

ST CROSS HOSPITAL VISIT – 24 September 2019

The Group enjoyed a visit to St Cross Hospital Winchester, kindly organised by June Chilton, followed by lunch at the nearby Bell Inn.

We were greeted with the “wayfarers dole” of bread and local ale, before having a most interesting and insightful tour led by Brother John.



The **Hospital of St Cross and Almshouse of Noble Poverty** is a medieval almshouse, situated on the outskirts of Winchester. Simon Jenkins describes it as “England's oldest and most perfect almshouse”. It was founded by Henry of Blois, Bishop of Winchester in 1136.

The building is constructed of stone and surrounds two quadrangles. The smaller Outer Quadrangle to the north consists of: the outer gate (C16th); the brewhouse (C14th); from the C15th, the guest wing,

kitchen (which had to produce food for thirteen poor men and 100 men at the gates); the porter's lodge and the three-storey Beaufort Tower of c. 1450.



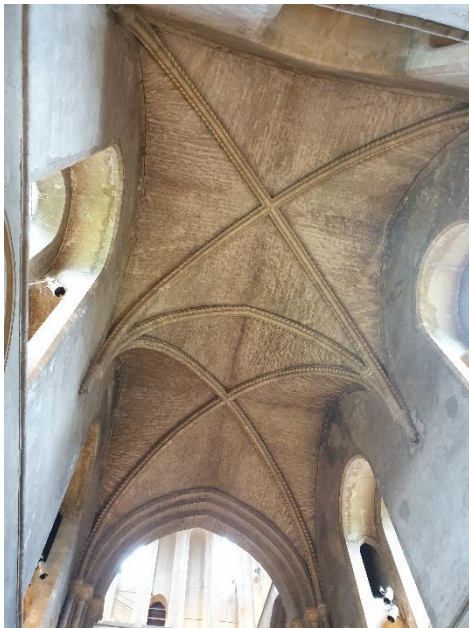
The spacious inner courtyard comprises the north range, including the C14th Brethren's Hall (which had to be large enough for the Brethren and 100 poor men), entered via a flight of steps in a stone porch. There is a timber screen with gallery above, within which is also a splendid timber roof, arch braced; a central hearth and a dais where the Master dined with the Brethren in the main part of the hall; and a wooden staircase leading to the Master's rooms in the south-east corner.

The main set of two-storeyed lodgings are on the north-west and west sides of the quadrangle; these house the 25 Brothers and are notable for the tall, regularly spaced chimneys and doorways, each leading to four sets of apartments.



There used to be a corresponding range on the south side joined to the church, but this was demolished in 1789. The eastern or infirmary range is occupied by an ambulatory.

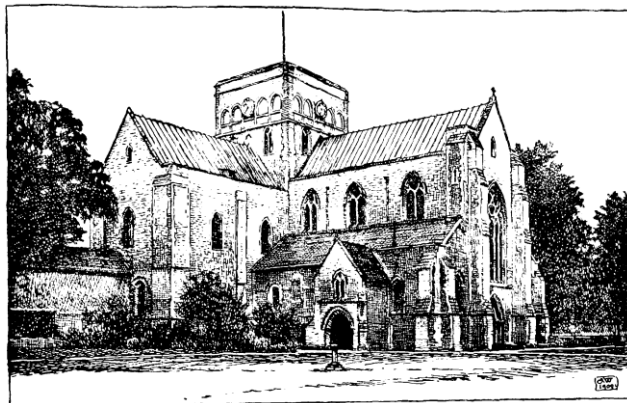
The C12th and C13th church in the south-east corner is more like a miniature cathedral than a typical almshouse chapel. The building is stone-vaulted throughout, with transepts and a central tower. The walls are over a metre thick, made from stone from Caen, Dorset, and the Isle of Wight as well as local flint. The roof is lead. The building is in Transitional Norman/Gothic style. Started in 1135, the chancel was the first part, built two bays deep with aisles. This is typically Norman, with round-headed windows and much



chevron ornament. But the main arches in the arcade and beneath the central tower are slightly pointed in the Gothic manner. The three-bay aisled nave and transepts continue the style. Between 1383 and 1385, a large tracery window was inserted in the west front, and the clerestory windows in the nave were enlarged and a north porch added. Several medieval encaustic tiles survive on the floor. There are also traces of medieval wall paintings. The stained glass is mainly 19th century. The font came from the nearby St Faith's



Church, which was demolished in 1507.



The Hospital still provides accommodation for a total of 25 Brothers, under the care of "The Master". They belong to either of two charitable foundations: those belonging to the Order of the Hospital of St Cross (founded around 1132) wear black trencher hats and black robes with a silver badge in the shape of a cross potent, while those belonging to the Order of Noble Poverty (founded in 1445) wear claret trencher hats and claret robes with a silver cardinal's badge in memory of Cardinal Beaufort. They are often referred to as the "Black Brothers" and the "Red Brothers". Brothers must be single, widowed or divorced, and over 60 years of age. Preference is given to those in most need. They are expected to wear their robes and attend daily morning prayers (Matins) in the Chapel.

The chapel contains some interesting graffiti. Perhaps some doodles during and overlong and less inspiring sermon!



The image to the left is of The Cloisters.

Besides the buildings, the grounds are equally enjoyable.

