

**THE ORIGINS OF THE ROYAL FREE FOUNDATION:  
AN XVIII CENTURY WHO'S WHO?**

Appeals to the consciences of people of goodwill and substance have long provided a method of raising money for worthy causes. In November 1705 a public subscription was launched in Windsor to provide a Free School for 70 poor children (40 boys and 30 girls). The original subscription list which bears the names of 48 benefactors on a piece of vellum (8" x 12") is preserved to this day at The Princess Margaret Royal Free School. Many of the names are quite illegible but I have recently located a fair copy made at the time and from this I have been able to identify almost all the Founders of Windsor's oldest educational charity that is now known as the Royal Free Foundation.

In a preamble written in a fine copperplate hand (dated November 3rd 1705) is stated "Whereas there is a considerable number of children in this Town and Parish of New Windsor, who have little or no education given them, through the Povertie of their Parents. 'Tis now agreed and resolved upon by the chief inhabitants (with whom ye Dean and Canons have likewise expressed their readiness to concurr) in setting up a Charity School for that purpose. And accordingly we whose Names are underwritten do subscribe for promoting so pious and usefull a work in manner following".

It would appear that this venture to provide Windsor with a Free School was organised jointly by the Mayor and Corporation of Windsor, the Dean and Canons of St. George's Chapel and the Vicar of Windsor. This early partnership is still reflected in the composition of the Royal Free Trustees and also in the present day Royal Free Schools which are maintained jointly by the local authority and the Church.

The organisers of the scheme were fortunate in gaining the support of Queen Anne and Prince George who subscribed £50 and £30 per annum respectively. Other subscribers followed the royal example and wrote their names, and the amount they were willing to contribute, on the vellum sheet.

The list of subscribers reads like an 18th century Who's Who of Windsor. As far as I am aware the names have not been published before so I have included them here along with brief biographical details.

The Subscribers

Queen Anne	(1665-1714)	Daughter of James II and last Sovereign of the House of Stuart, 1702-14.
H.R.H. Prince George	(1653-1708)	The Queen's consort, brother of King Christian V of Denmark.
Northumberland	(1665-1716)	George Fitzroy, Youngest illegitimate son of Barbara Palmer by King Charles II. Duke of Northumberland, KG 1684, Constable of Windsor Castle & High Steward of the Borough of New Windsor, 1701-02. Colonel of the Royal Horse Guards 1702.

C. Northumberland	(? -1714)	Catherine Lucy, widow of Thomas Lucy of Charlecote and daughter of Robert Wheatley of Bracknell. Married (clandestinely) George Fitzroy (above) 1685.
The Mayor, Bailiffs and Burgesses		<u>The Mayor</u> in 1705 was Samuel Gilman Apothecary. Held office four times d.1730. <u>The Bailiffs</u> were: William Sumner (1667-1728) Tailor. His son John (1705-1772) became Head Master of Eton. Richard Reeve Cornchandler d.1732. <u>The Burgesses</u> were the Benchers and Aldermen (town council) 28 or 30 of the more responsible inhabitants.
St. Albans	(1670-1726)	Charles Beauclerk, illegitimate son of Charles II by Nell Gwynne. Created First Duke of St. Albans 1684. Lord Lieutenant of Berkshire 1714-26.
D. St. Albans	(d.1742)	Diana second daughter of Aubrey de Vere 20th Earl of Oxford and his second wife Diana Kirke. Married Duke of St. Albans 1694.
E. of Ranelagh	(1641-1712)	Richard Jones 3rd Viscount and 1st Earl of Ranelagh, pupil of John Milton, Paymaster General. Convicted of misappropriating £72,000. Expelled from House of Commons 1703. Founded a Free School at Cranbourne in 1709. No obvious Windsor connection.
Fitzharding	(1650-1712)	John Berkeley, 4th Viscount Fitzharding of Berehaven (Co. Kerry), MP for Windsor 1695-1710.
Richard Topham		MP for Windsor during period 1697-1713.
G. Lyttelton	(1640-1717)	Major George, 12th Son of Sir Thomas Lyttelton Bt Co. Worcester.