The Leper Hospitals of Munster

GERARD A. LEE, Member

The name leprosy was applied to one of the most virulent and widespread diseases of medieval Christendom. It is sometimes vaguely identified with a disease endemic from early historical times in the delta and valley of the Nile, and with the scourge still common in Asia, Africa and some isolated areas elsewhere. ‘Death before Death’ is how the ancient Egyptians referred to it, and, down through the centuries, leprosy and kindred skin diseases have been among the most dreaded of afflictions.

Much confusion has always existed regarding the technical meaning of leprosy in our western civilization. In his discussion on the meaning of the term in the Irish annals, Sir William MacArthur points out that the words leper and leprosy had different interpretations and included many peeling, scabby or scaling diseases. The English word leper originally signified the disease itself and not, as at present, the diseased person. The word occurs in a variety of related forms in the Aryan languages and has the basic meaning of something which peels off. It was early applied to the inner bark of trees; the Latin form of the word was liber and, as this bark was used to write on, liber later came to mean a book. (It is perhaps interesting to note that the usual Irish word for a leper is lohbar which is pronounced very similarly to the Irish word for a book, leabhar.) The related word in ancient Greek was originally applied only to scaling skin diseases and never to leprosy which was called elephanthiasis because of the thickening and corrugation of the skin. Rather unfortunately lepra was adopted as the classical medical term for leprosy and, by association with the word, a host of skin conditions associated with scales and scabs but which have no connection with real leprosy came to be included under this heading. The plurality of meaning attached to the term is shown by the use of the plural ‘leprosies’ by Pliny and Macauley, which illustrates well the comprehensiveness of the term. Sometimes bubonic plague and smallpox were called leprosy, and the word was often used to indicate a stricken or pitable state where there was no disease, and even destitution sometimes earned the name so that a beggar could be called a leper. MacArthur believes that it is very doubtful if the epithets lohbar and leprous, as attached to some persons mentioned in the Irish annals, ever implied anything more than infirm. Likewise, the Hebrew word tsarath, translated as leprosy, was also an inclusive term embracing a number of diseases. But it is nonetheless not to doubted that true leprosy did, in fact, exist in Ireland as well as elsewhere in Europe.

From 1100 A.D. onwards leper houses or leprosaria shared in this inclusive, though inaccurate, description. Rules for segregation were by no means as usual as is believed and admission was ultimately voluntary. Of the 283 lazars said to have existed in England, many were merely alms houses. In others either lepers or paupers had the right to admission and, by the 14th century, many were found to have no lepers in them. The decline of leprosy and the disuse of leper houses was probably due to a better standard of living and hygiene aided, perhaps, by the introduction of stricter standards of diagnosis and the consequent exclusion of other ‘leprosies.’ The method

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of examination of a patient for admission into a leper hospital which was practised on
the Continent, as used in Ulm, Germany, has been described by Gregorius Horst who
refers to the various questions asked, such as those concerning family history, age,
length of time ill, habits of life, state of eyebrows, hair, skin, feeling, smell, etc., the
sensation in the affected parts being tested by puncturing with a needle. Two
European writers who lived in the fourteenth century, Bernard Gordanio and Gilbertus-
Anglicus, have provided us with an account of the symptoms of the medieval disease
which they called leprosy, viz. the eyebrows falling bare and getting knotted with
uneven tuberosities; the nose and other features becoming thick, coarse and lumpy;
the face losing its mobility or play of expression; the raucous voice; the loss of
sensibility in the hands; and the ultimate break-up of the leprous growths into foul,
running sores.

LEPROSY IN IRELAND

There is some evidence that leprosy, in its broad sense at least, was prevalent in
Ireland at the time of St. Patrick. An account given in one of his Lives tells of the
occasion, near Tuam, when nine lepers asked the saint to heal them of the disease. He
baptised them "and in the same hour they were healed of their leprosy and gave glory
to God." In Colgan’s Acta Sanctorum we are told that in A.D. 432 St. Patrick main-
tained a certain leper in his house and washed his sores with his own hands. The
ancient Lives of St. Brigid record no fewer than ten occasions on which she came into
contact with lepers; they came to her monastery in Kildare to be healed and she is
related as having healed them on several occasions. Saints Columcille and Fechin
are also mentioned in connection with these poor unfortunates. An entry for A.D. 546 in
the Annals of Inisfallen records that "Nessan a leper died," and in the Annals of the
Four Masters an entry for A.D. 551 reads "St. Nessan the leper [Iobhar] died." Rather
similar entries appear in the Annals of Clonmacnoise for A.D. 555, 569 and 675.
Numerous entries also occur in the Annals of Ulster relating to the disease in the years
554, 575, 585, 742, 769 and 957. In the last-mentioned year the Annals state that there
was a great leprosy on the foreigners (i.e. the Norse Vikings) of Dublin. Not long after
the first Viking raid the first mention of a leper hospital occurs when the destruction
done to leper houses in 860 by Ailaf the Dane is recorded. The literal acceptance of
this reference is open to serious doubt, however, as the interpretation of this entry for
the city of Armagh may be due to a mistranslation of a word meaning ‘oratories.’
In his Monasticum Hibernicum Archdall states that the main monastic leper houses
commenced very soon after the Anglo-Norman invasion of 1169.

Many writers have concluded that the affliction called ‘leprosy’ was caused by
eating improperly cooked or cured pork, or by eating it to excess. Putrid and unwhole-
some fish was also given as a cause of the disease. Ledwich, in The Antiquities of
Ireland, says that the Irish were insatiably fond of swine’s flesh and that it was so
abundant that Giraldus Cambrensis reported that he had never seen the same in any
other country; he notices particularly wild boars, and adds that the people did not

2 H. S. Purdon, UJA, 2nd ser. 2(1896), 268.
3 C. Creighton, A History of Epidemics in Britain, Cambridge 1891, pp. 69-113, esp. 71 and 100.
boil or roast their meat sufficiently. It was full of crude juices which, he thought, produced the leprosy which was formerly very common, and the same was observed of other people with whom pork was in daily use. The inhabitants believed that the bad effects of this and other ailments were effectively combatted by aqua vita or usquebeatha, more usually called whiskey.\(^4\) An earlier commentator, Dr. Gerard Boate, attributed the miserable state of leprosy which then prevailed in Munster to "the fault and foul gluttony of the inhabitants, in the successive devouring of unwholesome salmons," and he accounts for its suppression by the strict observance of severe laws made by the English against taking that fish during the spawning season.\(^5\) Other writers have ascribed the disease to the almost raw state in which the Irish used to eat their animal food:

"Twas blood-raw meat
Which they for constant food did eat,
Affirming that all meat was spoiled
That either roasted was or boiled!\(^6\)

Dr. Creighton, who has studied the history of the disease in Britain,\(^7\) accepts the view that half-cured and semi-putrid fish and flesh, particularly pork, was the cause of much of the distemper called 'leprosy' in the Middle Ages. It was some unnatural or noxious thing in the food, eaten steadily day after day and as the chief parts of sustenance from year to year, which, in his view, caused the epidemic. The improvement came with the reduction in the consumption of salted fish and meat, from the wearing of linen next to the skin, and from the increase in the supply of good bread, fruit and vegetables.

In addition to the confusion which existed between the nature of true leprosy and that of other skin diseases, a similar confusion reigned in relation to the real character of leper hospitals or lazare houses. These names were often vague terms applied to all hospitals, infirmaries, and shelters for the sick and infirm poor. Often they were not solely, or even mainly, for lepers, and by the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries only a small number of lepers were to be found in many of them. It is, accordingly, probable that the term lazare house or leper house became as widely generic a term as the terms lepra and leprous themselves.

Usually a grant of land was made as a revenue for the upkeep and support of medieval leper hospitals. In an Elizabethan grant (1578) of certain lands and premises for the relief of "poor leprous people" dwelling in lazare houses, some of the privileges of these hospitals were set out, viz, to be exempt from all temporal services; those visited with the leprosy to have proctors, herds, and ministers of bodily health to minister the Sacraments, to provide necessaries and to pasture their cattle; the proctors may pass through the country [of Leinster] to call for aims; the cattle may pasture in the parish commons; if any person shall give land to the houses the same shall be free of all charges.\(^8\) Another example is provided by the lazare house at Cashel which, when it was being built about 1230, was endowed with three plough-lands while

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\(^7\) Creighton, *op. cit.*
he Archbishop induced the burgesses to grant it two measures of ale out of every brewing for sale within the town—a very fair allowance considering that at the time there were thirty-eight common brewers in Cashel, each publican making his own ale. In the Papal Taxation of 1302-06 a number of ecclesiastical properties were exempted from the new tax because the rectors were members of a Hospitaller Order. Another form of privilege was known as housebote or firebote, and an interesting example of it occurs in the reign of James I, as belonging to St. Stephen’s leper hospital, Cork. Cormac MacCartie, lord and proprietor of Blarney Castle, exercised a ‘service custom’ by which he and his attendants, with their horses, could claim hospitality for twenty-four hours whenever he and they rode into Cork, in return for which the hospital authorities had the right to obtain wood from his estate for the repairs of their house and for fuel; he surrendered this right to the Crown in 1621.

LEPROSY AND ITS PATRON SAINTS

The name Lazarus means, literally, ‘without help.’ The Lazarus of St. Luke’s Gospel who waited at the rich man’s gate full of sores is a representative person, existing only in the parable. On the other hand, the Lazarus of St. John’s Gospel, the brother of Martha and Mary from Bethany, is both an historic personage and a saint, but there is nothing to suggest that he may have been a leper and there is nothing in common between one Lazarus and the other. Despite this, St. Lazarus became, at an early date, the best-known patron of lepers. The identification with Lazarus of Bethany of the malady of the Lazarus of the Parable is another example of the lack of scientific discrimination in much that pertains to medieval leprosy. This confusion did much for the prestige of the latter’s disease: among men of charity and good will in the medieval world it brought all persons full of sores within a realm of sanctity as being, in a special sense, pauperes Christi, the successors at once of him whom Jesus loved and of Lazarus ulcerosus.

St. Lazarus became the guardian of lepers partly through the influence of the Order of St. Lazarus of Jerusalem, which was founded by St. Basil about A.D. 370. The aim of this Order was the relief of sick and needy pilgrims, especially lepers. Following on the fall of the Christian Kingdom of the Holy Land in 1291, the Order continued to be administered from Boigny, near Orleans, in France, under the High Protection of the Kings of France. A further connection with France is provided by the traditional belief among some people that, after the death of Christ, Lazarus became bishop of Marseilles and that his sister, Mary accompanied him there. This Mary is thought by some to have been the St. Mary Magdalene of the Gospels, and she is said to be buried at Sainte-Baume, about 25 miles north-east of Marseilles, in Provence, where her shrine is still a favourite place of pilgrimage.

The identification by many people of St. Mary of Bethany with St. Mary Magdalene involved her in the curious double personality of Lazarus, and she thus became the patron saint of many lazaret houses and one of the most popular patrons of lepers. A leper hospital or lazaret house was often known as the ‘ Maudlin House,’ Maudlin being

9 R. H. Long, J. Waterford A.S., 3(1897), 27.
10 Edited by Sweetman and Handcock, London 1888.
a corruption of the name Magdalene, and the site and grounds of the hospital, or its endowed lands, were often called 'The Maudlins.'

An old Irish name for a leper was *máriat* which also signified a martyr and hence, by association of ideas, St. Stephen, the first martyr, was often chosen as the patron saint of Irish leper hospitals. The chief leper houses in Dublin, Cork and Waterford, for example, were dedicated to St. Stephen.

In northern and central Europe St. George was often chosen as patron of leper houses, and many such houses existed in Scandinavia and Germany. Elsewhere in central Europe St. James was often chosen. In southern and western Europe St. Lazarus was the most popular patron, while in these islands St. Mary Magdalene, St. Nicholas and St. Stephen were most frequently named and, in a few instances, hospitals were dedicated to St. Laurence, St. James, or one of the St. Johns.

**LEPER HOUSES AND PLACENAMES**

A large number of the townlands in Ireland owe their names to the presence of a leper hospital or lazaret house within their boundaries or because they comprise lands associated with such an establishment. Townlands such as Leperstown are obvious examples of this (including, of course, the euphemistically altered Leopardstown, near Dublin). All townlands called Spittle, Spiddal, Spital, and variations of same (e.g. Ballinspittle, Spitalfield), are likely to be associated with hospitals, although not necessarily leper hospitals, though this seems generally to have been the case. The Anglicised version of *lobhar*, the Irish for a leper, also gave rise to a number of placenames such as Cloonalour, Knocksaintlour, and Poulalour, while such names as Flower Hill (townlands in Cos. Antrim, Galway, Sligo and Waterford) almost certainly are similarly derived. Although the word *lobhar* is used in the singular to denote a person or the presence of an object connected with leprosy, the placename specialist, P. W. Joyce, considers that the word can include the plural, or even refer to a lazaret house, when depicting the historical association of a particular site with the medieval disease.\(^1\)

Other frequently occurring placenames showing connections with leprosy are those containing the element "Palmer," for example Palmerstown, Palmerston, or Palmers-Hill. These all owe their name to the word *palmer* indicating a pilgrim who had been to the Holy Land and who had brought back a palm leaf in token of the fact. As leper houses are known to have existed in or near most of these townlands it would appear likely that the pilgrim in question had visited the Holy Land in connection with the disease.

There are some other placenames in Ireland connected with leper hospitals, but less obviously so, and those in Munster are dealt with individually in the following list where they occur.\(^2\)


\(^{12}\) For further and more detailed discussion on the connection of leper hospitals with placenames in Ireland see the writer's "Leprosy and Certain Irish Placenames" in a forthcoming number of *Dinseanchas.*
ANNOTATED LIST OF LEPER HOSPITALS IN MUNSTER

CO. CLARE

KILCARRAGH

This townland, just west of the ancient episcopal town of Kilfenora, takes its name from the church or cell of Carthach. It adjoined the old Cathedral of Kilfenora, to which it is thought to have been a cell or hospital. The religious house of Gill Carthach lasted until late in the 16th century. No trace of it now remains although it is indicated on the Ordnance Survey maps. The monastery or hospital, which is believed to have been for leprosy, was endowed with a quarter of land adjacent thereto and which, at the Dissolution, was granted to a John King.13

KILLINABOY

In this parish there is a townland called Poulmalour—the Lepers' Hole or Pool—which suggests that an ancient lazaret house may have existed in the area.

CO. CORK

AGHADA or ATHFADA

It is believed that a leper house or colony existed at Aghada, in the Diocese of Cloyne, and two references to a church of Athfada appear in the Papal Taxation of 1302-1306.

ARDNAGEHY

In this parish, south of the Nagles Mountains, there is a place called Knockaunalour—the Little Hill of the Lepers—from which we may infer that a lazaret house or some kind of asylum for lepers was formerly established in the area.

BUTTEVANT

A townland of Spital or Spittle-Bridge is situated a mile east of Buttevant. In his History of Cork, Dr. Charles Smith says that the ruins of a chapel of ease existed there in 1749.14

CASTLEMARTYR

The Irish for the name of this town is Baile na Marta, from the word Marta meaning inter alia a leper, as lepers were thought to be somewhat similar to martyrs by the Irish. The town was formerly called Leperstown, after a leper hospital belonging to an adjacent place called Ballyoulteragh, at one time a village of some note.

CLEAR ISLAND

In this parish, near Skibbereen, there is a townland called Gortmalour—the Field of the Lepers—from which we may infer the former existence there of a leper hospital or colony.

14 C. Smith, County and City of Cork, revised edition, Cork 1893, p. 203
CLOYNE

Of the monastery founded in 707, or hospital founded in 1326, there are now no vestiges except the lands of the latter which are still known as the 'Spital Fields.' This hospital was a lazaret house.

CORK CITY

Outside the walls of medieval Cork, in the southern suburbs and situate in the present parish of St. Nicholas, was St. Stephen's Leper Hospital and Priory. Here was the small church of St. Stephen which exercised parochial jurisdiction over a small area in portion of which stood the hospital and priory buildings long before the union of the parish of St. Stephen with that of St. Nicholas. In a paper on "The Monastic Establishments of Medieval Cork," Denis O'Sullivan tells us that "The name of the religious order in charge of the sick at St. Stephen's has not been handed down to us, but it and other similar institutions in and near the medieval city may well have been ministered by the Order of Knights of Lazarus . . . the presence of other institutions similar to St. Stephen's . . . tends to show that such establishments were founded for the care of those afflicted with the more virulent and intractable forms of skin affections, and not for leprosy." The earliest record extant referring to St. Stephen's Hospital is from the year 1277, and from that time until the close of the 16th century when it passed into the hands of the Mayor and Corporation of the City several notices of the establishment have been preserved. Edward Henry was Custos or Keeper of it in 1295. In 1296 the "Custos of the house of Lepers of St. Stephen" is recorded as recovering from Nicholas FitzMaurice, his house, the two carrucates of land at Lismeynan and Ballymacoun. In 1303 John FitzDavid de Barry sued Henry FitzNicholas, Custos of the House of Lepers, for detaining a deed between John de Callan, the late Custos, and David de Barry, made in 1277, by which deed John conveyed the lands of Lisneyne and Ballymacoun to David for one hundred years and of which he was put into possession but afterwards rejected. The Custos succeeded in the case. In 1311 the Custos sued Gilbert Brandon for the waste and delapidation he had made and suffered in the woods of Lismeynan which had been set to him for a number of years. In 1388 King Richard II committed William Gardener, the Custos of the Infirmary of St. Stephen at Cork, with all profits belonging to same. In 1588 a grant was made by the Prior of St. Stephen's "and its convent," of two beds of the garden belonging to the House of the Lepers in consideration of aid in building "the great principall house of the lepers."

Although the several religious houses in Cork had been suppressed by law in 1543, the community in question held their hospital and convent for forty-five years beyond that date, and probably until the advent of Cromwell. In the fields adjoining the hospital, vaults and other indications of the burial ground have been found. The site of the hospital and priory having been granted in 1674 to William Worth, Recorder of Cork, the Corporation obtained the "Spital lands" and chapel from him in 1899 and there erected a school called St. Stephen's Hospital, for the education of boys of the Protestant religion. It became popularly known as The Blue Coat School and, like similar institutions elsewhere, was designated a 'Hospital'; e.g. the Blue Coat School in Blackhall Place, Dublin, is called King's Hospital, and the corresponding school in London is called Christ's Hospital.

St. Stephen's Church stood in St. Stephen's Street, and the priory, hospital and grounds occupied the entire space between St. Stephen's Street (formerly known as Blue Boys' Lane) and Hospital Lane. The cemetery adjoining St. Stephen's Street and later became a Baptist burial-ground; it is still surrounded by a high limestone wall with the old gateways built up and the former graveyard neglected, ruinous, and overgrown with grass and weeds. Some of the buildings of the school are still used as dwellings and the street itself is now only a small lane of old-world whitewashed cottages.

St. Stephen's Hospital possessed property on both the northern and southern sides of the city, and in the parish of St. Nicholas there is still a townland called Spital-lands.

Also in Cork City, at Shandon, was the House of the Lepers of St. Mary Magdalene, the church of which was often called St. Mary De Nard as well as St. Mary Magdalene. This church was in ruins.

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by 1615. A reference is also made to the Lepers of the Bridge, opposite the Friar Preachers (St. Dominic's Priory), and the Lepers of Glenmain (Glannmire). A lazaret house known as that of the Lepers of Dilby may, in fact, be an erroneous version of Gill Abbey, called the Abbey of the Cave of St. Finbarr, alias Gylley Abbey, near Cork. In the Rent Roll for the Diocese of Cork of 1699 it is called Glabby, and it is traditionally believed that a lazaret house was attached thereto.

The Church of St. Brendan stood on the north side of the River Lee beside the road leading to Youghal, at which spot there was still a burial-ground in 1893. The tithes, and a considerable part of the lands of the parish, were formerly appropriated to the maintenance of a leper house.\textsuperscript{17}

A Benedictine monastery was founded on the south side of the city by the Earl of Morton, afterwards King John, in the late 12th century, and in 1204 it was united with the Abbey of Bath, England. It stood near the now ruined Church of St. John and was called the Hospital of St. John the Evangelist. The Knights Hospitallers of St. John of Jerusalem, Rhodes and Malta had a \textit{Libre Hospes} or Guest House adjoining it. This hostel was not, however, a preceptory of the principal House of the Order at Kilmainham. In an early Taxation of the city the Church of St. John the Evangelist was rated and the Prior of Bath was stated to hold the rectory and vicarage. In a manuscript of the 18th century, \textit{Descripicio Hospitalis Sancti Johannis Corbe}, the Prior of Bath is stated to hold, at Cork, a hospital, a parochial church, and the Chapel of St. Leonard, as well as the church of Kinsale, and the brethren, sisters and sick of the said hospital received the tenth bushel of every kind of corn coming from the produce of the Grange of Legan and, in addition, a tenth of the ground corn of the Manor of Legan.

\textbf{DROMTARRIFF}

In this parish, near Kanturk, is a townland called Dromalour—the Ridge of the Leper—which suggests the former existence of a leper house or colony in the area.

\textbf{INCHIGEELAGH}

In this parish, near Dunmanway, is a townland called Gortnalour—the Field of the Lepers—which, as in the case of Clear Island, suggests a connection with a former lazaret house in the district.

\textbf{KILMOE}

This parish is at the tip of Mizen Head peninsula. In the account of the Visitation of his Diocese of Cork, Cloyne and Ross in 1689-1702, Dr. Dive Downes says that "the parish of Kilmoe extends to the western stone bridge, and so runs by the west end of the stone fort up to the sign of the Mitre, from thence to Gallows Green and the Spittle lands, and to Killinirdownagh lands belonging to St. Dominic's Abbey."\textsuperscript{18} These "Spittle lands" were probably attached to a leper hospital during the later Middle Ages.

\textbf{KINSALE}

During the fateful Battle of Kinsale in 1603, the English army dislodged early and encamped on a hill called 'The Spittle,' to the north of the town. On a plan of the Battle is marked "The Spittle hill where ye Lo. Deputie and Lo. President encamped."\textsuperscript{19} Although there are now no structural remains of a lazaret house at or near Kinsale, the site is well known through the place-names Lepers' Lane and \textit{Tobar na Lobhár} (the Well of the Lepers). This well is hewn out of a pile of rock where it is traditionally believed that lepers lived, using the waters of the well. Near the door of the Church of St. John the Baptist, in Kinsale, is a 'leper squint' or 'leper peep' where the lepers would congregate and attend Mass. Before the general congregation left the church, the

\textsuperscript{17} Smith, op. cit., p. 377.  
\textsuperscript{18} JCHAS, 15(1909), 129.  
\textsuperscript{19} S. O'Grady (edit.), \textit{Pacata Hibernia}, London 1886.
members of the leper colony (some of whom are thought to have been put ashore from ships) would leave the town. The leper settlement at Kinsale was probably under the care of the Canons Regular of St. Augustin in its early days and, later, under the Carmelites of the Kinsale Friary.

A townland in the civil parish of Ringcurran, in the barony of Kinsale, is called Spital-land, perhaps indicating another hospital in the area or that the land there was attached to such an establishment.

MIDLETON

In his *History of Cork*, Dr. Smith states that the remains of an ancient building which was known as "The Spittle" formerly stood not far from the water-side.  

TIMOLEague

About a mile from the village, on the road to Clonakilty, a leper hospital was built in the townland of Spital and Aghmanister. Most of the stone structure has now disappeared, but the site is still known and is indicated by a signpost as "Leprosarium." The townland gets its name from the presence of the hospital (Spital) and a Cistercian monastery, *De Fonte Vino* (Aghmanister) which is said to have been founded near this spot but which was later transferred a few miles away to the shores of Courtmacsherry Bay and called Abbeymahon; Archdall says that it was never completed.  

The hospital was tended by monks from the Cistercian Abbey, but the great Franciscan House nearby was also associated with it. A 'leper squint' or small hole still exists in the ruined Friary, through which the lepers could attend Mass which was celebrated at a side altar, and through which they could receive Holy Communion.

The hospital was situate near the old bridge over the Arigidean stream which, owing to its proximity to the hospital, was known as Spital Bridge. Nearby is the townland of Lettercollum—the Slope of the Dove—in which is a holy well known as Lady's Well to which pilgrimages are made each year on the 15th of August. The name is based on a legend that one of the monks from the Abbey, kneeling in prayer, felt a veil descend on his head. He then found a dove bearing a letter which informed him that water could be found on the spot where he knelt and that this water would cure the lepers of the hospital. Some distance to the east, in the direction of Kinsale, lies the townland of Ballinspittle which may derive its name from association with a leper hospital.

YOUGHAL

In this ancient walled town a lazaret house formerly stood on a hill near the now built-up area. This house was connected with St. John's Hospital which stood below it. St. John's hospitium or *Maison Dieu* was founded in 1185 and had apparently been united to Bath Priory by the year 1300.

CO. KERRY

ARDFERT

In Dr. Charles Smith's *County of Kerry* we are informed that Nicholas FitzMaurice, the Lord of Kerry, made several grants of land for pious uses and built a leper or lazaret house at Ardfert in 1312.  

Among the townlands included in Ardfert parish are Ballinprior (or Priorstown) and Gortaspiddale—the Hospital Field.

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21 Archdall, *op. cit.*, p. 78.
22 C. Smith, *County of Kerry*, Dublin 1756, p. 204.
CASTLEISLAND

In the Book of Rights the epitaph applied to Slieve Lougher, near Castleisland, is *Luachair na Lubhair*—Lougher of the Lepers—which seems to indicate the presence, formerly, of a leper house or leper colony in the district.\(^{23}\)

INISFALLEN

The island of Innisfallen, in Lough Lein, Killarney, has always been a holy island and its name is attributed to an early association with St. Fallen. St. Finan Lobhar (the leper) is reputed to have built a monastery there during the 7th century. The saint has been surnamed 'the leper' from his having been afflicted for thirty years with some form of cutaneous disease. Many writers have referred to the establishment of a leper hospital on the island about A.D. 869, but there appears to be no certain proof from record, placename, or popularly held tradition that a lazare house ever existed on the island. In fact, another saint by the name Finan Cam (the lame) is also popularly associated with Co. Kerry and Innisfallen, and this appellation, *Cam*, may be an abbreviation of the word *clam* which is another ancient Irish word for a leper.\(^{24}\)

KILLAGH

This monastery, near Castlemaine, was built for the Canons Regular of St. Augustin and was called the Priory of St. Mary Magdalene. A leper hospital was attached to it about 1216.\(^{25}\)

RATASS

In this parish, near Tralee, there is a townland called Cloonalour—the Lepers' Meadow—which may indicate that a lazare house formerly existed in the district.

TRALEE

In this parish also is a townland called Cloonalour which may likewise indicate the former existence of a lazare house in the area.

CO. LIMERICK

ADARE

In his *History of Limerick*, Lenihan states that the Knights of St. John of Jerusalem had a house at Adare.\(^{26}\) There is, however, no building in Adare which can be identified with this house or hospital, though the 'Spital Land' appears marked on the detailed map of the Abbey lands at Adare in the Down Survey of 1651-1655. Begley\(^{27}\) contends that the Knights of St. John had no house in the Diocese of Limerick and that the 'Spital Land' at Adare and elsewhere in the Diocese belonged to their House at Any (see below).

The detached building west of the main buildings of the Franciscan Friary (founded in 1464) has often been identified as a hospital or infirmary, but there is nothing to indicate that it was for the treatment of leprosy.

\(^{23}\) Joyce, *op. cit.*, p. 80.
\(^{24}\) Ibid., p. 81.
\(^{25}\) Smith, *op. cit.* (1760), p. 150.
ASKEATON

Many historians believe that the Church of St. Mary at Askeaton was a preceptory of the Knights Templars, but other historians (e.g. Thomas Johnson Westropp\(^{28}\)) doubt it.

BALLYLANDERS

Only the townland called Spittle nearby suggests that a leper hospital may have existed in the neighbourhood.

BALLYORGAN

Likewise a townland called Spittle nearby suggests the existence, formerly, of a leper hospital in the area.

HOSPITAL

This town owes its name to the presence there of a leper hospital founded in 1215 by Geoffreys de Marisco who introduced a commandary of the Knights Hospitalers of St. John of Jerusalem to the town. This establishment was the second most important of the Order in Ireland, the principal one being that of the Grand Priory at Kilmainham, Co. Dublin. During the Middle Ages this hospital was generally referred to as the Hospital of Any, from the adjacent territorial lands of Aine Clauch, surrounding the historic hill of Knockainey. In 1540 Henry VIII suppressed the monastery and all its properties were acquired by the Crown and Grand Juries valued each of them. In 1541 the Jurors reported that all the buildings were then standing and that 290 acres of land and other property belonged to the hospital. Remains of the 'Hospital Church' still survive (Nat. Mon. no. 194).

KILMALLOCK

To the north of the town are the Spital lands, known as 'The Spital Field,' where there was formerly a leper hospital which may also have been under the jurisdiction of the Knights Hospitallers of St. John of Jerusalem at the Hospital of Any.

LIMERICK CITY

It would seem that the medieval leper house of Limerick was either in the former parish of St. Nicholas or in that of Kilmurry. Canon Begley lists the parcels of land with which the hospital was endowed; they include Cobally, Rosbrien, Ballysheedy, Park, and Rathmichell. It would appear that the lazar house may have been built at Spital-land, a townland now in the civil parish of St. Laurence, while the chapel of the hospital may have been in that of Kilmurry. The former parish was, in medieval times, outside the city walls and, in 1435, the presence of a hospital for the poor, dedicated to St. Laurence, is recorded in the patent rolls. The modern cemetery of the city is dedicated to the same martyr-saint, being called Mount St. Laurence Cemetery.

In the medieval Cathedral of St. Mary is a small opening which is traditionally known as a 'leper squint.' It is less than a foot square and is now partly covered by an iron grating. From the outside it would appear as if this opening has been reduced in size. Both the parish of Kilmurry and a chapel in the Cathedral were dedicated to St. Mary Magdalene, patroness of the Guild of Barber Surgeons in the city.

In his History of Limerick, Ferrar states that the Knights Templars had a house in Quay Lane which was dedicated to St. John the Baptist.\(^{29}\)

MUNGRET

Lenihan, in his History of Limerick, states that the Knights Templars occupied the old castle at Mungret, a few miles west of Limerick City.\(^{30}\) An area of land there called Temple Mungret may


\(^{29}\) J. Ferrar, History of Limerick, Limerick 1787, p. 193.

\(^{30}\) Lenihan, op. cit., p. 542.
refer either to the lands of the Knights Templars or, perhaps more likely, to the church of Mungret. It is not unreasonable to expect that in the neighbourhood of a medieval town of the size and importance of Limerick several lazars may have existed contemporaneously, and the probable existence of one so near to those within the city itself need not surprise us.

NEWCASTLE WEST

According to Lenihan the Knights Templars had a commandery in this town,\textsuperscript{31} and a leper hospital may, accordingly, have existed here also.

CO. TIPPERARY

ARDFINNAN

In this parish are the townlands of Gortnalower—the Lepers' Field—and Spita land, both of which suggest strongly that a leper hospital or colony formerly existed in the area.

CARRICK-ON-SUIR

The Priory or Hospital of St. John the Evangelist was founded here by William Cantwell and his wife, Dinisia, about 1240. It was afterwards subject to the Hospital of St. Thomas of Acon, London, as shown from the register of the hospital preserved with the Cottonian Manuscripts in the British Museum.\textsuperscript{32}

CASHEL

About 1230 Sir David Latimer, Seneschal of Cashel, built a hospital for lepers, with the permission of the Archbishop of Cashel, just under a mile to the south of the town walls. The site of the hospital is indicated on the Ordnance Survey maps (6-inch scale, sheet 61 for Co. Tipperary) as a large circular earthen bank in the townland of Windmill. Adjacent is the townland of Knock-saint-lour which can, perhaps, be translated as the "Hill of the Saint of the Lepers" (i.e. St. Lazarus), and which, in itself, provides evidence of a leper house in the vicinity. Sir David endowed the leper hospital with lands and also with two measures of ale made from each brewing offered for sale in the town (see also page 15). It is recorded that Sir David's daughter was the first patient and, indeed, her illness is believed to have been the raison d'être for his founding the hospital.\textsuperscript{33} The hospital was placed under the care of the monks of Hore Abbey by the Archbishop of Cashel who also founded a chantry, dedicated to St. Nicholas, for the benefit of the hospital and which was also attended to by the monks of Hore Abbey.\textsuperscript{34} This chantry was situated near to the site of the present post office in Cashel.

Another hospital also existed near Cashel, but all traces of it have disappeared; perhaps the townland of Palmer's Hill, immediately to the north of the town, indicates its site. It is thought probable that the Hospitaller Order of St. Lazarus of Jerusalem may have had jurisdiction over this hospital during the period before the Suppression in 1540.

\textsuperscript{31} Ibid., p. 736.
\textsuperscript{32} W. J. Battersby, \textit{Monastic History of Ireland}, Dublin 1889, p. 111.
\textsuperscript{33} Long, op. cit., "This lazaret house, the ruins of which may still be seen, became the home of poor Miss Latimer, where, at her leisure, she learned with a vengeance to pity the poor leper, and as a sister of the Order of St. Lazarus, to make the best of her miserable state." (p. 27).
CLONMEL

The church which was particularly associated with the leper hospital at Clonmel was St. Stephen's. Considerable remains of the old lazaret house still exist. The Commissioner of the Bishop of Lismore and Waterford delivered judgment on the 20th of December, 1510, to the effect that the ecclesiastical revenues of the leper hospital of Clonmel appertained to its rector and not to the Prior of Athassel, which Abbey is situated near Golden about 15 miles to the northeast of Clonmel.35

In the outskirts of the town are the ruins of St. Nicholas' Church, or Teampull na Plaige, so called from the use of its cemetery for the burial of a large number of persons who died of the plague up to, and including, the 17th century.

FETHARD

In the Patent Rolls, 9 James I, June 13th, is a copy charter for the Hospital of the Holy Trinity at Fethard. The present Market House probably stands on the site of this hospital, as a tablet inserted in its front states that the hospital was completed by Dame Margaret Everard in 1846, death having prevented her husband from completing it. It is doubtful if this hospital had any close connection with leprosy, but the tradition of an earlier lazaret house in the parish exists and a street and townland (partly within the town and partly without) continues this tradition by the name Spitalfield.

NEWCHAPEL

In this parish, not far from Clonmel, there is a townland called Rathnalour—the 'Fort' of the Lepers—and Joyce36 has suggested that the diseased persons may have sheltered within the enclosure of the old rath or ringfort there.

RELICKMURRY AND ATHASSEL

A townland in this parish is called Spital-land and this suggests that a leper hospital or colony may have formerly existed in the area.

TIPPERARY

Near the town is a townland called Spital-land which, as elsewhere, suggests that a lazaret house may have existed in the district.

CO. WATERFORD

DUNCARVAN

In the Protestant churchyard is a singular and ancient gable, standing on its own like a piece of detached masonry, which is notable because of a series of circular opes perforating it.37 John O'Donovan,38 writing in connection with the Ordnance Survey, in 1841, believed that this unusual structure was part of the St. Brigid's Leper Hospital, Dungarvan, referred to by Archdall.39

36 Joyce, op. cit., p. 82.
37 P. Power, J. Waterford A. S., 3(1897), 218 and ill. on facing page.
38 In a letter dated 19th June 1841: unpublished.
39 Archdall, op. cit., p. 689.
LISMORE

This ancient ecclesiastical See contained what may have been one of the first leper hospitals in Ireland, and Hore says that its Prior had jurisdiction over all the other lazars houses in the country. 40 Dr. Charles Smith, writing almost two hundred years ago, 41 refers to the lazaret at Lismore, to which several parcels of land belonged together with an annual rent payable to all the lazars in Ireland. It seems, therefore, very probable that this ancient town was the administrative centre of a body of Knights Hospitallers which had jurisdiction over other houses of the same Order. The master of the lazaret at Lismore was called the Prior, which was a title assumed by the head of a preceptory of Knights Military or Hospitaller. It is thought that the Order of St. Lazarus of Jerusalem may have been in charge of the lazaret at Lismore from as early as the twelfth century. The lazaret is recorded in 1486 in a Registry which was destroyed accidentally by fire to the irreparable loss of the See, in 1617. 42 Later, an almshouse was founded there by Sir Walter Raleigh and rebuilt by the first Earl of Cork.

Nearby is a townland called Flower Hill, apparently a corruption of Knocknolour 43—the Hill of the Lepers—and also the townland of Nicholastown, both of which may perhaps have formed part of the hospital's endowment.

WATERFORD CITY

The Leper Hospital of St. Stephen in the city of Waterford was founded in the early part of the 13th century by King John of England. It is traditionally believed that over-indulgence in salmon and cider while at Lismore, on the part of the king himself or of his sons, resulted in skin eruptions which were believed to be leprosy, and that the king, accordingly, founded and endowed this hospital for persons so afflicted. The street in which the lazaret house was situated was called St. Stephen's Street and the parish in which some of its endowed lands was likewise called after the first martyr; the hospital also was endowed with lands at Ballymacadane, at Poleberry without St. John's Gate (which gate was formerly considered to mark the hospital's boundary), and at Leperstown in the parish of Killea. The king granted the House immunities and a Charter of Incorporation. The Corporation was also granted a seal with which the Master, with the consent of the Brothers and Sisters of the foundation, sealed the leases of lands and tenements of the hospital. The Master was apparently appointed by, and at the pleasure of, the Mayor, Sheriffs and Commons, at a small salary and he had a clerk as an assistant. The Master or Baron of the Hospital was the sole judge if any assault, battery or bloodshed was committed within the precincts of the lazaret house. Any man or woman in the city or county of Waterford who was infected with leprosy and had not received a licence and freedom from the members of the hospital to live abroad, lost his or her estate by forfeiture to the hospital on death.

In 1661, an Inquisition was held at Waterford before William Halsey, Sheriff of the County and Mayor of the City, Richard Power, Member of Parliament of the County, and James Briver, relating to the leper hospital. This document, transcribed in the last century from a document preserved in the Franciscan Friary at Clonmel, makes interesting reading in relation to the constitution, property and administration of what was probably a typical lazaret house of the later Middle Ages. 44 In particular the Court dealt with the endowments of the hospital which included the obligation of St. Mary Maudlin's (i.e. Magdalene's) Chapel and St. Stephen's Church, together with all the christenings, marriages and burials within the parish of St. Stephen's, and its tithes, the hospital allowing the Vicar a suitable annuity. Tithes from Leperstown, Kilhearten, Ballymorris, Birttas, Ballycadelon, and elsewhere also appertained to the hospital. At the time of the Inquisition the old hospital was ruined and its timber and material removed by several persons, and St. Mary Maudlin's Chapel had been converted into a house. The Inquisition also gives the names of a few of the lepers then in the area, including one, Joan Murphy, who was infected with

41 C. Smith, County and City of Waterford, 2nd edition, Dublin 1774, p. 49.
42 Ibid.
43 Joyce, op. cit., p. 82.
leprosie, and, at the time of the usurped power [i.e. 1650], was presented to the then Commissioner of Revenue who denied to give her release whereas she miscarried and dyed in a miserable condition."

Despite the changes in the political and religious authority in Ireland during the Reformation and after the Cromwellian and Williamite Wars, the hospital, although in a ruinous and chaotic condition, still continued as a leper house. It had, apparently, been repaired about 1632, as that date was carved in relief on a lintel, and in 1670 the Corporation considered the replies of a commission of four men to several questions put to them concerning the house. These replies were that two men and three women, all lepers, and one servant, were maintained within the building by its revenues as was the ancient custom, but that the house itself had not yet been "settled" (repaired), nor the revenues certain, and that further they were unable to answer. In 1690 Alderman William Denis was re-instated as Master of the Leper House of St. Stephen, and he was authorised to demand, and receive, from Councillor Porter all papers and writings touching on the hospital. In the same year a reference is made to the sum of £600 per annum for the maintenance of the hospital. In 1713 the Protestant Bishop of Waterford reported to the Government, inter alia, that the lazare house and the Holy Ghost Hospital were woefully mismanaged. In that year also, Richard Francis, "lame and afflicted with leprosy," was sent to the house. In 1723 two doctors certified that a woman, Mary Tobin, suffered from the disease and she was ordered to be sent to the leper house.

In the middle of the 18th century when the epidemic of leprosy had almost ceased, and on the grounds that the funds were intended solely for the relief of lepers, the Waterford Corporation closed the hospital. After legal proceedings had been instituted by the Rev. Dr. Downes, the Corporation were required to use the funds for relieving the sick and the poor of the city. In 1774 two houses for the sick and indigent stood in St. Stephen's Street, one endowed by the Corporation from the leper house funds and the other by the Earl of Tyrone who had invested £3,110, the interest from which was to defray its expenses.

It is provided by Section 4 of the Waterford Infirmary Act 1896 that the building known by the name of the Leper Hospital of St. Stephen, situate at John's Hill, Waterford, should become the public general infirmary for the county and city of Waterford, and that this infirmary should be situate within the limits of the so-called Leper Hospital and the grounds attached to it. This hospital still stands and has, rather pretentiously, an inscription on the doorway describing it as the Leper Hospital, 1786—another inscription, relating to the 19th century, more accurately describes it as the County and City Infirmary.45

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45 For the general history of the Waterford leper hospitals see Smith, op. cit. (1774) ; R. H. Ryland, History of Waterford, London 1824 ; P. M. Egan, History, Guide and Directory of County and City of Waterford, Kilkenny n.d. (but about 1894) ; B. Downey, The Story of Waterford, Waterford 1914.