

8 The Reformation and society

The Reformation affected the care of the sick and also extended into family life. Caring for the elderly was also seen as a Christian duty. After the closure of the monasteries and priories, caring for the sick was left to secular institutions at parish level, sowing the seeds for the development of local authorities. Although the NHS now organises healthcare in the UK, Christians are still at the forefront of developments in care such as hospices.

After the dissolution of the monasteries and chantries in 1534 many of the associated hospitals, schools and almshouses, which had existed since Norman times in England, were closed. The loss of monastic hospitals meant that others needed to provide for the sick. The pastoral care that had formerly been a religious task now fell upon the laity, and was devolved to the parochial level of the parish. Further, the Protestant reformers rejected the Catholic belief that rich men could gain God's grace through good works – and escape purgatory – by providing endowments to charitable institutions, and that the patients themselves could gain grace through their suffering. So throughout the late 1500s and early 1600s, voluntary charity was the means by which many hospitals were funded.

Local Authorities

Such efforts were not sufficient to cope with the complete dismemberment of the monastic system of pastoral care, and in 1547 every parish was required to set up a Poor Box. In 1594 this became the Poor Rate, a tax on every house in the parish. The seeds of local government were thus sown in the decades following the Reformation. The Statutes of 1547 also required parishes to keep records of all the births, marriages and deaths within the parish. This was the real beginning of the parish as a secular, as well as a religious, body, as it began to inherit greater secular responsibility for local administration, such as maintaining sewers and roads.



Abbot's Hospital, High Street, Guildford.

Photo J. Skelton

Abbot's Hospital

Although most hospitals were now organised by non-religious bodies, wealthy Protestants continued to endow hospitals and poor houses as an expression of the commands of Scripture in Galatians 6 v.10: 'as we have opportunity' to 'do good to all people'. A prime example of this is Abbot's Hospital on Guildford High Street opposite Holy Trinity Church. Bearing a

more than passing resemblance to Hampton Court, it is in fact a Jacobean and not a Tudor building. It is, and always has been, a community and home for elderly residents rather than a hospital. Its foundation stone was laid in 1619 and its original charitable purposes continue to be fulfilled there today.

Its founder George Abbot was the epitome of the local Guildford boy made good. George started life in a humble cottage on the banks of the River Wey as a son of two cloth workers. He was educated at the town's Grammar School (see 15) and Balliol College, Oxford. His Reformed theological views contributed to his appointment as Master of University College and in that capacity he soon came to the attention of King James I.

In 1604 he was invited by the King to be part of the conference of clergy and scholars charged with the production of the English translation of the Bible, and the Authorised Version was published in 1611. His contribution to this, together with his peacemaking efforts between the Church of England and the Church of Scotland, led to his swift elevation as Bishop of Coventry and Lichfield, then London and finally Archbishop of Canterbury.

George Abbot wanted to provide work for townspeople in a time of difficulty (a recession in the woollen industry), and to give help to the elderly who had no other means of support. To meet those needs



George Abbot. Picture hanging in Abbot's Hospital, attributed to a pupil of Paul Van Somer. Courtesy of the Master. Photo J. Skelton

George determined to build both a 'Manufacture' and a 'Hospital'. Abbot's Hospital welcomed the first nine residents in 1622 and the Archbishop's eldest brother became the first Master. The Old Cloth Hall was erected to provide work and today it houses a clothing chain as a commercial tenant of the Hospital. Rooms, coal and firewood, together with blue caps and gowns were given free to the residents, who also received two shillings and sixpence a day for food (12½p). The Hospital now provides sheltered housing for 28 residents and one Master in a group of unfurnished homes specially designed with the needs of older people in mind, making daily life as easy as possible and encouraging mutual contact and support between neighbours. Apart from the extensions erected in 1984 the outward appearance of the Hospital would be instantly recognisable by former residents.

Christians in healthcare

Evangelical Christians are the direct inheritors of the Reformation with their emphasis on doing what is pleasing to God in the service of others. Although many Christians have been in the forefront of medical science, the strong emphasis on Christian caring is exemplified by two radical Christians, Florence Nightingale and Cicely Saunders who transformed care for the sick in their particular fields.



Florence Nightingale
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Florence Nightingale had a strong sense of Christian vocation. She came to the fore during the Crimean War when she organised nursing care and worked to try to improve the living conditions for soldiers in the hospitals out there. When she returned she set up a nurse training school at St Thomas' Hospital. Her publication, *Notes on Nursing* was used as a standard in nurse training. However, her interests were wide as she demonstrated that bad drainage, contaminated water, overcrowding and poor ventilation were causing the high death rate of troops in the British army in India and in the process campaigned to improve the sanitary conditions of the country as a whole. She was a master of the ability to present information, being one of the first to use detailed statistical information graphically as in pie charts.

In founding St Christopher's in 1967, Dame Cicely Saunders made an extraordinary contribution to alleviating human suffering. By the 1950s, most people died in hospitals rather than in their own homes, and the medical profession increasingly saw death as failure. Physical pain afflicted at least three quarters of cancer sufferers and appropriate painkillers were rarely used. Led by Dame Cicely, who was motivated by her deep Evangelical Christian faith, St Christopher's set out to discover practical solutions to the problems of terminal care especially pain relief. There were other hospices before St Christopher's, dedicated to nursing the terminally ill, but they were not what we now think of as modern palliative care. In contrast, St Christopher's was committed to education and research, as well as excellence in clinical care. A holistic approach, caring for a patient's physical, spiritual and psychological wellbeing, marked a new beginning, not only for the care of the dying but for the practice of medicine as a whole.

Home life

At the Reformation, there was a shift in the understanding of marriage. Whereas under Catholicism, priests were celibate and women and marriage were regarded as an impediment to a holy life, the reformers saw how, right at the start of the Bible, marriage was instituted by God for the benefit of men and women. In the New Testament, the Apostle Paul would use marriage as a metaphor for the union of Christ and the church. Consequently the reformers celebrated marriage and the family, and viewed the everyday world of the family at home and daily secular work as something to be enjoyed and performed to the glory of God. Further, their reading of Scripture emphasised that women were equal to men in salvation and the pattern of home life could be modelled on that of the diligent wife in the book of Proverbs who was equally involved in industry and the family's welfare as her husband.