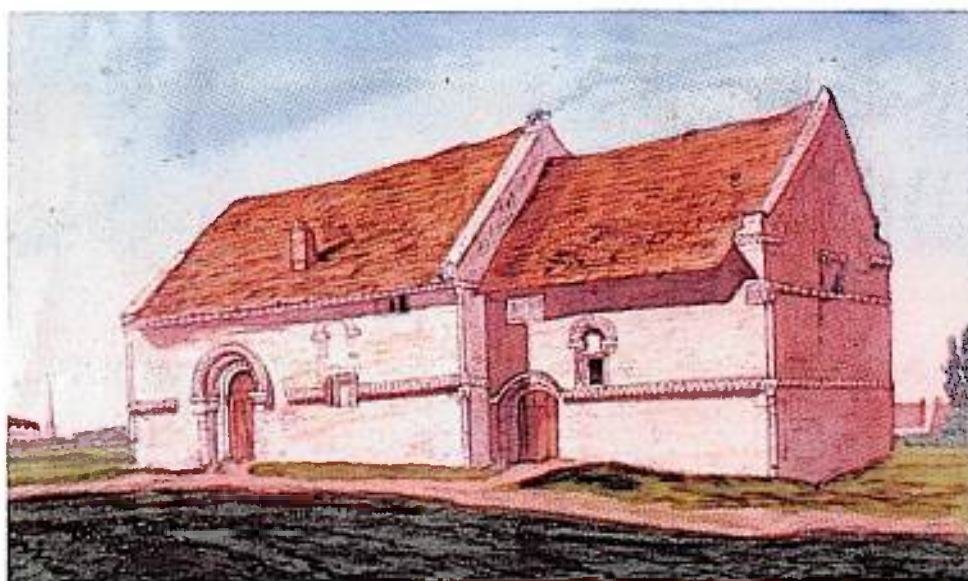


CAMBRIDGE
PAST, PRESENT
& FUTURE

STOURBRIDGE LEPER CHAPEL BARNWELL, CAMBRIDGE

A Brief History
by Barry Pearce



A Brief History of Stourbridge Leper Chapel was written by Barry Pearce.

Special thanks go to Catherine Hall and Mike Tittensor for providing background research and detailed comments. We are indebted to the Cambridgeshire Collection and the Cambridge Antiquarian Society for permission to reproduce illustrations and photographs.

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THE MASS OF SEPARATION

[The mass of separation, conducted by a priest, was performed
at the site of the leper's hut.

The whole parish would be in attendance.]

I forbid you enter a church, or a monastery, a fair, a mill, or a market.

I forbid you to leave your house without leper's clothes.

Do not wash or drink in a stream or fountain.

*I forbid you enter an inn. If you wish for wine it will be funnelled into your own keg. Do not
walk in narrow lanes lest you brush against a stranger.*

If you are accosted by anyone on your way, go downwind of them before you answer.

Share no house with anyone but your spouse.

Never touch children or give them any single thing.

I forbid you to touch the well's rim or the rope, without wearing gloves.

I forbid you eat or drink in company, save the company of lepers.

East of Cambridge city centre, on the very busy Newmarket Road, lies a little old chapel building, stuck rather inauspiciously next to a railway line and opposite a scrap metal yard. And yet the Stourbridge Leper Chapel is one of the most complete and unspoilt pieces of Norman architecture in the county, chock full of character and history.

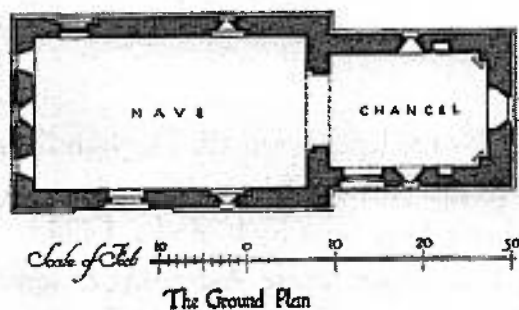


A brief description of the Chapel

The chapel consists of a nave (where the worshippers would stand, kneel, sit or even lie, if seriously sick) and a chancel (containing the altar) - see the diagram.

Outside: The chancel is built of large blocks of stone, probably from the old Barnack or Weldon quarries near Peterborough and Stamford. The nave has exposed flint pebbles with patches of brick - with the corners rounded off with stone shafts. Running horizontally around the building, in the middle of the walls, is a protruding course of patterned masonry (a 'string').

Chapel of Saint Mary Magdalene, Stourbridge, Cambridge



The eastern window in the chancel was put in in the 19th century, as was the west window in the nave when the building was restored by the great Victorian architect, Sir George Gilbert Scott, but the circular windows are original. Around the other windows there are raised arches - with zig-zag patterns (chevrons) - over stone piers. The roof is covered in tiles.

Inside: The walls would have been plastered and painted - though most of the original plastering has now gone. In the nave the walls are decorated with stone friezes made up of short raised rectangles placed at regular intervals. The most elaborate decoration is concentrated around the doorways and the chancel arch - again with zig-zag patterns and scallop shapes in the stone work.

The roof is clearly not original. It was taken from another building and put on the chapel in the 15th century. In places you can see how it is ill-fitted. Originally the chancel had a vaulted (arched) roof - and at various points around the nave, on the stone projections (or 'corbels') upon which the roof rests, are some ugly carved heads with rather grotesque looking faces.

And so to the chapel's history

1125-1150

Sometime between 1125 and 1150 a hospital for lepers, the first hospital in Cambridge, is set up here with the help of benefactions from the burgesses (the leading townsmen) of Cambridge. It seems likely that the hospital also benefits from royal patronage (probably exercised through local royal officials, for example the Sheriff).

Stourbridge Hospital, as it comes to be known, is dedicated to St Mary Magdalene, patron saint of leprosy and lepers.

The inmates or patients include those with syphilis and other disfiguring skin diseases, as well as leprosy. Some at the time see such diseases to be the result of a life of sin. It is possible that what is known as leprosy has been brought back by those returning from the Crusades. However, there is a European-wide epidemic at the time, possibly originating from China.

Though a safe distance from the town's residents - it is generally accepted that lepers should not circulate among the healthy - a conspicuous site is chosen for the hospital. The reason?: so that 'passers-by may witness the exhibition of divine justice and admire the piety of the hospital's benefactors!' The burial ground for those who die at the hospital is where the Abbey Football Stadium is (much) later built.

1150s

By the mid twelfth century the chapel has been built for the leper hospital¹. The builder is possibly the same man who built St. Edmunds church in Hauxton - the styles are certainly very similar. The early hospital buildings would probably have been built of wood and would have comprised a group of cottages or a long hall-shaped house. According to some authorities, it is also possible that the sick and dying sleep in the chapel itself.

Medieval hospitals were self regulating concerns, usually run by the monks or clergy of a religious order - most probably Augustinian monks - on a foundation of cooperation and mutual help. So religious observance forms an essential part of hospital life, with the patients attending worship daily - and probably praying for the souls of their benefactors. The hospital may have been operated on apostolic lines - with 12 or perhaps 13 lepers and one master, served by a group of carers (brethren and sisters), following the Augustinian rule. It may even have been the case that the nearby Barnwell Priory - established at its Newmarket Road site in 1112 (having moved from near Cambridge Castle) - provided the staff (though there is no direct evidence of this). Certainly the Austin Canons were known for their work in the community, their hospitality and acts of charity.

1 The first documentary evidence for the existence of the chapel is actually in the Pipe Roll for 1169.

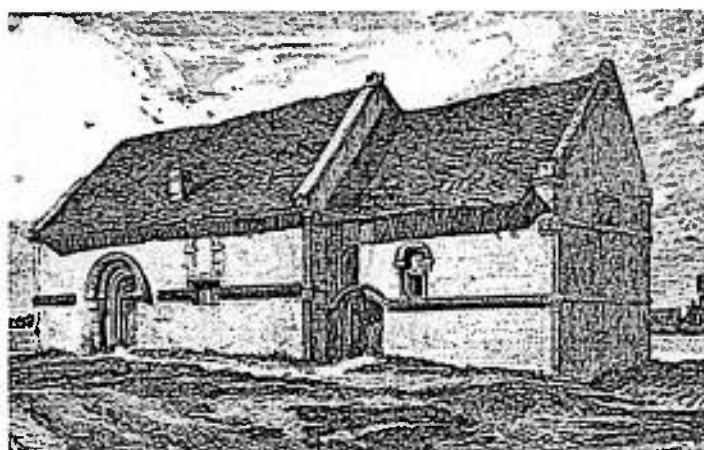
At this stage, it seems appointment of the hospital's warden is in the gift of the Crown.

1170

Royal patronage of the hospital continues. Records surviving for 1169-1172 show King Henry II's deputy in Cambridge (Sheriff 'Everard of Beche') each year gives charitable relief (alms) to the hospital to the tune of 20 shillings (worth many times more than the £1 in today's money: a labourer at this time earns less than 1/2 p, plus bread and ale, per day!). This is probably money that he has collected from regular dues paid by town and shire landowners; a nice act of wealth redistribution!



1199



The hospital by now owns a moderate amount of land; and most probably has done since the first years of its establishment (this being the norm for most medieval charitable institutions), implying many charitable donations from different patrons. Later records suggest that the hospital has land scattered over the open fields of Cambridge, Chesterton, Barnwell, Ditton,

Landbeach, Comberton and Bourn, though concentrated around Stourbridge. Most of this land would have been let to tenants.

Alongside the benefits of land ownership also come problems. This year the warden and inmates are involved in litigation at the royal court to recover hospital property in Comberton that has been taken by other landowners, including one Walter de Branford and 'three Jews and their tenant, Alan de Berton'. Just a few years later (in 1219) there is another dispute over some land in Bourn.

Leprosy, lepers and leper hospitals

Leprosy (aka 'Hansen's disease') is mainly a tropical disease, the product of bacillus *Mycobacterium leprae*; though it is not unknown in Europe and around the Mediterranean. Symptoms of the disease are varied: whitening of the skin (depigmentation), numb hands and feet, hoarse voice, ulceration and destruction of tissues (including bones) and a thickening of the face (often producing a 'leonine' appearance). In its most developed form, infections, resulting from injuries unfelt due to nerve damage, may produce the most horrible facial and bodily decay. However, in early medieval times the term 'leprosy' was used more loosely than it is today. Those with other skin ailments and diseases, like psoriasis, eczema and even syphilis and smallpox, were regarded as sufferers.

The factors underlying the spread of leprosy proper are still imperfectly understood. It was thought to be highly contagious - spread, for example, by touch and breath, and carried in water - although this was greatly exaggerated in ancient times. Numerous contributory causes were suggested; for example, over-indulgence in - or improperly cooked or cured - pork, fish or even red meat. Even drinking too much cider was blamed. Improvements in the condition could be achieved by wearing linen next to the skin or a proper diet of good bread, fruit and vegetables.

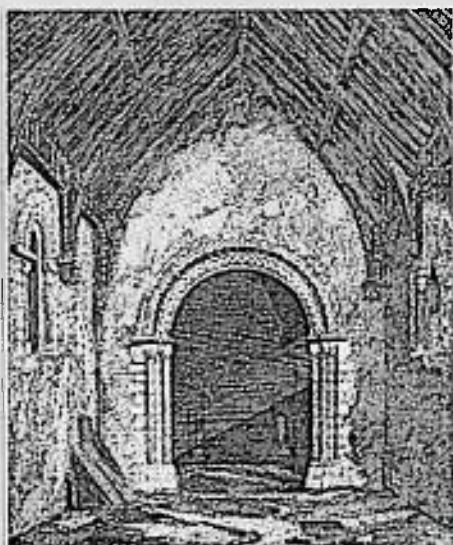
There has been considerable speculation as to how and when leprosy entered Britain. There is a tradition that Crusaders returning from the Middle East brought the disease back home. An alternative suggestion is that pilgrims to the Holy Land may have introduced the disease. In fact leprosy was prevalent in England before these times; there is even evidence of it in the 4th century at Poundbury, near Dorchester and, more locally, at Burwell in the 7th century. The main period for leprosy in Britain was from the 11th to the 14th centuries, with the disease reaching its height in the 13th. It seems that at this time there was an epidemic of the disease throughout Europe which may have come originally from China. By the 16th century, however, it was rare: and during the reign of Edward VI (1547-53) it was reported by a Commission that most of the leper hospitals were empty.

The first leper hospital in England was established at Harbledon, near Canterbury. Over the 12th century more than 80 similar institutions were founded and over the period 1150-1250 more than 150 leper hospitals were established in England. Royal patronage or foundation was common. Some leper hospitals became rather generously and richly endowed, so much so that their wealth began to attract attention. In some instances there was even competition among non-lepers for places, and the hospital gradually changed into a general infirmary or hostel for the poor and sick (with lepers and non-

lepers segregated). In other cases the hospital's wealth was seen as a resource to be jealously guarded or even exploited - with Stourbridge providing a rather good example!



Leprosy has long had religious significance. Numerous cases are cited in the Old Testament, where it is related to uncleanness and sin. Leprosy aroused feelings of disgust and lepers were stigmatised and feared. In some places they were regarded as the 'already dead' - and upon diagnosis there would often be a formal church ceremony with the Last Rites being held over the sufferer. Nevertheless, from the Middle Ages lepers were regarded with more pity. The church saw charity and compassion towards lepers as a Christian duty, teaching that they were Christ's poor, kin to the beggar who was carried by the Angels into his bosom. It is not surprising, therefore, that the church took the major early responsibility for providing Leper hospitals. The church and the Christian community became major patrons.



Lepers were frequently called lazars in medieval times - and their hospitals leper houses - after Lazarus the beggar who lay at the rich man's gate full of sores. Leper hospitals were also frequently dedicated to St. Mary Magdalene (as is this one) and thus called 'Maudlins'². There is considerable confusion, however, surrounding these associations: in the Bible it is another Mary who is linked to leprosy, by being the brother of a different Lazarus - Lazarus of Bethany!

So it is not surprising that the religious aspect of life in a leper community took precedence: indeed the modern word "hospital" is perhaps slightly misleading when applied to medieval times - at that time hospitals were hostels for pilgrims and travellers (places where hospitality was on offer) as much as they were infirmaries. They were usually staffed by the brothers and sisters of a religious order: the Augustinian Canons, for example, made it their chief aim to work among the poor and infirm and worked in many leper hospitals. In addition (or alternatively) there might be some lay brothers and sisters who would care for the sick. The leper inmates themselves became known as brethren, unlike in other hospitals where this term was applied only to the carers. In charge would have been a master or 'custos', who combined the role of hospital warden and chaplain - answerable to the patron or bishop.

2 St Mary was the first person to see Jesus after the resurrection and was present at the crucifixion and burial. Mediaeval scholars associated her with a repentant prostitute who had anointed His feet: He cured her of possession by evil spirits. It is also said that she aided His work in Galilee, though again there is much confusion about her story.

Each hospital had its own rules, based on the monastic order. The inmates commonly took vows of obedience, held their property in common and became part of a self governing community. They attended chapel very regularly and frequently - possibly twice daily - especially to pray for the souls of their patrons.

Lepers were usually obliged to wear distinctive markings - often with a bell or clapper attached to their belt. At Harbledown (near Canterbury, the first leper hospital in England, established c1080) it is known that both men and women wore russet coloured garments - the men wearing a scapular (a short cloak, rather like an apron or poncho) and hood (the normal working dress of a monk) and women wearing a veil. Chaucer mentions the costume worn by lepers as consisting of a mantle (a loose sleeveless cloak) and beaver hat, with a cup to collect alms.

Leper hospitals, such as the one at Stourbridge, were mainly small. As well as a chapel there would probably have been a separate group of cottages or a long hall-shaped house or infirmary hall to accommodate the inmates. Men and women would have had separate lodgings. Typically there would have been 12 or 13 inmates.

The need to segregate lepers from the community - virtually all leper hospitals were located outside towns and cities - has been stressed since Roman times. Although it is probably not generally the case, as was once thought, that lepers were forced against their will to live in leper hospitals, there were strict rules enforcing isolation. The leper was to touch nothing he wished to buy other than with his staff. If he drank it had to be from his own cup. If someone were to speak to him on the highway he was to go downwind before answering. And he could never enter a narrow lane lest he should meet someone he could not pass without touching. Typically they were forbidden to enter inns, churches, mills or bake-houses, to go to fairs or markets, to eat with healthy people, or to wash in streams or public drinking fountains. In 1175 the English Church Council of Westminster ordered that lepers should not live amongst the healthy, and in 1200 repeated the requirement laid down by the Lateran Council of Rome that leper communities were to have their own chapels, cemeteries and priests. However, as the extent of leprosy assumed larger proportions — and vast numbers were afflicted³ - such harsh rules and laws became more and more impracticable and difficult to enforce.

3 The fear of leprosy probably inflated the perceived threat. Actual casualties are not accurately known.

1207

The burgesses of Cambridge come to an arrangement with the King whereby they take over the collection of taxes in return for paying him a fixed sum.



They probably assume that the right to appoint the hospital warden (and the obligation to give alms) passes into their hands - if it hasn't been with them before. However, a little later on (in 1227) Bishop John of Ely is reminded by the Crown of his customary requirement to pay, annually, a sum in alms equal to the former royal alms of 20s. No doubt he expects something in return for these payments, and from hereon this provides a source of dispute between the burgesses of Cambridge and the Bishops of Ely over who has the right to appoint the hospital warden.

1211

King John offers the hospital yet more royal patronage, a charter granting the lepers permission for a three day fair to be held on their land, starting after harvest-time on the Feast of the Exultation of the Holy Cross (14th September). Quite probably he is simply reaffirming the fact that the fair already exists and thus providing some order to the situation. However, it has to be said that King John was only too ready to give royal confirmation to anybody prepared to pay him.

The fair comes to be known as Stourbridge Fair. Although it wouldn't have been 'held' or organised by the lepers themselves, income from the fair's proceedings, including rent paid by those using the hospital grounds to erect stalls (stallage), is an important source of revenue for the leper community, adding to income derived from roadside begging, from farm rents and from growing crops and keeping livestock.

1245

The right to appoint the hospital warden is formally usurped by Hugh de Northwold, Bishop of Ely, who takes over patronage of the hospital and appoints a 'master' to the chapel (at various times also called the rector or 'custos').

The burgesses are clearly none too pleased and relations between themselves and the Bishop further deteriorate. At the Assizes held in Cambridge in 1260 the matter of who has the right to appoint the clergyman is discussed.

1270s

What has been a simmering row now finally breaks out. Not only has the Corporation seen what they believe is their right to appoint the warden unjustly taken away from them but the hospital effectively ceases to function: no lepers being sustained at all in the hospital. They ask the King to intervene.

Whilst the extent of leprosy has declined by this time this is unlikely to be the entire reason for the hospital closing. Many hospitals run into financial difficulties and it is difficult to find staff to run the hospital (a job that requires enormous dedication). A Statute of

Mortmain in 1279 prevents any more land being donated to hospitals without royal approval (and compensation to the Crown). However, for our Leper hospital, the increase in size of the fair and its subsequent income are probably more important - suggesting, maybe, that the Bishop has other ideas for the chapel and its associated property.



Indeed, with the now defunct hospital owning almost 25 acres of land in the Cambridge open fields alone and probably an equivalent amount nearby (given by many of the townsfolk), it becomes a rich living held by men favoured by the Bishop. In 1271 the warden of the chapel, Thomas, even claims three acres of land in Chesterton, as having been given by Geoffrey de Steresbrigge⁴ to maintain a *lamp* in the chapel⁵!

Anyway, in 1279 the King's Commissioners side with the Bishop and the chapel is transformed into a 'free' chapel (the Chapel of St. Mary Magdalene) - i.e. one unattached to any parish church or cathedral - with a chaplain. Appointment of the chaplain has to be agreed by the Bishop and when the regular patrons do not select a

suitable person the Bishop has the right to fill the vacancy with a cleric of his own choosing.

1289

Organisation of Stourbridge Fair is taken over by the Corporation of Cambridge. No longer can the chapel rely on direct proceeds from the fair. However, the chapel grounds continue to be hired out for booths and stalls, and with the chapel comes the other land, with the incumbent - the chaplain - taking the rent.

Now no longer in use, the other hospital buildings - including a number of houses - either fall down or are demolished (the typical life expectancy of a medieval house would only have been in the order of 20 years).

1340s

In 1340 the rector of the chapel is charged £1 7s 0d. in a levy on one ninth part of the goods and chattels, voted by parliament to the King - Edward III (to help pay for the war with France).

4 Stourbridge has been variously called and spelled Steres-brigg, Stiebrig, Sturbrige, Sturbitch and Sturbridge. There are several theories about the name. One is that it is derived from the toll or custom that was paid for the 'steres' (steers) and young cattle that passed the bridge over the river Stour (which flows from Cherry Hinton Hall). Another is that it is named more directly after the bridge. Yet another view is that the name comes from a one-time owner of the bridge, a Mr. Steer!

5 Actually maintaining a lamp in chapel would have been reasonably expensive: beeswax and oil did not come cheap and the lamp would have been burning all the time.

Interestingly, a new 'leprosy hospital' is opened in Cambridge at this time. However, this is probably more a hostel for the infirm, frail and homeless than a hospital of the Stourbridge type. Cambridge is a prosperous place and attracts a fair number of wayfarers and refugees (much like today!). And the new hospital' is soon converted into a cluster of cottage-like dwellings, rather like almshouses.



1390-1400

The vaulted ceiling of the chancel collapses. In return for assisting in the repair of the chapel Bishop John Fordham of Ely grants a 40 day 'indulgence' (remitting penances for any sins committed) to anyone who helps - a rather common occurrence at this time. The roof we see today was probably put on the building at this time.

1400s

The chapel living is much sought after, by clergy from as far away as Durham, York and London - often part of the Bishop's entourage. From 1376-1412 and 1453-77 some eleven new chaplains are instituted and there are three exchanges with the holders of other livings: only one of these incumbents is titled a priest, another is a notary public. The chaplain still has to ensure that prayers for the souls of the hospital's benefactors are said, irrespective of whether the recipients of their charity are now long since dead and gone.

Occasionally, however, difficulties arise. In 1411, John Arondel, the chaplain, even sues (successfully) the Cambridge bailiffs because they do not allow traders to erect stalls in the chapel yard, depriving him of the rent ('stallage') he could charge. They have to pay him £10 for lost stallage and £10 damages (costs)!

In 1463 the annual value of the chapel living is assessed at £5. There are rents paid by tenants of the chapel's land, rent for the chapel during the time of the fair, and 'oblations' (offerings made to the clergy in return for making prayers on the day of St. Mary Magdalene and at the time of the fair).

1497

Most of the chapel's land—though not the chapel itself - is leased by the then chaplain (with the Bishop of Ely's consent) to the Mayor, bailiffs and burgesses of Cambridge, for 99 years.

The chaplain (Master John Fynne) supports himself from the annual rent of £12, together with any income derived from prayer offerings. The rents paid by tenants of the chapel lands now go direct to the Corporation. But the Corporation also has to place five wax tapers in the chapel, together weighing three pounds, before an image of Mary Magdalene, on Our Lady's birthday (the 8th of September). Votive candles are an expression of devotion - as long as the taper burns prayers made in the chapel catch the special attention of the patron saint, who then, being in close proximity to the Divine presence, furthers the requests made. With her compassionate association with fallen women our particular saint makes a very appropriate patroness for many whose business

would be carried out at the fair, and the weight of the candles certainly suggests a strong sense of need in this direction!

1534

The chapel living is now valued at 10 guineas per annum, in the 'valuation of the first-fruits'. This is a 'tax' on the incumbent. It had previously been paid to the Pope but with Henry VIII having split from Rome, is now payable to the Crown.

1544

The incumbent (one Christopher Fulneby) and the Bishop of Ely revise their lease of the chapel lands (now totalling over 50 acres) with the Corporation of Cambridge. This time the lease is for 60 years, and includes the chapel itself.

In return Fulneby receives £9 per year. Oblations no longer offer a source of income; after the Reformation paying the clergy to make prayers is considered improper and much frowned upon. He has to go to the University Church, St. Mary's, in Cambridge on the feast of the Exultation of the Holy Cross between one and five o'clock to collect his payment.

Fulneby is thus the last proper incumbent of the chapel.

Thereafter, the chapel still gets used as a place of worship, though now only from time to time: in the accounts for 1546, for example, are included payments of 2d. to Mr Jenings, a carpenter, for hanging up the bell at the chapel and for fetching a ladder, and another 2d. for the rope. Almost twenty years or so later (in 1565) there is an entry of 8d. for 'rushes to strewe the chapel' and another 8d. for 'carriage a pulpit to ye chapel and bryngynge it home ageyne'. However, the latter, it seems, is required for a very short time only, no doubt for some very special celebration.

1597

The chapel is now owned by the Crown. In 1597, doubtless growing tired of continuing disputes about payments made for use of the chapel grounds, Elizabeth I (on the advice of her Lord Treasurer, Lord Burghley), requires the Corporation to surrender their lease upon a fine of £9.

But then she re-lets it back to them for a further 21 years! This royal lady is certainly quick to see an opportunity for profit!

1606

The chapel is transferred into private hands. James I (perhaps not quite so prudent as Elizabeth) grants the chapel to John Shelbury and Philip Charte. After this the chapel passes through a series of owners. It is converted into a two storey building.

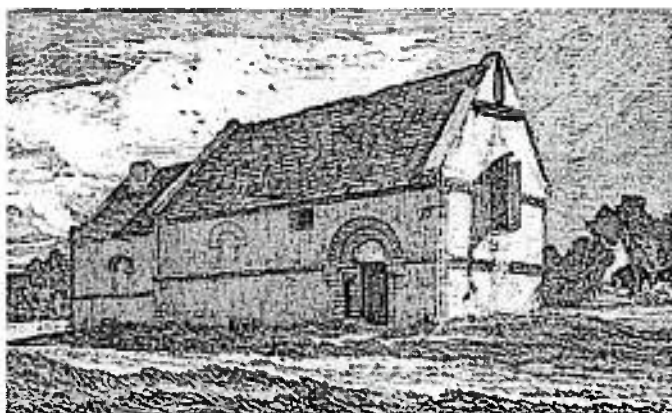
Disputes over use of the chapel's land for booths at Stourbridge Fair still break out fairly regularly nevertheless - in 1622 one such dispute ends up in the Court of the King's Bench

(today part of the High Court), after representatives of the Corporation seemingly have to use force to go onto the land, trampling as they go the grass that has been growing there, in order to erect stalls called 'berrybooths'. Clearly use of the chapel grounds and the erection of stalls for the fair means big money for some!



1725

According to Daniel Defoe, Stourbridge Fair is now one of the largest fairs in Europe. Originally in the chapel yard it has now spread along the Newmarket Rd. and down to the river, creating Garlic Row and other lanes. Barges offload goods from Kings Lynn⁶.



The fair now spreads over three weeks. It is a general fair, selling raw materials and made-up goods: including foodstuffs, cloth, building materials, household goods, luxuries, horses. By the 1700s it is particularly noted for wholesale wool, cloth and hops.

Entertainments have to gain University approval but include gambling, games, animal and human freak shows, theatre,

music and rope dancing - though they are never as important as the trade. Because the fair by now is owned by the town burgesses, only these Cambridge freemen can own booths (though often these are let to merchants from London). London Hackney cabs ply between the town and the fair.

The chapel area still plays a central part in the fair. The chapel grounds are still used for booths and stalls. And at the great square, or 'Duddery' (named after the bulk rags, wool and second hand clothing sold there), just opposite the chapel, where the largest booths are located, Divine Service is read by the Minister of Barnwell at noon and in the evening every Sunday during the fair. He preaches a sermon from a pulpit placed in the open air - for which he is apparently very well paid by the fair keepers.

⁶ Why the fair is quite so successful has been much debated. It has a good river location, where barges could unload directly, with access to the Wash ports. It is also on an important east-west route, heading for Newmarket. Really, in order to get in or out of Anglia travelling through Cambridge is almost a necessity. Perhaps most importantly, however, there is also a lack of regulation; and so, in general, the fair is free to grow relatively unrestricted by red tape.

Stourbridge Fair

Stourbridge Fair was held in the fields just behind the Leper Chapel and running down to the river. It put Cambridge on the national and even international stage for more than 500 years.

Although its precise origins are unknown King John granted a charter to the Leper Hospital to hold a market in 1211 - though probably the fair already existed. The fair was held immediately after harvest - originally for two days in mid September.

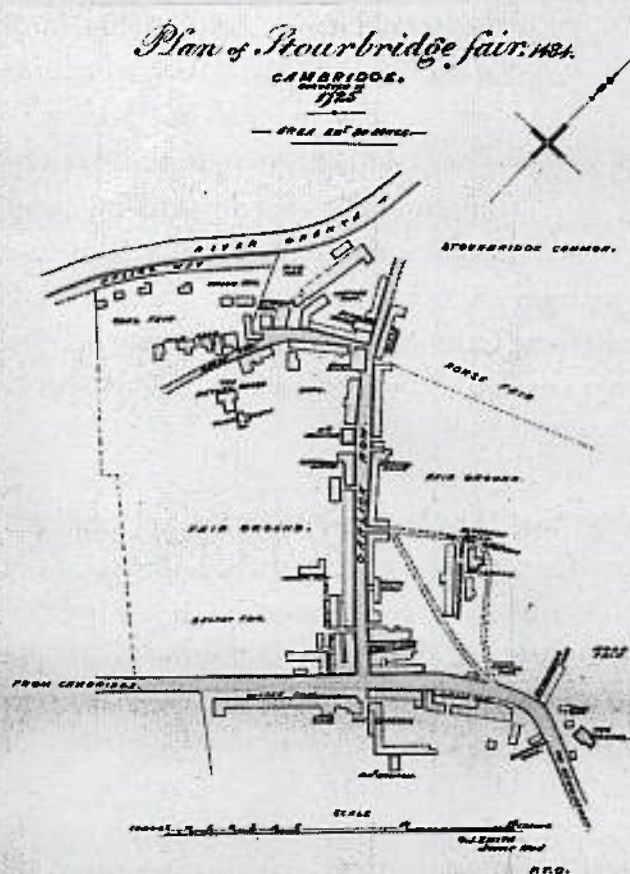
As Cambridge flourished in the thirteenth century, so did the fair. After the hospital ceased to function, at the end of the century, the fair belonged to the town burgesses, and the freemen individually owned the right to hold booths or stalls. This became very profitable - the owners could let their stalls to

merchants from elsewhere - and the town received 'stallage' payments which they used to meet its tax obligations to the Crown and cover the costs of providing 'streets, ditches and other burdens'. This all gave the townsmen an incentive to expand the fair and, despite a downturn in the city's prosperity during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, the ethics of a free market were allowed to rule the day.

Such a philosophy was always going to give rise to tensions with the University and sure enough this became a constant theme. With a return to prosperity in the sixteenth century the fair was expanded

to last from 24 August to 29 September by 1516. The University had a vested interest in controlling the quality of goods on sale, since it bought so much. It was also keen to protect the morals and manners of its members (junior and senior), who frequented the fair as much as anyone.

The townsmen resisted frequent calls by the University authorities for more controls over behaviour at the fair; and instead held their own court (known as the Pie Powder, after the French for 'dusty feet, pied poudre) on the site to

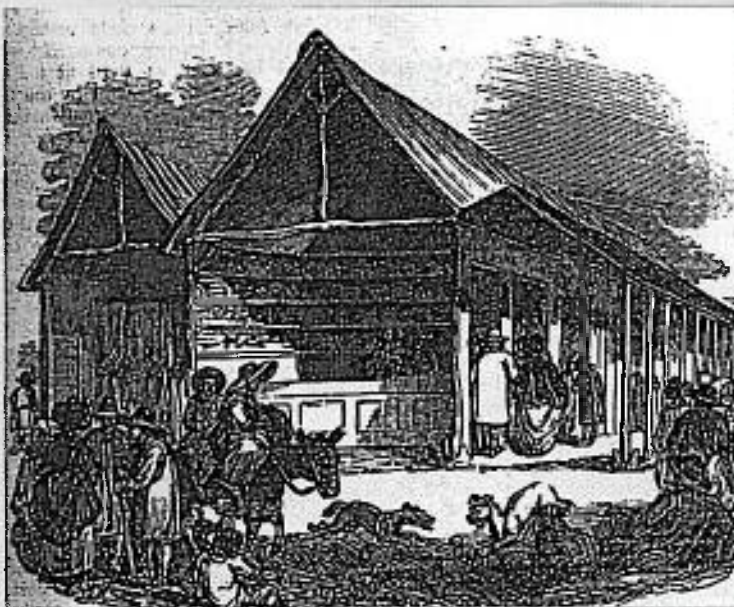


sort out minor nuisances. But the University persisted. In 1589 Elizabeth I had to issue a new royal charter, agreeing to the University's right to control the quality of merchandise while the town kept the profits. And at the start of the seventeenth century the University managed to secure a royal charter from James I giving its Vice-Chancellor the power to prohibit 'idle games and diversions within 5 miles of the town' and expel jugglers and actors.



There was plenty of farm produce for sale and leisure time and money to spend. If the crops weren't cleared by the right day the stall-keepers could enter and trample them down. And if the fair was not cleared in time the ploughmen could come in with cart and plough!

The fair grew in importance. And by the late 16th century it was alleged to be the biggest in England. It became the model for John Bunyan's Vanity Fair and there are references to it in the writings of Samuel Pepys, the diarist.



Organisation of the fair was a complex matter and at its height it became a small town. Layout of the fair became fixed enough for street-names to be used. Some are still with us: Garlic Row, Oyster Row, Mercer's Row.

The booths had to be set up in an approved fashion and order each year. They were made of timber frames and pine boards with haircloth roofs and

fronts, fitted out with shelves and counters and had a protective awning in front and a small room with beds for the stall-keepers behind.

It was always a general fair. Timber and iron, horse-shoes, mats, tar and soaps, wool, baskets and cloth, fish, herbs, were all bought and sold in the fourteenth century. By the fifteenth century luxury goods imported from abroad were on offer: leathers, silk and gold embroidery, spices and perfumes.

The sale of printed books, many forbidden, would have been a particular attraction to those from the University. When Matthew Parker was sent to Cambridge to be ready for the academic year 1520-21, he arrived early so that he could do his 'shopping';. The fair had everything a new undergraduate needed. His schoolmaster came with him, and probably did his shopping too.

By the eighteenth century all manner of clothes, furniture, books and personal items were being marketed. There was a horse fair, with animals from all over the country for sale. For wool and hops Stourbridge was the national market and price-setter. According to the writer Daniel Defoe, by the 1720s it had become the largest fair in Europe. He describes "goldsmiths, toyshops, braziers, turners, milliners, haberdashers, hatters, mercers, drapers, pewterers, a china warehouse, ... coffee-houses, taverns, brandy-shops and eating houses innumerable". Wholesalers from all over England were taking in money and orders, bringing in goods to sell in barges which thronged the river. The fair had become one giant out-of-town shopping centre!

Towards the end of the fair the social side took over. "The gentry came in from all around". Entertainments included puppet shows, drolls (comedians), jugglers, acrobats, rope-dancers, horse and foot races, and wrestling matches. After 1740 there was a theatre, with 'many respectable and excellent performers'.

There was, of course, also the seamier side of life well represented. In 1700 Edward Ward, author of a pamphlet 'A step to Stir-Bitch Fair' described how he walked to 'Bawdy Barnwell, so called for the numerous brothel houses it contains for the health, ease and pleasure of the learned vicinity'! At the fair he found 'an abstract of all sorts of mankind', including 'entry, scholars, tradesmen, whores, hawkers, pedlars and pick pockets'.

By the mid eighteenth century, however, the fair had passed its peak and had started its gradual decline. In 1772 the fair only lasted a fortnight. In the 1790s the civic procession was abandoned and by 1803 the theatre had been demolished. The medieval open fields upon which the fair was held were enclosed in 1811. Plots of land were now held by individuals and some sold to developers to build housing. Changing patterns of trading, with shops in town increasingly able to offer what customers wanted, more sophisticated transportation, marketing and banking systems and the growth of competition from the growing centres of population in the North and Midlands (now accessible by road and canal) all lead to a decline in demand for what the fair had to offer. Its location in 'Bawdy Barnwell' presumably didn't help; it became a rougher area still with the surge in population after Enclosure. It was no longer an area where newly respectable Victorians might choose to go, and the pennies that labourers could spare would not support many exciting stalls'.

Eventually, in 1933, Stourbridge Fair was opened for the very last time by Mrs Florence Keynes, then Mayor of Cambridge and mother of John Maynard Keynes the great economist, 'in the presence of a couple of women with babies in their arms and an ice-cream barrow'!

1750s

The chapel has ceased by now to be a place of worship. For most of the year, it is used as a storage place, mainly for stalls, building materials and lumber associated with the construction of booths used at Stourbridge Fair.



During the fair itself, it is also used as a victualling house and as a drinking booth: from here food is served.

In any event, the fair-keepers clearly find the chapel indispensable: and so keep it in good repair.

1780s

In 1783 the chapel is sold as a store room. Now part of the Barnwell Priory Estate, it once again changes hands several times. It passes to George Riste, then to John Gillam and on to Frederick Markby.

Whilst Stourbridge Fair is still an attraction it is becoming less popular. The chapel is used as a place from which to sell beer during the fair, and at one time may have been used as a dwelling (early prints show chimneys stacks rising from the roof); it is not unusual at this time for the priest to live in his church.

The chancel is probably partitioned off from the nave, the large doorway in the south wall is inserted to improve access (maybe for the entry of cattle - it is used for a time as a stable - or to make it easier to take the booths in and out), and the rectangular east window is inserted to light an upper room. Nevertheless, as the chapel struggles to find a use, and indeed as it is gradually used less and less, it is kept in less good repair.

1816

So deteriorated has the chapel become that it is now threatened with complete destruction. However, it is saved by the Revd. Thomas Kerrich, a Fellow of Magdalene College, University Librarian and a gifted antiquarian, painter and engraver, who buys it for £160.

After an appeal to help restore the chapel, which raises £174 (and to which he subscribes £30) Kerrich conveys the chapel to the University of Cambridge (in 1817) on condition that it is kept in good repair and preserved unaltered.



1843-5

Kerrich's son, another Revd. Thomas Kerrich, helps restore the chapel, contributing £30 to the total cost of £84 15s. 1d.

The chapel is used as a place of worship once again - a special grace is passed by the University's Senate to use the chapel

for the spiritual benefit of the labourers employed in building the Eastern Counties railway (there is a station just behind the chapel) and a salary is raised for a chaplain - but not for long.

1865-7

The chapel is once again in a dilapidated condition. As a result of yet another appeal, this time by the Cambridge Architectural Society, further restoration work (to the tune of £500) is carried out under the direction of the eminent and famous architect, Sir George Gilbert Scott. The west wall, which is in poor conditions, is rebuilt but care is taken to ensure that the original design is followed and that original material is used.

At this time the chapel serves around 200 people living in the adjacent Barnwell brickfields.

1914-18

The chapel is returned to its original purpose - it is lent for services to the nurses and police staff of the Army Ordnance Corps and the adjacent Barnwell Military Hospital built in the adjoining fields, but only for a few months - the hospital is soon demolished.

1925

Lack of use once more means that the condition of the chapel is giving cause for concern. Members of Westcott House Theological College (a training college for Church of England clergy) offer to conduct evening prayers and give an address every Sunday during Term time. Occasionally there is celebration of Holy Communion. The chapel is repaired and new flooring and heating installed, largely at the expense of Canon BK Cunningham, the Principal of Westcott House.

1933

Stourbridge Fair is opened for the last time by Mrs Keynes, then Mayor of the City. It finally closes due to lack of support.

1949

Having constantly found it difficult to discharge their obligation to maintain the chapel, the University puts it into 'sound condition' for services and then, in 1951, conveys it to the Cambridge Preservation Society, together with sufficient money to buy an acre of land. The Society must return the chapel if they are unable to maintain it. A legacy by Mr Eric Bunsen enables the Society to take on the chapel and undertake further restoration work.

2000

The chapel is used for regular worship under the auspices of Holy Cross church. It is also used for small scale concerts and drama events.

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East of Cambridge city centre, on the very busy Newmarket Road, lies a little old Chapel, stuck rather inauspiciously next to a railway line and opposite a scrap metal yard. And yet the Stourbridge Leper Chapel is one of the most complete and unspoilt pieces of Norman architecture in the county, chock full of character and history.....



**Cambridge Past,
Present & Future**

Wandlebury Ring
Gog Magog Hills
Babraham
Cambridge
CB22 3AE

Tel: 01223 243830

enquiries@cambridgeppf.org

www.cambridgeppf.org

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