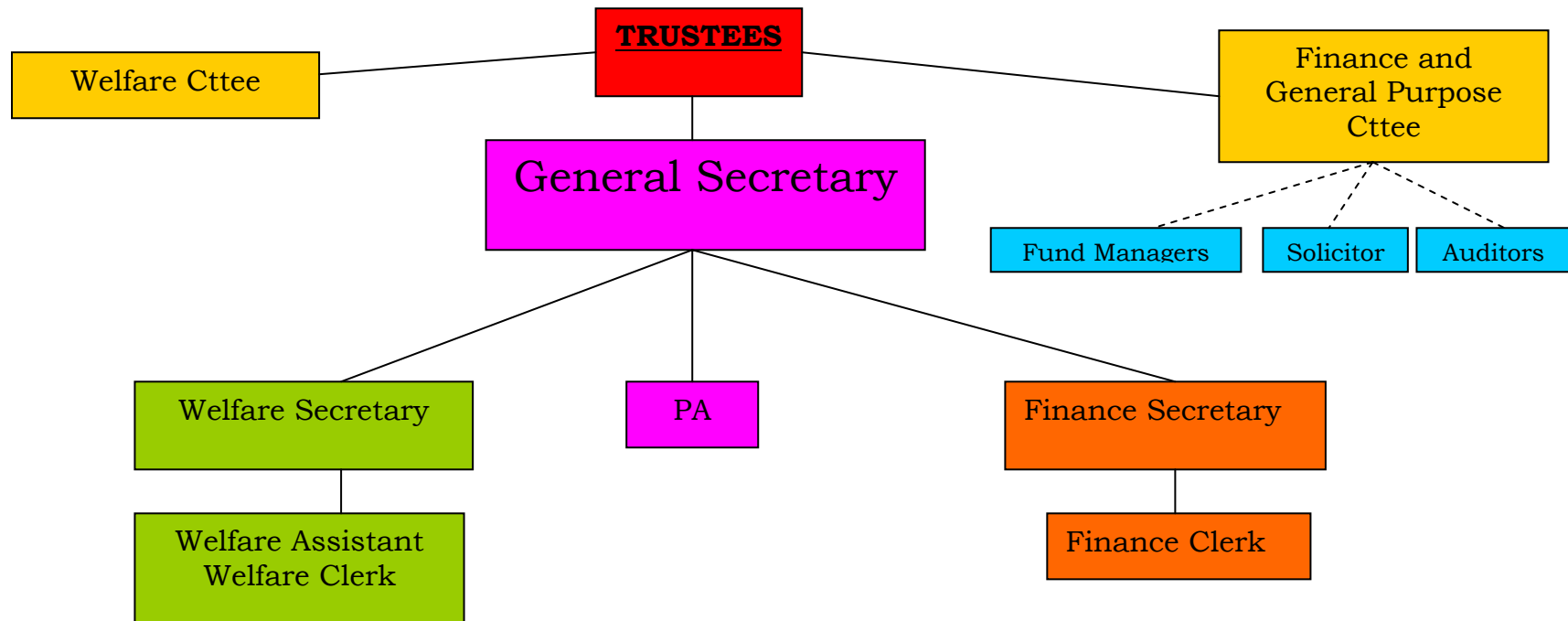


# ROYAL ARTILLERY CHARITABLE FUND



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**GUNNER WELFARE CHARITIES**  
by  
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Largely unknown, the Gunner welfare charities have been helping those in need for over 165 years. A jewel in the crown of the regimental family they have been doing work, often unsung, in helping a large number of Gunners, whether serving or retired, and their dependants over three centuries. The earliest Gunner Welfare Charity for NCO's and men was a Friendly Society formed in 1839 in Woolwich. It was formed by a group of Gunner Officers concerned at the plight of Soldiers wives left behind when their husbands went on foreign service. Its objects were 'to provide relief and employment for the wives and children of NCO's and privates of the RA embarked on foreign service'. Officers contributed a proportion of a day's pay. The oldest Gunner charity is the Royal Artillery Charities which was started in 1840 by subscriptions from officers for the welfare of soldiers and their families. Officers could not benefit but they recognised the plight of those below the rank of Commissioned Officer. In later years it also helped Gunner orphans at school. In 1904 four houses were built and presented to the RA Charities by the next of kin of officers killed in the Boer War for the benefit of other ranks who were unable to work. Two are in Colchester and two are in Bath, and they are in full use today by retired Gunners. When a vacancy arises, it is published in Gunner.

However, the RA Charities is not the oldest of the Gunner funds set up to help in times of crisis. The oldest recorded is the Royal Artillery Marriage Society, which was established in 1752. In practice this was and still is an insurance society whereby officers subscribed an annual sum that accorded his widow an annuity depending on the size of his contributions. Its terms were considerably better than commercially available at the time and did not incur the expenses of an agent. It later became the Society of the Benefit of the Widows of the Officers and Warrant Officers of the Royal Regiment of Artillery, but it closed for new business in 1993, as there had been no new business written since the Gulf War and the cost of promoting the Society was thought to outweigh the possible benefits. Further, the regulatory laws began to require costly specialist advice and training of those involved in promoting the business. In 2007 the Society currently looks after 65 annuitants and still has 43 members paying subscriptions to assist their wives in the future. RAWIS, as it has become known, is run by a Committee of retired officers, with specialist investment and actuary advice.

After World War I in 1919 funds were sought from donations to raise a memorial to all those killed in the war, to help Gunners in need and establish a headquarters in London for all the Gunner Charities. This fund was called the Royal Artillery War Commemoration Fund (RAWC). It was incorporated on 23rd January 1920 under the Companies Act as a Company not for profit and limited by guarantee. £185,000 was raised by donations and from these funds the sculptor CS Jagger and architect L Pearson built the fine monument with its 9.2inch howitzer at Hyde Park Corner, and which cost £27,000. This equipment was used as it was thought best to symbolise the power of artillery during war. It was unveiled on 18<sup>th</sup> October 1925 by HRH The Duke of Connaught. The remaining funds were invested to help those in need, but further donations and subscriptions were not sought as it was thought it would detract from the RA Charities donations and subscriptions. The third aim, to house the charities together, was not achieved until the mid nineties. Part of the of the RAWC Fund was the Ladies Work Guild, working through over 60 branches across the country, which aimed to collect new and second hand garments and money to buy footwear and garments for retired Gunners in need.

It also contained an Education Scheme to help those children born before 31<sup>st</sup> December 1919 to fathers killed or unable to work due to war injuries and this Education Scheme was wound up in 1935 having allocated about £65,000 in the sixteen years since the war ended.

Formed in 1914 from a bequest from Colonel Kelly Holdsworth another lesser known Gunner Charity is the Kelly Holdsworth Artillery Trust, which provides assistance through grants and annuities to Gunner officers, their wives or widows, unmarried daughters and children under 21 who are in need. It also helps with educational costs for the children of Gunner Officers or widows in need.

In 1920 the Royal Artillery Employment Bureau was started to assist retiring Gunners to find employment. All ranks were eligible for registration but it mainly concentrated on the London area whereas outside of London local Royal Artillery Association branches or 'Gunner Friends' tried to help. In the first nine months of 1946 it interviewed 5152 officers and soldiers for jobs and secured permanent employment for 1423. The RA uniformed servicemen supplied by the Bureau were a fore runner, I suppose, of the cap-badged corps of commissioners that one used to see in the 1960 and 70s. Its aims are now part of the Royal Artillery Charitable Fund's objects.

In 1927 the Royal Artillery Benevolent Fund (RABF) was established. The RABF had two objects; firstly to increase the income to the RA Charities and secondly to make grants on behalf of the Regiment to outside benevolent societies and institutions which helped Gunners thus relieving units of the necessity of meeting charitable appeals. It only dealt with and received subscriptions from the serving regiment but this was the first time serving soldiers could subscribe regularly to their charities. The officers who subscribed to the RA Charities were asked to switch their subscriptions to the new RABF. The subscription rates for the first time also included an annual amount to the Royal Artillery Association for those serving officers who were not life members of the Association. On 1<sup>st</sup> December 1943 the Royal Artillery War Commemoration Fund was renamed the Royal Artillery Association Benevolent Fund (RAABF). This recognised the nature of the RAA and their key role in welfare to those Gunners in need.

On the 10<sup>th</sup> January 1951 further changes took place and the Royal Artillery Association Benevolent Fund was renamed the Royal Artillery Charitable Fund (RACF). The driving force for this was connected to relief from tax. This meant that the RAA, hitherto the driving force behind Gunner welfare and benevolence, no longer had specific benevolence funds to distribute. All the Gunner welfare charities, less the KHAT, were under the RACF and in total amounted to about £500,000. The welfare funds moved from Artillery House in Earls Court to 58 The Common, Woolwich in 1960s and then leased premises in Connaught Barracks from 15<sup>th</sup> May 1973. The RACF was formed as a company limited by guarantee without a share capital with a number of members from whom the Trustees are elected. In 1955 the RACF appointed the first professional Investment Managers to manage the funds, in place of the committee, a group of senior officers who previously had done it themselves. They had invested mostly in gilt edged stocks but now began to look towards growth of the funds by investing in equities.

Towards the end of World War II a regimental consensus was sought on how best to commemorate those who had died during the war. After discussion it was decided to raise money from those serving and to add three bronze panels to the Hyde Park Memorial, and with the remainder to buy or build houses for those in need. In all 164 houses were built and five in Scotland acquired but in 1949 an agreement was reached with the Earl Haig Fund that the stock of housing would be run and for their use with the proviso that Gunners should have first call on the RA houses. In practice the requirement does not always work as relocation to where there is a specific Gunner house is not an option but those in need are accommodated where there is a suitable Haig home. Gunner Haig houses around the country are often

recognisable by the Gunner badge on the front of the house.

The Royal Artillery Charitable Fund is the name we now recognise as our Gunner welfare charity but in reality, though the biggest, it is one of two welfare charities dealing with all ranks. The other is the RA Charities and each contain many smaller Trusts and funds all there for specific purpose to help various Gunners and their dependants in need. Other funds exist for specific purposes such as the RA prisoners of War Charity which started in the First World War and was added to by new Prisoner War Charities in 1942 and 1944. They were designed to help the families of those captured. The RA Memorial Society in which interested members subscribed is to help fund new memorials and maintain those requiring maintenance. The first recorded minutes for the RA Memorial Society are 1909 and it became a Trust in 1932. It did not hold meetings during World War II and membership continued to dwindle from over a thousand in the late 1920s. Interestingly it does not seem to have been a driving force for the building of RA Memorial at Hyde Park or its extension in 1945 and, though still a separate Trust, it is now run by the RACF, without members.

Since the 1950s the RACF has been the major benevolence charity for the Gunners and as such has helped many retired and serving soldiers and their dependants in need. The RACF now carries out benevolence of over £1M a year and receives its income from investments, subscriptions from serving and retired soldiers and officers. Cases were once referred to the RACF by members of the Royal Artillery Association but now come from mainly the Soldiers, Sailors and Air Force Association (SSAFA), the Royal British Legion (RBL), the Officers Association and the Royal Commonwealth Ex-Services League (RCEL). All of whom have trained staff that can assess needs and requirements and can arrange for our benevolence to be spent appropriately. RAA Members can and do still identify those in need but the RACF then tasks one of the agencies to interview the potential beneficiary and assess the need. Much work is also spent in Almonising funds from other charities to increase the grant given to the needy.

What of the future? Over the years many funds have been started for specific purposes and in many cases those purposes have ceased to exist. In other cases welfare expenditure can be better achieved through the RACF but what is clear is that the requirement for benevolence remains paramount. Indeed though the number of cases has reduced in the last 55 years the amount required to assist those in need has risen. In the year ending 31st July 1954, for instance the RACF received 15,000 applications for assistance and gave £31,645 to 5,743 cases, and in 1962 the RACF dealt with over 10,000 cases a year. In the 17 years since the end of World War II until 1962 it disbursed £1.2M on individual cases, and in comparison in 2006 the RACF and RA Charities spent over £790K on 2015 individual cases with a further £275K on grants to institutions. The requirement for funds remains vital; whether donations or legacies.

In summary what can one say about such a charity? It is a key part of our Gunner family. It helps all those in need and it helps the serving regiments and soldiers. In the requirement to continue to support and reinforce the notion of a Gunner family the Gunner welfare charities do not just support Gunners from enlistment to death; they help from enlistment to after death because the RACF will help those dependants left behind when you die. Now that is what is called a regimental family!