

Foundation of St John's Hospital
Chapter V of Sydney Gardner Jarman. *History of Bridgwater*, 1889

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FOUNDATION OF ST. JOHN'S HOSPITAL —
JOHN LELAND'S VISIT TO-IT — IMPROVING
THE HAVEN, AND BUILDING A STONE BRIDGE
— THE PRIORY OF MINORITES — THE MANOR
OF BRIDGWATER — ITS REVERSION TO THE
CROWN; AND PRESENT DISPOSITION.

THE next act of Lord Brewer shows that he had a regard for religion, inasmuch as in 1216 he founded a hospital in the eastern part of the town, to the honour of John the Baptist, "*pro animabus Henr. 2, Richardi, & Joannis regum Angl*" (for the repose of the souls of Henry II., Richard and John, Kings of England). This hospital, which occupied a moderate area just below the present "*Queen's Head*," in Eastover, was of the Order of St. Augustine, and intended for a Prior, master and brethren, who were to superintend and maintain thirteen poor and infirm persons, besides "*religiosos*" and stranger pilgrims. The tithes of Bridgwater were appropriated to it, and the master and brethren thereof had the advowson of the vicarage (which in 1292 was valued at eight marks). The institution was confirmed by Josceline Bishop of Bath, in 1219, who ordained it to be free, pure and perpetual for indigent persons only that it should enjoy the same liberties and free customs with other houses of the same class, and be exempt from episcopal charges. The brethren had power to elect a master or warden out of their own number, who should dispose of all offices whatsoever belonging to the house. They wore clerical attire such as was common to hospitallers, with the distinction of a black cross worked on their mantles and outer garments. By order of the above-mentioned Bishop they were to see the Parish Church of Bridgwater served by some one or other of their society, and by another proper secular chaplain as curate or assistant; and "*that one of the brethren, or in his stead some secular chaplain, should perform mass every day in the chapel of the Castle, and also when the lord of the Castle should be there and require it to be performed, at canonical hours.*" For these services the master and brethren received all profits and oblations coming from the Castle, the lord thereof finding books, vestments, utensils, lights, and all other necessaries for the said chapel. An infirmary was also provided in connection with the hospital, in which the brethren took charge of the infirm, poor and sickly, and provided for them competently, according to the custom of the house, and their own abilities. Two or three women of good fame were

employed at the expense of the master and brethren to wait on the poor and infirm, and had their lodging in a cell or chamber, so as to be "*always ready, night and day, to assist the sickly in every other office beside prayers.*"* The first master of which any record can be found was Geoffrey de Mark, 1298; and others were as follows:—Henry de Stanford, elected March, 1312; John de Walchyn, confirmed May 11, 1334; Thomas de Badicote 1340; John Pathull, died 1422; Thomas Pulton, elected February 16th, 1422; Roger Cory, October 30th, 1449; John Holford, March 28th, 1457; Thomas Spenser, 1498; Robert Walsh, January 3rd, 1524. The Counts of Mercia, and Lords de la Zouch and Lords Daubeny were patrons and benefactors of this hospital after its endowment by Lord Brewer, and in 1349 it was "*found not to the King's damage to license Thomas Fitz James, Henry Redmor, Adam Caundal, and Thomas, the son of Ralph Caundal, to grant sixteen messuages, one shop, one cellar, one stall, one garden, and 23½ acres of land in Bridgwater and North Petherton, to the masters and brethren of the hospital of St. John, of Bridgwater, to hold for them and their successors for ever.*" The institution also held considerable possessions in various parts of the neighbourhood, and was appropriated the Churches of Bridgwater, Wembdon, Northover, and Isle Brewers, as well as two in Cornwall, besides the advowson of the Rectory of Chilton and Edstock. By an arrangement the master and brethren collected the tithes at Hamp, and in lieu thereof paid the Abbot of Athelney twenty shillings yearly, besides performing the services in the Church at Hamp. The appropriation of the Church of St. George at Wembdon to St. John's Hospital took place in 1284, and in return for the land, &c., and the tithe of sheaf and hay of the whole parish, the Brethren were to give the Vicar of Wembdon for the time being two quarters of wheat, of good quality, two quarters of oats, two quarters of barley, and a half quarter of beans, and to give holy water to the officiating clerks.

The hospital appears to have carried out the intentions of the generous founder, and for centuries was a most useful institution, particularly to pilgrims, great numbers of whom, bound for the sacred shrine of Glastonbury, gratefully accepted the safety and hospitality offered within its walls.

In the year 1300 the master (*Magister Hospitalis de Brugewalter*) was returned as one holding lands of more than £40 yearly value

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in the county, and as such was summoned under a general writ to perform military service against the Scots, to muster at Carlisle on the nativity of St. John Baptist, 24th June!**

On the 17th September, 1534, the master (Robert Walsh), with Henry Pety (President), seven deacons and three novices, subscribed to the Supremacy, the yearly revenues of the institution being then valued at £120 19s 1¼d. Following this the hospital was surrendered to the king, and the master was given a yearly pension of £33 6s 8d, and a gratuity of £16 13s 4d. For some years afterwards pensions were paid in respect of it, the amount in 1553 being £16.

In 1538 the hospital was visited by John Leland, the King's antiquary, who thus refers to it in his Itinerary "*In th'est part is onely the house, late the college of St. John, a thing notable, and this house stondeth partly without th'est gate. This college had prestes that had the apparell of secular prestes, with a cross on their breste, and to this house was adjoined a hospital for poor folks. Wylliam Bruer the first founded this place, and gave onto it faire possessions.*" In 1542 Henry VIII. granted the site of the hospital, with lands near it called "*Smallcroft*," to Humphrey Colies. The estates belonging to it had been previously divided, one part going to Queen Catherine, and the remainder to Henry Lord D'Aubeny. The Hospital itself is from this time lost sight of in history, until it went to ruins, some of which remained in 1795. At the time of the formation of the Bristol and Exeter (now merged into the Great Western) Railway, a few high mounds marked the site of the hospital, and in the course of building operations in that neighbourhood many interesting "*finds*" were brought to light, including numbers of human bones, military weapons, a stone coffin, and a variety of other relics. The hospital gave its name to the street—St. John Street, and through that to St. John's Church.

The next act by which Lord Brewer sought to benefit his town was by improving the haven for the better accommodation of vessels, and in providing a suitable bridge to span the river. The Saxon "*brugie*" was composed of strong timber balks, very similar, probably, to what we see represented in the town arms. Lord Brewer's idea of a bridge was something very different, and he commenced the construction of a triple-arched, stone bridge, lofty and of ample width, with houses on one or both sides. On the west bank stood mas-

sive gate-towers, with a portcullis hanging down within, and with machinery for lowering and raising the drawbridge, which spanned a wide, deep space between the bridge and the roadway. On this side of the river a path ran for the convenience of traffic, with archways under the houses outside the gate towers, and through the open space under the drawbridge, by which persons could get to the western quay without stoppage. Lord Brewer had previously built a bridge for the use of the Castle, spanning the river to what is now known as the Castle field (a "*rock*" in the centre of the river used to be pointed out as one of the foundations of this bridge). There are also grounds for believing that another bridge at one time connected the banks, doubtless erected during some troublesome period. Some piles which were found in the river just above the Infirmary strengthen the supposition, and Oldmixon, though by no means a reliable historian (except perhaps with regard to local matters), refers to communication which at one period existed between Hamp House and Sydenham House.

Before this important work of building a town bridge was completed, Lord Brewer died, 1227, and was buried before the high altar in the Cistercian Abbey of Dunkeswell, Devon, which he had founded, and where the bones of his wife lay. After his demise the work of construction appears to have been neglected for nearly half a century, when Sir Thomas Trivett, one of the king's justices (a gentleman of Devonshire, but who possessed some land in the neighbourhood), took the matter in hand, and admirably carried out the work. An ancient record among the town muniments contains the following interesting reference to this matter:—"*It appeareth that Sir John Trevett, Knight, gave, in Richard the Second's tyme, 300 markes towards buildinge of the new bridge, and the Stewardest and Comunaltie bound themselves to performe the rest of the charge in building of the said bridge, as by severail readings in French (dated at the time aforesaid) hit doeth appeare.*" Sir John's arms, a design of trivets, in punning allusion to his name, were affixed to the coping of the bridge. A reference by *Will. de Worcestre* indicates the structure was in length seventy paces or steps. In the town records there are several entries of expenses for "*repairs of y^e houses on y^e bruge.*"

To the Wm. Brewer before mentioned there succeeded a son of the same name,

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who, following the example of his father, founded in 1230 a Priory of Minorites, or Grey Friars, on the site, it is believed, now occupied by "The Friars," in Friar-street, the fields behind which belonged to it. An arched doorway, in Silver-street, in excellent preservation, is pointed out as having belonged to it, but it is more likely to have been part of the wall which surrounded the Priory; April 16th, 1326, a licence at the Bishop's pleasure was granted to Brother Robert de Taunton, "*one of the Friars Minors of Bruggwater*," to hear the confessions of the Prioress and Nuns of Cannington, and to impose penances and grant absolutions even in cases reserved to the Bishop himself. In 1413 licence was given by the Bishop to the Warden of the Friars Minors, to hear the confessions of Margaret, widow of Leonard Hakeluyt, with reference to a vow of fasting on Saturdays, "*which she cannot keep through illness*." This lady had previously made a vow of perpetual chastity before the Bishop. The institution, which was dedicated to St. Francis, appears to have done a quiet and unobtrusive work until the Dissolution of Monasteries, when Henry VIII. granted its site to Emanuel Lukan. We hear of it again during the reign of Elizabeth, when William Hodson claimed of John Davaige, and Ellen, his wife, and William Saunders, "*quiet possession under a lease, of certain messuages and buildings called the 'Grey Friars,' in the parish of Bridgwater, held by Friswilde Hodson, under a lease from John Saunders, deceased, the reversion of the inheritance being in the defendant Saunders*."

To resume the thread of history with regard to the manor of Bridgwater. The second Wm. Brewer obtained some distinction in the Crusades, and after his return from Palestine was one of the four earls who carried a silken canopy. He married Joan, the daughter of Wm. de Redvers, Earl of Devon, and likewise Lord of the Isle of Wight, and died without issue in 1244. His estates thereupon became divided amongst his sisters — Græcia, Margaret, Isabel, Alice and Joan. The castle, manor, and borough of Bridgwater, with the manors of Haygrove and Odcombe, fell to the eldest sister, Græcia, who married William de Braose, lord of the manor of Brecknock, Radnor, Abergavenny, and a great baron of his time. William his son and heir, was massacred by Llewellyn, Prince of Wales, and left issue four daughters, his co-heiresses, viz., Maud, wife of Rodger de Mortimer; Eve, wife

of William de Cantilupe; Eleanor, wife of Humphry de Bohun; and Isabel, first wife of David, son of Llewellyn, Prince of Wales, the murderer of his wife's father, as above related, and afterwards the wife of Peter Fitzherbert. Maud, being the eldest daughter, had the castle and third part of the manor for her share, and gave the same to William Mortimer, her third son, who married Hawise, daughter and heiress of Robert de Muxegros, but died without issue. The castle and third part of the manor devolved to Edmund, Lord Mortimer, his eldest brother, to whom afterwards succeeded Roger, Edmund, Roger, Edmund, Roger and Edmund, Earls of March. It passed by an heir female of the last Earl of March to Richard, Duke of York, who married Cecily, daughter of Ralph Neville, Earl of Westmoreland, and died in 1460, leaving issue three sons, including Edward IV., his heir. Thus the Crown became possessed of the Castle and one-third of the manor of Bridgwater, which were afterwards several times held by Queens of England.

The borough of Bridgwater and the outmanor of Haygrove, in the division of the Braose estates mentioned above, fell to the share of Eve, wife of William de Cantilupe, and in the next generation passed by marriage to the Lords Zouch and Harringworth. March 26th, 1326, a special license of alienation was granted by Edward II., enabling "*Willielmus la Zousche de Haryngworth*" to enfeoff Radulphus Cosyn to certain hereditaments, including the manor of Briggewauter, with power to re-grant the same to the said William Harringworth for the term of his life. William, the son of the above, in 1361 obtained a licence to go a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. In 1418 William Lord Zouch held two parts of the manor of Haygrove, and all the demesnes of the borough of Bridgwater, with two parts of the hundred court, the fair, the market, and other franchises and liberties belonging to the said lordship of the borough. By the attainder of John Lord Zouch of Harringworth, the premises above-mentioned came to the Crown; and Henry VII. granted a "*fee farm rent*" of £16 per annum out of the town of Bridgwater, to Giles, Lord D'Aubeny, who was made Constable of the Castles of Bridgwater and Bristol, and commanded the second division at the battle of Blackheath, in 1497. His possessions went to a son Henry, whom Henry VIII., in 1539, created Earl of Bridgwater. He died without male issue, and

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the newly made title lapsed. It was revived by King James the First, May 27, 1617, in the person of John Egerton, Baron of Ellesmere and Viscount Brackley, with whose descendants it rested till February, 1829, when Francis Henry Egerton, who had succeeded his brother as 8th earl, died, and the title again became extinct.

In July, 1626, Charles I. granted to Sir William Whitmore, Knight, and George Whitmore, Esq., and their heirs and assigns " *the manor and castle of Bridgwater, with the appurtenances, the manor of Haygrove, and divers messuages, lands, tenements, and hereditaments in Bridgwater, Haygrove, Durligh, Chilton and North Petherton, together with all toll, courts-leet, views of Frankpledge, law-days, and assize of bread, wine, and beer, and all other victuals; goods and chattels, of felons and fugitives, felons of themselves attainted, convicted and condemned, and put in exigent; fines, amerciaments, waifs, estrays, deodands, free-warrens, &c., in as large and ample a manner and form as Jane, Queen of England, Catherine, Countess of Devon, Roger Mortimer, Earl of March, or Richard, Duke of York, ever heretofore had by reason or means of any charter or grant whatsoever. And among many other things the said King grants all that rent of four iron horse shoes, and thirty-eight iron nails, a free fee-rent of John Buckland, for his house called 'The Swan, with the appurtenances, in Bridgwater, by the particulars mentioned to be of the yearly rent or value of fourpence; to hold of the King in free and common soccage, and not in capite or by knight's service.*" The Whitmores, in 1630, sold the manor of Bridgwater Cast-rum cum Haygrove, the Castle of Bridgwater, the lordship on manor of Bridgwater, and divers lands, &c., to Henry Harvey, son of William Harvey, of Bridgwater, and in the course of the next 160 years it passed to various branches of that family. In 1643 (two years before the siege), Henry Harvey leased the castle to Edmund Wyndham, the King's Governor. A part of the manor afterwards went to the Corporation, other portions having previously been vested in the Hales family, of Brymore, Cannington, and have since descended to Philip Pleydell Bouverie, of Brymore.



* Wells Registers.

** Palgrave's Parliamentary write, 335, 499