

CHRIST'S HOSPITAL - SOME HOUSEY TALES FIGHTS AND FEUDS

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The story of the founding of Christ's Hospital is I think well known to most historians since it is so closely associated with the Lord Mayor, the Court of Aldermen, the Court of Common Council and the Corporation. As one commentator has written: 'Almost from the beginning the Hospital was intrinsically woven into the institutional fabric of the City'. Although the relationship may have changed over the centuries still today that relationship very much exists. The Lord Mayor for his year is Vice-President of the Foundation and has the right of presentation of a pupil, as does the Corporation who have subscribed for this privilege. Four of the Council of Almoners are appointed by the Court of Aldermen, two Aldermen and two Common Councilmen. Then there is the annual St. Matthew's Day Service in September and the march from St. Sepulchre's to Guildhall when the School returns to its roots - so currently all would seem to be well.

But that has not always been the case, indeed it would be very surprising if it had been so over a period of nearly 450 years. When I volunteered to give this paper the Honorary Secretary asked me to give him a title for the notice that he intended to circulate. Christ's Hospital almost more than any other independent school has a wealth of history.

Many books have been written about it and as the centenary of the move from Newgate Street to Horsham in 1902 and the 450th Anniversary of the foundation in 1552 approach more will be added to this great archive which makes such an important contribution to the social history of this country.

I have chosen the title: 'Christ's Hospital - Some Housey Tales Fights and Feuds' - Why? Perhaps to demonstrate that the School has an independent spirit.

So what of some of these tensions that have on more than one occasion spilt over into open warfare. You may think it strange for example that the annual Spital Sermon now preached in April at St. Lawrence Jewry could have become a *cause célèbre* in the middle of the last century.

The preaching of the Spital Sermon is of ancient origin. Indeed in 1598 John Stow in his *Survey of London* commemorates the bi-centenary of the sermon. In 1594 a large house had been built for the Governors and children of Christ's Hospital to sit in and I quote further: 'but within the first year the same house decaying and like to have fallen was again, with great cost, repaired at the City's charge'. (Doesn't that all sound too familiar!)

It would appear that the Governors and the City Fathers realised the potential of this service to plead the cause of charity. Christ's Hospital soon appropriated the sermon for its own use.

What triggered off this particular 'tiff' was the location for the sermon which up to the middle of the 19th century had been preached at various churches. On this occasion the Lord Mayor summoned the Governors to attend St. Bride's whilst Christ's Hospital issued an invitation to Christ Church. The Lord Mayor and the civic party proceeded to St. Bride's in state only to find an empty church - the sermon was preached at Christ Church!

It is I suppose not surprising that a number of the 'misunderstandings' involved money and administration. From the outset King Edward VI vested the various hospitals including Christ's Hospital in the Mayor and Commonalty of the City of London. In 1557 a scheme embodying 'Ordinances and Rules of Governors' was printed. Over the next 140 years or so it is quite clear that the system of administration was far from perfect and was in many respects being abused, so much so that in 1666 the Treasurers of the various Hospitals met and agreed that each Hospital should choose their own Governors, although Aldermen and Common Councilmen still predominated. In 1699 the Corporation woke up to the fact that the management of Christ's Hospital was slipping out of its hands. The Town Clerk was instructed to write a letter of protest to the Governors which he did with what has been described as a 'sentence of such portentous length which is not uncommon when accompanying a weak case!' The records show that the Corporation frequently interfered in the affairs of the Royal Hospitals. Again in 1778 they began to agitate. They appointed a special committee, refused to seal leases and refused to confirm Christ's Hospital's nominee for the benefice of Enford.

Things came to a head when the Presidents and Treasurers of the Hospitals petitioned the Lord Chancellor, who found amongst other things that there were 230 leases of property at Guildhall waiting to be sealed and that the Court of Common Council was unfit to replace the administration as Life Governors because it was 'so numerous and fluctuating a body that if they should be Governors the greatest inconvenience would ensue'.

In 1782 an Act of Parliament was passed which embodied certain articles of agreement arrived at between the City and the Governors. This was by no means the end of the rumblings.

From 1837 various commissions of inquiry considered different elements of the running of Christ's Hospital including the donation governor system and the proposed move of the School in 1902 from Newgate Street to Horsham. It is interesting to note that that eminent man of letters and Old Blue Samuel Taylor Coleridge was moved to write a piece in *The Courier* in 1811 entitled 'The Purpose of Christ's Hospital'.

In 1582 three members of the Fellowship of Carmen approached the Governors of Christ's Hospital with a scheme that would help to finance the School which was causing a problem for the City authorities and the Governors and would at the same time give the City an opportunity to raise revenue from the holders of carrooms and for the Carmen to get rid of the Woodmongers. The Court of Aldermen decreed that 'The Treasurer and Governors of Christ's Hospital shall from henceforth have rule, charge, oversyqut and government of all carts, carres, and carmen as are and be or hereafter shall be within this cytte' and so on. The end result was that Christ's Hospital was given the right of sealing the cars. It received all fines for breaches of the rules and most importantly was paid a quarterly rental of 6s. 8d. by every carman, carter and woodmonger - a nice little earner! They did very well. The net profit for the year 1582-83 was £153.16s.5d. and by 1597- 98 was £223.14s.10d.

The struggle between the Carmen and the Woodmongers does not really concern us - needless to say the Woodmongers were unhappy and complained to the Board of Green Cloth.

The elaborate rules and system of payments and fines worked well for a time. Christ's Hospital assumed the burden of the administration but also took the rewards.

The relationship deteriorated and in 1600 the Carmen backed by the Woodmongers won a suit in the Court of King's Bench. The Lord Mayor and Aldermen realising the gravity of the decision and the results that would follow not only to the finances of the Hospital but also the chaos in the City's transport industry, supported Christ's Hospital in an appeal to the Privy Council. Temporarily things were resolved as between the Carmen and the Woodmongers and the Woodmongers and Christ's Hospital, but it was an uneasy truce with many skirmishes over the next 200 years.

Things really came to a head at the turn of the 19th century with the Napoleonic wars and the development of Docklands, an ideal set of circumstances for unprofessional working practices to thrive - unlicensed carts, pilfering and a breakdown of the system referred to in the history of the Carmens' Company as war with Christ's Hospital. Peace was eventually declared in 1838 when an Act of Common Council, agreed by both parties, removed the power of licensing carts from the Governors of Christ Hospital. The association of the Hospital and the Carmen had lasted for two and a half centuries, the Hospital holding the direct government of the cars from 1582 to 1605 and from 1665 to 1838. I am glad to say that today the relationship with the Carmens' Company, which received its Livery in 1848, and Christ's Hospital is harmonious and they have for many years sponsored a pupil at the School as Donation Governors.

As I said at the beginning of this paper there is a wealth of history appertaining to Christ's Hospital and scope for many more papers. Bearing in mind that as the Lord Mayor is Vice-President of the Foundation, there are three short pieces I would like to end with.

The first is an extract from a letter of Samuel Pepys to a Mrs. Steward dated 20th September 1695. Samuel Pepys was a Governor of the School and a prime mover in the founding of the Royal Mathematical School for, as Secretary to the Admiralty, he was perturbed at the inefficiency of officers as navigators. His letter to Mrs. Steward of 1695 is headed:

'THE VICE-PRESIDENT IS AMUSED'

Two wealthy citizens are lately dead, and left their estates, one to a Blue-coat boy, and the other to a Blue-coat girl in Christ's Hospital. The extraordinariness of which has led some of the Magistrates to carry it on to a match, which is ended in a public wedding - he in his habit of blue satin, led by two of the girls, and

she in blue with an apron of green, and petticoat yellow, all of sarsnet, led by two of the boys of the house, through Cheapside to Guildhall Chapel, where they were married by the Dean of St. Paul's, she given by my Lord Mayor. The Wedding-dinner it seems was kept in the Hospital Hall. Bow bells are just now ringing, *ding dong*, but whether for this I cannot presently tell: but it is likely enough, for I have known them ring upon much foolisher occasions, and lately too.

On the 12th June 1553 King Edward VI agreed to make grants for the erection and maintenance of the Royal Hospitals - and on 26th June 1553 letters patent were issued which laid down directions for the future government of the Hospitals. The charter allowed Christ's Hospital to hold money in mortmain. The funds, without which Christ's Hospital could not open its doors, came mainly from the citizens of London. The Lord Mayor's Committee started with a levy on themselves, and subsequently launched what is believed to be the first 'Mansion House Appeal' in history, and one of the most successful. 'The like provision was never yet made in any Christian kingdom'.

Finally as lottery fever has gripped the country the following might be of interest.

'The concept of a national or public lottery is not new - and for well over 100 years the boys of Christ's Hospital - better known as Bluecoat Boys - were used to draw the winning tickets. It is in fact exactly 300 years ago that boys from the Royal Mathematical School within Christ's Hospital, founded in 1673 by King Charles the Second, were first used at the lotteries. They received a fee for performing this task, although the Governors held the money until the boys left when it was used as part of their apprenticeship payment.

The authorities went to considerable lengths to ensure that the boys were not able to tamper with the tickets they drew and the twelve boys chosen to attend were not informed until the morning of the day of the draw.

Public lotteries apparently came to an end in 1826 but until that date the distinctive dress of the Christ's Hospital boy was to be conspicuously seen when the draw for the public lotteries took place'.

Christ's Hospital is undoubtedly a well endowed school but, as Richard Poulton - who retired as Headmaster last July - has said, it is the last of the truly great public schools. Today some 35% of the pupils pay no fees and only some 16% of the running costs come from parental contributions to fees. It adheres to its mission statement which starts: 'It is and should be the mission of Christ's Hospital in perpetuity

.....' and ends 'to maintain and further close connection between the Foundation and the City of London so successfully nurtured since 1552'.

Let me end with some words of another eminent man of letters and an Old Blue, Edmund Blunden, the centenary of whose birth fell last year. 'The foundation of Christ's Hospital was such a unique example of the co-operation between men of faith and goodwill in an act of christian charity'.