

**THE CERTIFICATES OF THE
COMMISSIONERS APPOINTED TO
SURVEY THE CHANTRIES,
GUILDS, HOSPITALS, ETC., IN THE
COUNTY OF YORK. PART I**

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ECCLESIASTICAL COMMISSION GREAT BRITAIN

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Edited by William Page

PART I.

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At a Meeting of the Council of the SURTEES SOCIETY,
held in Durham Castle on Tuesday, December 6th, 1892,
MR. GREENWELL in the Chair,

It was ordered,

That the Yorkshire Chantry Certificates should be
edited for the Society by MR. WILLIAM PAGE.

JAMES RAINE,

Secretary.

WILLIAM PAGE
SECRETARY

PREFACE.

THERE is no instance in the certificates here printed of a chantry founded prior to the Conquest, although it would seem probable that such foundations would have then existed, seeing that prayers for the dead formed one of the principal provisions in the ordinances of Anglo-Saxon Guilds.¹ Whether the earlier chantries had become disused or whether the custom of founding them did not come into use till the fourteenth century it is difficult to determine, but it is curious to notice that when monasteries ceased to be founded, chantries seem to have begun. It would appear that before the thirteenth century those who desired to have masses said for the repose of their souls, if they were wealthy, founded monasteries, but if they were otherwise, left legacies to their parish priest or made contributions for that purpose to some guild. Nearly the whole of the monasteries in Yorkshire were founded before the year 1200 and excluding the friaries, colleges, and hospitals, Haltemprice and the Carthusian houses, they were all founded before 1250.² For the next fifty years after the latter date we have foundations of friaries and hospitals, and then, probably on account of the more equal distribution of wealth and the growing importance of the middle classes, the less expensive foundations of chantries and hospitals were adopted in the place of monasteries. From 1300 to 1350 there were founded nearly a quarter of the chantries, the dates of whose foundations are given in these certificates, before which time there had been, according to the same source, less than a dozen such foundations in Yorkshire.³ The largest number of foundations of chantries and chapels in Yorkshire was from 1450 to 1500.

(1) The doctrine of the efficacy of prayer in alleviating the sufferings of purgatory was introduced in the seventh century (*Chesham Soc. vol. ix. p. iv.*)

(2) See Tanner's *Notitia*.

(3) On the certificates for Yorkshire taken under the commission of Henry VIII. there are returned 402 foundations, of which eleven were before 1300, but of the accuracy of the dates of some of these there is considerable doubt; from 1300 to 1350 there were 56; from 1350 to 1400, 48; from 1400 to 1450, 28; from 1450 to 1500, 61; from 1500 to the Dissolution, 47; and 149 undated. Of the 253 dated foundations there were 5 guilds, 9 hospitals, 5 colleges, and 10 prebends, the remainder being chantries, chapels, and stipendiaries.

Of the foundations brought within the Acts of 37 Henry VIII. and 1 Edward VI. by far the largest number were chantries, which were founded either in perpetuity or for term of years. Most of those in Yorkshire were of the former nature, the latter in these certificates are generally termed stipendiaries or services. A chantry was sometimes founded at an existing altar in a church and was often moved from one altar to another; sometimes again it was founded in a side chapel, specially built, adjoining to the church, or at times in a chapel detached from the church either in the churchyard or, as was constantly the case in Yorkshire, some miles from the parish church. In founding chantries in perpetuity, a licence to grant lands in mortmain had to be obtained from the Crown, many of which licences are given in notes to the certificates here printed. All chantries were dependent upon the parish church, and the chantry priests usually assisted the parochial clergy in their ministrations, and often had to give some evidence of their subjection. For the most part the chantries were founded by individuals for the benefit of themselves or their friends, but in some cases they were founded by guilds or the inhabitants of a district for the welfare of a community, and, as seems to have been very frequent in Yorkshire, for the ease of the inhabitants of some outlying hamlet where the people could not get to their parish church in winter time owing to the flooded state of a river or other impediment; others in the large towns were provided for those infected with the plague, which suggests the constant recurrence of that scourge of the middle ages; and some again were founded to say the morrow mass for strangers labouring on their journeys, artisans, and young folk. At some few chantries the priests were bound to teach a certain number of children of the parish in which they served. But at all chantries there was a founder for the repose of whose soul masses had to be sung, although it appears from these certificates, that in some instances the founder's name had long been forgotten.

Hospitals were usually places provided for the reception of poor and impotent persons. Although returned on the certificates of both Henry VIII. and Edward VI., these foundations came only within the terms of the statute of 37 Henry VIII. for dissolving chantries, the statute of 1 Edward VI. does not apparently include them. Most, if not all of the hospitals

which are returned on the certificates here printed were left undissolved, and many remain to this day, and are now generally used as almshouses, but the funds of a few of them have been applied to educational purposes. Many of the hospitals seem to have been in great poverty and became much neglected. At the hospital of St. Mary Magdalene of Bawtry, it is said the poor were relieved up to 1572, and divine service and prayers were weekly said in the chapel, but afterwards the master, for the time being, let the buildings get into decay, pulled down a dovecot and part of the mansion house, defaced the chapel, carried away the ornaments and furniture of the same, namely, the stalls, books, and altar table; took the lead from the roof, and converted the chapel itself into a pig-sty.¹ Much the same treatment was meted out to like foundations.

Colleges were like large chantries at which three or more secular priests lived in common. Several of these foundations existed in Yorkshire, notably the collegiate church of Beverley, the college of St. William at York, the Vicars Choral at York, the college of St. Andrew in Stillingfleet, the college of the Trinity in Pontefract, the Vicars Choral at Ripon, and some others.

Free chapels were exempt from episcopal jurisdiction, and were at first the King's private property.

Guilds, brotherhoods, and fraternities are too well known to need a definition. It was only those of a religious or social character that came within the operation of these Acts, those for trade purposes were specially exempted therefrom. It is curious, however, to note how few guilds are returned in these certificates, only five altogether for the whole of Yorkshire. Of the famous guilds of St. John the Baptist and of the Lord's Prayer at York, of St. Mary, St. Wilfred, and All Saints of Ripon, of the Holy Cross at Rotherham, of St. Ellen, St. John, Corpus Christi, and the Blessed Virgin at Beverley; and St. John the Baptist, Corpus Christi, and the Blessed Virgin Mary at Kingston upon Hull, which are returned on the certificates made in the reign of Richard II., there is no mention here.

(1) Excheq. Depositions 34 and 35 Eliz. Mich. 33. This document gives the names of various masters of the hospital and mentions "a deed book" of Henry I. relating to the same.

Obits and anniversaries were services performed yearly in commemoration of the death of the founder either in perpetuity or for term of years. Alms were usually distributed at such services. The yearly profit on stocks of money, cattle, and goods, and the annual sums payable out of the possessions of colleges, free chapels, or chantries which were to be distributed to the poor, were, under the statute of 1 Edward VI., to have continuance, but money given to finding a priest, lamp, or light was confiscated.

One point is brought strongly to light in the York Certificates, and that is the impoverishment of the various foundations consequent upon the agricultural depression. For this reason the Vicars Choral lacked sixteen of their number, Bootham Hospital ceased to be able to support the poor priests for whom it was founded, the yearly charges of the guild of Corpus Christi exceeded the revenues, the distribution of alms bequeathed by pious persons at St. Helen's, Stangate, and Holy Cross churches in York were discontinued, the Hospital of Well had to reduce the number of its inmates by ten, and it was the same tale at St. Michael's, Hull, and many other Yorkshire foundations. The dissolution of the chantries was it seems under consideration at the same time as that of the monasteries, for so early as 1529¹ an Act was passed forbidding any spiritual person, either secular or regular, after the feast of Michaelmas, to receive any stipend or salary for singing masses for the souls of the dead. About five years afterwards the survey of ecclesiastical possessions known as the Valor Ecclesiasticus was compiled, which comprised a valuation of the chantries throughout England. It was not, however, till the Parliament of 37 Henry VIII. [A.D. 1545] that the question of dissolving the chantries was officially brought forward, when an Act was passed giving powers to Henry VIII. during his natural life to dispose of all colleges, free chapels, chantries, hospitals, fraternities, brotherhoods, guilds, and stipendiary priests in England and Wales. The Act recites that many of the donors, founders, and patrons of such foundations had of late entered upon the lands belonging to the same, expelling the incumbents, and that some of the priests had conveyed away and made long leases

(1) Stat. 21 Hen. VIII. cap. 13, sec. xix. This Act does not appear to have been strictly enforced in Yorkshire, as we find chantries founded in 1530 and 1533. See p. 173 and 179.