

JOHN COLNEY'S OR S. LEONARD'S HOSPITAL FOR LEPERS AT SUDBURY.

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About five hundred and twenty years ago, at the foot of some gently rising ground, about a mile from the ancient town of Sudbury, on the crown of which the "Moneyer" of King Henry the Second had founded a Priory of Benedictine Monks, stood an unpretending tenement known as the Lepers' Hospital, dedicated to S. Leonard. It had been built on waste on the north side of the famous pilgrims' road to S. Edmund's Bury, and was but a bow-shot from the old, stone, wayside cross, which had marked the way to Brundon grange, mill, wood and hill, when as yet there was but a trackway over the marshes and "Kings mere" of the great Earls of Clare, a ford (and ferry in time of floods) over the Stour, and a narrow sheep-track to one of the smallest churches, across the bare "brown hill" which gave its name to Brundon.

Leprosy in the Middle Ages was a terrible scourge, and Suffolk had the unenviable notoriety of being the fourth county in England highest in order for the prevalence of this loathsome disease, for only Devonshire, Kent, and Norfolk had a larger number of leper hospitals. Out of the 540 hospitals founded in the country, no less than 117 were for leprous persons. Leprosy was certainly contagious, and as much as possible the patients in the hospitals were isolated, and various edicts were promulgated in England and France against lepers, proclaiming them dead in the eye of the law, and ordering them not to approach sound persons without giving notice (in France)

by making a noise with a wooden clapper. In 1225, during the reign of Louis VIII., there were in France no less than 2,000 leper houses. It was a current belief all through a great part of the Middle Ages that baths of human blood would cure the disease, and the belief gave occasion to numberless cruelties, but after a time these received a check from the growing opinion that only the blood of those would be efficacious who suffered freely and voluntarily for a beloved stricken one.

The situation of the Sudbury leper house was every way suitable for the retirement of the unfortunate triplet of sufferers who lived isolated within its walls, for there were no dwelling houses near; the nearest neighbours being at S. Bartholomew's Priory on the hill, at the Holgate, and at the "Folly," where an annual fair was held. The site was also advantageous to the sufferers, as they were likely to be the recipients of the alms of the wealthy pilgrims to the shrine of S. Edmund, who frequently passed along this historical "procession-way."

The hospital was founded by John Colneys, or Colneis, or Colness, the first "Governor," in the reign of Edward III.; and Simon, of Sudbury, when Bishop of London, at the request of the Founder, drew up certain Statutes and Regulations, bearing date "The Feast-day of S. Philip and S. James, 1372," which were issued under the Bishop's episcopal seal. The following is a translation (spelling modernized) :—

"HOSPITAL FOR LEPERS, In the name of the Undivided Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Ghost, We, Simon Theobald of Sudbury, in the County of Suffolk, of the Mercy of God, Bishop of London, being willing to provide for the Hospital of Leonard, in Holgate, near Sudbury, which John Colness founded, the governor thereof, Reigell Theband and Sarah his wife progenitors, charitably by ordination, for the state of infirm Persons, hereafter in the same to dwell, with the consent of John Colness, now the Governor of the said Hospital, and of all singular Infirm Persons there, do order in the manner following.

Imprimis, that there be for ever three Lepers, after the death of the said John Colness, of which one before the other Governor of the said place, and are one to the other to be obedient in things lawful as their state requires, and this they ought to swear at the time of their

entry, that if any of the said Lepers die, or voluntarily depart, or be expelled for a reasonable cause there, the other that remain are to choose another in his place within six months and to receive him amongst them, otherwise to be in Laps, unless some nice Impediment happens, of which they ought to inform the Mayor of Sudbury aforesaid, and the Spiritual Father of the Church of Saint Gregory in the same Town, who may put in if they can another in the place aforesaid, and that if any above remain be another Fellow of Saint Gregory as aforesaid, that the Profits, that is, the Profits and Improvements, appertaining to the said Hospital, divided into five parts, for which five parts the Governor shall have two, and his fellows two parts, and the remaining fifth part to be kept for the repairing of the Premises, and that there be a common Chest in some Church or safe place in Sudbury, in which the said fifth part and their writings may be put to be kept safe, having two keys, the Governor to have one and the other to be in the hands of a person deputed by the Mayor of Sudbury, or the Spiritual Father as aforesaid. In Witnesses whereof, this present writing we have caused our Seal to be dated at Sudbury aforesaid, on the Feast of the Apostles Philip and James, in the year of Our Lord God, 1372."

It was also ordained that if it should happen that the Statutes should not be kept in form after the decease of the Founder and his Wife, the Hospital should remain to the church of S. Gregory, in Sudbury, to be divided between the said church and the chapel of S. Anne in the same, by equal proportions, for the safety of the Souls of the Founder John Colney, of Nigel Theobald, or Tebauld, and Sarah, his wife, progenitors of the said Simon Theobald, and for the Souls of all the faithful deceased. S. Anne's Chapel adjoins the Porch of S. Gregory's and is under the same roof. When restored a few years ago by the Rev. S. R. Carter, rector of Brantham, near Manningtree, it being the mausoleum of his family, a lychnoscope, and the original consecration cross were discovered. Archbishop Sudbury had a family chapel, afterwards a chantry, at the east end of the north aisle, where his parents were buried, founded, according to a former inscription, in the window, A.D. 1365, in commemoration of All Souls.

It appears that the estates of the Hospital were vested in feoffees by a deed dated 16th January, 24 Henry VI., but no subsequent feoffment has been met with. In "the Rentall of Rents of Assize belonging to the Mayor of

Sudbury, collected by the Bailiffs before and since the Charters," the Rent of the land belonging to the Charity is given as under:—

Landholders in Hospital called Colnes, 2 ac. backside of	
said Hospital	- - - xxvj ^s
Pickel adjoining with Meadow	- - - v ^s

The first-named place, known as "Cross-path field," now contains by adjustment 3 a. 0 r. 2 p., and the second piece; or "Pickel," 2 a. 2 r. 11 p. The land behind the houses is subject to the rights of commonage or shackage by the freemen of the Borough, six months out of the year, from Old Bartholomew's Day (5th September), to Old Candlemas, or Valentine's Day (14th February.) The present owner and occupier of S. Bartholomew's farm pays five pounds annually to the Common Lands' Fund of the Sudbury Corporation in lieu of shackage. In 1838 it was agreed that application should be made under "The Redemption of Shackage Act" for this land to be enfranchised, and the freemen's right of commonage to be extinguished. Valuers were appointed, who not agreeing, an umpire was called in, who gave his award, but the matter fell through, and though revived in 1844, the land was never redeemed, and it is really *de jure*, only what is locally known as "half-year land." The Pickel adjoining North Meadow was a hop field nearly 300 years ago, and called "Hop piece." It appears to have been carved out of North Meadow, and adjoins "The Holgate," being but a short distance from the site of the original toll-gate.

There are several entries in the Corporation Books relative to the Hospital. In 1619–20, a tenement on a smaller scale was built, called "The Little House at the Colnes," and in the latter year the following items are charged in the Account of the Mayor, Mr. John Willett, Gent. :—

"Disbursement. Whereas paid first to Nicholas	} xxvij ^s
White for Timber and workmanship in building	
the little house at the Colnes	- - -
paid for dawbing the same	- - - xvij ^s

paid for nails	-	-	-	-	-	viiij ^d
paid for thatching	-	-	-	-	-	viiij ^s iiiij ^d
for lathes	-	-	-	-	-	xij ^s
for a loade of strawe	-	-	-	-	-	vij ^s
for three loades of clay.	-	-	-	-	-	iiij ^s
for drawing of the strawe	-	-	-	-	-	ij ^s
for springells	-	-	-	-	-	viiij ^d
To Nicholas White for a dore	-	-	-	-	-	ij ^s
for hooks & hinges to hang the same	-	-	-	-	-	vjd "
In a subsequent account (1626) is charged						
"Paid Sir Jo Highame's Clark for writing a L ^r (letter)						} vjd
to the Treasurer about the money for ye Colny's						
"Paid for the Bond containing Salter at y ^e Colny's						xij ^s
Paid to Jo Godfry for the newe pompe there						xx ^s

The present "Clay pits" on "Gallows' Hill," from which most of the clay for "dawbing" and wattling was dug, are mentioned in the borough records more than 300 years ago. In the time of the Great Plague of London a pest-house was built there.

There is a minute in the Books of 7th February, 1657, as follows :—

"John Rider to be Governor of the Hospital in the place of Edward "Stafford, and to find Surety for forty shillings for good behaviour."

The Hospital, which latterly consisted of three small separate occupations in one block, continued to be occupied by two or three poor inmates till about 1820. These resident beneficiaries for the previous hundred years were not generally lepers, though probably they were affected with some scrofulous or cutaneous disease, and were therefore considered eligible for the Charity. The Mayor and the "Perpetual Curate" of the united Parishes of S. Gregory and S. Peter exercised jointly the right of nominating the brethren of the Hospital, who were in possession or the receipt of the rents and profits of the land. But from about 1800 from neglect or otherwise, the vacancies as they occurred, were not filled up, and a man named Loveday, the last person regularly appointed, who bore the name and held the office of "Master," died

in 1813.* The Incumbent of SS. Gregory and Peter, the Rev. Mr. Finlay, set up a claim to receive the rents, on the authority of the last-mentioned Clause in the Statutes, that these Statutes not having been kept in form, the hospital and its possessions devolved to the church of S. Gregory, and he succeeded in getting the rents paid him till his death in 1816. Norden then refused to pay it to the succeeding Incumbent, but paid some acknowledgment to the inmates of the hospital, and kept the remainder for his own use. In 1822 there was only one inmate, named Rayner, who applied for parochial relief to the Governor and Guardians of the Workhouse of Sudbury, who were a body corporate, created by an Act of Parliament in the reign of Queen Anne. They prevailed on Rayner and Norden to give up possession of houses and land, and also to execute a deed of feoffment, bearing date 13th April, 1822, conveying the property of the Hospital to the Court of Guardians. The building was let in rooms to fifteen poor people, and the land to other people, at a total rent of £18 14s. per annum, which went into the general fund for the relief of the poor of Sudbury.

With the other of the Sudbury Charities, S. Leonard's Hospital, or John Colney's Charity, was put under the management of the Municipal Charity Trustees, who, in 1858, built two detached double tenements, near the site of the old buildings, at a cost of £376. On 6th December, 1867, the Charity Commissioners established a new scheme by which the nett income of Colney's Charity was devoted towards the support of S. Leonard's Cottage Hospital, which had been erected shortly before at a short distance from the town on the Ipswich Road, with a pleasant prospect of meadow, wood, and water down the Stour Valley. There are two wards, matron's, surgeon's, and servants' rooms, and the building is in every way a model one, admirably managed, and largely utilised by the poor sick and injured of the town and neighbourhood.

* Loveday had not resided at the Hospital, but let the land to Mr. Norden of the Holgate, &c., who continued in possession down to the year 1822.

It is conducted (according to the Trust Deed) on the broadest principle of civil and religious liberty, and no recommendatory ticket or subscriber's order is needed for the admission of patients.

Thus the generous stream of charity and care for the sick and afflicted has steadily flowed on for nearly five centuries and a quarter, and the endowment left by John Colney and his wife, and regulated by the unfortunate murdered Primate and Chancellor in the Rebellion of the Peasants, has been administered year after year, and is now merged in a more pretentious and eminently successfully scheme for the medical and surgical relief of the afflicted poor of the town and the parishes round, without distinction of party or creed. All the Sudbury Charities are well conducted, and especially that of John Colney's, or S. Leonard's Hospital.