

Burgesses of Guild of Aberdeen

Paper to Guildry & Mortifications Funds Committee

The Burgesses of Guild of the City of Aberdeen are about to celebrate the granting of a Royal Charter by King Alexander II who came to the throne in 1214. The actual date of granting is not known but a programme of events is planned to celebrate this important landmark in the history of Aberdeen's oldest civic body.

The Guild is a charitable body which provides for Burgesses, their spouses or daughters who may have fallen on hard times by annual payments set each year by the Guildry and Mortifications Funds Committee. The number of claimants has fallen consistently over a period of years mainly because such payments are taken into account when the recipients receive other benefits. Currently, the number of claimants is less than 10.

In 1990, a petition was raised in the Court of Session to allow a variation in the use of Burgesses' funds and this was granted in 1996. The Guildry Award Scheme was set up with a strict set of rules regarding eligibility. It was agreed initially that a total of approximately £10,000 per annum (to be reviewed annually) would be available for awards under the scheme and the first award was made in 2001. In the period since the first award was made, over £150,000 was available for distribution but it is estimated that the amounts granted are less than £60,000 with no awards being sought nor claimed in the past 3 years.

Recently, Aberdeen City Council (ACC) has been reviewing the charitable trusts under its management. Many of these are small and have been dormant for years with the funds being eroded by administration costs which have increased considerably because of the need to comply with OSCR guidelines. A number of these small trusts were set up by Burgesses to provide for Burgesses or their families who require support ie similar aims to those allowed for under the Burgesses funds. Following discussions with officers of ACC, it was agreed that, subject to approval by OSCR, these funds would be transferred to the Burgesses' funds so that a large sum (to be determined) will be received in the not too distant future.

Concern has been expressed that, because the amounts being paid to Burgesses are *de minimis* in relation to the total funds and this, coupled with the lack of other charitable payments under the Awards scheme, OSCR may consider that the Burgesses of Guild no longer qualifies as a charitable body which would have adverse consequences for the Guild and its funds.

To avoid this situation, therefore, and in recognition of the 800th anniversary of the granting of the Royal Charter, we would put forward the following proposals for consideration by the Guildry & Mortification Funds Committee and Aberdeen City Council:

1 A one off payment of £500 is made to all current recipients of payments from Guild funds. This would be by way of a heating allowance at a time when many people are suffering hardship in meeting such bills and should not affect their other benefits.

2 Under the Awards scheme, payment of annual scholarships to students at Aberdeen and Robert Gordon's Universities, Aberdeen College and the Saltire Society. The criteria for qualification for persons applying for such scholarships would be the same as for those under the current awards scheme ie with regard to residence and other regulations.

These scholarships would be discussed (and awarded) each year with the respective institutions and it is believed that, in this way, the scheme would be more likely to achieve the aims for which it was set up. It should be emphasised, however, that other applications would still be considered under the existing scheme which has to be better administered and advertised.

To provide for these awards and, given the shortfall in award payments to date and allowing for inflation, we would propose that the annual amount payable under the scheme be increased to a maximum of £20,000.

3 In recognition of our 800th Anniversary, we would propose a "one off" competition among charities in Aberdeen requiring assistance with projects of a capital nature rather than income support. 3 awards would be made of £10,000, £6,000 and £4,000 with charities applying for these by submitting a paper setting out details of the project and what the award would be used for.

4 The Burgesses of Guild of Aberdeen do not have their own coat of arms. The symbol on our notepaper is that of the medallion on the Dean of Guild's dining miniature which has no significance other than the date of 1214. We believe it is appropriate that, as the oldest civic body in the city, the Guild should have its own coat of arms and request approval for funding the application for this.

In summary, these proposals recognise the historical significance of the Burgesses of Guild, meet the criteria for payments from Guild funds and will help in the event of any challenge by OSCR to the charitable status of the Burgesses of Guild of the City of Aberdeen.

Fred Dalgarno

Dean of Guild