

Dr Jasper Despotin

The ancient library was very much enlarged in 1630 when more than thirty local people gave donations of books. One of the most interesting characters is the Italian Jasper Despotin, a 'Doctor of Phisicke' who gave *Instructio sacerdotum ac poenitentium* (Cologne, 1621) by the Spanish Jesuit, Cardinal Toledo and an edition of *Opera omnia* (Venice, 1591) by William of Auvergne, Bishop of Paris, 1228-49.

He came to Bury in 1610 with William Bedell, the Lecturer at St Mary's church, who had spent three years in Venice as chaplain to Sir Henry Wotton, the English ambassador. It was said that Dr Despotin was 'disgusted with Romish corruption' and settled in Bury to breathe 'a freer air'.

Dr Despotin made a success of his life in England, treating members of the aristocracy as well as the townspeople. His will made in 1648 reveals that he was lord of the manor in Nedging as well as owning land in Bury St Edmunds, Stanton, Orford and Brockford in Essex. He also made provision for his surviving daughters, Catherine and Anne, to have at least a thousand pounds each.

Evidence of his practice is illustrative of medicine at the time. In 1628 he was called to Cambridge to treat John Preston, the Master of Emmanuel, who had been treating his lung complaint with tobacco for many years. Preston did not follow Dr Despotin's advice and insisted on being bled and soon died in Oxford.

On 28 July 1632 he wrote a letter to Sir Robert Crane, an MP and High Sheriff of Suffolk, regretting that he could not attend on his child as he was treating the Queen's Solicitor General, Sir Henry Calthorpe, at Ampton. Nonetheless he sent a prescription and a course of treatment whilst cautioning that 'the case is hard and will yet a while be difficult to judge if the trouble of our little patient be worms or some affection of the head inclining to convulsions and falling sickness'. He advised Sir Robert to send a messenger if these directions did not suffice.

In the same year he was summoned before the College of Physicians in London in the case of Lady Walsingham. He admitted to giving her two laudanum pills and that he had prescribed castor, but it was accepted that other doctors had prescribed an emulsion of almonds for her. The case against him was not proven and, as an unlicensed foreign practitioner, he was asked to act with caution in medical affairs.

Less forgiving was Lady Anne Clopton of Kentwell Hall, who married Sir Simmonds D'Ewes, and moved to Stowlangtoft. She lost all but two of her six children in infancy and blamed the death of her fourth son from rickets on 'a proud, fretting, ill-conditioned woman for a nurse' aggravated by the unskilful treatment of Dr Despotin.

Despotin corresponded with his friend Beddell throughout his life, even after he had moved to Ireland to become Bishop of Kilmore and Ardagh, and he gave him advice when he was deciding to give up one bishopric so that he could serve the diocese of Kilmore more effectively.

The inventory made at the time of the doctor's death in July 1650 showed that he had a library with two globes and £200 worth of books – all of his 'apparill' was only worth £20. He left £3 to Mr Clegatt, minister of St Mary's, and 'fortie shillings sterling to buy a ring for a memorial of me' to Mr Gibbon, minister of St James.