



The Medieval Leper and his Northern Heirs

Peter Richards

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Medieval history is rich in rules and regulations for lepers, but reveals little of who they were or what became of them. This book searches for the reality of the individuals themselves, people who through their disease - or suspicion of it - contributed a unique chapter to social and medical history. Their hopes, fears, frustrations, and sufferings are explored partly through English medieval sources but mainly through the record of the remarkable survival of both leprosy and many medieval attitudes to it in the Aland islands between Sweden and Finland in the seventeenth century, where the struggle of a poor community both to contain the disease and to provide for those suffering from it were recorded for over a quarter of a century by the rural dean. The medical identity of medieval leprosy is confirmed from descriptions, from portraits (many previously unpublished or forgotten), and from the characteristic mutilations of bones; an appendix of original documents forms a unique collection of source material for social and medical historians. The late PETER RICHARDS was a former Professor of Medicine and Dean of St Mary's Hospital Medical School in London, and President of Hughes Hall, Cambridge.

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