



Prospect Square

ALMSHOUSES

In 1868 Abraham Laverton stood for parliament against J. L. Phipps, of Leighton House, and lost by 27 votes. In those days voting took place by a show of hands in the Market Place. Abraham Laverton petitioned an allegation of intimidation namely against Phipps and his associates had threatened their workmen and tenants that if they voted for Laverton they would lose their employment and/or their houses. This case was tried at the Town Hall in the Market Place, and Phipps lost his seat. Another election took place and Laverton stood again for parliament - this time he was opposed by Phipp's brother, and again Laverton lost. As a result of the accusation of intimidation Parliament, in 1872, passed the Ballot Act which introduced secret ballots for elections. Prospect Square is, therefore, a constant reminder of Westbury's contribution to British democracy.

Laverton, who was a radical and also a benevolent and efficient employer, decided to build houses to re-house the people who had been evicted from their houses by Phipp's through voting for Laverton, and to house his workers in better conditions. So Prospect Square was built and was popularly known as 'Laverton's City of Refuge'. The buildings were completed in July 1809 and this was celebrated by a grand dinner given in the open air in the middle of Prospect Square, for all the workmen associated with the building.

In accordance with the wishes of Abraham Laverton, W. H. Laverton set aside the seven houses across the top of Prospect Square as alms-houses, mainly for former employees of Laverton Mills - maintained by the rents of the 32 houses. During WWII the grass area was planted with vegetables. In 1980 the Trustees of the Laverton Housing Trust sold the majority of the houses to a company who after renovation sold the properties on the open market. The Housing Trust used the monies from the sale to

build six alms-houses on land at the rear of the library.

In 1890, Mary Brown, the daughter of Stafford Brown, vicar of Westbury 1845-47, conveyed in trust fourteen cottages adjoining Warminster Road near its junction with Edward Street. Four of the cottages, known as `Stafford Brown Alms-houses, Ivy Court`, were to be alms-houses for poor parishioners who were members of the Church of England. In 1903 rents from the four cottages totalled £24. The alms people paid 6d. per annum for their cottages. The alms-houses consisted of a double row of two-bedroomed dwellings in a small court extending back from Warminster Road.

In 1937 the cottages facing Warminster Road had been sold and converted into a house and shop with a rent of £25 per annum.

The alms-houses behind the library were in a dilapidated state and plans were considered for demolition. During WWII the cottages were used to house evacuees. In 1955 the disused alms-houses were sold for the grand sum of £560.