

# Accord: A Brief Story of Origins



Accord's Chief Executive, Dr. Chris Handy, looks back at the origins of Accord and how we have kept to our singular purpose: providing housing and care for people in need.

Accord has quite complicated origins being an amalgam of many organisations that have joined forces over the years. The very earliest is Harpers Almshouses now based in Bath Road in Walsall. Â The properties are not the original (they were in Dudley Street) and were in fact rebuilt during the Victorian period. Â However, the almshouse charity was set up in 1511 following the bequest of William Harper, Lord of Rushall. Â He settled a trust to provide lodging for poor men visiting Walsall. Â So this was effectively a very early scheme for the homeless poor.Â He died before the properties were built so they were built by his son John. John Harper however got so worried that the properties were attracting a lot of âidle peopleâ to the town that henceforth (1519) there were to be four permanent inmates to be chosen by the Vicar of Walsall and approved by the Lord of Rushall.

Accord also acts as trustee or supports trustees to a number of other almshouse charities dating from the Victorian period which exist to provide housing for the poor of various parishes within the Walsall area. Â They include: Margaret Colquhoun Chavasse, Henry Boys and the now named Harperâs Marsh and Crumpâs.

The next oldest member of Accord was Fry Housing Trust (now of course absorbed into Accord following our recent restructuring), which was formed in 1957 as a memorial trust to commemorate the work undertaken by Margery Fry,

a member of the Fry Chocolate family. She championed penal reform especially in relation to rehabilitating offenders rather than simply punishing them. She firmly believed that offenders could lead a meaningful life in prison and upon release. Under the banner of Fry, Accord still undertakes this work today underpinned by the same belief.

But probably the primary driver of what can be seen as the modern origins of Accord are the various *Cathy Come Home* associations that were formed following the showing of the film in 1966, which depicted the harrowing experience of a young family, who were homeless. "Families back in the 1960s were effectively punished for being homeless, with men having to live apart from their wives or partners and children taken into care." There was an outcry as a result of the screening of this film on national television, which still has one of the highest viewing numbers of all time. Moseley and District Churches, Walsall and District Churches and Caldmore Area Housing Associations were all formed in its wake with support from grants from Shelter, the homelessness charity. "The local great and good through force of faith were moved to do something locally to address the unfair and inhuman treatment of the homeless." All of the associations built their first homes to meet the need of homeless families. These origins reinforce the strong credentials we have today in our important work in meeting the needs of the homeless.

A yet further strand to the origins of Accord were the formation of three organisations which pioneered in different ways cooperative or co-ownership housing. Westland Homes and Parklands Housing Society were both founded by professionals (architects, lawyers, surveyors and accountants) to house young people who wanted to get a foot onto the housing ladder through a government initiative which took off in 1964 (which incidentally also created the Housing Corporation) by building co-ownership schemes. Much later on Birmingham Cooperative Services Limited (bchs) was formed as a secondary housing cooperative to help groups of people build and run housing coops. "These are important origins in the development of the diversity of Accord's work in supporting tenants' leadership and control."

Almost there!

Two additional organisations; Ashram and Gharana, were formed as part of a political movement in the 1980s, out of concern that mainstream housing associations were not meeting the needs of Black and Minority Ethnic communities. "Both interestingly were faith-based initiatives mirroring the approach of the *Cathy Come Home* associations." In the case of Ashram, it was multi-faith to meet the wide needs of South Asian communities. "And in the case of Gharana, a Hindu faith-based approach to meet the needs of the Gujarati community of Northamptonshire."

And finally, we acquired some five and a half years ago, a private sector organisation, Direct Health, which itself was a group of care organisations formed through takeovers and mergers over a number of years. "It provides over two million domiciliary hours of care (home based) a year supplementing Accord's 800,000 hours of residential care per year."

**Multiple origins but singular purpose: providing housing and care for people in need.**

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