

**Brief History of Worcester Commandery**

The Commandery is one of Worcester’s oldest and best loved buildings. It was founded in 1085 by St Wulstan, Bishop of Worcester, as a hospital. It seems to have been dedicated originally to St John the Baptist but probably became known as the Hospital of St Wulstan around 1203 when he was canonised. It was established as an almshouse for the aged poor and a place of hospitality for travellers benighted outside the Sudbury gate. It was run by a Master, two chaplains, poor brethren and possibly some poor sisters.

In 1221 a man named Thomas who had been blinded and seriously injured in a duel had his sight restored and his wounds miraculously healed after prayers to St Wulstan. Thomas became a Brother of the hospital.

St Wulstan endowed the hospital and more land for its upkeep, those almost certainly included what is now known as Fort Royal Hill.

None of the original buildings survive but they were probably of timber and some stone footings.

Henry III made a grant of six oak trees for repairs and extensions in 1256

Excavations in 2005-2006 found the east end of a 13th Century chapel, which was a high-quality building built in green Highley sandstone. 49 masons’ marks were found, several of which matched with marks at the cathedral. A north chapel was added in the 15th Century but both were demolished in the 16th Century making way for new domestic accommodation.

In the late 1470s, all the buildings – apart from the chapel – were swept away to be replaced by timber-framed buildings around two courtyards linked by the great hall or refectory. This has a fine bay window with medieval stained glass, a cross passage and a 17th Century west gallery.

Medieval tiles with stamped tile makers’ marks, probably made between 1467 and 1525, have only been found in and around Worcester. Wall paintings from around 1490 in the west wing were rediscovered and restored in 1930s and restored again by Percy Lithgow between 2006 and 2007. These include a depiction of St Erasmus, the patron saint of sufferers of intestinal pain.

In 1540 when the monastic institution was dissolved The Commandery was bought by the Wilde family.

In 1651 it served as a Royalist headquarters and the Duke of Hamilton died there from injuries received in the Battle of Worcester.

From 1866 to 1887, The Commandery housed the first school for blind people, and the first for blind adults anywhere – The College for the Blind Sons of Gentlemen.

Following this, Littlebury’s Printers occupied the building. It remained a private house until late 19th Century.

In 1973, when Littlebury’s closed, The Commandery was purchased by Worcester City Council and restored as a museum focusing on the Civil War.