

# JOHN SHORNE'S WELL AT NORTH MARSTON

E. CLIVE ROUSE

AFTER protracted negotiations between the Society, the Bucks County Council, the North Marston Parish Council and other bodies, the long-hoped-for step of repairing and improving the condition of John Shorne's "Holy Well" at North Marston was accomplished during the summer of 1970. Each authority concerned made a contribution towards the cost; and £25 was received from the Dean and Canons of Windsor.

A stone-faced wall, some 6 ft. or 7 ft. square in plan and some 2 ft. 6 ins. high was built to surround the original basin. This is partly covered by stout boarding, with a hinged trap-door in the centre which can be opened to reveal the water beneath. The basin itself was cleaned out, and the remains of the stone steps and shelf preserved. It is hoped at some time to secure and erect a suitable old-fashioned pump.

The occasion was marked by a special service of Matins in North Marston Church, arranged by the Vicar, the Rev. W. Watt, representatives of the various bodies concerned being present, on All Saints Day, November 1st, 1970. The order of service is printed below. After the Service members of the Congregation visited the Well, where prayers were said, and the waters were tasted, without ill-effects despite an official warning by the Water Authority that they could not guarantee that the water was fit for human consumption!

NORTH MARSTON PARISH CHURCH

A SERVICE TO COMMEMORATE JOHN SCHORNE AND ALL THE SAINTS,  
AND TO GIVE THANKS FOR THE RESTORATION OF  
THE SCHORNE WELL

ALL SAINTS' DAY      SUNDAY, 1st NOVEMBER 1970

Hymn 436    Hark the Sound

Venite

Psalm 84

1st Lesson. Numbers 20 verses 1-11

Read by Mr. Elliott Viney

Hon. Secretary The Buckinghamshire Archaeological Society

Te Deum

2nd Lesson. St. John 4 verses 1-14

Read by Mr. Ewart Dancer

Member of The Parish Council, and a Churchwarden

Jubilate

Hymn 222 Ten thousand times  
The Address: Mr. E. Clive Rouse, M.B.E., F.S.A.  
President of the Buckinghamshire Archaeological Society  
Hymn 438 How bright these glorious  
The Prayers  
Canon R. H. Hawkins, representing the Dean and Canons of Windsor  
Hymn 437 For all the Saints  
The Blessing

The President of the Bucks Archaeological Society gave an Address on the subject of John Shorne and his Well, which is printed below, since, while the President does not claim that his remarks contain any fresh material, it may be convenient to have the salient facts gathered together. A list of the main sources is given at the end of the paper.

The President said:

It is very fitting that on the occasion of the restoration of John Shorne's Well or the Town Well, we should remember, on All Saints Day, the man whose name is associated with it. This is Master John Shorne, Rector of North Marston. He was previously incumbent of Monks Risborough, and was presented to the living of North Marston in 1290: and here he remained until his death in 1314, although his Will (still preserved) is dated 1308. He possibly came from Shorne in Kent, or Canterbury, though there is some confusion about the latter story.

He is often referred to as *Sir* John Shorne, though this is merely a courtesy title for a priest or minister. Or as Master, or even as *St.* John Shorne, though he was never Canonised or even Beatified. You will search in vain for his name in the Roman or the English Calendar, nor will you find him in Arnold Foster's *Studies in English Church Dedications*, or in Husenbeth's *Emblems of Saints* or Roeder's book on the same theme or in the Ramsgate Augustinian Abbey's volume of *Lives of the Saints*. But you will find him in Francis Bond's *Dedications of English Churches, Saints and Emblems*, where there are two pages and two illustrations devoted to him. And there are (or were) representations of him on fifteenth century rood screens at Cawston (Norfolk), Gateley (Norfolk), Sudbury (Suffolk), and Suffield (Norfolk). In all but the last, where he is shown tonsured and vested, he wears Doctor's Cap and Gown and is accounted to have been a Doctor of Divinity—a man therefore of some culture and learning. Representations of him also appear on two Devonshire rood screens, namely Hennock and Alphington. In the former he is shown tonsured and vested as a priest: in the latter he wears Doctor's cap and gown. (Plates XI & XIIa)\*

It is no part of our concern today to weigh the truth or merits of the miracles of healing alleged to have been performed by John Shorne himself or to have taken place at his Well or shrine, either here or at Windsor after his death. But rather to consider him as a man, and to rehearse some of the known facts of his life and his shrine and relics and cult. Here is no mythical figure, such as St. Rumbold or Rumwold, a supposed three-day's old Prince of Northumbria of the mid 7th century, who immediately after baptism pronounced aloud the profession of faith and then died. He was at one time honoured with a cult chiefly in Northants and Bucks, especially at Buckingham itself where St Rumbold's Lane survives as a street and where there was also a holy well, the site of which was recently destroyed. Or St. Osyth and her tenuous connexion with Aylesbury. Or the miraculous image of the

\* I am indebted to Mr. S. L. Bath James for these references and for supplying the photographs.

Virgin at Bradwell Abbey to which pilgrimage was made in that little extra-mural chapel still standing, or a cult at Linslade, put down by the Bishop.

But here we have a solid and devoted parish priest whose piety is beyond question and of whom it was said that "his very knees did become horny with the fervency and frequency of his devotions". Of his "Holy Well" we know nothing beyond the tradition that on striking the ground with his staff after an exceptionally dry season, a healing spring of water gushed forth at the command of the Rector. His cures of rheumatic ailments and affections of the eyes are no doubt associated with the chemical or medicinal properties of the water which were available in the well or cistern erected round the spring, in the same way as the Dorton spring not far away became a chalybeate spa in the 18th and early 19th century. Of John Shorne's celebrated act of imprisoning the Devil in a boot ("Master John Shorne that blessed man born who conjured the Devil into a boot") we must regard this as picture language for the good Rector's undoubted powers of healing or banishing evil in the form of illness. I personally believe that many ancient Inns having the sign of the Boot may refer to John Shorne and not always to the postilion's boot.

It is not known when the well was built. But an old drawing in the Records of Bucks shows a basin, 5 ft. 4 ins. square with a shelf or step running round three sides, and a wide step on the entrance side with three lower steps leading down into the cistern. It has the appearance of 15th century work. It is suggested that on account of its size, the basin might occasionally have been used as a bath; but more usually pilgrims or sick persons would probably descend the steps to drink the water or bathe afflicted limbs or other parts with it.

I remember it 40 years ago with a derelict old-fashioned pump, and a cracked concrete slab surrounded by gravel, and a notice by the Bucks Water Board warning of penalties for damage and throwing away the gravel. It has been repaired by the joint efforts of the County Council, the local Council, the Bucks Archaeological Society and a gift of £25 from the Dean and Canons of Windsor—a somewhat belated amends after nearly 500 years.

As has been said, the good Rector died in 1314, and his Will leaves instructions that he was to be buried before the High Altar of this church. This may well have been done, but not in the present chancel, which was not built until 170 or 180 years afterwards. Indeed there is little more than the proportions of the nave, and the North arcade and aisle (c. 1260) that Shorne himself would have recognised, all the rest of the fabric being later. I have always felt that the extremely elaborate arrangements at the East end of the South Aisle, with a number of niches, recesses, piscina, aumbry, squint, etc., dating from about 1330, are likely to have been made in connexion with John Shorne's first shrine or chantry chapel. At any rate, after his death, cures were reported, and pilgrims flocked to the shrine and its relics, wherever it was, and to the well. It would be interesting to know where or how pilgrims were accommodated. There is no evidence of any hostel in North Marston itself, and I suppose Whitchurch, or Aylesbury would have been the answer, for North Marston must always have been tolerably remote.

So matters stood until the 1480's when Edward IV began his great rebuilding and re-organisation of St. George's Windsor. It was deemed fitting, if not a necessity, that the Chapel should hold the relics of a Saint, both for prestige and for profit from pilgrims' offerings at the shrine. Windsor, who then owned and still own, the gift of the Living of North Marston, bethought themselves of Master John Shorne; and Richard Beauchamp, Bishop of Salisbury, who had been appointed Dean of Windsor in 1477 obtained a licence from the Pope (Sixtus V) "to remove the body wheresoever he pleased." It is strange that papal authority should have been required to translate

the body of a humble country Rector who had not even been Canonised, and it is further proof of John Shorne's reputation and cult, and the esteem in which he was held even 170 or more years after his death. Another account states that "The Vicarage was very considerable on account of the offerings at the tomb of John Shorne, formerly Rector of North Marston, to the value of £300 per anum".

From now on we are on firmer ground, for the body was removed to Windsor where it was sumptuously housed, the Chapel accounts actually recording work, materials and costs in connexion with the Shorne Chapel, Chantry or Tower. Like the following: "For making and carving thirty feet of crests, thirty feet of trayles, eight lintels for the enterclose of the Chapel of Master John Schorne". And again in 1506, in connexion with the roofing, there is a convenient "That the creastes, corses, beastes above the outsides of Maister Johan Shorn's Chappell, bee done and wrought according to the other creastes and comprised within the said bargayne".

I like to think that the present sumptuous Chancel at Marston was built by Windsor (certainly the mason's marks correspond with those at Hillesden where craftsmen from Eton and Windsor have been identified) as a sop to the village for the loss of their Saint. Possibly a small relic was returned and housed in a tabernacle or shrine that could be watched from the upper chamber of the Vestry and Sacristy, where there is a squint or small observation window.

That the Pilgrimage both to here and to Windsor was considerable is evidenced by a number of references to it. Latimer spoke in a sermon of "running hither and thither to Mr. John Shorn or to Our Lady of Walsingham". In Michael Wodd's Dialogue we read "If we were sycke of the pestylense we ran to Saint Roche; or if of the ague to Saint Pernel or Master John Shorne". As late as 1519 Joane Ingram in her Will left "To Master John Shorne's light, a pound of wax". This light probably burned before the image of the Saint at North Marston shortly to be noticed.

At the Reformation of course all this ceased, and everything connected with Shorne and his chapel, shrine or chantry was destroyed. There was formerly a representation of him in stained glass at North Marston. But more famous was an effigy, apparently of wood. The notorious Dr. London, one of the iconoclastic Commissioners in the 16th century, refers to it in a letter to Lord Cromwell. "At Marston Mr. John Schorn standith blessing a bote whereunto they do say he conveyed the Devil. He is much sawgt for the agow." This object must have been something special, for it was conveyed to London (presumably for ceremonial destruction)—"thys wek folowing I will send uppe Mr. John Schorn, and so as many as I fynde."

A number of the pilgrims' badges or signs, of lead, associated with Shorne survive and may be seen in the London, Guildhall and British Museums. They were probably on sale to swell the funds in much the same way as you now buy souvenirs at Lourdes, Rocamadour or other continental pilgrimage shrines.

One final item must be mentioned. Some years ago (1949) a MS Book of Hours of John Schorn came up for sale in the Berkeley collection. It was bought by the Friends of St. George's, Windsor, and presented to the Chapel, where it has been placed in a case outside the Lincoln Chapel which used to house John Schorne's Chantry and Shrine. Inset into the binding is one of his Pilgrim Badges. Mr. Maurice Bond wrote a scholarly account of the book, from which I may quote. He dates it as having been written and illuminated about 1430-50.

The hymn of Master John Schorn is in the form known as a *prosa* or a sequence intended to be sung between the Epistle and Gospel at mass. (More famous sequences still in use are the *Veri Sancte Spiritus*, *Stabat Mater*, and *Dies Irae*.) Or,

with the response and collect which follow the hymn, it could form a useful devotion to be said by the faithful on their sick bed or on pilgrimage. Its text is as follows (I give a translation for the original is, of course, in Latin).

Hail, gem of pastors,  
O John, flower of teachers,  
rector of Marston

Hail, light of preachers,  
vessel of virtues, way of manners  
leading to heaven

Hail, father of clerks  
example of priests  
in chastity of body

Hail, companion of angels,  
who dost enjoy the heavens,  
and conqueror of demons

Hail, help of the sick,  
medicine of those harassed  
by the pain of fevers

Hail, light of the eyes,  
liberator of the weak  
from the toothache

Hail, since the ox  
restored to life  
gives witness of your miracles

Hail, thou who art the  
rescuer of all the drowned  
by thy prayers

Hail, heavenly consoler  
of wretched boys  
who are in sadness

Hail, leader of pilgrims,  
lead thou wayfarers  
to the joys above.

Pray for us, John, priest of Christ  
That the grace of Christ may defend us from all fevers.



*S. L. Bath James*

PLATE XI. *Hennock, Devonshire, John Schorne and St. Gertrude.*



*A. W. Everett*

PLATE XIIa. *Alphington, Devon.*  
*John Schorne*



PLATE XIIb. *North Marston.*  
*John Schornes Well. Renovations*  
*in 1970.*



*Bucks. Advertiser*

PLATE XIIc. *The President of*  
*the Society takes the waters.*



PLATE XIIIa. *Leaving North Marston Church, 1 November 1970.*



PLATE XIIIb. *Canon R. H. Hawkins (representing the Dean and Canon of Windsor), Miss C. Baker, Hon. Archivist of the Society, Mr. E. Clive Rouse, President and Rev. W. McM. Watt, Vicar of North Marston.*



PLATE XIVa. *North Marston. The Well in 1920 with pump.*



PLATE XIVb. *North Marston. The Well restored in 1970.*

And I end with the prayer taken from the Book itself :

*Let us Pray*

Lord Jesus Christ, son of the living God, who by the power of thy word wast willing to put fevers to flight from Peter's mother-in-law and the son of the ruler, grant in thy mercy to all fevered persons who honour the memory of thy priest, John, that if it be thy will, fevers may have no power to trouble them further, who livest and reignest, etc.

The main sources for the facts quoted above, and for much more material are as follows :

Rev. W. H. Kelke in *Records of Bucks*. Vol. II (1870), 60-74. (Also quoting other authorities).

Rev. W. Sparrow Simpson, *Ibid*, Vol. III (1870), 354-69.

R. T. Pelly. *Ibid*, Vol. XV (1947-52), 299-300.

M. F. Bond. *Ibid*, Vol. XV (1947-52), 301-307.

(The last two papers originally appeared, in a rather more amplified form, in the *Annual Report of the Society of the Friends of St. Georges, Windsor*, for 1949).

*Royal Commission on Historical Monuments*, Bucks, North, (1913), 223-225.