

The Collegiate Church of Burton Lazars

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Abstract

The article sets out to explore the history of the last church of the order of St Lazarus at Burton Lazars. It existed for about a hundred years up until the order's dissolution by Henry VIII in 1544, after which the church seems to have been entirely obliterated. The article seeks to draw together the fragments of information which exist from documentary sources to add to the evidence from the stonework explored by Dr Jenny Alexander in Vol 4 of the *Acta Historiae Sancti Lazari Ordinis*. Collegiate churches are also examined as an important phenomenon in late medieval religion to create a general context: and also the collegiate church of Tattershall, Lincolnshire, about the same date and scale as the vanished Burton Lazars, as a comparison. The conclusion is that the two articles, together, provide a last glimpse of the Order of St Lazarus on the eve of the Dissolution and its principal preceptory at Burton Lazars.

Keywords

Monastic institution, Collegiate church, confraternity, Medieval period, England, Burton Lazar.

The Traditional Pattern

The book *Leper Knights: the Order of St Lazarus of Jerusalem in England, c1150-1544* set out to tell the story of the Order of St Lazarus in England.¹ It existed from the twelfth century and went through many changes before it was abolished by Henry VIII in 1544. Principally, the first Order was entirely different to the one that was suppressed, but when some stonework was discovered in 2000 our task in the Burton Lazars

¹ David Marcombe, *Leper Knights: the Order of St Lazarus of Jerusalem in England, c1150-1544* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2003), Fig 1.

Research Group was to place it somewhere in this long and complicated history. Dr Jenny Alexander, an architectural historian, has been invaluable in this process, and I refer you to her article in the *Acta Historiae Sancti Lazari Ordinis* to understand the significance of the Burton stones in the context of the history of the order and English medieval architecture.² The purpose of this introductory paper is to explain all that is known from documentary sources of the pre-2000 archaeology of the last church at Burton and why it was there. But before we do that, it is necessary to understand a little of what preceded it. The site at Burton Lazars is a palimpsest with settlement going back to the Prehistoric period. Consequently, it is extremely difficult – if not impossible – to work out. But what is clear is that there was considerable activity during the early medieval period after the Lazarites first settled there in the twelfth century.



**Figure 1: Earthworks at Burton Lazars from the air
RF Hartley, courtesy of Leicestershire Museums**

² Jenny S. Alexander, 'Burton Lazars, Leicestershire: the evidence from the worked stone collection', *Acta Historiae Sancti Lazari Ordinis*, 4, (2021), 7-47.

The earthworks provide evidence of many structures, but the heart of the preceptory has so far defied discovery – there are no key buildings: no chapel, no chapter house. We know, from documents, that all these places existed but we have no idea where they were. Likewise with the collegiate church which replaced them in the fifteenth century. Of these uncertainties the most persistent misunderstanding is that Burton Lazars was a leper hospital charged with the maintenance of all the lepers in Christendom. This is still heard from people who purport to have researched the institution for many years. In fact, Burton Lazars was a *preceptory* responsible for administering an estate and sending the resources back to the Holy Land as an *appertum*.³

What is clear is that this early institution at Burton suffered major upheavals during the fourteenth century. The fundamental reason for this was the war with France which commenced in 1338 and which, as a side issue, caused the English Lazarites to question their relationship with the French mother house, Boigny. One of the consequences of this was a bitter dispute over the mastership between brethren based at Burton Lazars, champions of the English branch of the Order, and those at Locko, Derbyshire, who preferred loyalty to the French mother house. The dispute was epitomized by the rift between Nicholas de Dover (Burton Lazars) and Geoffrey de Chaddesden (Locko) which at times became very unyielding. Eventually all was referred to the Pope and confirmed by the Chancellor in 1372. The judgement was that Chaddesden should give up his claim in return for a pension and this initiated the process by which the Order of St Lazarus became much more a ‘national’ order. But an equally damaging challenge was on the horizon under Dover’s successor,

³ Marcombe, 2003, *op. cit.*, 66–85. This too is the conclusion of Dr Rachael Hyacinth who has researched the Order in Europe, see ‘Rachael Hyacinth, *L’ordre militaire et hospitalier de Saint Lazare de Jérusalem et l’Occident: histoire – iconographie – archéologie*, University of Paris (Sorbonne), PhD thesis (2000)’; see also Rachael Hyacinth, ‘Crisis, what crisis? The ‘waning’ of the Order of St Lazarus after the Crusades’, in Helen Nicholson (ed), *On the Margins of Crusading, the Papacy and the Christian World* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011), 177–193.

Walter de Lynton. The issue here was the appointment of John Macclesfield as master of St Giles's, Holborn in 1389. St Giles's had been given to Burton Lazars in 1299 and was by far the wealthiest of its dependencies: to lose control of its mastership was therefore a major blow. However, following another long dispute, Lynton received judgement in his favour in 1402 and John Macclesfield was compensated with another pension. Dover and Lynton had successfully fought off two extremely threatening challenges and the scene was set for a fundamental reorientation of the order.⁴

The Reform of the Order of St Lazarus

What is beyond dispute is that in the early fifteenth century the Order of St Lazarus achieved a new identity for itself. Following the disputes of the fourteenth century this was necessary for survival. The first issue concerned the very identity of the order, a vital issue after the links with Boigny had been weakened. Casting around for a new patron, the eye of the order fell on the papacy which was not unnatural given the long support which the Lazarites had received from that quarter. The critical change came under Sir William Sutton who in 1479 received an important grant from Sixtus II:

*although the said house or hospital is said to be dependent on the house of Boigny ... the master and brethren of Burton have for about eighty years behaved as though free from any obedience to Boigny: that the two houses are so much apart that if the master and brethren of Burton had to have recourse to Boigny for all their affairs, its revenues would hardly suffice therefore, and that such recourse would moreover be unsafe, in as much as there have long been wars and dissensions between the English and French.*⁵

For this important concession the Order paid an annuity to the Pope but there can be no doubt it had massive consequences. The order had become essentially Anglicised – it was now the order of St Lazarus of

⁴ Marcombe, 2003, *Ibid.*, 86-100.

⁵ Marcombe, 2003, *Ibid.*, 218.

Jerusalem in *England* – which had the implication that much of the revenue it collected could be bestowed on its own possessions rather than being sent overseas to support initiatives in France. This was not inconsiderable. In the *Valor Ecclesiasticus* (1535) Burton Lazars was valued at £265 10^s 2½^d (gross) and this may well be an underestimate since revenue was derived from a number of sources not accounted.⁶ At the same time, Sutton orientated himself much more to the service of the Yorkist kings and was an associate of Edward IV's favourite, Lord Hastings, in the government of the Midlands. There is also a suggestion that at about this time the order became much more identified with the doctrine of romantic chivalry, as epitomised in the Grail story. This was knighthood, as followed by the earliest knights, but it was knighthood with a specific fifteenth century twist. Sir William Sutton, by being fundamental to all of these important changes, was probably the most significant master of the late medieval period.⁷

Collegiate Churches

About the same time the idea of the collegiate church was taking off. Collegiate churches were very ancient, with their origins in the Saxon period, but had a specific identity. They were similar to cathedrals, being staffed by canons who were supported by endowments and ruled over by a Dean or Provost. In the later Middle Ages, a new form of collegiate church developed, connected with the contemporary pre-occupation with endowments for the dead. In these foundations the church was staffed by chaplains or fellows – *Consocii* – and presided over by a warden or master. Collegiate churches looked different too. They were often grandiose in appearance, providing plenty of space for the liturgy which was considered so important in the fifteenth century. Their choir stalls were located along the north and south walls, facing each other, rather than being orientated towards the altar. More important than this, they often had a social function too which put them more in touch with the spiritual preoccupations of the day. Collegiate churches often supported schools and alms-houses on the understanding that the prayers of these

⁶ Marcombe, 2003, *Ibid.*, 87, 55-57.

⁷ Marcombe, 2003 *Ibid.*, 88-91, 218.

worthy persons were more beneficial to founders and benefactors. Here was a type of church which fitted well with all the fashions of the late Middle Ages.⁸ A good example of the transitions that often took place between these old and new concerns is the Hospital and New College of the Annunciation of St Mary at Newarke at Leicester. Originally founded as a hospital in 1330, it was transformed into a collegiate church by Henry, duke of Lancaster, in 1359, exactly what the Lazarites hoped to achieve at Burton.⁹

What went on these places? This is an interesting question and less readily answered in the twenty-first century when knowledge of formal religion has conspicuously declined. Collegiate churches, ‘founded to the greater glory of God’, represented a move away from the collectivism of earlier worship with more emphasis on the individual’s relationship with God: this is why Sir William Sutton was so astute in moving the order of St Lazarus away from its earlier preoccupations towards a much greater focus on the mindset of late medieval people. Significantly, the collegiate churches represented this trend by placing much greater emphasis on chantry foundations. This had begun earlier in the Middle Ages when several monasteries, notably Cluny, had begun to pray for the souls of past members, but it was taken over and developed by the new collegiate churches in line with the concerns of late medieval people. Late medieval religion differed from that which had gone before. Whereas in the early Middle Ages liturgy had been directed to the wellbeing of society, in the late Middle Ages it became more concerned with the development of the community of the living and the dead, hence the concern with chantry foundations. In a collegiate church each chaplain had an obligation to pray for a specific patron and also co-operate in the community’s joint obligations. At Burton Lazars this probably included a duty to pray for the welfare of the confraternity, alive and dead, which would have comprised quite an extensive bede role. Chantry priests also had obligations for a host of other duties, including the training of choirs and teaching in

⁸ ‘Collegiate church’, in *Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia*, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Collegiate_church, accessed 16/11/2020.

⁹ Marcombe, 2003, *op. cit.*, 93.

grammar schools. There were over a hundred collegiate churches in England at the time of the Reformation and when the second Chancery Act abolished them in 1547 it had fundamental consequences for English spirituality. Far beyond the loss of the collegiate churches, their contribution to the worship of late medieval England had been considerable.¹⁰

Burton Lazars

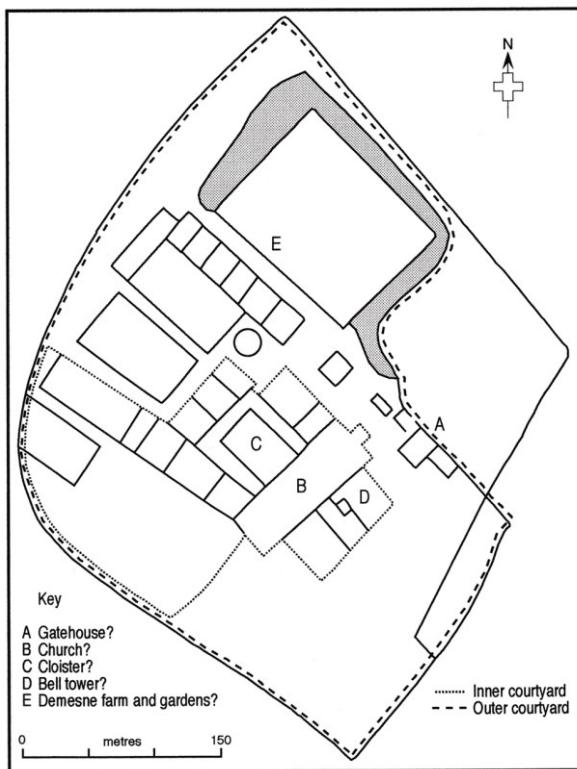
At Burton Lazars, the problem is that the collegiate church has entirely disappeared. The fact that there was one is attested by John Leland, Henry VIII's antiquary, who speaks of a 'very fair hospital and collegiate church' at Burton: the fact that this church was quite large is proved by the fact that in 1648 it required fifteen of the 'best oaks' to repair the roof alone.¹¹ Comparing Leland's use of words, the same description, 'very fair', is used for Rotherham, Yorkshire, and Bunbury, Cheshire, both perpendicular churches of some status: Rotherham 'is one of the largest and stateliest parish churches in Yorkshire'.¹² Another piece of evidence is that Burton's inmates were identified as fellows – *consocii* – a mode of description which is almost exclusive to collegiate foundations. How a church such as this can 'disappear' defies the imagination. But such things did happen during the troubled years of the sixteenth century. In some parts of the country, it was decreed that churches should be literally obliterated, blown up by gunpowder and undermined, to prevent their use by future generations and, in others, materials were plundered for building works until little or nothing was left, resulting in Shakespeare's 'bare ruined choirs'. At Burton we know,

¹⁰ 'Collegiate church', in *Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia*, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Collegiate_church, accessed 16/11/2020. For the role of the chantry priest as teacher, see Roger Bowers, 'Liturgy and Music in the Role of the Chantry Priest', J British Archaeol Assoc, 164 (2011), 130-156, available at <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1179/174767011X13184281108045>, accessed 27/11/2020.

¹¹ Marcombe, 2003, *op. cit.*, 93-5, 237.

¹² N Pevsner, *The Buildings of England*, (Yorkshire: Harmondsworth, 1959), 418-420.

for example, that Martin Heton, bishop of Ely, ordered the removal of a ‘barn’ in the abbey yard in 1601.¹³ It should also not be forgotten that, after the Dissolution, Burton Lazars was home to an extensive secular mansion in the context of which much ‘tidying up’ may have gone on.¹⁴ It is difficult to know exactly what was happening.



Plan 1: Possible layout of Burton Lazars Preceptory
prepared by Jenny Allsop¹⁵

¹³ Was the ‘barn’ that was demolished the last remnant of the collegiate buildings? Marcombe, 2003, *op. cit.*, 236.

¹⁴ Why was the church being repaired in 1648? Was it being converted into a storage facility? Marcombe, 2003, *Ibid.*, 236-237.

¹⁵ Marcombe, 2003, *op. cit.*, 150

The Burton Lazars Research Group hunted diligently for a church in the years after 1983 but nothing came to light amongst the scattered earthworks of the huge site. Eventually, late in the day, Jenny Allsop came up with a plan that is reproduced as Plan 4 in *Leper Knights* and Plan 1 in this article.¹⁶

This plan purports to illustrate a large rectangular building orientated to the north, near the gateway to the preceptory complex. It is not clear how these conclusions were arrived at. The northern orientation is not necessarily problematic since medieval churches were often orientated away from the east if geographic problems prevented them from being placed more conventionally: and that was certainly the case at Burton where generations of earlier building had cluttered the available space. The size of the building is more challenging. According to Allsop, its length was 110 metres and added to it was a small extension to the 'east' which looks like a lady chapel, tomb or shrine: this measured only 9 x 11 metres. This would make Burton Lazars larger than the chapel of King's College, Cambridge (88.072 metres), and only a little smaller than major cathedrals such as Lincoln (147 metres) and York (159.715 metres). All the surviving evidence suggests that Burton Lazars was indeed large but our comparison, Tattershall, Lincolnshire, was only 52 metres overall. Moreover, Allsop claims to have discovered the outline of a square tower to the northeast of the church, visible as a parch mark during one of the dry summers of the 1990s. This was comparable to several more detached towers built during the late Middle Ages, for example at Fountains Abbey, Yorkshire. The ringing of bells was part of the liturgy required in the obsequies of the dead and a bell from Burton Lazars was alleged to have survived at Melton Mowbray.¹⁷

The problem with Allsop's interpretation is that it conflicts with the only contemporary description of Burton Lazars which we have. Between c1598 and 1609 Burton Lazars was visited by William Burton, historian,

¹⁶ Jenny Allsop was an amateur archaeologist and member of the Burton Lazars Research Group.

¹⁷ Marcombe, 2003, *Ibid.*, 149-150, 239.

and William Wyrley, Rouge Croix herald. One would expect a herald to be a meticulous recorder and he recounts that the ‘monastery’ at Burton was adjacent to the south wall of the church. If by the ‘monastery’ he means the buildings associated with the occupiers of the last church (i.e., the collegiate church) – perhaps he means the cloister? – then his description conflicts with Allsop who places some buildings to the east of the church. These could be considered south, by a stretch of the imagination, thus confirming Wyrley’s observation, but it is difficult to make it fit. The conclusion must be Allsop’s collegiate church may well be in the wrong place as well as being unusually large.¹⁸ This seems to be confirmed by some of the collegiate buildings at Tattershall which are adjacent to the south wall, exactly where Wyrley places them at Burton. Perhaps we should keep on looking.¹⁹

What did this vanished collegiate church look like? We have a few clues from documents and archaeology. William Sutton, rector of St Stephen’s, Wallbrook, gave Burton Lazars a cloth and corporas case embroidered with verdue, along with his best carpet, items which suggest a preoccupation with the finer intricacies of liturgical worship.²⁰ In the early seventeenth century Burton and Wyrley also noted heraldic glass at Eye Kettleby which had been ‘removed from Burton Lazars’. There was also possibly glass at Freeby and Welby, but the situation is complicated by the fact that Eye Kettleby was demolished in the eighteenth century and some of its glass found its way to Melton Mowbray. Some of this was rescued by the antiquarian clergyman Dr Thomas Ford (1773-1820) and some may yet survive in Melton Mowbray parish church, such as the splendid representation of the Mowbray arms depicted on the cover of *Leper Knights*.²¹ A more dramatic discovery was made in 1913, where

¹⁸ Dr Alexander suggests that Wyrley may have been describing property of Vaudey Abbey and was therefore confused. JS Alexander, ‘Worked Stone’, 45

¹⁹ Marcombe, 2003, *op. cit.*, 148.

²⁰ Marcombe, 2003, *Ibid.*, 194. Verdue was a form of Flemish tapestry characterised by leaf decoration.

²¹ Marcombe, 2003, *Ibid.*, 237-239, Fig 2.

some medieval tiles were discovered near the house of one Thomas Hack. The investigation was made by the marquess of Granby and Captain Charles Lindsey, assisted by Bertall Hubert Smith, curate of Melton Mowbray, and it uncovered a 'pavement' 6 feet 9 inches x 3 feet comprising almost a hundred tiles 'in good preservation'.



Figure 2: Fifteenth century tiles from Burton Lazars
©British Museum

The problem was that the tiles were laid in a haphazard fashion and many of them were of poor quality, made with defective stamps. However, the date was fifteenth century and some of the heraldry was confirmed as being of families who were patrons of Burton Lazars, such as the Ferrars and D'Aubignys. Thus, although the original location cannot now be ascertained, their association with Burton Lazars seems certain. The tiles are now in the British Museum, an important addition to the ceramic collection.²²

²² Marcombe, 2003, *Ibid.*, 239-240, Fig 3.



Clearly, some investment had been put into beautifying the church both by fashionable stained glass and purpose made ceramics, relics of which survived completely by chance.

Many collegiate churches possessed the shrines of saints such as St John at Beverley which attracted many pilgrims over the years. More fashionable in the late Middle Ages were statues of cult figures connected with the church in question, many of which attracted devotional stories.



Figure 4: The Burton Lazars 'leper head'
Photograph by Trevor Clayton, Burton Lazars Church

This raises the controversial case of the Burton Lazars 'leper head'. The 'leper head' is a medieval sculpture allegedly from the site of Burton Lazars and once in the Guildhall Museum at Melton Mowbray. It was written up by Marcombe and Manchester for the journal *Medical History* in 1990 and Manchester's conclusion was that it was the head of a

medieval leper.²³ But who? In 1999 Professor Carole Rawcliffe raised the intriguing possibility it could be none other than one of the patrons of Burton Lazars, Lazarus the Beggar or Lazarus of Bethany, or even a merging of the two.²⁴ Could this have been part of the ‘image of St Lazarus’ at which the faithful made offerings in 1535? Was the small extension to Allsop’s putative church made to locate the statue? Another possibility is raised by the fact that William Wyrley mentioned seeing the arms of Simon de Montfort when he visited Burton Lazars in the early seventeenth century. De Montfort, of course, was dismembered after his defeat at Evesham in 1265 and many churches possessed his relics, including Alnwick Abbey in Northumberland which laid claim to a foot.²⁵ Could not Burton Lazars have joined the craze and also purloined a portion of the holy remains? St Lazarus and Simon de Montfort both provide the possibility that the collegiate church may have provided a focus for relics which were such big business in the late Middle Ages. Interment was another possibility, though the disappearance of Burton Lazars has provided little evidence of human remains. Tombs, though a feature of many medieval churches, are not in evidence at Burton Lazars. That may not have been the case historically, and here documents come to our aid again. Robert Rowe, who died in 1521, requested burial in ‘the cemetery of Burton Lazars’, probably the preceptory. Moreover, a fragment of human bone was discovered on site in the 1990s and this was identified by Manchester as a portion of human jawbone.²⁶ This proves that burials *did* take place at Burton which would have been entirely in line with the requirements of a late medieval clientele.

²³ D Marcombe and K Manchester, ‘The Melton Mowbray “Leper Head”: an historical and medical investigation’, *Medieval History*, 34 (1990), 86-91, fig 4.

²⁴ C Rawcliffe, *Medicine for the Soul: the life, death and resurrection of the English medieval hospital, St Giles, Norwich c1249-1550* (Stroud, 1999), 63.

²⁵ Marcombe, 2003, *op. cit.*, 97.

²⁶ Marcombe, 2003, *Ibid.*, 195. The fragment of jawbone is now in the possession of David Marcombe.

Another characteristic of the collegiate church, not yet discussed, was the master's house, a feature which put the church complex closer to the country houses of the gentry. In the late Middle Ages the status of the master of Burton increased inordinately and he became much more a helper in the government of Leicestershire: Sir William Sutton was a JP and these secular duties were probably mirrored by other masters.²⁷ After the early fifteenth century all of the masters of Burton were knights, compared with only two during the earlier period.²⁸ The source of these honours is uncertain, except in the case of Sir Thomas Legh, but they could have been because of the economic position – a knight was supposed to have landed wealth of more than £40 *per annum* – or by grant of the papacy following the Order's realignment.²⁹ In any event, that this new, knightly, master of Burton would require suitable accommodation and a sumptuous house was, no doubt, part of Sir William Sutton's plan, a house which probably reflected the most innovative styles of the gentry. This was partly to provide accommodation for high status guests and even the king was possibly a visitor in 1484.³⁰ On the Dissolution, this residence was probably taken over by the Hartopp family and remained in their possession until it was destroyed in a storm in 1705.³¹ This home, like the remainder of the collegiate complex, has entirely vanished but its existence illustrates how collegiate churches were strange hybrids, part ecclesiastical and part secular, especially so in the case of the Order of St Lazarus which had a notable social position to uphold.

²⁷ Marcombe, 2003, *Ibid.*, 88. See David Marcombe, 'The Seals of the Order of St Lazarus of Jerusalem in England', in N Adams, J Cherry and James Robinson (eds), *Good Impressions: Image and Authority in Medieval Seals*, British Museum (2008), 52-59.

²⁸ Sir Geoffrey de Shriggley, Sir William Sutton, Sir George Sutton, Sir Thomas Norton, Sir Thomas Ratcliffe, Sir Thomas Legh. The two earlier masters were Sir Adam Veau and Sir Richard Sulegreve. Marcombe, 2003, *Ibid.*, 252-253.

²⁹ Marcombe, 2003, *Ibid.*, 89-91, 228.

³⁰ Marcombe, 2003, *Ibid.*, 91.

³¹ Marcombe, 2003, *Ibid.*, 237.

The most interesting documentary evidence for the collegiate church comes from the confraternity of St Lazarus, which seems to have been especially active in the years before the Reformation.³²

The confraternity, which may have had very ancient origins, was an organisation of clergy and lay people through which members could become associated with the Order of St Lazarus. The chief benefit was spiritual privileges, and its membership was very wide ranging: people joined from all parts of the country, but chiefly from the Midlands. Between 1455 and 1526, twenty-six grants of confraternity exist, suggesting a close link between this enterprise and the collegiate church. 'These dates tie in conveniently with the building of the collegiate church and it is likely that the growth of the confraternity was, on the one hand, inspired by this development and, on the other, helped to fund it.'³³



**Figure 5: Seal of the confraternity of Burton Lazars
By permission of the British Library, seal lxvi 48a**

³² Letters of confraternity and confraternity seals provided a specialist study for the Burton Lazars Research Group. One early (?) confraternity seal was discovered by a metal detectorist at Robertsbridge, Sussex. See, David Marcombe, 'The Confraternity Seals of Burton Lazars Hospital and a newly discovered matrix from Robertsbridge, Sussex', *Transactions of the Leicestershire Archaeological and Historical Society*, 76 (2002), fig 5, fig 6.

³³ Marcombe, 2003, *op. cit.*, 187-189.

Artefactual remains are quite considerable, including letters of confraternity and a number of seals which take many forms, both original and reproduction. Thus, the confraternity and Sutton's church were interdependent, and Burton Lazars offered practical benefits far beyond a place on the bederoll. But that was always the crux, and James Breton, rector of Bulphan, Essex, left money to three confraternities in 1517, one of which was Burton Lazars:

*that the said fraternities pray for me as they be accustomed to pray for brethren and sisters having letters of them.*³⁴

Certainly, the confraternity provided a firm rock on which the collegiate church could build in the years before the Reformation.³⁵

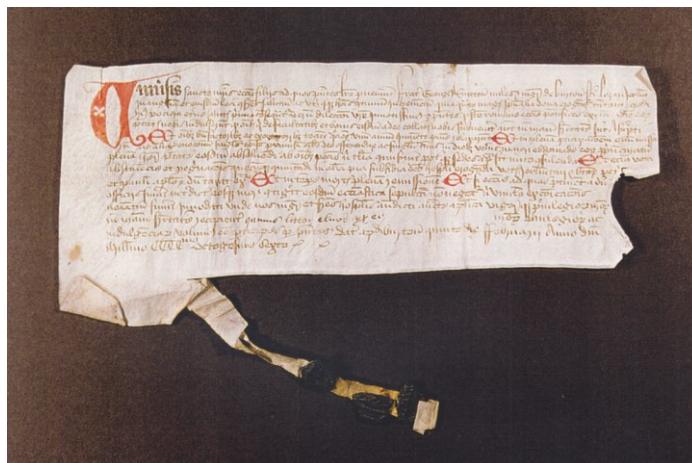


Figure 6: Letter of confraternity to James and Eleanor Layton 1486
Cheshire Record Office

³⁴ Marcombe, 2003, *Ibid.*, 194.

³⁵ Marcombe, 2003, *Ibid.*, 186-194.



**Figure 7: Memorial of Sir Thomas Legh, last master of Burton Lazars, 1545
from the church of St Leonard, Shoreditch
British Library, Add MSS 27348**

How extensive was the personnel of the collegiate church at Burton? One of the most perplexing references we had to deal with in our research was the statement by William Burton, later repeated by many sources, that Burton Lazars was a foundation for a master, eight sound brethren and an unspecified number of leprous brethren.³⁶ The distinction between 'sound' and 'leprous' brethren caused a good deal of problems over the years, but it begins to make sense if we assume that Burton was talking about the situation he knew best i.e., approaching the Dissolution. Eight 'sound' brethren fit well with the complement of the collegiate

³⁶ Marcombe, 2003, *Ibid.*, 142, fig 7.

church and the ‘leprous’ brethren could have been drawn from the confraternity or wider affiliations of the Order. The best indication of numbers is the attestation to the grant of the advowson of Braceborough, Lincolnshire, made in the chapter house in 1544, one of the last acts of the old corporation. It is signed by the master (Dr Thomas Legh) and five brethren (William Frankis, Thomas Bitchfield, Robert Coke, William Smith, and John Capper).



Figure 8: The ‘hypocrite brother’ 16th century lampoon of a brother of St Lazarus - Huntingdon Library, San Marino, California HM160 f.129

This seems to represent a reasonable stability in the last years of the foundation (Bitchfield had been there since 1524 when he is described as a ‘brother’), but it is possible that numbers fell in the last years, thus representing a decline from eight to five. Nevertheless, a head count of five brothers was not unusual for a late medieval collegiate foundation:

our comparison, Tattershall, had six brothers. Frankis appears to have been the last survivor: he died in retirement at Melton Mowbray in 1555.³⁷ All of this was supported by the ancient endowments of Burton Lazars which were quite considerable, but in line with fifteenth century chantry colleges Burton Lazars had attracted new endowments, especially to fund its obligations of praying for the dead. Some patrons who one could expect to provide money to pay for their *obits* fail to do so, perhaps there was some arrangement beyond the probate procedure, but others do. In 1522 Maurice Berkley of Wymondham, Norfolk, bequeathed to the brethren of Burton and others:

*to have a solemn obit kept ... with ringers of bells and to have a hearse and tapers set after the manner of their solemn obits kept within their said monasteries.*³⁸

But one of the main functions of the collegiate church was the care of the poor. Tattershall had been founded for ten paupers and a range of alms-houses had been built to accommodate them. These are still in use today, though increasingly out of step with the requirements of modern living. By contrast Burton Lazars was part of a religious order with ancient endowments and its provision for the poor rested on the gift of St Giles's Hospital, Holborn, from the Crown in 1299.³⁹ St Giles's had been founded in the twelfth century to provide for forty lepers, but its history is a tale of how this original provision declined in the light of the changing nature of the disease it was supposed to be treating. In 1479, in line with the changes affecting the Order of St Lazarus, the fourteen lepers at St Giles's were changed to fourteen paupers at 2^d per day who are also mentioned in the *Valor Ecclesiasticus* of 1535. If this was not enough to fulfil the Order's responsibility, it received more with the gift of Holy Innocents' Hospital, Lincoln, in the mid-fifteenth century and the *Valor* notes a further one, 'from an old foundation', at Burton Lazars. The original Holy Innocents' provision had been for ten lepers, but in 1457 it was cut down

³⁷ Marcombe, 2003, *Ibid.*, 233, fig 8.

³⁸ Marcombe, 2003, *Ibid.*, 234.

³⁹ Marcombe, 2003, *Ibid.*, 161-171

to three who need not even be maintained at Holy Innocents'. The obligation of Holy Innocents' and Burton Lazars was therefore vague, but the St Giles's obligation was clear enough and in its last years Burton Lazars' obligation can be calculated on the London payments alone. Interestingly, this is more than Tattershall, and also exceeds the 10% of income deemed appropriate for religious houses. Burton Lazars directed 14% of its revenue to charity in 1535 which was in excess of most East Anglian religious houses at the same date.⁴⁰ Thus ancient endowments tended to exceed those sums set aside by the founders of the collegiate foundations in the fifteenth century, though neither matched the expectations of Tudor reformers, such as Roderick Mors. Tattershall maintained a grammar school in line with several other collegiate foundations: there is a single reference to a choir school at Burton Lazars, so what was being done to support the educational role of the college must remain in doubt.⁴¹

Tattershall

The obvious comparisons to have been made with Burton Lazars are Bunbury and Rotherham, both of which are highlighted by Leland, but both were difficult to access during the travel restrictions imposed by Covid. It has therefore been decided to take the Lincolnshire collegiate church of Tattershall as a comparison.⁴² The advantage here was that most of the research was undertaken prior to 2020 and Tattershall exists as one of the principal, well preserved, collegiate foundations of the UK. Tattershall was founded in 1440 as a result of the will of Ralph, Lord Cromwell, Lord Treasurer to Henry VI. However, it was not begun immediately, and the work was commenced by Cromwell's executor William Wainfleet, bishop of Winchester, and was still going on in the early sixteenth century. The church replaced the earlier church of St Peter and St Paul, of which some fragments survive. Built of Ancaster stone,

⁴⁰ Marcombe, 2003, *Ibid.*, 172.

⁴¹ Marcombe, 2003, *Ibid.*, 95.

⁴² N Pevsner and J Harris, *Lincolnshire, The Buildings of England* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1989), 743-745, fig 9, fig 10.

Tattershall was 56.7 metres long and remarkably plain in appearance, almost puritanical in its character.

The church was founded for a master and six chaplains, not unlike Burton Lazars, and had connected with it the usual additions of collegiate foundations. Firstly, ten alms-houses, still standing, despite renovation: this compares with accommodation for fourteen paupers at St Giles's which had none of the novelty of Lord Cromwell's benefaction. Secondly, some 'most impressive' stained glass most of which was removed in the eighteenth century but some of which still survives in the chancel. Thirdly, a good selection of memorial brasses, including those of the founder and his wife, underlining Tattershall's role as a mausoleum.



Figure 9: Holy Trinity, Tattershall
<https://www.bats.org.uk>, accessed 21/01/2022



Figure 10: Tattershall Alms-houses

<https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1287752?section=comments-and-photos>, accessed 21/01/2022

Where it does fall short of Burton Lazars is in the survival of medieval tiles. There is virtually nothing, the only tiles of note being those in the chancel installed by Butterfield in the nineteenth century. At both Tattershall and Burton Lazars the collegiate buildings have suffered inordinately, but at least Tattershall was excavated in 1967 leading to the conclusion that the main body of the building lay to the northeast of the church: some structures adjoined the south wall of the church, again providing an interesting parallel to Wyrley's observations at Burton. The area was examined by the author in 2019 when evidence of fifteenth century artefacts was found. There appears to have been a much greater interest in education at Tattershall and physical remains of the grammar school are much more in evidence. Despite this, there are broad similarities between Tattershall and the vanished church at Burton Lazars: the main contrast, perhaps, being in the level of decoration which existed in the architecture. If Dr Alexander's essay is correct, Tattershall could not

boast a series of themed decoration which made Burton Lazars remarkable.

Conclusion

After the problems of the fourteenth century the Order of St Lazarus reinvented itself. Under its outstanding master of the fifteenth century, Sir William Sutton, it put in place a series of reforms which meant it was never going to be the same again. One of these was the revival of its spiritual role and the foundation of a new collegiate church at Burton. This church conformed to many of the norms of the period and supported fourteen alms-houses connected with its daughter house at St Giles's, Holborn: it was also backed by a considerable confraternity. Moreover, in line with the fashion of the day, it was decorated with stained glass and purpose-made ceramic floor tiles. In fact, it compares favourably with other collegiate churches of the period, particularly Holy Trinity, Tattershall, Lincolnshire. The problem for the historian is that this church has entirely vanished and has left no evidence of where it might have stood on the landscape: all evidence is entirely derived from documentary survivals, which may well have been misinterpreted had it not been for a wider understanding of the history of the Order of St Lazarus. All this changed in 2000 when Mary Hatton encountered some medieval stonework in the garden of Burton House. It seems this must have come from Sutton's collegiate church, in fact the last evidence to survive of that building. The stonework was initially written up in *Leper Knights* but in 2021 Dr Alexander produced a full analysis for the journal *Acta Historiae Sancti Lazarus Ordinis*.⁴³ It displays the commendable caution of an archaeologist but at least one feature, the portion of a window capital, appears to have come from a large and impressive church.⁴⁴ Most notable, though, are the sections of chimneys which look as if they came from a large secular dwelling, possibly the master's house.⁴⁵ These are decorated, remarkably, with some plant symbolism which seems to take

⁴³ The stone was initially dealt with in Marcombe, 2003, *op. cit.*, 95, 241-245. See also Alexander, 2021, *op. cit.*, 7-47.

⁴⁴ Alexander, 2021, *Ibid.*, 17, 38.

⁴⁵ Alexander, 2021, *Ibid.*, 23-36.

its inspiration from flora associated with the early treatment of leprosy.⁴⁶ This is perhaps not as surprising as it seems, because this was a period when the Order was harking back to its foundation myths and the basic inspiration of the leper knights.⁴⁷



**Figure 11 Post-Reformation stonework from the Burton Lazars Collection.
Probably dismissed by Dr Alexander because of its lack of architectural detail
Photograph David Marcombe**

Not considered by Dr Alexander are some fragments of sixteenth/seventeenth century (?) stonework, mostly sills and jambs, which seem to have come from a post-Reformation house. There are several candidates for this, and it is, perhaps, the least interesting part of the collection.⁴⁸ In all the Burton Lazars stone was 'of some richness and elaboration' and provides a fragmentary reminder of the last days of the Lazarites in medieval England.⁴⁹ It is virtually the sole physical survivor of

⁴⁶ Alexander, 2021, *Ibid.*, 20; Marcombe, 2003, *op. cit.*, 243-244.

⁴⁷ Marcombe, 2003, *Ibid.*, 245.

⁴⁸ Marcombe, 2003, *Ibid.*, 242.

⁴⁹ Alexander, 2021, *op. cit.*, 8.

Sir William Sutton's collegiate church, the epitome of English religion on the eve of the Reformation.

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This paper is being published posthumously after Prof. David Marcombe (*1947 †2022) had submitted the paper to the journal. Prof. Marcombe passed away suddenly on the 11th June 2022. He was a real academic, inspirational educator and research historian – a great loss to the academic community researching the history of the Order of Saint Lazarus. David Marcombe's main interests lay in medieval church history. He started his academic career as a Lecturer in History at the University of Durham, but subsequently in 1980 moved to the University of Nottingham where he was eventually appointed an Associate Professor and Director of the Centre for Local History. His research work included a detailed study of the Order of Saint Lazarus in England for which work, he was, in 2005, made an Officer in the Order of Merit (OMLJ) of the Military and Hospitaller Order of St Lazarus of Jerusalem.