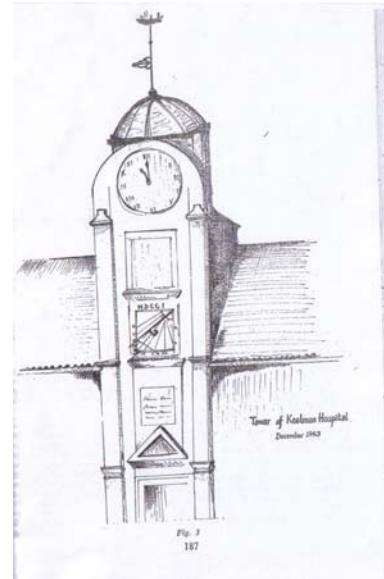


The Keelmen's hospital was built from old brick and can still be seen, in relatively good condition, today. On the front of the building is a clock tower with an inscribed stone, a sundial and a wooden clock (long ago stopped). A link with the 18th century remains, as on top of the tower's weathercock is a small wooden keel with masts and three pegs which represent the keelmen.



The clock tower

It was the first ever hospital that the Bishop of Ely had ever seen that was built for the benefit of the poor.

For many years there was a struggle between the keelmen and the hostmen (the coal owners) for control of the hospital. Politically, it was a struggle for any working class organisation to run its own affairs. In 1730 the Keelmen's Benefit Society was formed which put them in a much stronger position.

A stone on the building dated 1786 states that the interest on the sum of £100 at 5 per cent "for ever" is to be distributed annually among the 10 oldest keelmen resident in the hospital on 23rd day of December. This money was left by the Governor of the Hostman's Company, which suggests that all disputes must have been settled by then.

Finally, in 1788 an Act was passed establishing a permanent fund for the relief of Tyne skippers and keelmen who had fallen upon hard times. Every six weeks after that, the Stewards and Clerk would meet to share out the funds to those who were in need and on that day the keelmen would process through the city behind a band.