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INCISED LEDGER STONE WHICH COVERED THE GRAVE OF
JOHN SPROTT, RECTOR OF CRUNDALE, 1431-66.

From a drawing by Dorothy Lightfoot.

JOHN SPROTT, RECTOR OF CRUNDALE,
1431 - 1466

HIS PATRONS AND HIS CHURCH¹

BY HAROLD WACHER, M.D., F.S.A.

JOHN SPROTT, the Rector of Crundale from 1431 to 1466, was presented to the benefice by the Master and Brethren of the College of All Saints, Maidstone, a Religious House, founded originally as a Hospital called *The new work of Presteshella in Meydestane*, which was built about the year 1260 by Archbishop Boniface of Canterbury (1244-70) and dedicated to St. Peter and St. Paul.

In Register I in the Cathedral Library, Canterbury, on fol. 255, recto, will be found a copy, made in the time of Prior Eastry, c. 1285, of an old Charter entitled, *Confirmatio Hospital de Maydestane* (1261) by which Roger of St. Elphage, Prior of Christ Church, Canterbury, and the Chapter assent to the foundation and endowment of the Hospital of Maidstone by Archbishop Boniface.

This hospital was built for the accommodation of poor travellers in West Borough on the bank of the River Medway, of which the Church of St. Peter is the only remaining portion now standing. In 1314 Archbishop Walter Reynolds appropriated to the hospital the Churches of Sutton by Dover, Lillington and East Farleigh.

In the nineteenth year of Richard II (1395) William Courtney, Archbishop of Canterbury (1381-96), with the intention of elevating the Parish Church of St. Mary's, Maidstone, into a collegiate church, obtained a licence from

¹ *Chichele's Register* (1414-43), Crondale. 11 March, 1431. Mag. Joh. Sprott, Cap. Adm. P.-Custos et confratres, ecl. Colleg. omn. sanctor. de Maydeston-f. 194 recto.

Bourgchier's Register (1454-68). Crondale. 12 Dec. 1466. Ric. Loone, cap. Adm. p.m. Joh. Sprotte, ult. rect. P.-magis. et Cappellani Colleg. Om. Sanctor. de Maideston, f. 94 recto.

the King, dated 2nd August, 1396 (19 Richard II, Part I, M. II) to erect that church into a college and to endow it, amongst which endowments the hospital of the Apostles St. Peter and Paul of the New Work and its endowments were included ; and in 1397 the King granted to the College the advowson of the Church of Crundale, near Wye, together with the Manors of Tremworth and Fannes in that parish ; later, Henry IV, in the eighth year of his reign (8th June, 1407), gave to the College a licence to hold the Manor of Wightresham in Kent.

The Archbishop re-dedicated the Church to All Saints and completed the buildings before he died in 1396.

It was to this impropriated Church of Crundale that John Sprott was appointed on the 11th of March, 1431, on the presentation of the Patron, Roger Heron,¹ the Master, and the Brethren of the College at Maidstone. He is described in the Archbishop's Register as a " Master " and a " chaplain ", but that was the usual title for a Master of Arts who was a secular priest in those days. On his tomb, however, he is called a " Bachelor of Civil Law ", and it is therefore likely that he took this higher degree subsequent to his appointment to Crundale. It is not known if he was a graduate of Oxford, as the lists previous to 1500 are but fragmentary, and his name does not occur on those extant from 1449 to 1463, nor am I able to state if he was a socius or confrater of the College of Maidstone who appointed him to this living. He left, however, by his Will the sum of 10 marks (£6 13s. 4d.) to the College for an obit for his soul and all his benefactors, yearly for twenty years, such a sum would represent in value £150 of our money at the present time, a large sum for such a purpose, but he was evidently a wealthy man as well as a generous one. His Will was dated on the 4 December 1461 and probate was given on the 20 December 1466, at Canterbury. He desired to be buried in the chancel of his church and, no doubt, was so

¹ Presbyter who had been elected by the Sub-Master and Fellows of the College in 1419 ; he was afterwards appointed to a Prebend in Chichester Cathedral and Precentor of the Collegiate Church at South Malling, near Tarring in Sussex.

buried; over his grave was laid a fine marble slab, carved with the life-sized figure of a priest in the Eucharistic vestments, holding the Chalice and Paten in his hands, his head on a tasselled cushion, on each side of which is a cross flory. Within the hollow chamfer round the slab is an inscription, much worn by reason of the tread of feet for over 400 years, though now no longer subject to further wear as the marble slab was moved at the restoration of the church in 1894, and placed on a plastered brick altar-tomb in the north aisle of the church. Near the present position of the slab and within the south door is a capacious Holy Water stoup, which doubtless this most benevolent rector for the last thirty-five years of his life always used on entering his church.

The inscription is:—

Orate pro anima Domini Johannis Sprot Baccalarii iuris canonici quondam Rectoris huius ecclesiae qui legavit cuique parocianorum suorum coniugata cuilibet in maritata et obiit nono die mensis Decembris anno Domini MCCCCLXVI, cuius animae propitiatur Deus.

Pastor quidem sobrius gregis hic fuit ille sibi finis.

Which may be translated thus:—

Pray for the soul of Master John Sprot, Bachelor of Canon Law, formerly Rector of this Parish who bequeathed to each of his parishioners joined together in marriage [40d.] and died the ninth day of December A.D. 1466. On whose soul God have mercy.

He was indeed a faithful Shepherd of his Flock here and [came to a suitable] end.

The Latin inscription is so worn that it is quite impossible to identify all the words, but it was more legible when Philip Parsons wrote his book on *The Monuments and Painted Glass, etc., in the Eastern Part of Kent* in 1794, from whose volume the greater part of the above inscription is taken. Hasted mentions the inscription, but does not give it, and also quotes somewhat inaccurately from his Will to the effect that he gave the west window in the church,

where his name was formerly in the glass. There is no mention of this in his Will, but as he gave £10 to the *opus* of the church it is quite likely that part was spent on the west window; also there is no mention in the Will to a bequest of 12d. to each unmarried parishioner, but the bequest of 12d. is to each priest at the day of his burial.

We are indebted to Mr. Arthur Hussey of Wingham for the following Abstract of his Will, which will be found more than usually interesting from the numerous bequests to the clergy and religious of the various Orders in the neighbourhood of East Kent.

ABSTRACT.

JOHN SPROT, RECTOR OF CROUNDAL, KENT 4 DECEM 1461

Buried in the chancel of the church.

High altar 6-8d. To the *opus* of the church £10.

High Cross in the church 6-8d.

Light of St Mary 6-8d.

To each priest at the day of my burial 12d.

To each parishioner both men and women 40d.

Repair of roads within the parish 20s.

Magister John Rotley vicar of Westgate Canterbury 40/-.

Each Ex'or have 20/- that they faithfully administer my goods.

A priest for one year or two if possible in Croundale church or Wey [Wye] so that twice in the quarter he celebrate in church of Croundale, and other times if possible.

The College of Maidstone £6-13-4d that they have one Obit for my soul and all my benefactors yearly for 20 years.

Nicholas Stoffold 20/-.

To each monk within Christchurch 12d, that each one say three masses—of the Trinity, of St Mary, of Requiem for my soul and all faithful departed.

In like manner to each monk of St Augustine's, and all the Friars within Canterbury. And those who are not "capellani" in those places, say exequies of the dead.

Residue of goods to William Searlys of Wye, chapman, John Champneyes, Thomas Honnette, Stephen Collfolle, of Croundale, my Ex'ors, to dispose for my soul.

Lands tenements be sold, money disposed equally to Alice my sister and her children (not named), and Cecilie daughter of Joan my sister.

No Witnesses names.

(Probate 20 Decem. 1466.)

A. Vol. 1, fol. 437.
(Canterbury Probate Office.)