

# NORWICH SCENES

## The Great Hospital



[Last month](#) we saw the provision which the medieval church made for lepers. At the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215, Pope Innocent III decreed a two-pronged attack to strengthen the dominance of the Church in society; firstly, heresy was to be ruthlessly extirpated, and secondly, greater provision was to be made for the poor. In response to this initiative, Bishop Walter Suffield founded a hospital for the care of the old and the sick, initially called St Giles Hospital, after the patron saint of the poor and lepers, who was alleged to have given all that he had to the care of the poor and sick. Although Walter Suffield seems to have been a genuinely charitable man, the setting up of such a hospital was not without an eye to his own interests; the idea of such institutions was that the occupants would pray for the founder's soul and get him out of purgatory more quickly.

Naturally, such an institution included a church, and our picture shows the church tower and the medieval buildings which made up both the church and the hospital. It was not really a hospital as we know it; it did not provide medical treatment, but corresponded more to an old people's home, providing food and shelter for those who otherwise had no one to care for them. Priority was given to the care of retired priests, but there was space also for old people from the laity. They were accommodated two to a bed, and from their beds the men could see the altar of the church, emphasising the importance placed on spiritual things. An interesting feature of the church is the existence of 252 double-headed eagles in black on the chancel ceiling. This was in honour of Ann of Bohemia, who visited the hospital in 1383 with her husband, Richard II king of England. The eagle was the symbol of Rome, and Bohemia was one of the constituent parts of the Holy Roman Empire.—*Tony Benson*