

The Big Society - currently politically fashionable - requires for its success volunteering and philanthropy. It is expected that public good flourishes with little or no expenditure from the public purse. However, the concept of service for public good is an ancient one.

Certainly, many of our nineteenth century predecessors regarded public service as virtuous<sup>1</sup>. Such thoughts accompanied me when a few years ago I was involved in researching and writing the history of Loughborough Hospital. One of the people who enabled the hospital to come into being and to thrive was Richard Crosher.

Richard Crosher was born in Newbold Verdon, a village about a dozen miles from Loughborough, on 28 December 1799. I do not know when or why he came to live and work in Loughborough. He is recorded in Pigot's *Directory* in the 1828/9 year as a tea and grocery dealer whose business was in the Market Place. He became not only a retailer but also a wholesaler in partnership for many years with Clarke. One of the glimpses of his business activity was the award by the Poor Law Guardians of a contract to supply flour. This indicated a trustworthy enterprise. His success in business enabled him to be a benefactor of his parish, the hospital, and an initiator of the first Woodhouse Eaves Recovery home. He could also afford to build the handsome house, Forest Field, almost opposite to Emmanuel Church.

He took an active interest in the life and work of All Saints parish, serving on its Vestry Committee. He became its treasurer and by such service attracted the then Rector, the Revd William Holme, to consult him in the dividing All Saints parish. A new parish had become necessary because at that time, in the 1820s and 1830s Loughborough had a rapidly growing population.

The patron of the living of All Saints was Emmanuel College, Cambridge University, which agreed to the proposal that the new parish should not only take its name but that the Rectory living be divided so that Emmanuel became a Rectory as well.

Building the new parish required more than land and a building. It needed at its heart hard working Churchwardens to support the new Rector. We find in the *Leicestershire, Nottinghamshire and Derby Telegraph* (in fact, the Loughborough local newspaper) an advertisement which reads:

*Emmanuel Church. The inhabitants of Emmanuel parish are hereby informed that every arrangement is now made for the celebration of all the Offices of the Church; namely, Baptisms, Marriages, Funerals, etc.*

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<sup>1</sup> It was still esteemed when as an undergraduate Charles Macinnes (1892 – 1971), Professor of Imperial History at Bristol University, reminded us that we were privileged people and that there came with this, the obligation to return to society by voluntary means our recognition of the debt we owed to society. We might receive public recognition but the true reward came from having done our duty.

*Loughborough being divided into two parishes for all ecclesiastical purposes, it is requisite for persons residing in each division to confine themselves for the above purposes to their own parish church. Churchwardens Thomas Warner, Richard Crosher, December 7 1838.*

During the 1820s Richard Crosher married Susanna and they had only two children: Edward Joshua born 18 November 1828 and Susannah Smith born 3 May 1830. Susannah died four months later on 24 September 1830 and her brother died at almost six years of age on 11 November 1834. Such sadness may have influenced how Richard Crosher used the time not demanded by his business. He built a house, still standing and forming the core of William Davis's headquarters.

Whilst Richard took on public roles, his wife Susanna supported his work and she was recorded on several occasions as donating flour and fruit to the hospital in Baxter Gate. Susanna died on 5 January 1869 at the age of 70 years and was buried with her two children in the same plot in All Saints graveyard.

Richard Crosher took Sarah Jane as his second wife and her tribute to her husband is on the north wall of the chancel of Emmanuel church. Perhaps significantly, only Richard Crosher and the first Rector have memorials in the chancel, his memorial being a stylised portrait chosen and paid for by his wife. When Richard died on 7 April 1882 he was buried in the family plot at All Saints and his widow, Sarah Jane is also interred in the same place, having died on 2 December 1910 at the age of 79 years.

A commemorative plaque in Emmanuel Church, on the north wall of the chancel reads:

“In affectionate remembrance and with tender love this monument is inscribed to the dear memory of Richard Crosher of Forest Field by his second wife Sarah Jane Crosher. He was born on December 28<sup>th</sup> 1799 and died on Good Friday, April 7<sup>th</sup> 1882.

*In thy presence is the holiness and by thy right hand there is pleasure for ever more. Psalm XVI Verse 12.”*

The memorial was designed and made by T. Brock ARASC, London 1888.

The public works of Richard Crosher were demanding over many years. He served on the Management Committee of the Governors of the Loughborough Hospital acting as one of the two Visitors whose duties were to inspect the accounts of the hospital weekly and to authorise regular payments.

Crosher's role in the governance of the hospital only becomes fitfully available in the surviving records. He served for many years on its Committee and the press

reported him acting as a visitor for various periods during the 1840s. The press ceased to record this information but there is no reason to suppose that he did not continue to scrutinise the accounts and give advice as required. The Visitors had their own office when the hospital moved into the new premises in 1862, which we now see in a ruinous state in Baxter Gate. The Visitors' room was lit by the Oriel window over the patients' entrance. Ironically, perhaps, the final users of the room were patients who wanted to smoke.

On various occasions Richard Crosher chaired the quarterly meeting of the Governors of the hospital. Not infrequently, as in July 1876, the editor of the *Advertiser* stated there was no business of general interest. A separate item in the same edition records that a midwife continued her work in Loughborough but not in association with the hospital.

Richard Crosher and both of his wives donated gifts of fruit, flour and cash to the hospital and these were acknowledged from time to time in the *Loughborough Advertiser*.

In 1874 the idea of establishing a convalescent home for patients recovering from treatment in the Loughborough Hospital became an active policy. Many thoughtful people recognised that the patients often came from cramped homes with few facilities for nursing a weak person. Richard Crosher was one of a small group of Committee members who left Loughborough on a foggy November day and as they approached Woodhouse, they passed the Beacon bathed in 'glorious weather'. In the following spring the first of the homes for recovery was opened after a successful campaign to raise funds for a house in Maplewell Road. One of the first members of the administrative Committee of the home was Richard Crosher.

One of the innovations of the increasingly powerful General Medical Council of Great Britain was a move to exclude midwives from dealing with births because such duties more properly lay with surgeons. Loughborough Hospital at its AGM in March 1875 saw a motion proposed by Mr Brock and seconded by Richard Crosher that from 6 July 1875 the Hospital would cease to support midwifery.

Such a move soon proved nationally to be wholly unsustainable and in appropriate. However, we have no account of what arguments Mr Crosher had advanced. Interestingly, in November the *Advertiser* recorded: 'The Services of a trained nurse from the Middlesex Hospital have been secured to attend the sick working classes at their own homes.' This was under the heading of District Nurse, the first time such an appointment was made and supported by prominent ladies of the town.

If Crosher did not understand the importance of the role of midwives, he did argue strongly for Girls' education. The *Loughborough Advertiser's* reports on the 'New Scheme for Burton's Charity' proposed in March 1873 records the arguments of

Crosher and others to the absorbing of the Hickling Charity<sup>2</sup> with Burton's because of the loss of the provision for the education of poor girls. The final outcome was that Hickling's Charity lost its educational funding.

Richard Crosher did not ignore the needs of the poor of Emmanuel parish and is recorded in early February 1875 of giving coals for the poor. In the same year he supported the UK Alliance, a temperance organisation, along with other prominent business people of Loughborough.

On a different aspect of life, Richard Crosher was elected by the ratepayers to serve on the Loughborough Board of Health. This had been established to deal with the above average death rate in Loughborough arising from inadequate sanitation. Although drains were laid along the principal roads and new houses had to be connected to the service, much of the poorer areas of the town remained without a sewer connection. Sufficient clean water only became available in 1870 thanks to the sustained pressure of Archdeacon Fearon and some allies who promoted a private company to dam the Woodbrook at Nanpantan to create a reservoir to meet the needs of both the inhabitants and industries. Only belatedly when the bill allowing the water works scheme to be imposed on Loughborough did the Public Health Board assume responsibility for this vital service. Richard Crosher chaired the Board in 1863 but what his role was in this important local reform deserves to be explored.

It is important to recognise that the past is a foreign country and so it is a mistake to censure people for having some attitudes and knowledge gave them different values to some that we might support. However there is no doubt in my mind that Richard Crosher was a volunteer motivated by ideals that were expressed in the *Ode to Duty* by William Wordsworth:

“Give unto me, made lowly wise  
The spirit of self-sacrifice.”

*This article by the late Ian Keil appeared in the Loughborough Archaeological and Historical Society Newsletter in Spring 2011.*

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<sup>2</sup> Local landowner Bartholomew Hickling died in 1688, leaving money in his will for a school for '20 poor girls.' The Hickling School was opened in 1690, with pupils provided with a uniform of a blue gown, stockings and shoes. A Mott 2020