

Living London history

Sadlers Wells, the Old Vic, Chelsea Physic Garden, Hampstead Heath, Whitechapel Art Gallery... these are all symbols of London, its heritage and culture. And all have direct connections with City Parochial Foundation.

CPF has been operating in the capital for 112 years and during that time it has been associated with many innovative projects and institutions, not all of which were popular at the time, but which have since become firmly established and significant features of the London scene.

Back in the early days, education for 'the working man' was an important priority. It was the time when polytechnics had just arrived, and CPF took an active part in providing funds for their expansion.

Linked to this were a number of 'kindred' institutions which also attracted the support of Trustees – including Chelsea Physic Garden, Whitechapel Art Gallery and the Old Vic. The latter was supported on a number of occasions over the years. And CPF was also instrumental in backing the establishment of Sadlers Wells, an Old Vic offshoot, in the 1930s.

Another early priority was maintenance of open space in the capital. Among the best known areas that Trustees supported were the expansion of Hampstead Heath, Hackney Marshes and Coram Fields.

By the 1930s, this enthusiasm had developed into the provision of leisure facilities, some of these linked to large London County Council estates such as Dagenham and Becontree, and the development of Grange Farm holiday centre in Chigwell, which continues to thrive. Bellingham Recreation Project in Lewisham was another – it is still supported by CPF.

In their time such projects were not considered appropriate for public funding but, as a result of their success and changes in attitudes, they have come to be regarded as important facilities that should be supported by central and local government.

In the second half of the twentieth century Trustees began to direct funding increasingly towards organisations providing services to groups concerned with a wide range of social issues, many of them also unpopular at the time. This was a period of large scale immigration and racism began to be a serious issue. The need to do something led Trustees to provide support to organisations set up to tackle the problem.

Poor housing was another serious concern after the second world war. After initially providing funds for direct provision, CPF later made funds available to organisations such as Shelter to provide advice to homeless people, and Housing Societies Charitable Trust (now HACT) which supported the establishment of housing associations – some of which have now grown to become multi million pound social businesses housing many thousands of Londoners.

Greater London Association for the Disabled received backing, and support for GLAD and similar organisations continues today. Many other groups dealing with social problems such as child poverty, unemployment, drug and alcohol dependency and abuse, youth disadvantage and women's welfare have been seen as priority groups by the Trustees.

More recently, issues such as prison reform, and the needs of refugee and migrant communities have featured prominently, alongside support for very small voluntary groups that provide vital services for their often isolated and disadvantaged clients.

This type of support has been a major feature of the approach adopted by Trust for London which was set up in 1986 to replace funding of voluntary bodies which had previously been supported by the defunct Greater London Council.

If past experience is anything to go by, today's funding by CPF and TfL will see benefits for many Londoners extending for years to come, through institutions that become established and vital contributors to London's evolving heritage.