



More Than Almsmen

Brotherhood and
Belonging at the Lord
Leycester Hospital,
1571-1700



EXHIBITION AT THE
LORD LEYCESTER,
GUILDHALL,
WARWICK

JUNE 2026

ANGUS CRAWFORD
AND NAOMI PULLIN



'Poor men' at the Funeral Procession of Sir Philip Sidney (1587). © The Governing Body of Christ Church, Oxford, Aldrich 1.1, plate 3.



Comment from Professor David Lambert, Midlands4Cities Site Director, University of Warwick

Funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council, Midlands4Cities is a partnership bringing together eight leading universities across the Midlands (among them the University of Warwick) to train and support students doing doctoral research. We also work with a range of regional, national and international partners such as museums, galleries and other heritage organisations, as well as the creative and cultural industries, on collaborative doctoral research. As Angus Crawford's project with the Lord Leycester Hospital demonstrates through this exhibition a key aim of such collaboration is to develop doctoral researchers who can work in and beyond academia and, in so doing, bring new knowledge and understanding to the wider public.

Comment from Lieutenant Colonel (Retd.), Dr Daren Bowyer, Master of the Lord Leycester

Writing as the newly appointed Master, the 34th in its more than 450 year history, I am delighted to offer some thoughts to this excellent brochure which illuminates the findings of Angus Crawford's intriguing research into the lives of the early brethren. As an organisation that sits at the intersection of heritage preservation, tourism, and veteran support, housed in one of the most important examples of medieval courtyard architecture, it is easy for us, and our visitors to focus on our built heritage. Spectacular though the buildings are, however, it is our people – and most notably the brethren – who make us what we are. So far as we can tell the Lord Leycester Hospital is the oldest still-functioning charity offering support to military veterans. This project, though, highlights the complexity around veteran identity more than four and half centuries ago. It has been exciting for us to work with the University of Warwick, supporting this project, and for us to discover more of what it has meant to be part of the brethren community over the centuries.



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THE BRETHERN OF THE LORD LEYCESTER

Introduction

This display explores the lives of the men who lived at the Lord Leicester Hospital from its foundation in 1571 to around 1700.

The Lord's Leicester's deed of incorporation and statutes were written in November 1585, which set out the rules for admission and living. They stated that the almshouse was to provide relief to 'poor, needy and impotent men'. Priority was given to ex-soldiers and those 'hurt in the wars in service of the Queen's majesty', but the servants and tenants of Dudley and his successors were to be chosen 'before all others'. The men admitted would join the twelve almsmen known as the 'brethren', who lived in the hospital and, together with the master, formed the heart of its community.

For centuries, attention has focused on the hospital's founder, Robert Dudley, and his heirs, the Sidney family. This exhibition shifts the spotlight away from these well-known figures towards the brethren themselves. These are men whose histories have been overlooked and life stories remain incomplete.

Reconstructing the lives and experiences of ordinary people in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries is always a challenging task. When this project began in 2023, very little was known about the brethren beyond their names. By bringing together information from a range of archival records, it has been possible to trace the lives of 114 men admitted to the almshouse during this period. To build a clearer picture of the brethren as individuals, the project has examined a range of sources, including the hospital's records, now on deposit at Warwickshire County Record Office, as well as church court and probate records, the Sidney papers in Kent, St Mary's Warwick parish accounts, the Greville household accounts, and English state papers.

The brethren's stories help historians answer much bigger questions about English society in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Through them, we see how complex webs of power operated that connected monarchs to their subjects; how patronage could be administered in major aristocratic households; and how ordinary people lived nearly four hundred years ago. Although a small institution in a West Midlands town, the lives of the brethren were closely tied to wider national events, changes and debates.

The Lord Leicester has provided a home for ex-soldiers for more than 450 years and continues to do so today. Understanding the experiences of its earliest residents still matters for the community that surrounds this treasured institution. This exhibition shows the continuities and the differences between the almshouse then and now, focusing especially on shifting ideas of what it meant to be a soldier and what 'counted' as military service.



SOLDIERS AND MILITARY IDENTITIES



Military Identity and Occupation

Since its foundation, the Lord Leycester has always considered its connection to the military to be a core part of its identity. However, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, military identity, and the role of soldiers, was understood rather differently from today. Before the emergence of standing armies, military service was often temporary and non-professional. Many 'soldiers' served only for short periods, for example when summoned to musters for a particular campaign or to help suppress a rebellion. When this service was over, they would return to their usual trades and occupations.

Although the Lord Leycester is sometimes viewed as a precursor to later royal military welfare institutions, such as Chelsea Hospital (established 1692), these comparisons can obscure the more complex processes of admitting brethren to the almshouse and the very different understandings of military identity that existed in Tudor and Stuart England.

The Lord Leycester's 1585 Statutes

When writing the hospital's statutes in 1585, **Robert Dudley** set out his intentions for the almshouse. Among those who were to be prioritised for relief were ex-soldiers and those 'hurt in the wars in service of the Queen's majesty'.

Military service was clearly on Dudley's mind: the same month the statutes were written, Elizabeth I appointed him to lead an expeditionary force in the Netherlands to fight against Catholic Spain. As a future military commander, Dudley anticipated the social cost of the war. The emphasis of the statutes on caring for ex-soldiers therefore tied in with Dudley's desire to promote himself as a great Protestant military leader.



Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester, founder of the hospital by Steven van der Meulen, c. 1584. Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons.

The Deserving Poor?

In Elizabethan England, maimed soldiers were recognised as a distinct category of the poor. Their honourable service in the monarch's wars distinguished them from other able-bodied men. Injuries that resulted from their service also rendered them 'deserving' of relief. Yet despite this, there was very little governmental provision, with only a handful of private charities set up to support soldiers who returned from warfare injured or unable to work.

After military activity, disbanded or displaced soldiers could become a threat to public order. Reports of marauding ex-soldiers with no fixed place of residence fuelled widespread fears that former soldiers might drift into vagrancy and crime.

Institutions such as the Lord Leycester were created in part in response to this crisis. It was one of a number of charitable foundations established in late Tudor and early Stuart England to support former soldiers. This included the London Charterhouse, founded by Thomas Sutton in 1611 and Sir Thomas Coningsby's Hospital in Hereford, which opened three years later.



'Poor men' at the Funeral Procession of Sir Philip Sidney (1587). © The Governing Body of Christ Church, Oxford, Aldrich 1.1, plate 3.

ROYAL PATRONAGE

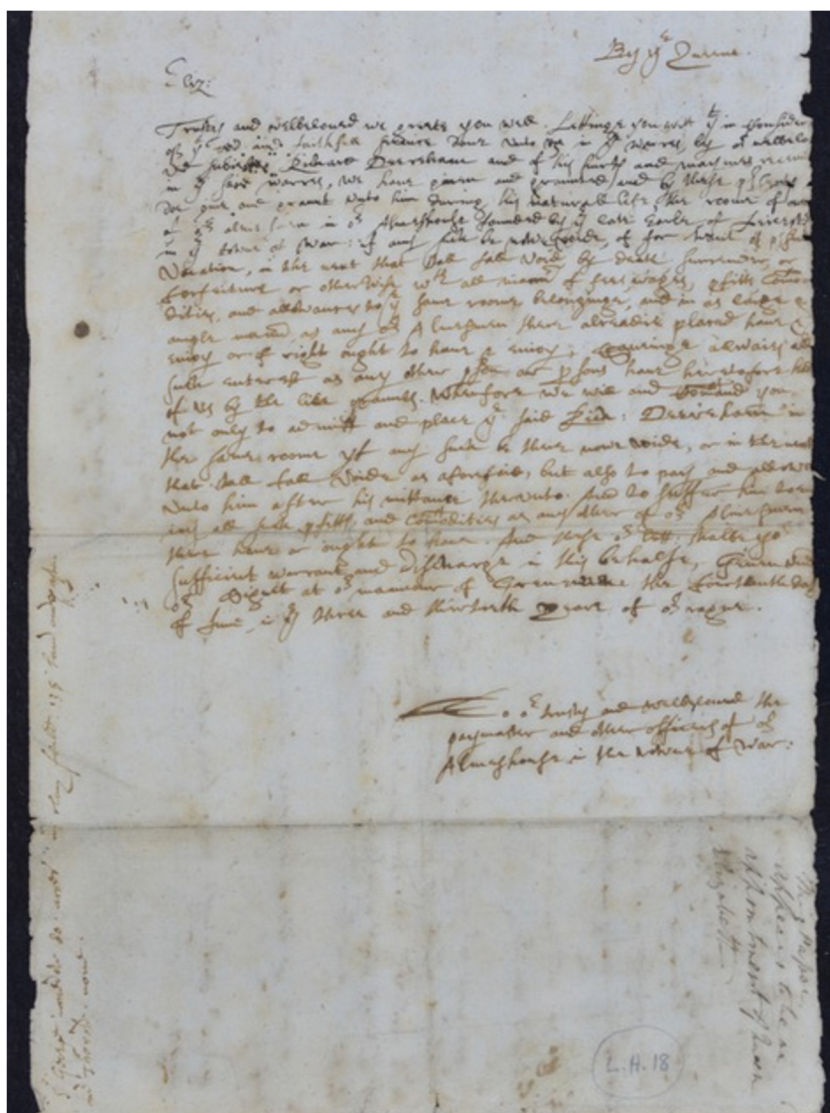
Given the emphasis in the Lord Leycester's statutes on supporting ex-soldiers, it may be surprising to learn that very few early brethren can be confidently identified as 'soldiers'. One reason for this is the difficulty historians face when trying to trace military service among men who were not members of the aristocracy or gentry. For the majority of the early brethren, military service was not necessarily the most prominent part of their identities, certainly not in the way it became for later generations.

Moreover, military service was likely understood as just one of several forms of loyalty valued by the Lord Leycester's patrons. Alongside former soldiers, Dudley and Sidney patrons also rewarded long-serving servants, estate employees, and trusted tenants. In this context, 'service' could take many forms, and military experience was only one element among a broader set of relationships and obligations.

By Order of 'The Queene'

When Robert Dudley's brother **Ambrose Dudley** died in 1590, **Elizabeth I** temporarily took over the patronage of the Lord Leycester. A surviving warrant from 1591 orders that **Richard Dereham** be given the next available place at the almshouse because of the injuries he had suffered - likely during England's campaigns against Spain.

Dereham was one of the longest-serving brethren, occupying this role for for almost fifty years until February 1639.



Richard Dereham's warrant for admission issued by Queen Elizabeth I from Greenwich Palace

By the Queene Eliz:

Trusty and well beloved, we greet you well.

Letting you with[all] that in consideration of the good and faithful service done unto us in the wars by our well beloved subject Richard Dereham and of his hurts and maims received in the said war, we have given and grant and by this present do give and grant unto him during his natural life, a room in our almshouse founded by the late Earl of Leicester in the town of Warwick if any such be now void or for want of present vacation, in the next that shall fall void by death, surrender, or forfeiture or otherwise with all manner of fees, wages, profits, customs, duties and allowances to the same room belonging, and in as large and ample manner, as any of the almspersons there already placed have & enjoy or of right ought to have & enjoy, having always all such interest as other person or persons have heretofore hold of us by the like grant.

And this our letter shall be your sufficient warrant and discharge on his behalf.

To the trusty and wellbeolved the paymaster and other officers of our Almshouse in the towne of War[wick].

Former Soldiers

The early brethren who served as soldiers took part in a wide range of military conflicts in England, Ireland and Europe.

A surviving Warwickshire muster book from 1569 shows that future brothers **Daniel Geywood**, **John Fox**, **Nicholas Parker**, **Richard Cotes** and **Richard Makyns** from Warwick and Stratford-upon-Avon were part of the Kineton Hundred militia, serving as arquebusiers and pikemen. They may have been part of the force led by **Ambrose Dudley**, Earl of Warwick, which was deployed to suppress the Northern Rebellion the same year.



Scan the QR code to view a digitised and transcribed version of this document.

THE IMPACT OF THE BRITISH CIVIL WARS

Some of the best evidence for men admitted to the Lord Leycester because of their military service comes from the Civil War period of the 1640s. Records suggest that a few future brethren or their fathers, including **John Sutton** and **Henry Wilson**, were mustered to fight for Parliament during the conflict. The Civil Wars touched every part of the British Isles and had many consequences that extended far beyond the battlefield.

Civil War Warwickshire

Because of its geographical position, Warwickshire quickly became one of the central arenas of the war. The county experienced continuous fighting between 1642 and 1647 and was among the most heavily affected regions in England. It was also the site of the first major military engagement, the Battle of Edgehill (South Warwickshire) in October 1642.



This Royalist cannonball was found near Thistleton Farm following the Battle of Edgehill. It was acquired by Master Philip Harris in the late nineteenth century and is now part of the Lord Leycester's collections.



Horsemen of the New Model Army, c. 1645 by William Wollen, c.1910. National Army Museum. Rights from Bridgeman Images UK.

Strategically important to both Royalist forces (supporting Charles I) and Parliamentarians, Warwickshire became a key thoroughfare during the conflict. The nearest major Royalist garrison was at Banbury, only twenty miles south of Warwick. Meanwhile, Warwick Castle, the seat of Robert Greville, Lord Brooke, was fortified and served as a significant Parliamentary garrison.

For ordinary people living in Warwickshire, the Civil Wars brought major social and economic upheaval. In addition to the heavy tax burdens placed upon local communities, residents faced demands for the quartering of soldiers and endured widespread plunder, requisition of goods, and the loss of livestock, especially horses, vital for travel and military use.



HERE LYETH THE BODY OF M^r RICE JEM
LATE RECTOR OF BOSWORTH WHO
LIVED PIOUSLY TOWARDS GOD PEACE-
ABLY TOWARDS HIS NEIGHBOURS &
CHARITABLY TOWARDS Y^e POORE
HE DIED THE 9th OF JUNE 1648 AGED 68.

Engraving of Rice Jem's funeral monument (now lost) from J. Nichols, *The History and Antiquities of the County of Leicester* (1800-04).

The inscription reads: 'Here lies the body of Mr Rice Jem, late rector of [Husbands Bosworth], who lived piously towards God, peaceably towards his neighbour, and charitably towards the poor, and so died June 9, 1648, aged 68'.



This sword is believed to have been found after the Battle of Edgehill. It is now held in the Lord Leycester's collections, although its exact provenance remains uncertain.

The Lord Leycester and the Civil War Conflict

The Lord Leycester underwent significant physical changes during the Civil War. The historian Philip Tennant has found evidence that the Parliamentary authorities laid 'trunks' (pipes) to bring water to the hospital. Plans were also made to 'draw' a bulwark along the garden boundary.

Parliamentarian soldiers used the hospital as a convenient vantage point from which to oversee the construction of the town's fortifications, which ran through its grounds. The master, **Rice Jem** (left), complained in 1644 that soldiers had been occupying the chapel and making 'incursions into the House, to the fear and trouble of the poor old men' (Tennant: 1992, 146).

Rice Jem served as master from 1635 to 1648, and was also the vicar of Husbands Bosworth in Leicestershire. His surviving letters suggest that he spent much of the Civil War conflict in Leicestershire and was brought before the Leicestershire Committee for Scandalous Ministers in 1646 and 1647 for pro-Royalist sympathies. During his absence, **Timothy White** – who succeeded him as master – seems to have deputised.

THE WISDOM BROTHERS AND THE 1641 IRISH REBELLION

In the 1640s, two brothers, John and Humphrey Wisdom, were admitted to the Lord Leycester from County Armagh in Ireland.

Humphrey Wisdom was a maimed soldier, while **John Wisdom's** patent of admission to the hospital (below) explains that he had been 'undone by the Rebels'. Both men had suffered during the 1641 Irish Rebellion, a violent uprising against the mainly English Protestant settlers. In his witness statement, John reported being 'forcibly robbed & dispoyled ... of all his goods'. These were losses worth nearly £17,000 in today's money.

As Protestants forced to flee Ireland, the Wisdom brothers became refugees, making them compelling candidates for charitable support at the Lord Leycester. The Sidney family had long-standing ties to Ireland, which stretched back to Sir Henry Sidney's time as Lord Deputy under Elizabeth I.

Thomas Brabant, a tanner working in Ireland and a servant to the Sidneys, was also admitted in these years after losing his estate in the 1641 Rebellion and being too old to work .

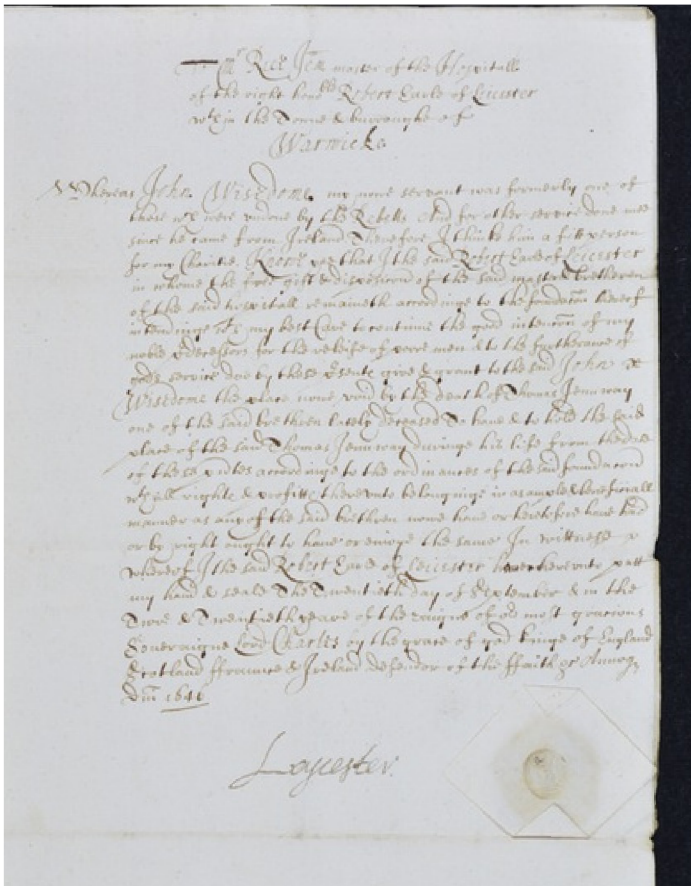
John Wisdom's Patent of Admission

Whereas **John Wisdom**, my new servant was formerly one of those which were undone by the rebels. And for other service done me since he came from Ireland. Therefore I think him a fit person for my charity.

Know you that I the said Robert Earl of Leicester in whom the free gift & disposition of the said master & brethren of the said hospital remaineth according to the foundation thereof intending with my best care to continue the good intention of my noble predecessors for the relief of poor men & to the furtherance of God's service doe by these presents give & grant to the said John Wisdom the place now void by the death of Thomas Jemeway one of the said brethren lately deceased.

To have & to hold the said place of the said **Thomas Jemeway** during his life from the date of these patents according to the ordinances of the said foundation with all righte & profite thereunto belonging in as ample & beneficiall manner as any of the said brethren now have or heretofore have had.

Leycester



Warwickshire County Record Office, CR1600/LH19/14, John Wisdom's Patent of Admission [20 September 1646].

Scan the QR code to view a digitised and transcribed version of this document.



John Wisdom's original badge (c. 1655). Held in the Lord Leycester's Collections.

Below: Wenceslaus Hollar, *The Portadown Massacre*, first published in James Cranford's *Tears of Ireland* (London, 1642). Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons.



SERVANTS



Service to the patron was the most common way of securing a place at the Lord Leycester. The servants that the Dudleys and Sidneys admitted to the almshouse were from a diverse range of occupations and geographical locations.

Noble households were major institutions in Tudor and Stuart England, employing hundreds of men and women across their estates. As Lords of the Manor, members of the nobility were often the local leading landowners, bringing many families directly and indirectly under their orbit as tenants, servants and workers on their estates.

The Dudley and Sidney Estates

By the end of the sixteenth century, the Dudleys were the largest aristocratic landowners in the West Midlands. This was the result of Elizabeth I granting extensive lands and properties in Warwickshire and the surrounding region to her favourite Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester, and his older brother, Ambrose Dudley, Earl of Warwick. Robert Dudley's 1585 statutes for the Lord Leycester reflected this local influence, expressing a preference for brethren to be admitted from towns connected to his Warwickshire and Gloucestershire estates.

After Ambrose Dudley's death in 1590, a protracted inheritance dispute followed. The Sidney family became the patrons of the hospital in the early 1600s – a role they continue to hold today. Yet **Robert Sidney's** failure to inherit the earldom of Warwick limited the family's direct involvement in the county. This left the family's principal interests elsewhere, with their main estates at Penshurst and Leigh in Kent, rather than in the Midlands. The Sidneys nonetheless held property in Balsall, Knowle and Long Itchington in Warwickshire.

As discussed further on page 10, it is striking how many almsmen were drawn from areas connected to both the Dudley and Sidney estates, which is revealing about the enduring influence of patronage in shaping patterns of admission.



The Sidney Chapel in St John the Baptist Church, Penshurst. Photographed by Angus Crawford.



Penshurst Place, Kent. By kind permission of Viscount De L'Isle, MBE.



Jacob Hoefnagel c. 1634. © The Trustees of the British Museum.

John Terry

John Terry worked as a gamekeeper on the Sidney estates at Penshurst in Kent. In January 1633, after many years of service, he was admitted to the Lord Leycester. His patent of admission praised him for having 'carefully and faithfully performed his duty towards us'.

The Terry family had long served the Sidneys at Penshurst, and were longstanding tenants at Ensfield farm, next to Penshurst park. Several relatives had worked as chief gamekeepers on the Penshurst estate.

Gamekeeping was an important and sometimes dangerous role. Deer parks were symbols of noble status, and protecting them from poachers required courage and loyalty. In 1601, John Terry and his brother Robert were injured while defending Penshurst's deer park from illegal poachers.

Grateful for their loyalty and bravery, **Sir Robert Sidney** wrote to his steward, asking him to assure the brothers that their 'good affections' would not go unrewarded. John Terry's later admission to the hospital, overseen by Sidney's son, shows how relationships between servants and patrons could span across generations.

LOYAL SERVICE

Admission to the Lord Leycester was often determined by connection rather than need. The Dudleys' and Sidneys' decision to reward loyal, long-standing servants with almshouses was one way aristocratic families maintained good relations with their employees at a time of profound social and economic polarisation. For many servants, an almshouse, with secure accommodation and a generous stipend, would have been a prized asset and often a fierce source of competition.

Selection for a place at the almshouse does not therefore seem to have been based on a meritocratic system that selected the poorest or most vulnerable men over others. Even maimed soldiers – whom the statutes said should be favoured – were not always prioritised on this basis.

Most brethren had strong personal ties to the patron and were counted among his most trusted servants. In some cases, the connection could run deeper: one brother, **Robert Sydney**, may have even been an illegitimate relation of the Sidneys.

Grooms of the Stables

Three of the first men admitted by Robert Dudley to the almshouse – **'Little John' Flood**, **John Thomas** and **Thomas Greysley** – had all worked for him as grooms in his stables. This was not a coincidence. Dudley was Queen Elizabeth's Master of the Horse, a position which he fulfilled for nearly thirty years. By the end of his life, he employed seventy-nine grooms, reflecting the scale and prestige of his household.

'Little John' Flood appears in Leicester's household accounts as a groom of the stable. He also took part in Dudley's grand funeral procession from Kenilworth to Warwick Castle in 1588. Several other brothers, including **John Gilbert**, **John Hancock** and **Richard Gardner** (another groom), also attended the funeral, which suggests their close ties to Dudley's household and service.



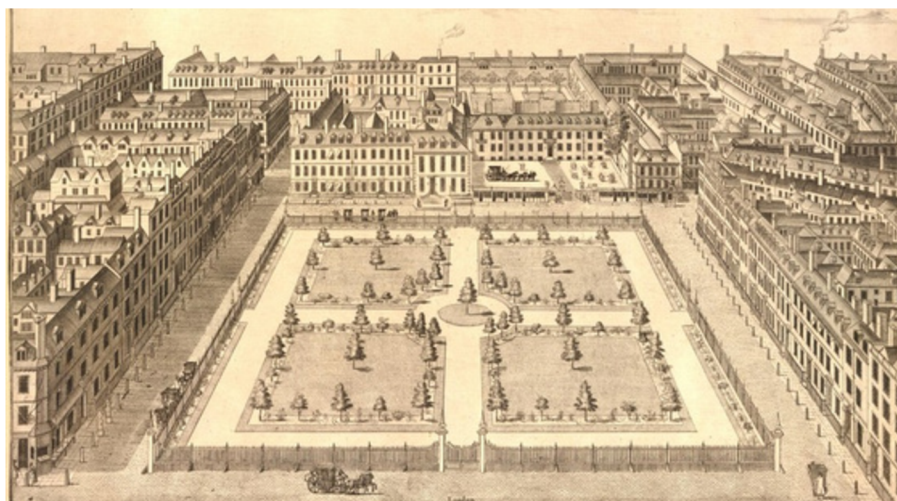
The Sidney family porcupine in the Lord Leycester courtyard. Photo from the Lord Leycester collection.

John Miles

John Miles was admitted to the Lord Leycester in 1647. Before this, he had served as overseer of Leicester House in London, the Sidney's grand residence in the capital.

One historian has described it as 'the largest house to be built by a nobleman in London in the early seventeenth century'. In this impressive household, Miles was responsible for receiving letters delivered to the Earl, managing the family's estate finances, and handling payments worth several hundred pounds – substantial sums of money by the standards of the time.

A post of this kind demanded education, literacy, discretion and a high level of trust, highlighting Miles's importance within the Sidney household.



Printed view of Leicester Square, c.1720, showing Leicester House, the Sidney's London residence, where John Miles served as overseer. © The Trustees of the British Museum.

Noble Connections

Servants were also admitted from other prominent Warwickshire families, as well as from households linked to the Sidneys. For example, **Bartholomew Heath**, admitted in the 1650s, had served as the Grevilles' cook at Warwick Castle.

In 1634, **Hugh Jones** entered the Lord Leycester. He had been a servant to the Earl of Essex, the patron's great-great-nephew (he was the son of Lady Frances Walsingham, who was the widow of Sir Philip Sidney).

Occasionally, men, like **John Hemmings** and **Simon Cash**, were also admitted at the request of leading figures in the town of Warwick, including the burgesses (civil officials). These stories show how wider networks of patronage, kinship and estate politics could influence admissions to the almshouse.

GEOGRAPHICAL ORIGINS



As an elite institution, the Lord Leicester did not operate like many other sixteenth- and seventeenth-century almshouses, which often served as places of refuge for the local town poor. Instead, its brethren were drawn from the towns and communities where its patrons held influence, coming from many parts of the British Isles.

Dudley Influence

When Robert Dudley set out the rules for admitting new brothers to the hospital in 1585, he stated that preference should be given to men from Warwick, Kenilworth and Stratford-upon-Avon in Warwickshire, and from Arlingham and Wotton-under-Edge in Gloucestershire. These towns all had long-standing connections to the Dudley family and were linked to their estates and influence in the region.

Because no patents of admission survive from Robert Dudley's time (the earliest dates from 1616) (see page 12), we know little about the very first brethren or whether Dudley actually admitted men from the places he specified in the hospital's statutes.

Geographical Diversity

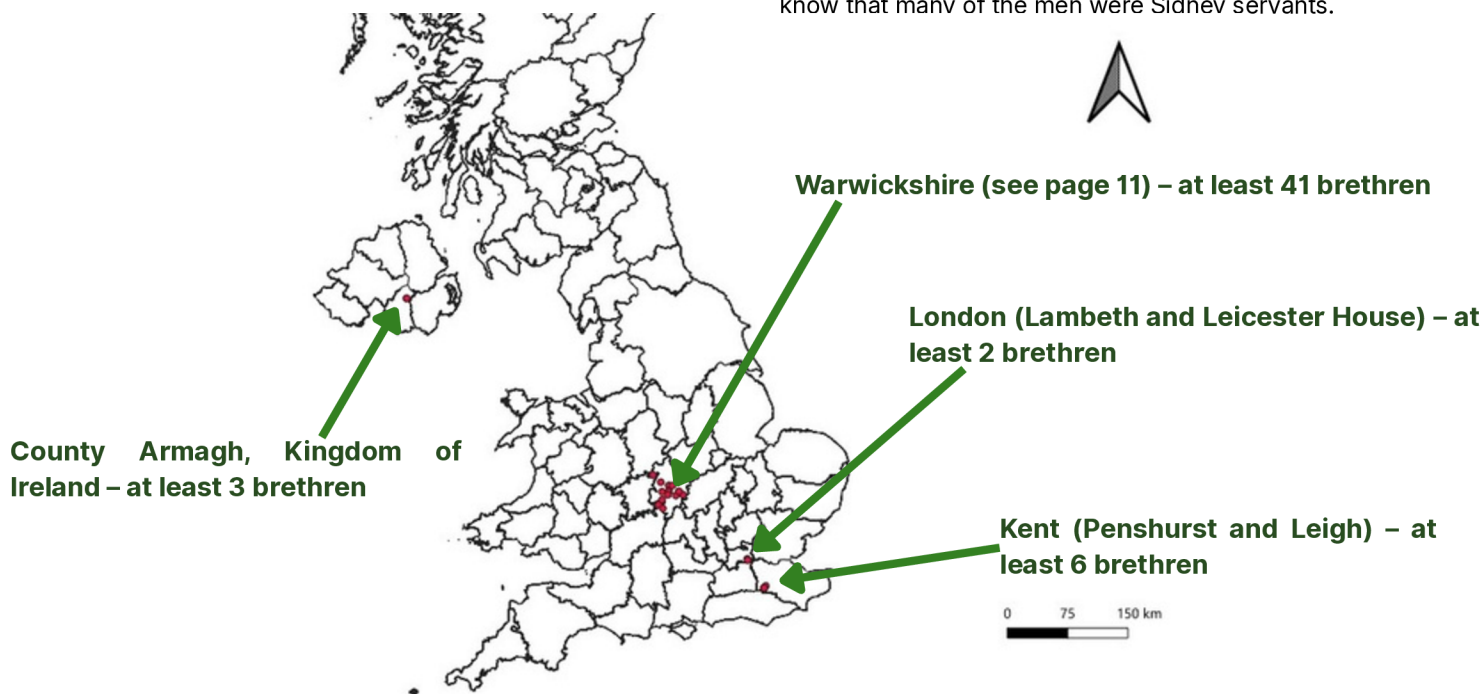
Using the patents admission (discussed page 12) together with informed inferences from other records, it has been possible to identify the geographical origins of fifty-eight brethren who were admitted to the almshouse between 1585 and 1700, forty-one of whom came from Warwickshire.

Sidney Patronage

Admission was intended to operate on a system of rotation, with a new brother admitted from each of the towns listed in the 1585 statutes in turn. However, Dudley's instructions were not entirely clear. As pages 3-9 show, he also wanted to prioritise admission for former soldiers, loyal tenants and servants, and poor and needy men, which left a great deal of uncertainty about how this system was meant to work in practice.

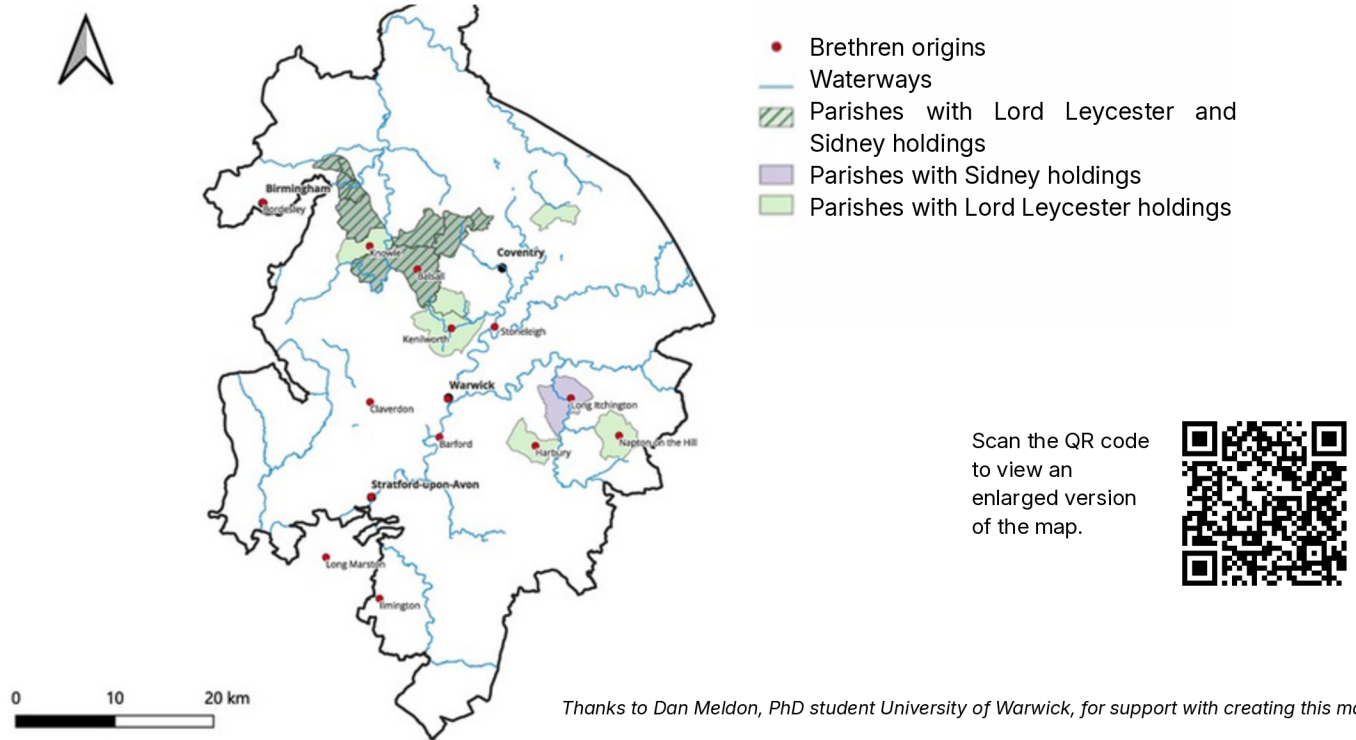
When the Sidneys took over patronage of the hospital in the early seventeenth century, they admitted very few men from the towns named in Dudley's statutes – apart from Warwick. With their main estates in Kent, the Sidneys had few personal ties to these towns, which may explain their limited interest in appointing brethren from them.

Instead, they selected men from areas where they themselves held influence, including Kent, London and parts of Warwickshire, such as Balsall, Knowle and Long Itchington, where their estates and ties of patronage were strongest. Four brethren came from these Warwickshire villages, while twenty-four were admitted from the town of Warwick, demonstrating the continuing importance of local connections. A further eight brethren originated from London, Leigh and Penshurst, and at least three were admitted from Ireland following the 1641 Rebellion, including **John** and **Humphrey Wisdom** and **Thomas Brabant** from County Armagh, where the Sidneys also held influence (see page 7). These figures are likely to be underestimates, as most patents provide no details of geographical origin. We know that many of the men were Sidney servants.



LOCAL ORIGINS OF THE BRETHREN

Where the Lord Leicester's brethren came from in Warwickshire



Scan the QR code to view an enlarged version of the map.



Thanks to Dan Meldon, PhD student University of Warwick, for support with creating this map.

Warwickshire Residents

This map, showing the historic boundaries of Warwickshire, illustrates the known places of origin of the forty-one brothers from Warwickshire admitted between 1571 and 1700. While a particularly strong concentration came from the town of Warwick, it also highlights the wider geographical spread of admissions from across the county. The map further indicates the locations of the Lord Leicester's Warwickshire estates, which the brethren frequently visited to meet with tenants, alongside those held by the Sidneys (see also pages 16-18). Areas where these sites overlap on the map – the Lord Leicester's estates and places where the brethren were admitted – underscore the combined influence of estate politics, patronage and tenancy.

A survey of the town conducted in 1576 by Robert Dudley's brother Ambrose shows that several Warwick townsmen were admitted in the 1570s, among them were brothers **Alexander Saxon**, **Nicholas Scott** and **Richard Makyns**. As Earl of Warwick, **Ambrose Dudley** was the town's Lord of the Manor and later became patron of the Lord Leicester after Robert Dudley's death in 1588. He likely played an influential role in deciding which of the town's residents were deserving candidates for relief at the Hospital.

Local tensions?

Local and regional identities were strong in this period and often fuelled rivalry and mistrust. As the brethren were drawn from a range of locations within Warwickshire and from further afield, it is possible that these differences contributed to tensions among them. Moreover, their status as outsiders, may also have shaped how they were viewed by the people of Warwick.

Later Controversy

The rotation system set out in the statutes does not appear to have been properly implemented for the first century after the Lord Leicester's foundation. By the early 1700s, representatives from Kenilworth, Stratford, Arlingham and Wotton-under-Edge were complaining that their right to nominate a candidate for a place at the Hospital had been ignored.

Following a visitation from the Bishops of Worcester in 1700, the Sidneys were reprimanded for failing to admit both ex-soldiers and men from the towns specified in the Hospital's statutes. From this point onward, admissions were governed more strictly according to the 1585 Statutes, fundamentally reshaping the character of the institution and placing greater emphasis on admitting ex-soldiers from the towns originally identified by Dudley.



Bird's Eye View of Warwick, 1654, by Wenceslaus Hollar (1607-77). © The Trustees of the British Museum. The Lord Leicester is circled in red at letter C.

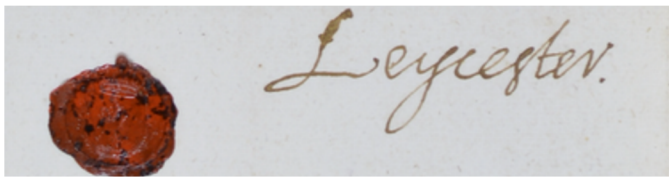
SOCIAL BACKGROUNDS



When Robert Dudley set out his plans for the Lord Leycester in 1585, he stated that it should support 'poor, needy and impotent men' with an income of no more than £5 a year. This was a modest amount by the standards of the time – a skilled tradesman in the sixteenth century could earn around £15 a year.

Patents of admission

The best surviving sources for the brethren's social backgrounds comes from their patents of admission. These formal documents were issued by the patron when a new brother entered the almshouse. Nearly all of them bear the Sidney Earl of Leicester's signature and seal. The patents record the reasons each man was admitted and name the brother he was replacing.



Signature of Robert Sidney, Second Earl of Leicester's from **John Stowe's** patent of admission in Warwickshire County Record Office, CR1600/LH19/19 (10/10/1650).

Stowe was expelled in 1656 because the master decided his estate was too considerable for a brother of the hospital. He had been recommended by the Spencers of Wormleighton.

Some patents provide additional contextual details, such as the new brother's place of origin, former occupation, and whether he suffered from any ailments or injuries. Some also emphasised the applicant's poverty and stressed his loyalty to the patron and to the Crown.

The earliest surviving patents date from the hospital's patronage under **Robert Sidney**, with the first extant example from 1616. No patents survive from the period of Dudley patronage, making it difficult to identify the brethren admitted to the Hospital between 1571 and 1616, beyond those named in the 1585 and 1589 deeds of incorporation.

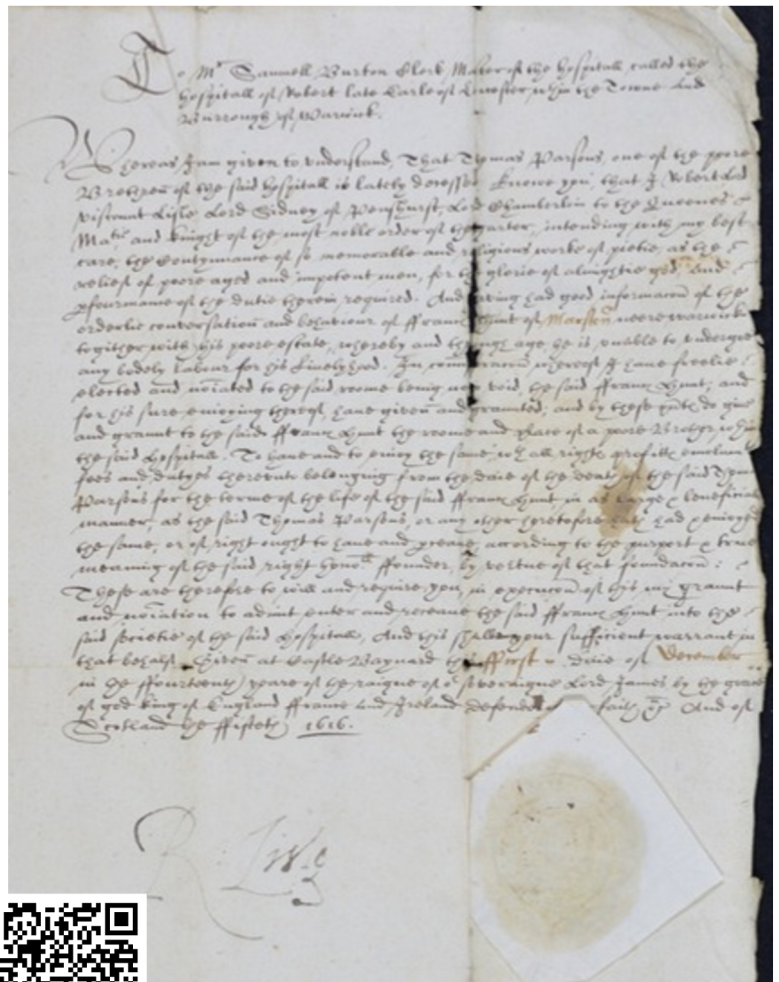
While these documents offer valuable insights, they provide only a limited picture of the brethren and their social backgrounds. Important details, such as their marital status, age, or how they first came to the patron's attention, are missing. We do not know whether any of the brethren petitioned for admission to the hospital, or whether they relied on more informal networks of recommendation and patronage.

Francis Hunt's Patent of Admission

Francis Hunt's patent of admission is dated 1 December 1616. He is the first brother for whom a patent survives. He succeeded brother **Thomas Parsons**.

Hunt came from Long Marston in Warwickshire, and he was admitted to the hospital on the grounds that he was 'unable to undergoe any bodily labour for his Livelyhood'. To reassure the master of his respectability, the patent emphasised Hunt's 'orderly conversation and behaviour'.

He remained at the hospital for 32 years until April 1648, when he was succeeded by brother **George Hartcourt**. The length of Hunt's stay at the Lord Leycester suggests that he was not particularly elderly when he was first admitted, though it is possible that he suffered from an injury that prevented him from working.



Francis Hunt's patent of admission to the Lord Leycester. Warwickshire County Record Office, CR1600/LH19/1 [1 December 1616].



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THE AGE AND WEALTH OF THE BRETHERN

Length of stay

Using the patents of admission, it has been possible to calculate the average length of stay for many brothers by comparing the date of each brother's patent with that of the subsequent patent issued to his successor. In some cases, this can be supported with evidence from parish burial records.

Between 1616 and 1698, the average length of residence at the Lord Leycester was twelve years. Some brothers stayed only briefly, for example, **Thomas Yardley** for 50 days and **Henry Wilson** for just less than 5 months. **Thomas Carter** was selected as a brother in 1678 but died before he could take up his place, so his brother, **George Carter**, was admitted instead.

Others were long-term residents. Four brethren lived at the Lord Leycester for more than thirty years: **Francis Hunt**, **John Humphrys**, **Henry Yardley** and **Richard Dereham**. Dereham, a maimed soldier who had been recommended for a place by Elizabeth I in June 1591, served for nearly fifty years. He was succeeded in February 1639 (see his warrant from the Queen on page 5). Longevity of this kind suggests that many of these men were not particularly old on admission and were certainly not in the final stages of their lives when they entered the hospital.

The contrast between the long stays of some brothers and the very short residencies of others suggests that this was a varied and changing community, made up of men, of different ages, occupations, and from diverse places of origin.



A man in ragged clothes with a walking stick. Etching by F. Vivares, [1700-1799], after Rembrandt, 1639. Wellcome Collection, 43833i, Public Domain.



Ambrose Dudley, Earl of Warwick, monument in Beauchamp Chapel, St Mary's Warwick, by Wenceslaus Hollar c.1656. Public domain via Wikimedia Commons.

Were the brethren 'poor men'?

In the Tudor and Stuart period, poverty was a broad term, typically defined without reference to precise financial measures. The evidence suggests that contrary to our modern understandings of the poor as a group of destitute individuals requiring relief, the brethren did not come from the lowest rungs of society.

Some of the surviving written documentation from the Lord Leycester, shows that, on formal occasions, the brethren often described themselves as a house of 'poor men'. For example, when the Lord Leycester petitioned the Bishop of Worcester's court about church seating arrangements. When they complained to Parliament about missing rents and defaulting tenants during the Civil War conflict, they referred to themselves as 'poor petitioners'.

These descriptions are not straightforward to interpret, as they were clearly crafted to achieve a particular outcome and may therefore mask the reality of the brother's social backgrounds. From the outside, the brethren were perceived to be living in comfortable circumstances. This may explain why the town authorities sometimes had a cold relationship with the Lord Leycester.

It would be fair to say that the brethren were not of pauper status. In practice, they were probably closer to a community of elderly gentlemen. **Richard Wigley's** signature on his will on page 14 shows that he was literate and able to sign his own name.



Seal of Warwick Borough (1619). Courtesy of the University of Warwick's Digital Collections.

THE WEALTH OF THE BRETHERN



Scan the QR code to view a digitised and transcribed version of this document.

In the Name of God Amen I Richard Wigley one of the Brethren of the Hospital of the Right Hon^{ble} Robert Earl of Leicester in Warwick being weak in body but of perfect understanding and memory prayed to God therefore do make constitute and ordain this my last Will & Testament in manner and form following. First, I bequeath my soul into the hands of God my Redeemer beseeching him of his infinite mercy to pardon my sins and to give me the end of my faith even eternal Salvation. And as for the worldly goods wherewith God hath blessed me I dispose of them in manner following. Inprimis I do ordain that the deed of trust reposed in my good friend Samuel Jemmat Clerk Master of the Hospital for a provision for my loving wife Mary Wigley do & shall remain in full force & virtue during the life of yo^r said Mary, my now wife it is dated ye nine & twentieth day of March 1683. with the intent of twenty pounds more ^{because my said wife Mary is now & hath been for a long time very sick & weak} I do give her liberty to spend any part of the principal monyes mentioned in yo^r said deed of trust if her condition shall require it with yo^r approbation of my Trustee therein mentioned. Item I do give and bequeath to Catherine Crowhurst Sister to my wife Mary two Summes of five pounds to be paid her within one year after yo^r decess of me & my wife. Item I do ordain & appoint that ye summe of five pounds shall be spent at my funerall And two like summe of five pounds at the funerall of my wife both according to the direction of my Master Jemmat if he shall so long live. Also I do bequeath unto my said Master Samuel Jemmat Clerk & Master of yo^r Hospital in consideration of the Trust reposed in him & his constant love & kindness my silver watch and one Guinea of gold to buy him a mourning ring. Lastly I do constitute & appoint Edward Raven of Long-Itchington in yo^r County of Warwick Weaver my sole Executor of this my last will & Testament to do give to him & his son Richard Raven all my estate provided that he do take my now wife Mary Wigley into his own custody immediately after my decess & provide carefully & tenderly for her during her life. I charge him to pay all my debts & Legacies & funeral charges. I bequeath unto yo^r said Master Jemmat all other Wills & Testaments And do constitute this my last will & Testament of full & intiret of yo^r I have in witness hereof hereunto set my hand & seal this May 6th 1687.

Richard Wigley

Samuel Jemmat
Thomas hall

Richard Wigley's signature and seal from his will of 9 August 1687. Worcester Archive & Archaeology Service, Ref.008.7/BA35 85/323/238.

The wealth of the brethren

Wills and household inventories are particularly useful sources for helping us build a fuller and richer picture of the brother's social backgrounds.

They reveal that some brethren came from humble backgrounds, whilst others, like **Richard Wigley**, were high-status. The inventory that accompanied Wigley's will valued his possessions at £121 - well beyond the £5 limit for admission.

Edward Faulkner's inventory on page 16 shows that he lived in comfortable, though not luxurious, circumstances.

Richard Wigley's will

In his will made on 6 May 1687, Richard Wigley made arrangements for his wife Mary Wigley, who had 'for a long time [been] very sick & weak'. She lived in Long Itchington in Warwickshire, and he appointed a local weaver, Edward Raven, to act as his executor, take his estate, and care for his wife after his death. He also requested that the current master of the hospital, **Samuel Jemmat**, who he described as his 'good friend', should ensure his wife received his pension. He ordered that £5 should be spent on the funerals for him and Mary.

He bequested £5 to his sister-in-law Catherine Crowhurst after his wife's death.

His final bequest was to the master Samuel Jemmat, to whom he gave his silver watch and one guinea of gold for a mourning ring in return for 'his constant love and kindness'.

WILLS AND INVENTORIES

Brethren expelled for excessive wealth

At least three brothers - **John Stowe**, **William Woodgate** and **Richard Biddle** - were expelled from the Lord Leycester for being too wealthy. This shows that Richard Wigley's comfortable lifestyle was not unusual.

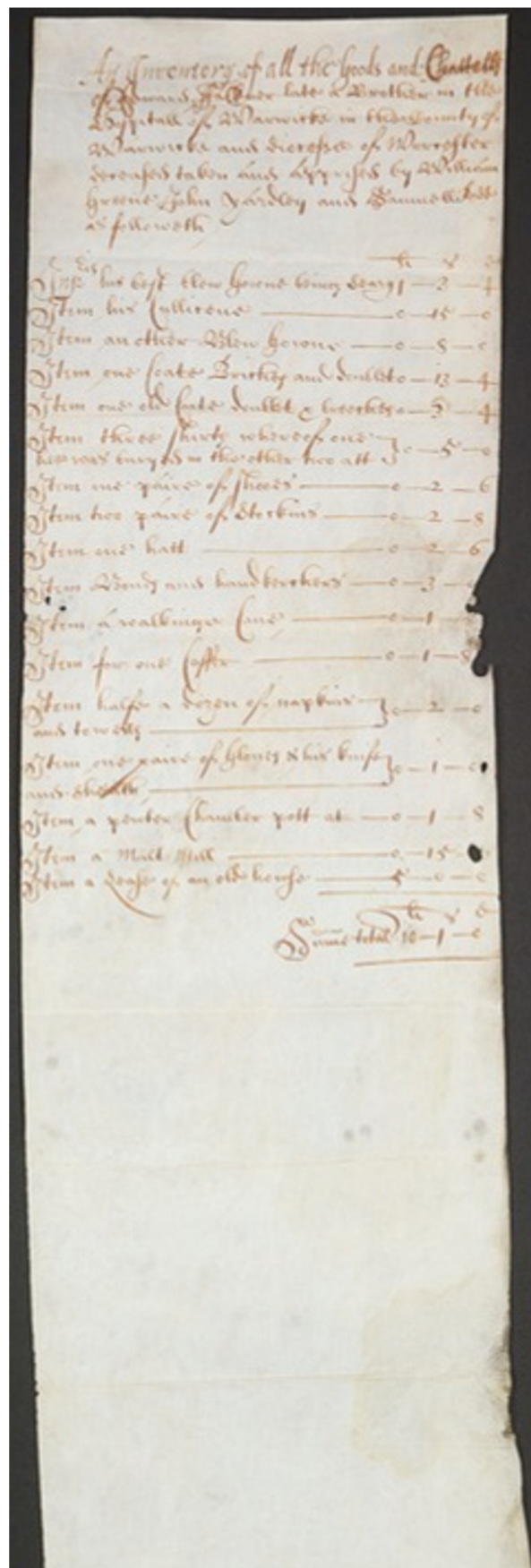
In 1704, visiting church officials from Worcester, ordered the dismissal of **Richard Biddle** after estimating his wealth to be £500 - a sizeable fortune by the standards of the time.

An inventory of all the goods and chattels of Brother Edward Faulkner (17 June 1669).

Faulkner late a brother in the hospital of Warwick in the county of Warwick and the diocese of Worcester deceased.

Taken and appraised by **William Green**, **John Yardley** and **Samuel Rudd**, as followeth.

	£	Shillings	Pence
In the first place: his best blue gown being serge [a woven woollen or worsted fabric].	1	3	4
Item: his Cullicene [?]	0	15	0
Item: another blue gown	0	8	0
Item: one coat, breeches and doublet	0	13	4
Item: one old coat, doublet & breeches	0	3	4
Item: three shirts, whereof one he was buried in the other two at	0	5	0
Item: one pair of shoes	0	2	6
Item: two pairs of stockings	0	2	8
Item: one hat	0	2	6
Item: bonds and handkerchiefs	0	3	0
Item: a walking cane	0	1	0
Item: for one coffer [small chest]	0	1	8
Item: half a dozen of napkins and towels	0	2	0
Item: one pair of gloves & his knife and sheath	0	1	0
Item: a pewter chamber pot at	0	1	8
Item: a malt mill	0	15	0
Item: a lease of an old house	5	0	0
Sum total	£10	1	0



Edward Faulkner's Inventory. Worcestershire Archive and Archaeology Service WAAS/Ref.008.7/BA3585/260/171



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EVERYDAY LIFE



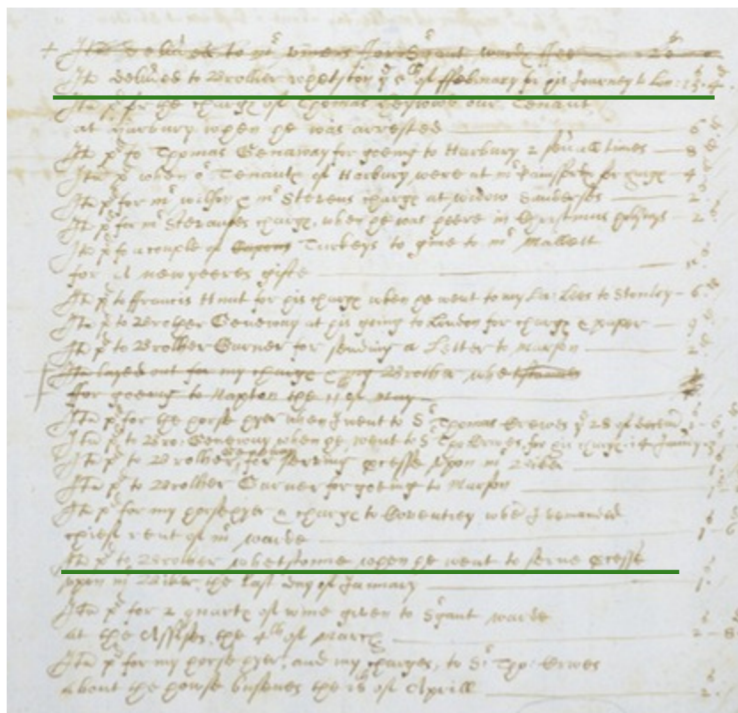
Like today, the Lord Leycester in the Tudor and Stuart periods was home to a much wider community than the brethren and master alone. Brothers' wives, gardeners, handymen, nurses, weeding women and other servants all played an important part in maintaining the buildings and grounds and supporting daily life at the hospital. Surviving evidence, particularly fragments from financial accounts, allows us to glimpse the everyday lives of the people who lived and worked within the almshouse.

Staying active

Despite the supposed infirmities and poverty of the brethren who were admitted to the Lord Leycester, evidence from the hospital's financial accounts, suggests that many lived active and busy lives. Brothers regularly undertook errands to support the hospital's administration, including visiting tenants, collecting rents, and instructing attorneys and lawyers in London.

Brother **Francis Whetstone**, a yeoman from Kenilworth, was described in his admission patent as 'aged and ... unable to labour ... for his livelihood'. Yet in 1631 he was fit enough to make multiple journeys to London and to the hospital's estates in Warwickshire. Such trips would have been demanding, involving long rides on horseback and overnight stays at inns or other lodging houses.

The financial records also show that many brethren possessed high levels of literacy, basic accounting skills, and other administrative competencies.



Steward's accounts, including the expenses paid for Francis Whetstone's journeys for Hospital business in 1631. Warwickshire County Record Office, CR1600/LH42/1.

Living together: master and brethren

Although the 1585 statutes placed the master above the brethren and gave him responsibility for disciplining them, the reality was more complicated. The master relied heavily on the brethren's cooperation for the hospital to run smoothly. He needed their approval to make property agreements and to pay his own stipend. Although his salary of £50 a year was generous at the time of the hospital's foundation, it remained fixed over time and gradually became less favourable. This could make enforcing discipline difficult.

During periods of tensions, such as in the decades of the British Civil Wars, relations were especially strained. At one point, the brethren even refused to pay the stipend of their absentee master, **Rice Jem** (see page 6). However, surviving wills also reveal evidence of close positive relationships between brethren and their masters. In his will of 1687, for example, Brother **Richard Wigley** bequeathed a silver watch and a guinea of gold for a mourning ring to the master **Samuel Jemmett** (see page 14).



Seal of King James' Hospital, Gateshead (founded in 1611). It is one of the only surviving Stuart illustrations of a master and almsmen.

Northumberland Archives. Society of Antiquaries of Newcastle upon Tyne, SANT_BEQ-30-01-04.



Scan the QR code to view a digitised and partial transcription of this document.

“I can not but wonder at your indiscretion that in all these hard & distracted times, wherein you know the rents do not come, besides the taxes, yet you think to hold up as high a sale as you have formerly done.”

Excerpt from a letter sent by the Master Rice Jem to the brethren in the 1640s, threatening legal action after they refused to pay his stipend.

STIPENDS AND CLOTHING



Replica black gown and silver bear and ragged staff badge from the Lord Leycester's collections. Versions of these items would have been worn by the brethren as part of their livery.

In several important ways, the brethren represented a distinctive group within the town of Warwick. Each brother received a stipend of £4 a year, paid quarterly and often timed to coincide with major religious feasts. They also received annual payments for coal and fresh bedding.

In addition, to their stipends, the records show that each brother received around £20 a year from the hospital's stock. As a point of comparison, a single person without dependents at this time could survive on about £4 a year. This level of income clearly set the brethren apart from other poor individuals in the town and placed them among the more secure members of Warwick society.

Clothing further marked this distinction. Each year on St George's Day, the brethren received money for their blue gowns, worn on formal occasions, and on May Day for their black gowns, intended for everyday use (see image of replica above). The statutes required them to 'go together decently in their liveries to the ordinary service and sermons in the parish church'.

From 1665, the brethren wore a silver badge of the Bear and Ragged Staff on the left sleeve of their gowns though this was not mentioned in the original statutes. **John Wisdom's** original badge is on page 7. When dressed in their gowns and moving through the town, the brethren would have been easily recognisable. Local churchwardens frequently referred to them as the 'hospital men'.

*"I'll give ... my gay apparel for
an almsman's gown".*

This line from Shakespeare's *Richard II* (Act III, iii, 131-3) captures how visually striking a group of almsmen could be, and how instantly recognisable their clothing was in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century society. The brethren's gowns signalled not only charity, but status, identity and belonging.

RELATIONSHIPS AND RESPONSIBILITIES



The Gardens

The brethren cared deeply about the appearance of the Lord Leycester's medieval buildings and its grounds and garden. The garden probably looked similar to today, though it also included a vegetable plot planted with cabbage, parsley and turnips, and an orchard of apple, pear, plum and walnut trees.

The hospital's financial records show that the garden was carefully maintained: weeds removed, hedges and grass cut, trees pruned, vines trimmed, and dung and sand spread. The brethren regularly paid for herbs, plants and seeds. In 1675, for example, they purchased up to fifty different plants, including rosemary, roses, sweet-brier and thyme. Laid out with gravel walks, a seat and a sundial, the garden would have been a valued space for the master and brethren, providing them with useful occupation, as well as a space for relaxation, leisure and reflection.

Most urban households at this time had only simple outdoor spaces, often where they kept animals. Gardens featuring ornamental plants and flowers were rare. The size and richness of the Lord Leycester's garden is therefore another indication of the brethren's elevated status within the local community.

Women at the Lord Leycester

Women were a central part of the Lord Leycester's daily life and essential to the hospital's operations in crucial supporting roles. The brethren employed a woman known as the 'nurse', to do the laundry, clean the hospital's rooms, and care for the men when they were sick. In some cases, the nurse may have been the wife or widow of a brother. Unnamed 'weeding women' were also employed by the Lord Leycester, working in the gardens for up to three weeks a year and earning five pence a day.

Many brethren were married, although their wives did not live with them in the almshouse. In the 1660s, Brother **John Wisdom** borrowed money from the hospital to rent a house for his wife, Anna, elsewhere in the town. **Richard Wigley's** will (page 14) also made provisions for his sick and ailing wife, Mary, who lived in Long Itchington.

The presence of women within the Lord Leycester could, however, be controversial. In the 1650s, the master, **Timothy White**, felt compelled to write to a 'highly displeased' Earl of Leicester to explain why a woman linked to a sexual scandal had been employed at the almshouse. White explained that although he personally disapproved, the brethren supported her appointment because of the care she provided for them following the death of the previous nurse. White feared that her presence might set a precedent for allowing wives to lodge in the hospital, increasing the risk of future scandal.

Poor relief

The Lord Leycester regularly supported needy individuals both within Warwick and much further afield. Between 1660 and 1700, the hospital gave small sums to thirty-five separate fire disasters, including to those living far away, such as a payment in 1664 to a 'poor man whose house was burnt' in Wetherby, Yorkshire.

The hospital's stewards also dispensed alms to a wide range of poor people living in Warwick. In 1661, for example, they gave money to a 'poor lame man, a mason, to go to the bath'.

It is noteworthy that the Lord Leycester, an institution founded to support poor men, was able to make such one-off charitable payments to the needy. This reflects the hospital's financial security and offers further evidence of the relatively comfortable living conditions and the heightened social status of the brethren.



A Nursery Maid by Paul Sandby, ca. 1805. Yale Centre for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection. B1981.25.2695.

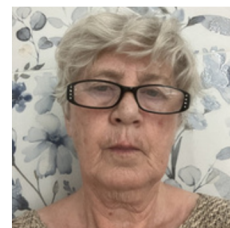
THE PROJECT TEAM



Angus Crawford is a third-year AHRC Midlands4Cities funded PhD student in the Department of History at the University of Warwick. His research into the early history of the Lord Leycester from its foundation in 1571 until 1700 forms the underpinning research for this exhibition. He has published two open-access articles connected to this project: 'Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester, and his Hospital: Military Identity, Veterans and the Elizabethan Church, 1571-1603', *Studies in Church History*, 62 (2026) and 'Theologian and Locality: Cartwright, Puritanism and the Lord Leycester Hospital in Tudor Warwick' *Midland History*, 50/1 (2025), 3-24.



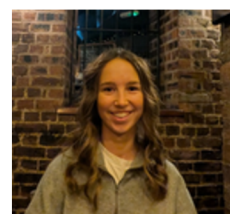
Dr Naomi Pullin is Associate Professor of Early Modern British History at the University of Warwick and has been the research and academic lead on this exhibition project. She has published widely on many aspects of the social, religious and political life of Britain and its North American colonies. She is the author of *Female Friends and the Making of Transatlantic Quakerism, 1650-1750* (2018) and *Negotiating Exclusion in Early Modern England, 1550-1800* (2021). Her current project, *A Social History of Solitude in Early Modern Britain* explores how time spent alone was understood and experienced in early modern Britain. In 2025-26 she received the Ann Bodley Ball Fellowship in Women's History from the University of Oxford.



Dr Angela Nicholls is a historian and former social worker who studies welfare provision in the early modern period and is an expert on English almshouses. She completed her PhD at the University of Warwick in 2014. Her book *Almshouses in Early Modern England* was published in 2017. While working as a volunteer at the Lord Leycester, she was involved in researching and writing 'Masters and Brethren: the 450 year history of the Lord Leycester Hospital Warwick told through the stories of its people'. This was published in 2021 to celebrate the 450th anniversary of the founding of the Lord Leycester.



Harry McNeile is a third-year History & Politics student at the University of Warwick. His research interests centre on public history, memory and heritage. Through Warwick's Undergraduate Research Support Scheme, he authored 'Archives to Airways: Translating History for Public Audiences'. His dissertation focuses on the National Trust and its connections to legacies of enslavement. At Rewind, a student-run public history initiative, he co-produced and presented a national award-winning documentary. While working as a Junior Researcher at History Hit, he contributed to the production of over ten documentaries and podcasts for platforms including Channel 5.



Hope Robinson is a third year History student at the University of Warwick. Her research interests centre around early modern social and religious history, particularly looking at non-elite individuals and groups. Her dissertation utilises petition documents to assess the relationship between communities and punishment in sixteenth and seventeenth century England. Outside of university, Hope has demonstrated a passion for education, undertaking work experience placements across both primary and sixth form institutions. Additionally, she helped to establish a charity hub within her local community, aiming to provide clothing and household goods for vulnerable families across Leicestershire.



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