

FOUNDATION

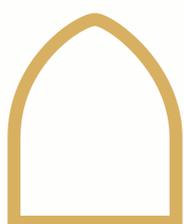
St Thomas's or Eastbridge was an important pilgrim hospital [place of hospitality] in the Middle Ages that was founded about 1180, soon after the murder of Archbishop Thomas Becket (1170) and papal recognition of his sainthood (1173). Edward son of Odbold, a wealthy merchant, was the founder and nearby another Canterbury citizen William Cokyn established a second hospital dedicated to St Nicholas and St Katherine.



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To help both hospitals, they were united with Pope Innocent's blessing in about 1203, William Cokyn granting all his goods and property to the new hospital. Thereafter it was known as St Thomas's and came under the patronage of the archbishop, as it still is today.

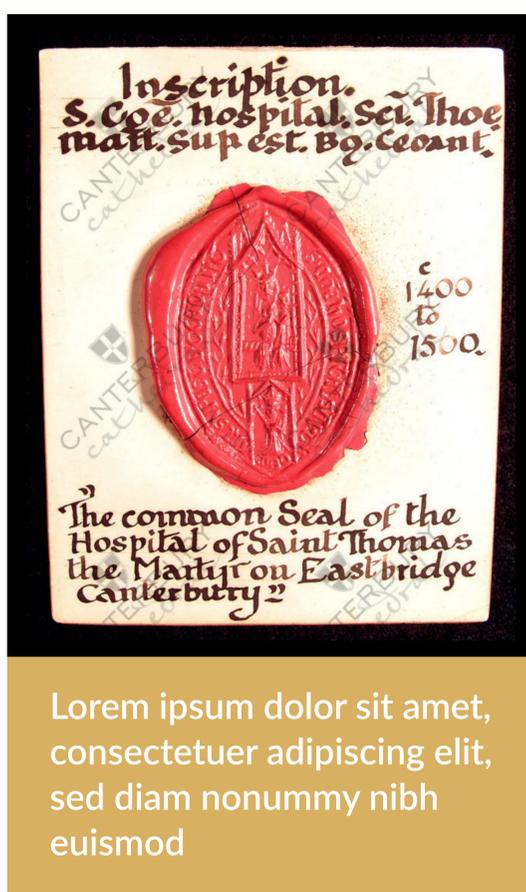
The hospital received many more grants of land, houses, and rents over the next hundred years. Among the benefactors were nobles such as Hamo de Crevequer whose ancestor had come to England with William the Conqueror in 1066, some of his tenants in the Forest of Blean, and Canterbury townspeople, including Margaret the widow of Alphage Lamb.



EASTBRIDGE
CANTERBURY

PILGRIMS AT ST THOMAS'S HOSPITAL

Soon after Becket's murder, pilgrims flocked to visit his tomb in Canterbury Cathedral, and then after 1220 the great shrine in the cathedral's Trinity Chapel. Some pilgrims could afford to stay at inns or other hostelries, but many were too poor. St Thomas's Hospital offered accommodation to some of these poor pilgrims, but there are no records of their names.

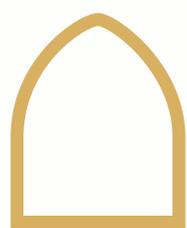


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Archbishop John Stratford's regulations, dated 1342, do tell us that poor pilgrims could stay overnight only, but those who were sick, provided they were not lepers, could remain until they recovered sufficiently to continue their pilgrimage. Those who died at the hospital were to be buried in the cathedral's lay cemetery. A candle for their funeral would be provided from the great candle of

Dover, which stood next to Becket's shrine.

Twelve beds were available for the pilgrims and they were to be looked after by an honest woman over 40 years old who received 4 'old' pence per day from the hospital's revenues. If she did not use all the money, she could add it to the 4 pence she received the following day. In 1475, Alice was the custodian of the poor pilgrims. Poor women in childbirth were also sheltered at the hospital.



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ADDITIONAL ACTIVITIES – CORRODIANS AND CHANTRIES

Some hospital patrons refused to allow corrodies – paying for a hospital place, often for the remainder of the person’s life – because hospitals were for the poor, but corrodies became more numerous by the later Middle Ages. At Eastbridge, a few people did give property or money to stay there, they were called “Corrodians”. Among these, in 1269, was John de Adisham, who received the use of a hospital chamber and his food, clothing and shoes for life, and a halfpenny in rent in exchange for 2.5 acres of land. In 1358, Robert de Dentone paid £75 in cash, but the benefits he received were more generous.

Hospitals were also seen as suitable places to establish chantries where priests conducted masses for the soul of the founder and those he or she named. There were several chantries linked to St Thomas’s Hospital, including one located in the little Lady Chapel to the left of the entrance way, which is still a chapel today. Archbishop Simon Islip gave permission for Bartholomew de Bourne to establish his family chantry there in 1363. In addition to his chantry duties, the chantry priest, as a Brother at the hospital, was expected to support the poor pilgrims spiritually.

Hospitals might be responsible for other works. The Master and Brothers at St Thomas’s Hospital were expected to maintain the city’s East Bridge that was next to the hospital from some of the rents they received. In 1388 the bridge was in a poor state due to neglect, consequently the Master was ordered to repair it.



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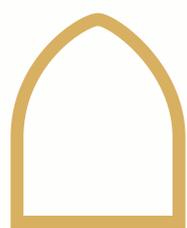


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REFORMATION

Like some hospitals, St Thomas's survived the religious changes of Henry VIII and Edward VI. It was moderately prosperous, the gross value of the hospital's possessions in 1535 was over £43 and after expenses was worth almost £24. That year the pilgrims were looked after by Ralph Coker and his wife, who had replaced the 'elderly woman' in the 1342 regulations. They received 46 shillings 8 pence 'for the washing of beds for poore people'.

However, once St Thomas's shrine had been destroyed in 1538 by order of Henry VIII, the purpose of the hospital changed. It no longer accommodated poor pilgrims and the chantry priests, the Brothers, also disappeared. Instead St Thomas's Hospital gave shelter to the 'wayfaring and hurt'. This is according to Archdeacon Nicholas Harpsfield's visitation during Queen Mary's reign in 1557. There were still twelve beds for the poor, eight for the men, four for the women. They could stay more than one night if they were not fit to leave and if they died the Master was responsible for their burial. Alms [charitable gifts] in the form of firewood and ale were also distributed at the hospital gate to poor people.

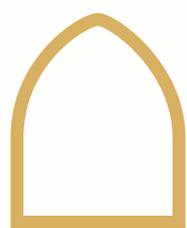


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NEW BEGINNINGS – ARCHBISHOP MATTHEW PARKER

By Elizabeth I's reign, Eastbridge (no longer called St Thomas's) Hospital had fallen into decay. In 1569, Archbishop Matthew Parker provided new regulations to try to restore the hospital. As before, there were to be twelve beds for the itinerant poor, who were to be cared for by an elderly woman. Alms were to be distributed every Friday, a penny each to thirty poor people. At times of war, the distribution was increased to 4 pence daily to benefit returning soldiers passing through Canterbury.

Parker's rules included one innovation. Nationally, the provision of education expanded during the sixteenth century. The loss of monastic schools at the Dissolution was one factor, but also a growing population meant that there were increasing numbers of young people who, through education, were expected to become valuable members of society. Parker introduced a free school for up to twenty boys at Eastbridge and two scholars were to be maintained at Corpus Christi College, Cambridge.



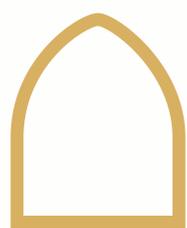
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FURTHER CHANGES – ARCHBISHOP JOHN WHITGIFT

The later decades of Queen Elizabeth's reign saw more changes. For a few years the city authorities used Eastbridge before acquiring the Poor Priests' Hospital as the municipal house of correction in 1575. A year later Eastbridge was reported to be ruinous, the building let out to rent as private tenements. At this point Eastbridge almost disappeared because Elizabeth granted it to John Farneham for a yearly sum, a fate suffered by many ex-religious houses.

For a second time Eastbridge was rescued. Archbishop Whitgift recovered the hospital and produced new regulations in 1584. Whitgift built on the ideas of Parker but his rules also reflect changing attitudes towards the poor in the late Elizabethan period. Almshouses were increasingly seen as places for poor, honest, aged persons, but great emphasis was put on local residency.

Whitgift's almshouse provided dwellings for five in-brothers and an equal number of in-sisters who previously had been resident for at least seven years in Canterbury or its suburbs. There were to be similar numbers of out-brothers and sisters who received specific alms, and the school was reinstated, including the Corpus Christi connection. As part of their religious education, the poor scholars, who were taught in the upper chapel, were joined by the almsfolk for morning and evening prayer on three weekdays.



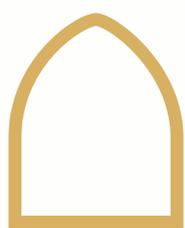
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STUART TO VICTORIA – MAINLY CONTINUITY

Generally, by renting out its urban property in Canterbury and its farmland and woodland in the Blean to the north and west of the city, Eastbridge continued to receive sufficient income to support the Master, the ten in-brothers and sisters, the ten out-brothers and sisters, and the schoolmaster. Yet at times the financial situation was extremely challenging, even though Eastbridge benefitted from several bequests over the centuries, such as one from Archbishop Gilbert Sheldon (died 1677) that was used to repair some of the dwellings.

The 18th century saw changes to the city's East Bridge, the hospital no longer responsible for its upkeep. Nevertheless, its other charitable activities continued. In 1837 there were still the same number of in-dwellers and out-dwellers, although by the early 20th century the balance had changed to twenty brothers and sisters, and only a further four non-residents.

Regarding the communal rooms, the chapel was the schoolroom, and the undercroft became a coal cellar. A great fireplace was put into the refectory, the room serving as a common hall for the almsfolk.



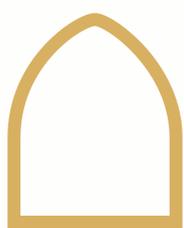
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EASTBRIDGE IN MODERN TIMES – SOME CHANGES

The school was disbanded in the later 18th century, but Eastbridge still maintains the Parker Exhibitions at Corpus Christi College. The trustees, appointed by the Archbishop of Canterbury, as patron, also administer the Eastbridge Awards Scheme. Secondary school pupils in Canterbury state schools can apply for funding towards a worthwhile project, either in this country or abroad.

The last fifty years has seen a change in emphasis. Payments to non-residents ceased following changes to the state pension and today Eastbridge houses nine elderly people in self-contained flats. During this half century a great deal of restoration work has taken place, including renovation and modernisation both within the main building and in the Master's Lodge next door. This is an ongoing process, a reflection of the hospital's river-side location, which means the work is difficult and expensive.

Over the last century, the undercroft, refectory and chapels have similarly undergone restoration. Among the most important features now on view are the late 12th-century vaulting in the undercroft; the early 13th-century mural showing Christ in Majesty with the Four Evangelists in the refectory, and the 13th-century king-strut and scissor-braced roof over the upper chapel.



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