

VERY BRIEF HISTORY OF ST. BARTHOLOMEW'S HOSPITAL 'BARTLEMAS'

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St. Bartholomew's Hospital was founded and endowed by Henry I c.1126 for the treatment and care of twelve lepers in a countryside location outside the city, on 6 acres of land out of his Manor of Headington, bordering the old drove road to London:

An 'arboreous place, partly pastured and partly tillaged, situated on an ascent or rise of an hill... and having severall springs' (A. Wood). A source of plentiful fresh water was a pre-requisite for leper sites as bathing and cleansing were the only known treatments.

Built from the *'overplus of his palace in Beaumont'* (A. Wood), the royal foundation was originally for 12 lepers plus a chaplain/warden: the buildings known from documents comprised a chapel, accommodation for the lepers and a Warden's house.

Over the years the site gradually became part hospital/part almshouse; it also increasingly attracted pilgrims and extensive charitable endowments because of its reputed relics, including a piece St Bartholomew's flayed skin. Many disputes over the mismanagement of, and frauds against, the Trust are recorded, during which time the buildings suffered neglect and in **1328** the Hospital foundation was granted by the Crown to Oriel College and its function changed (see the Victoria County History for Oxford). Considerable redevelopment took place and in about **1336** Oriel rebuilt the chapel. Extensive building work is also recorded to have taken place at the Hospital in the fifteenth century.

There is no evidence for lepers on site after **1342** and it seems that most of the revenue was diverted to benefit the College, whose scholars used and were housed in the buildings at various times. In **1643** during the Civil War the Royalist garrison cut down the grove of elm trees to the north of the site and razed the almshouse. The Chapel was damaged (according to A. Wood *'ruinated almost to the ground'*) and the lead was stripped from its roof for shot. The Warden's house was let out as an alehouse in **1645**. The Chapel was restored and re-roofed in **1649** when the almshouse was rebuilt.

After the Civil War pilgrims of another sort came. May Morning was celebrated at Bartlemas, later transferring to Magdalen College Tower. After that time the fellows of New College came on Ascension Day to sing anthems in the Chapel followed by madrigals at the 'holy' spring (a tradition recently recreated).

Sadly the Hospital Trust's management disputes continued over the centuries: the buildings were increasingly let out for farming purposes until by the end of the 19th century almsmen no longer lived on site, the foundation had become obsolete and was dissolved. Finally in **1913** the Chapel with a rood of surrounding land was transferred to the Church Commissioners under the parish of SS Mary & John. Oriel College was given outright ownership of the two remaining houses and land.

About 550 years after the hospital was granted to Oriel College an Ordnance Survey (OS) map, dated **1879**, indicates that it was still in a remote location; later ones, however, illustrate the rapid expansion of the city in the late 19th century.

By **1899** Southfield Road had been created and many houses had been built on that road and on others to the west and south. The urbanisation of East Oxford continued throughout the **1900s** bypassing the peaceful, rural setting of the **Bartlemas** hamlet.