
WATSONIAN BENEVOLENT FUND

It all started during the First World War when Dr Arthur Hunter – a Watsonian working in New York – published a letter in “The Watsonian” of the Summer Term 1916 proposing the setting up of a Fund to help the “cases of privation nobly hidden from the public eye; there may be orphans who would receive a good education if a little financial assistance were given them; and there are probably mothers who are entitled to comforts which are denied them as a result of the death of the bread winner.” “I am willing to start the list (fund) with a subscription of £15.” And so the Watsonian War Memorial Fund was set up in November 1917 under the chairmanship of the Headmaster Dr Allison. The purpose of the Fund was:

1. The erection of a visible permanent Memorial>
2. The publication of a record of all Watsonians who served in the War
3. To provide education and where necessary give financial assistance to the children and dependants of Watsonians killed or permanently incapacitated in the war
4. To give help to Watsonians who have suffered by the war.

The Appeal started in April 1918 with a target of £10,000. Within no time £10,486 had been raised and the War Memorial was able to be erected at a cost of £3341. The War Memorial Volume was also compiled and published at a cost of £1723. The remainder was invested to provide all financial demands made on it.

The War Memorial Fund was then incorporated into a new War Relief and Benevolent Fund which started with the remaining £1,140. In 1933 the then President of the Watsonian Club Dr John Orr wrote in The Watsonian.

‘To the undoubtedly genuine applicant one’s course is clear but it is not always easy to decide what is the right thing to do when there is doubt as to the genuineness of the applicant. To meet the problem it is proposed to raise a small fund annually to tide over cases of genuine distress. Inquiry will be made into all cases applying and only those standing the test are to be assisted.’ This Fund found itself faced not only with isolated claims for temporary and small-scale assistance but also with the responsibility for the care of widows and young children for years to come and for the care of totally disabled persons for the rest of their lives. This Fund struggled on for ten years until it was incorporated in the new War Relief and Benevolent Fund. At that time it had a credit balance of £688 and was caring for six beneficiaries.

The Second World War brought further changes and it was our old friend Dr Arthur Hunter who with his colleagues of the North America Branch of the Watsonian Club contributed £300 in 1941. There then was discussion whether the Fund should be devoted entirely to the relief of financial distress and be limited to the victims of the War. Dr Orr argued that the Fund should be spent on the relief of distress and not confined to War sufferers. After an appeal for donations in October 1943 £4000 was raised within 3 months and the target of £10,000 was reached in August 1947. Naturally there was concern that the Fund would be exhausted with numerous claims but that did not happen. And so the Fund was established on a regular footing. In 1945 the Annual General Meeting of the Watsonian Club amended the Constitution by including in its objects “the carrying on of a Benevolent Fund for the benefit of Watsonians and their dependants.” This was to include past and present members of the School Staff.

Over the first ten post-war years there were concerns that the Fund would be totally spent and in 1954 grants and loans to beneficiaries was £8,634 with a deficit of £730 on the accounts. War claims were fewer than expected but claims for death and misfortune were more numerous.

Fortunately thanks to the continuing generosity of Watsonians since then, the Watsonian Benevolent Fund as it is now known is in a much healthier position. The invested funds are now in excess of

£300,000 and last year over £12,000 was paid out in grants, loans and Christmas donations – slightly in excess of income for the year. Currently there are 14 regular beneficiaries.

As Dr Arthur Hunter said in 1916 the current Trustees feel that there are “cases of privation nobly hidden from the public eye”. If you know of a Watsonian in this situation the Trustees would be pleased to hear about them. Also as Dr John Orr said 1933 ‘Inquiry will be made into all cases applying and only those standing the test are to be assisted.’ All applicants are discussed by the Claims Sub-Committee before any payment is made. The Watsonian Benevolent Fund can be contacted through either Alan Hartley (Secretary and Treasurer) or Roger Smith(Chairman) via the Development Office (development@gwc.org.uk).

Refs: “Watsonian Benevolence” in “The Watsonian 1904 – 1954” ed Hector L Waugh