

St Mary Magdalene Hospital, Bawtry

Travelling from Tickhill to Bawtry you will have passed the site of these buildings, situated on the right hand side of the road close to the centre of Bawtry. You may not have given a second thought to what looks like a Victorian chapel, all that is left of a large complex of buildings. The chapel was rebuilt in 1839 and its walls were cement rendered but the east end has a clue to its 15th Century origins. At the east end is a niche, left, also shown in the early 19th Century illustration, below right.



The Hospital was founded by the time of King John's reign with additional funds from Sir Robert Morton who died in 1396. Rent from 29 acres was received by monks at Nostell Priory who then paid the Hospital chaplain one of whose responsibilities was to pray for the souls of Sir Robert Morton and his family. Buildings consisted of infirmary, almshouse, chapel, chaplain's house and service buildings including, stables, barns and a dovecot.

After the Reformation, Henry VIII granted the income to a favourite, Richard Pygott, who kept most of it. In Elizabeth I's reign the chaplain, John Brewster, tried to sell off the Hospital's possessions and used the chapel as a stable for horses and cattle. A warrant was issued in 1590 by a church court 'for profayninge and ruininge the house and chapel of the Hospital....divers evil disposed persons have of late entered the Hospital of Mary Magdalene at Bawtry and pluckt up and carried away certain stalls and other furniture belonging to the same and contrary to all order and without authority'. Brewster was deprived of his position and subsequent chaplains repaired the chapel, but other buildings were dilapidated and so were demolished.

However, the almshouse was replaced in the 17th Century: 'two mean little cottages were erected for widowsunder the very eaves of the chapel are two small low brick cottages'. The illustration, right, shows the cottages between the chapel and the road; now there is merely a narrow, concreted, space. The almshouses received £1 a year, with a gown yearly and some coal. They were chosen alternately from Harworth and Scaftworth. According to the 1881 Census Sarah Huddleston and Jane Hanson lived there and both were classed as paupers. This was unusual as almshouse residents were often described as annuitants or almspeople but £1 a year left them dependent on charity.



Although priests were appointed to the chapel no services were conducted for more than 100 years. By 1834 the chapel building was used as a carpenter's shop. Edward Harwood Greaves of Hesley Hall rebuilt the chapel in 1839 and also paid a large portion of the stipend for the minister conducting a Sunday service.

The chapel was acquired by the freemasons for use as a Masonic Hall in 1930, its current purpose. The two cottages were finally demolished in 1930.

Since 2002 several archaeological investigations have been undertaken, primarily by the University of Sheffield, into the land immediately to the east and south of the former chapel, once the Hospital's cemetery. The latest excavation in 2010 revealed 16 graves and a number of disarticulated remains; bones from a minimum of 53 individuals were identified. It was possible to determine the age at death of individuals as follows:

15 were aged up to 4 years	1 from 15-24 years
8 from 5-9 years	5 from 25-34 years
4 from 10-14 years	5 from 35-49 years

One reason for the large number of children being found is that their remains tended to be buried close to a church or chapel in the medieval period. None of the remains showed signs of leprosy and overall the health profile of the remains varies little from what has been found in contemporary churchyards. It is therefore not possible to be sure of the Hospital's role other than the fact the Hospital was founded for the poor. One find in 2010, not associated with a skeleton, was a perforated copper-alloy plate of a type found in some other cemeteries of medieval hospitals and monasteries. The plate was used to help in the healing of limbs. An analysis of the inside of similar plates found elsewhere suggests they were lined with dock leaves and could have been buried to help in the healing process in the afterlife. Another find in 2010, a copper-alloy ferrule could have come from the end of a walking stick and could have been an aid for those receiving care at the Hospital. The patients could well have included some people from Tickhill.

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