

**CHARLES II's GARRISON HOSPITAL, PORTSMOUTH.**

By CAPTAIN C. G. T. DEAN, late R.A.

PORTSMOUTH boasts so many imposing military works that it is perhaps scarcely surprising that the comparatively modest Garrison Hospital founded by King Charles II should have been forgotten. Like most of the defence works of this naval port, the hospital was constructed at a time when relations with France were strained. Faced with the dangerous situation created by Louis XIV's campaigns of aggression against his neighbours, Charles II took various precautionary measures in January 1678 ; and in particular ordered Colonel John Legge, the Governor of Portsmouth, to repair the fortifications there. At the same time the garrison, which then consisted of only two Companies of Foot, was reinforced by ten more Companies, thus bringing the strength up to about one thousand of all ranks. As there was insufficient accommodation in billets for such large numbers, "several huts and lodgings" were built for the soldiers. The work must have been completed by April 1679, when the Master-General of the Ordnance was instructed to send 400 beds to Portsmouth. At this period it was usual to allot two soldiers to a bed, so the barracks, which appear to have been the first constructed for the British Army in England, were evidently intended for 800 men. The site of these hutments, which were presumably of a temporary nature, has not been located.

Although the House of Commons declared all military forces illegal in April 1679, Charles II disregarded this resolution and a few weeks later ordered the Master-General to make contracts to the value of £6,000 for fortifications at Portsmouth. To inspect the progress of work there, the following August, he set sail from Sheerness, landing at Portsmouth on the 17th of that month. Fever happened to be raging in the narrow streets of the old town, and—no doubt during this visit—the King "was given to understand that it would much conduce to ye benefitt and welfare of our Garrison of Portesmo. to have a convenient hospitall erected for ye accommodation of ye sicke men of ye sd Garrison from time to time." A proposal such as this would have appealed to Charles II not only on humanitarian grounds, but as affecting the efficiency of the Army, in which he was vitally interested. He was already maintaining a Garrison Hospital at Tangier by grants from the Privy Purse, and continued to do so until the evacuation of that Colony in 1683. Furthermore, as recently as July 1679, he had approved the building of a hospital at Kilmainham, Dublin, for the old soldiers of the Irish Army ;

a decision that he was to follow up two years later by founding a similar hospital at Chelsea for the veterans of the English Army.

The first question to be settled was finance. On the 7th February, 1680, the Treasury called for an account of the expenditure on the sick and wounded at Portsmouth, who as then customary were no doubt boarded out in taverns. The necessary enquiries seem to have taken some time, for it was not until the 21st July that the Treasury authorised the issue of a Letter of Privy Seal for the building of a Garrison Hospital. This document, which was duly signed by the King a week later, also provided for the repair of "our Chappell at Godshouse & ye Alarme Gallery there," both of which were stated to be "in a ruinous condicon." Godshouse, it may be mentioned, was an old monastic foundation, then used as the Governor's residence; while the Chapel is now the Royal Garrison Church.

The necessary funds were to be obtained by the sale of timber felled in the New Forest. The proceeds were to be accounted for before the following 20th March, paid into the Exchequer, and issued to "the Treasurer and Paymaster of ye Office of ye Ordnance" on imprest. In pursuance of these instructions the Treasury, on the 29th July, authorised the Wardens and other officials of the New Forest "to fell, cutt downe or cause to be marked, felled and cutt downe so many dotard & decayed trees (not being fitt for ship timber) in such convenient places of his Majties Forest called New Forest in ye County of Southton, where ye same may best be spared wth regard to ye Verte & Venison . . . as shall or may be by ye sale thereof produce ye full sume of £1,500."

The arbitrary methods employed to secure a site are described in a letter written by the Rev. Thomas Heather, Vicar of Portsmouth, to Dr. Nicholas, Warden of the College of Winton, in 1694. He stated that :

"There are three small parcells of glebe within the towne, one is neare a small acre of land called the Vicar's Close, near the Land Port, wich more than fourteen yeares agoe the officers of the Ordnance tooke up, to erect thereon an hospitall for the garrison. I had much trouble about it, and I was a great loser, but at last got forty shillings yearly rent, wich after seven yeares delay and frequent attendance and application to superiors I gained . . . Kg Charles ye 2d did promise some further compensation for his seizure of that land, and destroying the vicar's tithes in the severall parishes neare the towne . . . but I could never by any friendes procure the settlement of aught while the king lived, and had feint hopes afterwards to expect aught."

Building was probably begun about the 11th October, 1680, when the Treasury were instructed to pay the Treasurer of the

Ordinance £1,500 on imprest. Of this sum £500 were issued to the Treasurer on the 26th April, 1681, who eight days later paid this money to Sir Thomas Fitch, "for building the Hospitall & repairing the Chappell at Portsmouth." The balance of £1,000 was issued on the 17th October, and paid on the 30th March, 1682, to Sir Thomas Fitch and partner, "for the workes at Portsmo."

Sir Thomas Fitch, or Fitz, was a well-known building contractor who often worked in partnership with his brother, John. They were both originally master bricklayers at Farnham, a town notable for its fine local building tradition. John Fitch was employed at Kingston Hall, Dorset, as early as 1663; while his brother held the lucrative contract for making the Fleet Ditch sewer in 1672-74. The latter work brought Thomas Fitch—he was not knighted until 1679—into contact with Robert Hooke, who was then employed as a surveyor in supervising the rebuilding of the City. With the versatile Hooke, Thomas Fitch "contrived" a house for Sir William Hooker, a City alderman, in 1673. The following year one of the brothers made Lady Wren a present of china, in the hope of influencing Sir Christopher to make him master bricklayer at St. Paul's; but although recommended by Hooke he was disappointed. Four years later, however, John Fitch was nominated by the Lord High Treasurer for a reversionary grant of the office of "Workmaster for the building and repair of all His Majesty's forts, castles and fortifications in England and Wales," at a salary of £120 per annum. This, no doubt, explains why Sir Thomas Fitch was allotted the Portsmouth contract.

As to whether Sir Thomas Fitch designed the Garrison Hospital as well as built it, it would be hard to determine. It may be observed that the Treasury asked him to submit proposals for some Royal stables at Newmarket in 1684; but such proposals may have been estimates of costs and not necessarily designs. Nor is the fact that he became Surveyor, that is to say, architect, to the Cinque Ports conclusive, for such posts were often conferred on unqualified men. However, he is credited with having designed the imposing gateway to the Citadel at Plymouth, as well as the Court House at Windsor, which after his death in 1689 was completed by Sir Christopher Wren. If these attributions are correct he would certainly have been competent to design a building of secondary importance such as this Garrison Hospital. On the other hand Wren, as Surveyor-General of Works, was responsible for all Royal buildings, and so may be assumed to have inspected and approved the plans, if, indeed, he did not supply the preliminary sketches.

The Hospital was probably completed by the 6th September, 1683, when Charles II inspected it during the course of a visit of two days at Portsmouth. It is constructed of brick and measures 120 feet by 35 feet externally. It is two storeys in height, except

in the projecting central bay where a third floor has been added. The central bay was probably pedimented, and as late as 1828 bore the Royal coat of arms in bold relief, but these features have since been removed. The roof has a valley, as originally intended by Wren at the Royal Hospital, Chelsea. There are now no chimneys, and the staircase and administrative rooms that may be presumed to have occupied the central bay have also disappeared. The central doorway and ground floor windows have semi-circular arches, and the upper windows segmental arches. The wards in each wing measure about 40 by 30 feet; and in each ward the ceiling is supported by four massive oaken posts spaced evenly down the middle of the room. These posts measure 21 by 12 inches, are reeded, and have a nine-inch deeply moulded cap. Wainscotted berths may have been fitted between the posts, similar to those designed by Wren for Chelsea Hospital in 1682. If so each ward would have accommodated ten patients, and the whole building forty.

The Hospital was completed before the 6th September, 1683, when Charles II inspected it during the course of two days spent at Portsmouth. Sir Christopher Musgrave relates that after dinner at God's House the King, Duke of York and Prince George "went to visit the Hospital . . . The King and Duke were extremely satisfied with what was done." The same day the Duchess of Portsmouth (the King's French mistress), attended by the Governor, "went to Southsea Castle, and resolved to visit the Hospital on Friday, but proving rainy, after my two hours' attendance upon her, it was deferred till her next coming, promises all her interest for the supporting it." Despite this influential patronage, the Hospital had by 1694 been "turned into a barracks for lodgings of soldiers." Other buildings were erected close at hand in 1718, and the whole, with later additions, form what are now known as Colewort Barracks. The old Hospital, now shorn of all its attractive architectural features, is at present used as a store.

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