

Medieval Hospital (2007 and on-going)

Castleton's Hospital of St. Mary in the Peak – Documentary evidence

Nearly 500 hospitals and almshouses were founded in England before 1300, many of them for the poor and infirm of the parish, as was likely for Castleton's Hospital of St. Mary in the Peak. Castleton developed as a planned village in the 12th century when royal power was significant in the area, and Peveril Castle was used to accommodate guests for hunting, as well as guests for the Forest gaol. The village had its own church, hall, market and cornmill. Castleton's hospital is therefore also likely to have served as a hospice (Latin origin hospes = host or guest, hospitium = a place where hospitality is both given and received) for poor wayfarers.

Whilst larger hospitals in the cities probably had access to medical care, the sick poor in small rural hospitals such as Castleton's were mainly provided with "bed rest, cleanliness and an adequate diet". Needy travellers were often welcomed to stay for a night or two; for example at Godshouse Thetford, three travellers were received each night in winter, and hot water was ordered for the washing of their feet. Hospital inmates would have been required to participate in the daily round of religious services and prayers, and the care of the soul was at least as important as the care of the body.

Castleton's hospital was reputedly founded by the wife of one of the William Peverels (putting its foundation before 1153), as reported by the traveller and writer William of Worcester in the 15th century ("Domus hospitalis de Peke fundatur per uxorem domini Peverelle"). It continued as a hospital or spytelhowse until 1543 or soon after when it was valued at 40s in the survey of the finances of the church ordered by Henry VIII, the Valor Ecclesiasticus.

Two of the earliest documents referring to the "Spital" are a grant and a Charter from the early 14th century. The first of these reads:

"Grant by Robert, son of Robert Balge, to William Blanchard of Castleton, 6 furrows of land in Spital Field, at a rent of a barbed arrow. Sept. 22nd, 1305"

The hospital is known to have had a succession of wardens who administered to the daily running of the institution, and chaplains who were responsible for celebrating mass in the chapel. The documents naming wardens or masters sometimes give fascinating insight to the conditions and properties of the hospital, for example:

"Order to Oliver de Barton, steward of the Peak and elsewhere, to send to Walter atte Grove (the Warden) by the Duke's gift, all the timber in an old house in the castle of Castleton in the Peak, for repair of the hospital of Castleton....."
(January 1382, from John of Gaunt's Register)

"In 1394, (Duchy Lanc. Misc. i, 28) John, duke of Lancaster, confirmed the grant of William Peverel, formerly lord of the High Peak, by which he gave to the warden of the hospital of the Blessed Mary of Castleton in the Peak pasture for a mare and its foals, and eight oxen, at all seasons of the year, and for a sow with its litter during the season of pannage in the pasture of Tydale (Edale). The grant further provides that every warden of the hospital shall be a chaplain and celebrate divine service continually therein"
(Victoria County History)

Hospital wardens were supported by lay brothers and sisters, who would have provided most of the caring duties for the inmates. Whilst in the 1394 extract above, the warden was also the chaplain, this was not always the case. One prestigious master of the Hospital of the Peak was John de Hermesthorp appointed in 1368, who at the same time was also master of St Katherine by the Tower. This probably indicates that he wasn't to be seen in Castleton much of the time, but administered the hospital at distance.

Place name evidence supports the general location of the hospital on the outskirts of the village (e.g. Spital Bridge, Spital Field), and a Parliamentary Survey of 1654 describes boundaries of the lands of the Hospital of the High Peake that indicate its location in or close to the current Spital Field:

"bounded on the South by the Peakes Arse River, East by a Comon feild knowne by the name of Over Maston, north by the Highway that leadeth to Hope and west partly by the said River, and partly by the said highway....".

The supposed site of The Hospital of the Peak was scheduled in February 1999 (NMR No. 29938). The scheduled monument contains the obvious surface features to the south of Castleton road and opposite Losehill Hall lodge, and the NMR report cites evidence from a 1920 lecture given by the Reverend Brooksbank that describes the position of the hospital.

There is little evidence for the specific function or plan of the hospital. In the Augmentations a grant to Thomas Babyngton mentions that following its dissolution the hospital included a "mansion" with a "little chapel annexed to that house".

Castleton Historical Society has been awarded a grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund to conduct a geophysical survey and investigate documentary evidence for the Hospital, and this work is ongoing.