

*Without the help and support of the British Factory (originally, a group of British merchants, or "factors", living in Gothenburg), it is doubtful whether the English Church would ever have been built.*

In 1635, only fourteen years after the founding of Gothenburg, trade between Sweden and Britain had grown in importance. It was in that year that the original British Factory was established as a group of factors trading with Sweden. The merchants Anthony Knipe, Thomas Horner, John Wright, John Wilkinson, and Jacob Almond were able to obtain a lower rate of duty on iron, timber, tar and manufactured woollen piece goods.

The English trading company or Factory was still functioning to some extent in 1699 for it was in that year that the Factory took responsibility for the British Poor Box. In the exhortation composed by Henry Maister in that year there is evidence that this was the case as these words were used "by mutuell agreement the Factory has made and subscribed the First of March 1699." There is also a reference to an earlier "decayed" Poor Box. The revived Poor Box was to be financed by levies imposed on British ships calling at the port of Gothenburg or on ships owned or chartered by British merchants trading in Gothenburg. And ever since the Factory has taken its responsibility for the Poor Box most seriously.

The records of the Poor Box are certainly unique. One reason for this is the fact that they are existing today considering the great fires which have from time and again devastated whole quarters of Gothenburg causing the loss of church and city records. Another reason - of interest to historians - is that there is a complete record of successive annual meetings of the Factory from 1699 to the present day. Year by year the accounts of the Poor Box have been submitted for approval by the members and a new Treasurer and Trustees elected. Many prominent citizens have, through the centuries, been willing to accept the duties of Treasurer including John Chambers (the father of Sir William Chambers, the famous British architect), William Chalmers (founder of Chalmers University of Technology), John Hall, James and Robert Dickson and several generations of their families, George Seaton, William Gibson, George Kennedy, James Thorburn, George and David Carnegie, Alexander Keiller, John West Wilson, Axel Calvert and John Nonnen. The records of the Factory give a clear account of how the funds of the Poor Box were used to relieve distress and suffering.

In June, 1731, the King of Sweden granted a charter for a period of 15 years to the Swedish East India Company. Its ships, such as the Eastindiaman Götheborg, were to sail to the East Indies and trade there. The headquarters of the Company were to be in Gothenburg. One of its three directors was Colin Campbell, with earlier experience of trading in the East Indies. On becoming a director he was obliged to become a Swedish citizen. He established his home in Gothenburg. Although deterred from membership of the Factory as he was no longer a British subject, Colin Campbell was none the less deeply interested in the welfare of British people in Gothenburg, many of them employed by the Swedish East India Company. He advised the Factory on the investment of Poor Box money in the voyages of the Company ships to Canton, which proved profitable. He was also concerned that the British were not permitted to worship in public according to the rites of the Anglican Church and to have their own church. Mainly due to his influence with the Swedish Crown, the British in Gothenburg - and elsewhere in Sweden apart from Karlskrona - were by Royal Decree granted the right of public worship.

Colin Campbell generously supported the first English Church in Gothenburg and, in his will, he bequeathed money to be used for the purpose of building a better church. The bequest was placed in the trusteeship of the British Factory with the stipulation that the building of the church should commence within two years of his death. When other subscribers, the majority being members of the Factory, had collected a sufficient sum to commence the building of the church, the Factory paid out the bequest to the body representing the subscribers. In 1779, a plot of land was purchased at the corner of Östrahamnsgatan and Sillgatan, bricks and other building material were imported from Hull, and the work started in earnest. After a time, the building proved too costly for the Factory and the subscribers to finance. In the end, the site and the incomplete building were sold to three members of

the Factory, the legendary John Hall. George Carnegie and William Williamson. There was a clause in the contract of sale which ensured that the "English Congregation" should "have the largest room two floors up in the corner on the south side at a yearly rent of 200 dalers silvermynt." This room was the place of worship of the British people in Gothenburg until 1857 when the present church, St Andrew's was completed.

The support which the factory, at an early stage, gave to the establishment of a church is clear from the minutes for the 1749 annual meeting when William Chalmers was Treasurer of the Factory and a grant from the Poor Box towards the expenses of the church was made. It is from that year that the Factory began to make grants to the church or "English Congregation." This support has been of great importance for the English Church in Gothenburg.

*John R. Ashton, 1998.*