

Hospital of St James, The Steyn, Dublin

In Archbishop Alen's Register there is a transcription of a 13th-century Latin document, dateable to c. 1216, relating to the foundation of a hospital by the archbishop of Dublin, Henry de Loundres (1213-28), for the use of the poor and pilgrims, especially those intending to travel to the shrine of St James the Apostle in Compostela. The foundation of this hospital was a condition, enjoined upon the archbishop by Pope Innocent III, for confirming the union of the bishopric of Glendalough and the archbishopric of Dublin. The intention was that the hospital was to be dedicated to St James and built 'without Dublin on the seashore which is called Steyn' (*extra Dublin quod in littore maris quod dicitur Steyn*). Archbishop Henry made provision for the appointment of ten chaplains or brothers to look after the needs of the poor and pilgrims 'both in necessary victuals and beds' (*tam in victualium necessariis quam in cubilibus*). The brothers were to wear: 'black cloaks ... with a white cross on the breast' (*cappas ... nigras cum cruce alba in pectore*), and the chaplains 'white surplices' (*suppellicia alba*). Various properties were assigned by the archbishop to the hospital for its maintenance, including the rectory of Delgany, and he also granted an indulgence of 30 days, relaxing imposed penances, for those who would bestow alms on the hospital.¹

This foundation document, though interesting historically, is shrouded in mystery. Curiously, despite the detailed provisions for the establishment of the hospital, there appears to be no further evidence attesting to the hospital's existence. Certainly, by the time of the dissolution of the Dublin monasteries in 1539-40, it did not exist, nor did it exist at the time Archbishop Alen compiled both his register and his roll of Dublin churches, the Reportorium Viride, in the early 1530s. Indeed, in his description of the church at Delgany in the Reportorium, for example, which according to the foundation document was impropriated to the hospital of the Steyn, Archbishop Alen describes Delgany as an independent rectory, no longer impropriated to a religious house, with the advowson belonging to the archbishop himself. There is also no mention of the hospital in the surviving records of the nearby priory of All Hallows, which one might expect to find in deeds and inquisitions describing properties in the area. The lack of evidence for the hospital's existence is also evident in the classic studies of Irish religious houses: none of them, whether of older or more recent vintage, have ever found a reference to the hospital outside the foundation document.²

When Archbishop Alen located a copy of the hospital's foundation document, and had it transcribed into his register, he did so out of no mere antiquarian interest. Cast in the mould of his master, Cardinal Wolsey, he was a determined and pugnacious administrator, who was determined to increase the revenues and privileges and rights of his see, a process which he described in his Register as 'winning bread and increasing honour'.³ He was clearly seeking to identify any residual rights that would accrue to him and his see, as the successor of the founder

¹ Charles McNeill (ed.), *Calendar of Archbishop Alen's Register*, pp. 55-6; and original Alen Autograph copy, being RCB Library D6/3, f. 154.

² Richard Butler (ed.), *Registrum Prioratus Omnium Sanctorum Juxta Dublin* (Dublin, 1845); 'Reportorium Viride', ed. N. B. White, *Analecta Hibernica*, 10 (1941), p. 203; Archdall, *Monasticon Hibernicum*, ed. P.F. Moran, vol. 2 (Dublin, 1876), p. 81; Gwynn and Hadcock, *Medieval Religious Houses Ireland* (Irish Academic Press, 1988), p. 350.

³ J. Murray, 'Archbishop Alen, Tudor Reform and the Kildare Rebellion', in *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy*, 89, C (1989), pp 1-15

of the hospital. Alen's marginal notes to the transcribed foundation document clearly reveals that he had not found, nor could not find further evidence of the hospital's medieval existence. Though now badly faded, McNeill's rendering of the main note at the foot of the folio in the original captures its sense and shows that Archbishop Alen was trying to make sense of the existence of a hospital called St James, and a nearby chapel of St Clement, which had both disappeared by his time.

In conclusion, what can we infer from this? If Archbishop Henry de Loundres ever activated its foundation, it appears that the Hospital of St James in the Steyn did not exist for any lengthy period of time, and that all documentary traces of the institution have disappeared. The disappearance of all such traces seems unlikely and may indicate that it never came into existence, though this is speculative. Certainly, none of the surviving references to Irish pilgrims travelling to Compostela in the medieval period mention it.⁴ The Steyn area, which now forms the area between the Pearse street side of TCD down to the Liffey, and covers streets like Townsend Street and Poolbeg Street, was a river side district, which underwent continual development, in terms of reclamation and the building of quays. It may well be that the need for such development reflected a reality that it may not have been a stable and suitable area for establishing a hospital, a situation which may also account for the disappearance of the chapel of St Clement in the same district.

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⁴ For example, see Richard Hayes, 'Ireland's Links with Compostella', *Studies* 37 (1948), pp. 326-332.