



Medicine for the Soul: Religious Life in the Hospital



During the Middle Ages the dead and the living were part of a single religious community, the latter accepting a responsibility to pray and fund masses for the souls of those who were already atoning for their sins in purgatory. Hospitals, such as St Giles's, profited from these beliefs, since benefactors were anxious to make suitable provision for themselves in the next world, while also arranging spiritual succour for deceased friends and family. The following deeds are representative of hundreds that survive in the archives of the hospital and the city, and reflect the prominent place occupied by the celebration of the Mass in its daily life. Like many other hospitals, St Giles's ran its own fraternity, or guild, posthumous membership of which bestowed a share in the many celestial merits accumulated by the house, but it was also possible to make individual arrangements to suit every pocket.

21 April 1322 Brother John [Salmon], by divine permission bishop of Norwich, to his beloved son in Christ, Dominus Peter de Heryngflet, master of our hospital of St Giles in Norwich, greeting. Whereas we have learned that John Woderove, layman, who wore the habit of the lay brother (*conversi*), residing in the said hospital while he lived, has gone the way of all flesh, we, wishing another able and honest person to be substituted by you in place of the said departed for the increase of divine worship, commission and order that, with due haste, you take care to substitute a certain chaplain, a humble and honest man, for the celebration of divine service for the souls of the founders and benefactors of the hospital above said every day, save for a legitimate impediment, in the above said hospital; and the person thus substituted is to be maintained and kept in his necessities, according to the customs long obtaining in the said hospital, until otherwise shall be ordained in the matter by us or our successors. In testimony of which, our seal is affixed to these present [writings]. Dated at Norwich 11 Calends May in the year of Our Lord 1322 (**NRO, MS 12077, 30 E 1**).

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1 October 1331 To all the faithful of Christ to whom this present writing comes, Peter de Herlingfleet, priest, master of the hospital of St Giles in Norwich, and the brothers of the same place send greeting in the Lord Eternal. Know all that, whereas Dominus Thomas de Preston, rector of the church of Colby, gave us one hundred pounds sterling with which to buy the advowson of the church of Mundham St Peter, with the glebe, three rods of land and a messuage and thirty acres of land in the vill of Mundham, with the appurtenances, and did many other good works for our hospital, we, wishing to recognise his devotion and goodwill towards the augmentation of divine worship, undertake on behalf of us and our successors to support a chaplain in the aforesaid hospital in the chapel of the Blessed Virgin Mary, constructed by the said Dominus Thomas on the north side of our church, to celebrate divine service in perpetuity for Dominus Thomas while he shall live, and for his soul when death befalls, and also for the souls of Edward and Elena, his father and mother, for the souls of Richard and Roger, for the souls of all and singular for whom the said Dominus Thomas is bound to intercede, and for the souls of all the faithful departed, which chaplain shall minister and receive ...

in all things as others of the said hospital; and we bind ourselves and our successors to keep and observe this perpetual chantry. In testimony of which, we have affixed the seal of our common chapter to this indented writing, along with the seal of the said Dominus Thomas. Dated at Norwich, in our chapter on Tuesday next after the feast of St Michael the Archangel [29 September] in the year of Our Lord one thousand three hundred and thirty one (**NRO, MS 12083, 30 E 1**, indenture and chirograph).

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15 April 1347 This indenture testifies that we, the master and brothers of the hospital of St Giles in Norwich, hold ourselves and our successors bound and obligated to Beatrice Bodale of Possewyk for the term of her life in eight silver shillings annual pension, payable to the same Beatrice, or to her attorney, in our hospital annually at two terms: that is to say four shillings at Christmas and four shillings at Easter. And if it befalls that we or our successors default, in whole or in part, in the payment of the said pension at the two terms, which God forbid, we will and allow, on behalf of us and our successors, that it will be lawful for the aforesaid Beatrice and that attorney to distrain upon all our tenements in Holmestrete, and to remove the distrains, and to retain [thereof] whatsoever will be of satisfaction of the arrearages, damages and expenses. And, if it befalls that Beatrice dies within a year of the date of the present agreement, then we, the aforesaid master and brothers and our successors, will arrange for the celebration of an annual for the soul of the said Beatrice and the souls of the benefactors of the said Beatrice in the year next following. Moreover, we, the master and the brothers aforesaid, wishing to reward the gracious benevolence of the said Beatrice, receive into our fraternity the souls of Wydonis and Matilda, the father and mother of the said Beatrice, and the soul of William, her late husband; and we will and grant, on behalf of ourselves and our successors, that in future on one day a year, that is to say the vigil of [the feast of] All Saints [31 October], the anniversaries of these souls will be celebrated in our hospital in perpetuity. In testimony of which to this indenture the seal of our common chapter and the seal of the said Beatrice have alternately been appended. Dated at Norwich the fifteenth of the month of April in the twenty-first year of the reign of Edward the third (**NRO, NCR, 4A**, private deeds box 5, St Helen and St Giles no. 93).

14 January 1376 This is the last and final will of me, Robert de Bungeye, citizen of Norwich, in addition to my testament made at Norwich on Tuesday in the feast of St Hilary [13 January] 1376. Item, first, I will and depose that all the profits of the entire messuage, with appurtenances, on Le Cordewanerrowe, bequeathed in my testament, shall be spent in this way after the decease of Egidia, my wife: namely, that any chaplain celebrating a weekly mass of the Blessed Virgin perpetually in the hospital of St Giles in Norwich shall receive sixpence from the profits of the said messuage; and the residue of the profits coming from the said messuage, above reasonable repairs to the same, is to be given and assigned to the common utility of the said hospital, to be taken by the master and brothers of the same in perpetuity after the death of the said Egidia. Item, I will and depose that all the profits of a certain shop of mine, with appurtenances, which I lately purchased from John, rector of the church of Burgh, in my said testament bequeathed, is to be given and assigned to the same usage of the said hospital in perpetuity in this way: that the same Egidia has, for the term of her life, an honest chamber in Holme Street of the said master and brothers. Item, I will and depose that whichever monk of the monastery of the Holy Trinity, Norwich, will solemnly celebrate a mass for my soul on the day of my anniversary, that is to say, annually in perpetuity five days after Easter Day, will take two shillings of the profits of a certain shop with appurtenances which I lately bought of Robert Pennynges, which once was of Robert Pennynges in Norwich, in the parish of St Peter, upon the Netherrowe, bequeathed in my testament to William de Iteringham and others. And the profits of the said shop, above repairs, are to be given annually in perpetuity to the making of the cloister of the said monastery, so long as the said cloister proceeds; and afterwards to be given in perpetuity to the repair of the church of the above said monastery. In testimony of which I have affixed my seal (**NRO, MS 12105, 30 E 1**).

The Hospital Cartulary

Single deeds, such as those translated above, were important records of title, but could easily be mislaid or stolen. For greater security, and in the interests of administrative efficiency, religious houses copied these documents into books known as cartularies. Only forty-two English medieval hospital cartularies have apparently survived to this day, the great majority having been lost or destroyed during and just after the Dissolution. One of these is the Liber Domus Dei (Book of God's House) which was compiled during the fourteenth century by the scribes employed at St Giles's, and records over 260 deeds. The deeds are entered by place, the use of red (rubricated) headings making it easier to trace individual entries.

The importance attached to the provision of lights (usually in the form of heavy wax candles) to burn during the mass is worth noting, since it was important that the patients should be able to see the Eucharist. Candles also symbolised eternal life and were used to heighten the sense of ritual.

For more on the subject of hospital records and record-keeping, see Carole Rawcliffe, 'Passports to Paradise: How English Medieval Hospitals and Almshouses Kept their Archives', Archives, volume 27 (2002), pp. 2-22; and, by the same author, 'Written in the Book of Life: Building the Libraries of Medieval English Hospitals and Almshouses', The Library, seventh series, volume 3 (2002), pp. 127-62.

In Holmstrete

Know all that I, William de Dunwich, citizen of Norwich, have granted, and by this charter confirm, for the health of my soul and the soul of Catherine my wife and of all our ancestors, to God, the Blessed Mary, the Blessed Giles, their hospital in Norwich, [and] the master and the brothers there serving God all my meadow with appurtenances which I acquired from Agnes, widow of a certain John Herman, in Norwich, which meadow extends from the bridge which is called the bishop's as far as the aforesaid hospital, along with six shillings and ten pence annual rent to be taken in Holmstrete, that is to say: of the messuage of Aveline le Mey fourteen pence; of the messuage of John le Cotiler eight pence; of the messuage of a certain Alice de Saint Leonard twelve pence; of the messuage of Reyner de Langele, chaplain, twelve pence; and of the messuage of the abbot of Sautereya [Sawtry] three shillings. I also grant and give to the aforesaid hospital fifty-six shillings annual rent to be taken in Fibriggate, that is to say: of the messuage of William de Intewode forty shillings and of the messuage of Thiphania, widow of a certain Seman Cook, sixteen shillings, which messuages lie between the rent of John le Skot on the north and the rent of Nicholas de Ingham towards the south, which messuages the said William and Thiphania also hold by me in fee farm. To be had and held by the said master and brothers and their successors in free and perpetual alms, with all escheats which may in future fall [due] from the said meadow, rents and their appurtenances, rendering annually of the said meadow and rents belonging to them thirteen sesters of wine to the prior and convent of Norwich on the day after [the feast of] the Blessed Mary Magdalen [22 July] in return for all secular demands. And the aforesaid master and brothers and their successors will honourably support a chaplain in all his necessities, who every day, in perpetuity, will celebrate a mass of the Blessed Virgin with solemn chant in the aforesaid hospital for the health of my soul and the souls of Catherine and our ancestors. On the condition that the same chaplain, or another in his place, every day during the said offertory chant [of the mass] will ask and exhort those lying in the

said hospital and others standing about that they will pour out devout prayers to Lord Jesus Christ for the health of my soul, the soul of the said Catherine and the souls of our ancestors. In testimony of which, I have appended my seal to this writing. Witnesses: Nicholas de Ely, Roger de Swerdestone, Adam le Specer, then [1271] bailiffs of Norwich with me [and] William le Cuncte, Simone le Paumer, William Picot, John le Skot, Hugh le Tundur, Henry de Heylesdone, William Payn, Roger de Disinge, Roger de Thodeham and others (**NRO, NCR, 24B/48, Liber Domus Dei, f. 2r-v**).

In the parish of St John Berstrete

In the name of the Father and the Son and Holy Ghost, Amen. Richard de Hovethorp, chaplain, approaching death (*in extremis laborans*), granted, and by his last will disposed, bequeathed and assigned, on the fourth of May in the year of Our Lord one thousand three hundred and one, for the upkeep of a light at the altar of the Blessed Mary in the chapel of St Giles Holmestrete in Norwich, in perpetuity for his own soul and the souls of all the faithful departed, four shillings annual rent, to be taken annually at the four usual annual terms from a certain messuage situated in the parish of St John de Berstrete, between the messuage of John de Ely on the south and the messuage of Hawyse Balle on the north; and one caput abuts on the king's highway towards the east and the other caput abuts on the courtyard of Roger de Batisford. Other goods he committed to the disposal and ordinance of Dominus Thomas, master of the hospital of St Giles, Norwich (**NCR, 24B/48, Liber Domus Dei, f. 8r-v**).

In the parish of St Saviour, Fyebridge gate

Know [all men] present and future, that I, Thomas Spik, citizen of Norwich, for the salvation of my soul, and of my ancestors and successors, have given and by this present charter have confirmed to God and the Blessed Mary, and the hospital of St Giles in Norwich and the master and brothers of the same hospital and their successors, in free, pure and perpetual alms four shillings annual rent with its appurtenances, which I lately acquired from the executors of the testament of Peter de Dallinge, chaplain, to be taken annually, at the four usual terms of the year by equal portions, of that messuage with its appurtenances which John of St Faith, smith, holds in Norwich in the parish of St Saviour in Fyebridge gate; and

and it is between the messuage of a certain Adam Marshall towards the north, and the messuage of Sabine towards the south; and its abuts upon the king's highway towards the west. The aforesaid four shillings to be had and taken annually from the aforesaid messuage, with its appurtenances, whoever will have held it, for the aforesaid master and brethren and their successors, that is to say, especially for the upkeep from it of four candles burning each year about the sepulchre of the body of Jesus Christ in Eastertide in the above said hospital, and that any surplus [revenue] thereof may be spent annually at the altar of the Blessed Mary in the same hospital, freely, quietly, purely and honourably, without any condition, in perpetuity. And so that this, my grant and gift, shall remain stable and undisturbed for ever I have affixed my seal to the present writing. These [being] witnesses: Adam de Toftes, Geoffrey de Bungeye, Adam de Saham, John le Bleckestere, then [1286] bailiffs of Norwich [and] Roger de Wileby, Godwyne Brond, Humfrey Mumoye, Adam Fegge, John le Baker, William Bischope, Henry son of the priest, William the Flaxman, Alan de Sparham, William Spanye, John Clerk and others (**NCR, 24B/48, Liber Domus Dei, f. 6v**).

