

A WESTMINSTER CHARITY

ROSEMARY WEINSTEIN

A Queen Anne oval silver almsman's badge in the Museum of London collections—repoussé and chased with the head and shoulders of Emery Hill (1610–1677) brewer of Westminster—bears the initials EH and coat of arms of Hill of Lewisham, Kent.

Emery Hill left provision in his will (1677)¹ for the founding of several separate benefactions including almshouses in Rochester Row (then Tothill Fields) and a free school to teach twenty Westminster born children English, Latin, accounts and religious instruction.

Hill, a Past Master (1663)² of the Brewers' Company, appears to have made his money by property dealing. He endowed his almshouses from properties in the Strand, Buckingham Street, Duke Street, Villiers Street and Of Alley, adjacent.³

Wealthy Londoners provided for the poor, often members of their own company or trade, by building almshouses, usually small cottages ranged round a quadrangle with a matron's house and a chapel.⁴ Badges of the type illustrated⁵ represent the history of such charitable institutions (as a feature of their uniform) which were so important in London patronage of the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries. Personal emblems including donor's initials are increasingly common after the Reformation.

The almshouses, built by Emery Hill's trustees in 1708 at a cost of £1,229 15/5½d, were located on Tothill Fields, south-west of the Green Coat School and opposite the present church of St. Stephen, where the charity still exists, though now part of the United Westminster Almshouses.⁶

A stone bust and memorial to Emery Hill set in the wall record the original foundation in 1708, as does the adjacent Emery Hill Street.

The almshouses consisted of six houses of one room each, for six poor old men or six couples, and six houses for six poor old widows, a free school for the twenty children mentioned above, with a chapel over the school and 'a territt at one end of the chapel to hang a bell in, to ring the poor people to prayers,' and 'a house for the school master to dwell in, much after the manner of Mr James Palmer'.⁷ One



Plate 1. Silver cloak badge by Benjamin Pyne, London 1708. Museum of London Acc. No. 77.174. The edges are pierced for attachment, the reverse with suspension rings; ht. 115 mm

of these almspeople wore this silver badge on his cloak. The school master was to have £20 per annum, a house and a supply of coals. It was enacted that there should be a courtyard in front of the almshouses 'planted with good elmes, and not with lime trees, for elmes is a better greene and more lastingly'.⁸

From the almshouses it was said that the Residents had a clear view over the open country to the River Thames and the heights of Sydenham beyond. The mens' accommodation was built to the west of the chapel and the widows' on the east side; all almspeople were to be sixty years of age or more, to be known to the governors as 'honest housekeepers', and residents of at least twenty years standing in St. Margaret's parish. Those born in the parish were to be preferred, if equally in need. Should the wife die, the man continued to live there as a single person, if the governors thought fit, but if the

husband died, the widow was placed in temporary accommodation to await the next occurring vacancy on the women's side. None was to marry.

In 1708, couples were entitled to 12/- (60p), single women 8/- (40p) per month, a chaldron (thirty-six bushels) of coal each year, and a coat or gown every second year (the material not to cost more than 10/6 (52½p) a yard, or 50p for the school master's gown).

The Treasurer's account book⁹ records that in the year of the foundation of the almshouses (1708):

'Jan²⁰ Pd Mr Gilbert for making the Gown^s as pR^t 04 03 00'

The cost of the badges themselves are also recorded in the same account entry:

'Pd Mr Eales for 12 Badges as per Receipt £13 09 00'.

The Museum's badge is one of these made in 1708.



Plate 2. Emery Hill's almshouses, 1708, Rochester Row, Westminster. Watercolour, T. H. Shepherd, 1880-1. (British Museum)

Not all inmates, it seems, were mindful of the succour they received, and the governors were empowered to remove any inmate for misbehaviour. Such a person was Richard Booner. In 1710 it was complained that 'Richard Booner one of the almsmen lives disorderly, keeps ill company and comes into his roome at unreasonable Houres. Order'd that the s^d Ric^d Booner for the sd offences, do deliver up to the Treasurer his Gown and the Key of his roome and stand suspended for three months'.¹⁰

From the end of the 18th century, services in the chapel were discontinued, the premises being used as temporary lodgings for widows awaiting a vacancy. By 1817 the Nurse appointed to look after the old folk no longer existed, one of the women inmates acting as warden. No boys were educated at the school until that year (1817), owing to shortage of funds. Their education was then undertaken in Palmer's school, the same Trustees controlling Emery Hill's and Palmer's charities.

Emery Hill died on 27th June 1677 aged 68 years. A member of the Vestry of St. Margarets Westminster and a churchwarden, Hill is buried there.¹¹ His bequests included: the revenue of several houses in Westminster forever, for the use of the poor children of the King's Hospital in Tothill Fields (Green Coat School) of which he was a governor; also, sympathetically, green mittens to help them combat chilblains, each time they had new cloaks, and money for roast meat and plum pudding at Christmas, £100 was given for the building of almshouses for three old women in Petty France (also with an elm court or walk), £7 p.a. in fee for teaching poor children of the parish, £100 for a stock of coals forever, for the parish poor, £50 for the children of Christ's Hospital, a donation towards the setting up of poor decayed tradesmen and

£50 for the use of the poor of the Brewers' Company.

20/- was also set aside annually for a collation each June for the governors of his almshouses, their wives and the vestrymen of St. Margarets. This was intended as more than a mere 'spread' but to see, in Hill's own words, that his gifts to the parish were 'truly entered in a book' and 'applied justly and according to the donor's intentions'. 'I know' wrote Hill that 'for want of such a yearly inspection, there is a great neglect of good works, and many a pound lost to the parish for want of looking after gifts and wills'.¹²

On 11th July 1879 the almshouses of James Palmer, Nicholas Butler and Emery Hill, together with Mrs Hardwick's Charity, were consolidated into one charity in future to be known as the United Westminster Almshouses. The present buildings were erected in 1881-2 on the site (42 Rochester Row) formerly that of Emery Hill's almshouses of 1708.

NOTES

1. See Abstract of Deed of Settlement, 8th March 1674. MS 882/15 Westminster City Libraries Archives Department.
2. Also listed amongst Wardens to appear with gowns and hoods on Lord Mayor's Day 23rd November 1669. MS 3875 Guildhall Library.
3. *Loc. cit.* in note 1. See also Guildhall Library MS 1990 for 24th September 1674: lease of parcel of property in York House Yard (south side of the new Duke Street, c. 1674-6), St. Martins-in-the-Fields; between Hill *et al.* and Benjamin Bartlett.
4. W. H. Godfrey *The English Almshouse* London, 1955. Westminster was generously served by its inhabitants in respect of almshouses and schools. See also *The Parochial Charities of Westminster*, London, 1890. Almshouses are still a necessity, some 2,500 separate groups of almshouses in this country have been noted (Jennifer Lang *Pride without Prejudice* London 1975, 153).
5. Surviving badges include three other Emery Hill badges two hallmarked 1708, 1718 (both by Benjamin Pyne), and c. 1740, on loan from the United Westminster Almshouses to the Victoria and Albert Museum; also that of Rev. James Palmer, an assimilated charity. The Mercers and Fishmongers are amongst the Livery Companies still retaining 17th century almsmen's badges. See Phillis Cunningham and Catherine Lucas *Charity Costumes of Children, Scholars, Almsfolk, Pensioners* London 1978.
6. *The Report of the Commissioners to enquire concerning Charities in England and Wales Relating to Westminster* London 1903, 194, 232-4; also Gerald R. Shutt *A Brief Account of the United Westminster Almshouses* 1979.
7. Deed, dated 8th March 1674 (*loc. cit.* in note 1). The Rev. James Palmer's almshouses erected in 1654, served as the model for Hill's foundation. Hill acted as Treasurer to the Palmer Charity in 1667, with the responsibility of overseeing of the school and furniture.
8. *Loc. cit.* in note 1.
9. MS 882/13 Minutes of the Governors of Emery Hill's almshouses, 19th October 1708-19th October 1763. James Eales was appointed a governor on 2nd November 1713, to replace John Aynsworth, deceased. Westminster City Libraries Archives Department.
10. 1710. *Loc. cit.* in note 9.
11. Memorial plaque on nave column. As churchwarden, Hill audited the accounts for plague year (1665).
12. *Loc. cit.* in note 1. If this duty were neglected, the 20/- to go to the churchwardens of St. Martin-in-the-Fields!