

Coping with the casualties of war 1672



Engraving by Hamlet Watling, 1848

Some books about Southwold have conjectured that this little building on South Green, long demolished, was the original town hall. This idea, which is almost certainly wrong, probably stems from the fact that it bore the town's coat of arms above the front door.

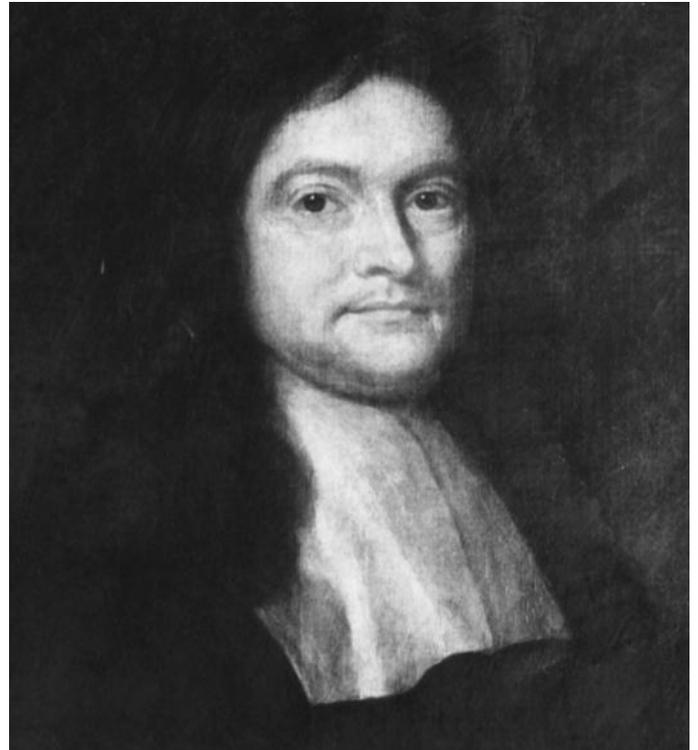
The stone also carried the date 1673, the arms of Strickland and Chapman and the initials RM, standing for Robert Milbourne who was one of the town Bailiffs that year. It is not clear which particular Chapman is referred to but the arms of Strickland clearly refer to Sir Roger Strickland who commanded the 58-gun 'Plymouth' at the Battle of Sole Bay. This, together with the date, supports the tradition that this building was originally a hospital for sick and wounded seamen, casualties of the Anglo Dutch wars.



Photos of the building and plaque in the late 19th century reproduced from 'A Visit to Southwold' by Barrett Jenkins. Below, the 19th c house now on the site which has a version of the plaque on its wall.



By the time the Free British Fishery was established in 1750 the building had become the Salt Tax Office presided over by the Salt Officer, Thomas Gardner, best known as a renowned local historian.



Dr Daniel Whistler (1619 –1684), above, was a Fellow of the College of Physicians and a friend of Samuel Pepys.

In 1653, during the first Anglo-Dutch War, he helped to set up a network of casualty reception stations in Portsmouth and East Anglia to provide front-line care for casualties of both sides. His personal involvement in military medicine and concern for the welfare of injured participants in our area is evident from the letter he wrote from Aldeburgh in 1653 to the Admiralty Commissioners, urging that funds of £400 to £500 (about £100,000 in today's terms) be made urgently available to the Bailiffs of Southwold to pay for the accommodation of the injured seamen.

The South Green facility may well have been part of Dr Whistler's initiative although it appears to date from 20 years later during the second of the Dutch Wars, which included the Battle of Sole Bay.

Part of Whistler's letter is reproduced below, together with an annotated transcript.

Dr Whistler's penchant for 'hands-on' medicine apparently led him to be neglectful of his more mundane duties. He is said to have been negligent as a registrar at the College of Physicians and, as its President, paid little heed to its administration and maintenance.

Right Honourable,

At my coming to Ipswich I addressed my selfe to General Blake, whom I found somewhat amended, and then in a resolution of taking a journey to London on Thursday next. He desired mee to goe immediately to our Fleet to receive further instructions concerning the Sicke and wounded men from General Monke: whom I found with his fleet at Alborough Bay. The wounded are most at Yarmouth, the Sicke he sent to Soale and the places adjacent. It were very desirable on their behalves that foure or five hundred pounds were lodged in the Baylys hands of Soale that they might be enabled to pay their quarters weekely. They are all ready indebted three hundred and fifty pounds to captain Land for that use. As I was aboard the Resolution one Captain Sandars of the Ruby that had taken a Huy of the enemy reported that the prisoners did assure him of the death of Van Trumpe, and wounding of Endeshaus in the back the last engagement. Captain Peacock that was reckoned among the wounded in the list I saw at London is since dead of his wounds

and brought to Ipswich to be buried on Saturday night last. There went from thence to Yarmouth three Surgeons and their mates and one Apothecary. The third of this instant all the wounded men of Harwich were sent to London, to make room for Sick men that are likely to be sent from the Fleet, there remaining at present here about 60 Sick, of which many god willing will be able for the Fleet shortly. I was advised by Generall Monke to goe immediately to Soale and from thence to Yarmouth and bee resident most there where is most need of mee - whither accordingly I intend after the sealing hereof. I crave your Honours pardon for this imperfect account of things, I hope by the next to bee more full.

Alborough. Aug: 8. 1653.
Your Honours,
most faithfull friend
and servant.
Daniel Whistler

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