

A FEW OF THE PUBLIC BUILDINGS AND INSTITUTIONS OF BRIDGWATER.—THE TOWN HALL—THE INFIRMARY—THE MARKET HOUSE, &c.

SEVERAL of the public buildings and institutions of the town have been dealt with at more or less length in our General History, but there are some that call for more than passing comment.

THE TOWN HALL

is situated in High-street, an extensive building, a little over twenty years old, standing on the site of the old Assize Courts. No ornamentation has been lavished on the outside; but the interior contains much that is interesting. The large hall (the Old Assize Court) is really a splendid room, one of the best of the kind to be found in the West of England. There is ample space for any purpose for which halls are generally used, such as concerts and public meetings; and a spacious gallery extends round three sides of it. Here are three life-size portraits, of great merit, painted by the late Mr. W. Baker, of Bridgwater. Two of these portraits, those of Queen Victoria and the late Prince Consort, were, according to brass tablets subjoined, *Copied by permission of Her Most Gracious Majesty from the originals in Windsor Castle by Winterhalter, presented to the Borough of Bridgwater, in the year 1865, by John Browne, Esq., when this hall was opened.* The third portrait is that of Alderman Browne himself, and underneath it are the words: *This portrait of John Browne, Esq., J.P., was presented to him during his fifth mayoralty, in the year 1865, by the inhabitants of the town, and given by him to the Corporation to be placed in this hall.*

The Council Chamber, now used as the Grand Jury-room, is in an upper storey. Here are three splendid pieces of tapestry presented by Alderman John Chapman, in 1836, Mr. Chapman resided at Hamp House, on the Taunton-road, now in the occupation of Mr. P. O. H. Peed, solicitor, and he purchased these valuable pieces of antiquity at a large sale at Enmore Castle, since razed to the ground and replaced by Enmore Park House, now occupied by Mr. Broadmead. One of these beautiful masterpieces of the loom represents Alexander the Great saluting his father Phillip before mounting the horse Bucephalus; a second represents Alexander the Great throwing his mantle over the slain body of King Darius; the third represents a patriarch surrounded by his family. Over the mantel-piece are the Poyal Arms, painted by Mr. W. H. Hawkins, formerly a coachbuilder,

of Bridgwater, for, the old Assize Court. Beneath this is a supposed portrait of Admiral Blake. There are also two interesting pictures of old Bridgwater hung on the walls: one shows an old turnpike gate and toll-house on the Salmon Parade (near the limekiln), and at the back of the picture is a memorandum extracted from the minutes of the Corporation as Turnpike Trustees, dated 17th July, 1842, as follows: — *Mr. J. Wainwright, builder, of Bridgwater, tendered to pull down the old toll-house, called Salmon-lane gate,, and to erect a new toll-house at Redgate for the sum of £59.*" Another picture represents the Parret, as seen from Cannington Park in 1745.

In the Police-court below is a series of shields, blazoned with armorial bearings of families connected with Bridgwater. Here also are painted up lists of the Mayors, Aldermen, Recorders, &c.

Under the same roof are the Corporation offices, Free Library and Public Reading-room, &c., all being well-appointed and a great credit to the town.

THE INFIRMARY.

One of the most useful and valued institutions in the town—and one of which Bridgwater may well be proud—is the Infirmary, Its origin' dates as far back as 1813, about which time the need was much felt of an institution having for its primary object the relief of sickness and alleviation of pain of particularly the labouring poor of the town and neighbourhood. Thus we find a public meeting held in the Grand Jury-room on June 26th, 1813, the Mayor of Bridgwater (Mr. James Mills) presiding, the following resolution being unanimously adopted: —

That a Medical Institution be established in Bridgwater, for the relief of the labouring poor (requiring medical and surgical assistance), in that and the neighbouring parishes, under the direction of a committee of management, subject to regulations.

Sir Philip Hales was appointed President, Mr. John Chubb Treasurer, Mr. Morley Chubb Honorary Secretary, Dr. Dunning and Dr. Haviland Physicians, Messrs. John Symes, John Haviland, and William Anstice Consulting Surgeons, and Mr. Henry Axford Honorary Apothecary. A code of rules was also discussed and adopted, and other means taken to place the Institution just called into existence on a firm footing.

A representative Committee which had been appointed carried forward operations

vigorously, and a house and garden were taken in Back-street at a rental of £40, of a Mr. Evans, who agreed to make the necessary structural alterations on payment of seven-and-a-half per cent, on the outlay; The premises were opened for the reception of patients on Sunday morning, October 6th, 1813, Mrs. Nancy Burrows being the first Matron, at an annual salary of £12 12s. The donations the first year amounted to £604 4s.

The Institution was soon doing a useful work, but its operations were early restricted for want of funds, and a few years after its formation the Committee regretfully decided that no patient should remain in the Infirmary for a longer period than a month.

In 1820 it was found that the old premises were too small and after mature deliberation a spacious house and garden on Salmon Parade were purchased of a Mr. Holloway for £700 in addition to £60 for fixtures, &c. To pay this* the Committee had only £413 18s., and the property was thereupon mortgaged to the extent of £400. From this time the Institution was known as the *Bridgwater Infirmary*; and the following year the number of patients treated numbered 295.

In 1825 financial matters had flourished to such an extent that the mortgage was paid off, and the Infirmary entered on an enlarged career of usefulness. In 1835 the number of patients relieved amounted to 1313, including 199 in-patients, whilst two years later they had increased to 1683, necessitating the provision of two extra wards, which were erected at a cost of £90 10s. In 1842 we find the Institution having an invested capital of £825.

In 1845 Dr. Jonathan Toogood, who had been mainly instrumental in founding the Infirmary, and had been Senior Medical Officer for more than thirty years, resigned his office, and a portrait of that gentleman (painted by Mr. William Baker) was publicly subscribed for, and placed in the Institution, a brass plate with suitable inscription being affixed.

In 1849 a great number of needed improvements were carried out, at a cost of £428, which were effected without recourse being had to the reserve fund. In the same year an outbreak of cholera in the town severely tested the resources of the Institution, which did a great amount of good and prevented much sickness in that trying period. Over one thousand patients were treated through the outbreak.

At the anniversary meeting held on September 24, 1854, the Committee reported with special satisfaction the fact that for the first time in the history of the Institution every arrear and subscription had been collected. A special vote of thanks was thereupon accorded Mr. Edward Lilly, the Honorary Secretary. It may here be stated that that admirable improvement has been continued for the long period of 35 years by Mr. Lilly and his successor, Mr. John Coombs.

The name of Mr. Lilly brings us to mention the fact that he was one of the most painstaking and energetic officers ever connected with the Infirmary. He was first elected on the Committee in September, 1848, and in March, 1851, he accepted the office of Honorary Secretary, the important and laborious duties of which office he continued to discharge until 1881, at the annual meeting in which year the Committee reported as follows :—*It is with great regret that your Committee have to report the resignation by Mr. Lilly of the office of Honorary Secretary. After some years of very useful assistance to the Infirmary as a Member of the Committee, Mr. Lilly, in the year 1851, kindly consented to undertake the onerous duties of the Secretaryship. From that day, your Committee have had the pleasure of reporting every year that the Institution was in a position of financial soundness, and of ever growing efficiency. It is needless for your Committee to point out for how much of this satisfactory state of things the Institution is indebted to Mr. Lilly's indefatigable and gratuitous exertions.*

Mr. Lilly has most kindly held his office, after the period at which he would have been glad to retire, in the hope of a successor appearing ready to devote himself to the same honourable task. Your Committee have much pleasure in reporting that Mr. Coombs, who has been for some years Mr. Lilly's partner, and a zealous Member of the Committee, has kindly consented to undertake the office of Secretary. He is well known to your Committee and to the Subscribers generally; and your Committee feel that there is much reason for congratulation in the vacancy which Mr. Lilly's resignation creates being filled by another volunteer, able and willing to tread in the steps of his predecessor. In losing Mr. Lilly's services as Secretary, your Committee will not lose him as a member of their body, whose experience and good judgment will be of the greatest assistance in their labours.

A brass Tablet was placed in the Entrance Hall of the Infirmary with an inscription

engraved thereon, of which the following is a copy :—

In Testimonium

On the 13th of October, 1881, Mr. EDWABD LILLY retired from the Honorary Secretaryship of the Bridgwater Infirmary, having held that office for Thirty Years. During this long period he promoted the objects of the Institution with energy, ability, and success.

In pursuance of a Resolution of the Subscribers passed at the Annual Meeting held on the 13th of October, 1881, a Tablet has been erected in the Entrance Hall of the Infirmary, in grateful acknowledgment of his gratuitous and valuable services.

M. FENWICK BISSET, M.P., President.

JOHN COOMBS, Honorary Secretary.

A beautifully illuminated copy of such inscription on vellum, mounted in a handsome gilt frame, was presented to Mr. Lilly by the subscribers,

Mr. Lilly had some years previously received a flattering testimonial to his unwearied services. In 1867, in response to a recommendation made by the General Committee (who made a striking comparison between the management of the finances then and before Mr. Lilly's acceptance of office), a subscription list was opened, and shortly afterwards a splendid tea and coffee service, of silver (value £150) was publicly presented Mr. Lilly, the pieces being inscribed as follows:—

Presented to Mr. Lilly by the friends of the Bridgwater Infirmary, as a tribute of personal respect and a mark of their appreciation of his zealous and energetic services as Honorary Secretary to that Institution during the past 16 years.

In 1862 we find various alterations and improvements, being effected, at a cost of nearly £500, which was more than covered by special donations. Soon afterwards a house and premises adjoining were purchased of the Corporation for £205 with a view to further enlarging the Institution and its operations. In the jubilee year of the Institution a special effort was made, resulting in the payment of the cost of the new premises and the carrying forward of over £100. In 1863 the annual subscriptions reached the highest total then known—£401 0s. 6d. The year's patients then amounted to about 3,800, including 300 in-patients.

In 1872 there was a proposition to change the situation of the Infirmary to North-street, the Corporation being agreeable to build a

small-pox hospital in connection with the same site. The late Mr. John Browne generously offered to pay £1,500 towards the expenses, but after mature consideration the Committee reluctantly decided not to remove from the existing premises. Shortly afterwards some very important alterations and improvements were effected at a cost of over £1,400, which was paid without touching the reserve fund.

In 1876 the death occurred of Mr. Gabriel Stone Poole who had been a warm and zealous supporter of the charity, and as a memorial to that gentlemen the front of the Infirmary was rebuilt and a portico added, the work being satisfactorily done by Messrs. Chedzey & Sons. The invested capital then amounted to £3,065, which was not touched. A brass plate at the Entrance Hall thus refers to the matter

In Memoriam

The new front elevation and portico of tills Infirmary and the new ward called The Poole Ward were erected by subscription in memory of GABRIEL STONE POOLE, who died on the 25th of March, 1876, having been through life a zealous supporter of the Institution, and for thirty years before his death Chairman of the Committee of Management.

(Signed) R. A. LORAIN-GREWS, President.

1876. *EDWABD LILLY, Hon. Secretary.*

In 1878 a valuable presentation was made to Mr. John Parsons, the senior Medical Officer, in recognition of his gratuitous services for the long period of 33 years. The subscriptions amounted to £450, and with this sum a magnificent and massive centre-piece, with four dessert stands to correspond, were purchased. On the base of the centre piece the following inscription was engraved :—

Presented to JOHN PARSONS, ESQUIRE, F.R.C.S., Senior Medical Officer of the Bridgwater Infirmary, by the friends and supporters of that Institution, and by patients mindful of its benefits, as an expression of their thanks for his gratuitous services and unremitting kindness for a period of 33 years.

In 1882 the Institution received a most valuable gift in the shape of 60a. Or. 17p. of land at Glastonbury (the purchase money of which amounted to £4,500); by Mr. James Broadmead, of Langport. In the following year the same gentleman made another gift to the Institution of 26a. 1r. 28p. of freehold land at Wembdon, which had been purchased at a cost of £2,875. This munificence is without a

parallel in the history of the Infirmary, and one of the results was increased comforts to the in-patients and additional advantages to out-patients, a qualified House Surgeon being also appointed. Another striking gift to the Infirmary was that of £1,049, in 1881, by Mr. Philip Hewett, of Boulogne, but who afterwards came to reside in Bridgwater, and died here.

We have already referred to the great usefulness of the Institution to the town and neighbourhood, and too much gratitude cannot be expressed to the various kind friends who have done so much for it. It is well supported by annual subscriptions, and collections are also made in aid of it every year in the various Churches and Chapels, in addition to which there is a *Hospital Saturday* fund, subscribed to by railway employés and workmen at the brickyards and in other manufacturing establishments.

THE MARKET HOUSE

Is a fairly handsome building; to a visitor approaching it from over the Bridge its appearance is very imposing. It fronts on the Cornhill, from which it is enclosed by handsome railings. The Corn Exchange is commodious and well-appointed; and the vendors of fish, flesh, pannier, fruit and vegetables, &c., are provided with ample accommodation. The northern facade contains the Post Office, which has a good front on High-street.

THE YOUNG MEN'S ASSOCIATION*

This organization was started in 1871, with a view to providing the means of social recreation and enjoyment for the young men of the town. The premises are situated in St. Mary-street, and contain a billiard-room (with two good tables), spacious reading-room, etc. and the Association is well-supported.