner of the Guildhall Feoffment, were made for what could broadly be described as municipal purposes and so survived the suppression of the Gild. Jankyn Smith, who died in 1481, left land to the Candlemas Gild to provide an income for a single payment of one hundred marks to each new Abbot. After the Reformation, this money was used to pay the task and subsidy for the town, and in the late 16th century this amounted to about £24 a year. After 1610 the Feoffees ceased to pay these taxes, and instead paid a contribution towards the poor rates. Over the period covered by the accounts the income of the Feoffees rose from £67 15s. 2d. in 1570 to £386 8s. 10d. in 1622; this increase was largely due to new endowments. Relief to the poor in Bury took the form of fostering children, the maintenance of orphans, and payments to the two parishes for poor relief, but little was spent on apprenticing at this period. Just as at Beccles the Feoffees paid for the purchase and cleaning of town armour, and the setting forth of soldiers. As well as repairing their own buildings, they also contributed to the cost of work on public buildings in the town. The Feoffees established a house of correction in Bury in 1580, and a workhouse in 1594. From 1586 they began to pay money to the preachers of the two parishes, and by the end of the century were selecting them as well as paying their full stipends (Statham 1982 and 1987).

Recent work on Overseers of the Poor accounts from Norfolk parishes, and on Norfolk Quarter Sessions records for the years 1580–1700, shows that the kind of provision made for poor relief in Beccles was not unique. In the early 17th century there were ‘town or church estates’ in one hundred Norfolk parishes, predominantly in the south of the county. Their income was used to repair churches, to pay taxes for the poor and for poor relief. Most of the endowments of these foundations date from the late 15th century, and many of them were from the first intended for lay purposes. They could be used to pay the tenths and fifteenths, for clothing and relieving the poor, and for apprenticing children. It is interesting that at Attleborough in 1628 an attempt was made to recreate a gild, partly with the aim of relieving the parish poor (Wales 1984 and n.d.). Charitable and institutional poor relief co-existed in many Norfolk parishes in the first half of the 17th century, just as it did at Beccles and Nayland. During the period covered by this paper, the principal providers of assistance to the poor in Beccles were the Overseers and the Holy Ghost lands Feoffees, but lesser amounts were provided by the Churchwardens and the Corporation of Beccles Fen. The Churchwardens’ accounts for this period have disappeared, but, before they did so, a few extracts were published. The sums they expended on poor relief were small; 5s. in 1660 for instance (*E.A.N.Q.*, N.S., II, 298–99).

There is no 17th-century Corporation account book, but the minute book which starts in 1670 records occasional payments for the benefit of the poor. In 1674, ‘during frost and great snow’, £10 was voted for the poor, and there were similar payments in other winters. In addition money was given to some individuals in need, and to others to buy stock to enable them to work; occasionally loans were made.<sup>22</sup> This type of relief is the same as that provided by the Feoffees.

Did the poor try to get help from the Overseers and the Feoffees at the same time? Beccles was a small enough place for all its inhabitants to be known to the officials, and it is

unlikely that paupers were able to obtain relief from both bodies at the same time. Between 1645 and 1669, of the ninety-six men who served as Overseers, twenty-two were also Feoffees of the Holy Ghost lands. Nevertheless, in any particular year there might be no Feoffees who were also Overseers and *vice versa*.

However, it is worth looking at one year in detail to see what duplication did occur. In 1667 there are seven names which appear in both series of accounts.

TABLE IV: DUPLICATION OF RELIEF

<i>Name</i>	<i>from Feoffees</i>	<i>from Overseers</i>
Old Ewin	5s.	1s.6d. per week + 15s. for wife's illness and burial
Widow Russells	2s. 6d.	6d. per week
Widow Piggott	12s. for looking after a girl	1s. 2d. per week
Old Hetch	5s. for making coats for paupers	10d. per week
Isaac Girling	5s. when very sick	1s. when sick
Richard Todd	46s. for keeping him	3s.
Rysing's child	1s. 10d. for shoes	2s. per week for keeping him

In addition to the above, four weekly pensioners of the Overseers were provided with lengths of cloth by the Feoffees in 1667. What the above table makes clear is that, apart from Isaac Girling, those who received help from both Feoffees and Overseers received it for different purposes. The former provided regular relief, while the latter mainly concentrated on dealing with crises. Richard Todd is an exception to this.

There seems to be a change in the pattern of the Feoffees' expenditure in the 18th century, when they concentrated almost exclusively on the relief of poverty, rather than spending money on public works. It is difficult to be precise about this, for the 18th-century accounts record bills, but not the items or services supplied. It can tentatively be suggested that as the Corporation of Beccles Fen extended its activities beyond the simple management of the common, so the Feoffees came to restrict theirs to assisting the poor. Apart from a mid-16th-century volume, there are no Corporation accounts earlier than 1741,<sup>23</sup> so no firm conclusion can be drawn, but the minute book which begins in 1670 does show that the Corporation was striking out in new directions.<sup>24</sup>

Until very recently the Feoffees of the Beccles Town Land still owned all the land bequeathed to the Holy Ghost Gild in the late 15th century. In some details the way in which the income from the land is spent has changed over the centuries, but it is still disbursed for the benefit of the people of Beccles as it has been for 500 years. Certainly in the 17th century life would have been much harder for the poor of the town if this charity had not existed, and the poor rates would have been significantly higher in the period before 1650.

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## NOTES

- 1 S.R.O.I., GB 12/3/1.
- 2 B.B.R., A4/87. Undated, but probably from the 1540s.
- 3 Copy, in private hands, of a copy made by Cardinal Gasquet from the original MS, whose whereabouts are unknown.
- 4 The records of the Beccles Town Lands (formerly Holy Ghost lands) Feoffees are in their care. They are uncatalogued and the first account book is unpaginated.
- 5 B.B.R., A4/37.
- 6 B.B.R., section A4.
- 7 A tax levied on moveables at the rate of one tenth in towns and one fifteenth elsewhere.
- 8 N.R.O., N.C.C. Jekkys 222.
- 9 S.R.O.I., IC/AA2/2/213.
- 10 N.R.O., N.C.C. Hubert 67.
- 11 S.R.O.I., IC/AA2/2/135 (Edmund Crowe), N.R.O., N.C.C. Popy 162 (Robert Quaynte).
- 12 S.R.O.I., GB 12/3/1.
- 13 B.B.R., A15/2.
- 14 P.R.O., PROB 11/43/10.
- 15 The Corporation of Beccles Fen was composed of 24 junior and senior members, and the Portreeve, who fulfilled similar functions to a mayor, was elected annually from the senior group.
- 16 B.B.R., A5/1 (first minute book of the Corporation of Beccles Fen).
- 17 S.R.O.L., 229/1 (minute book of Beccles Independent Church, 1652–1773). No pagination.
- 18 S.R.O.L., 109/G1/1, 2 (Beccles Overseers of the Poor accounts, 1636–45, 1646–69).
- 19 Rix Collection, Town Hall, Beccles. Division IV, Vol. III (accounts of the bailiff of the manor of Beccles and Wade Hall, 1557–74).
- 20 S.R.O.L., 109/G1/2.
- 21 S.R.O.I., GB 12/3/1.
- 22 B.B.R., A5/1.
- 23 B.B.R., A18/2.
- 24 B.B.R., A5/1.

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*Abbreviations for printed works*

C.P.R. *Calendar of Patent Rolls.*

E.A.N.Q., N.S. *The East Anglian or Notes and Queries, New Series.*

*Abbreviations for MSS*

B.B.R. Beccles Borough Records (in Beccles Town Hall).

N.C.C. Norwich Consistory Court.

N.R.O. Norfolk Record Office.

P.R.O. Public Record Office.

S.R.O.I. Suffolk Record Office, Ipswich Branch.

S.R.O.L. Suffolk Record Office, Lowestoft Branch.