

Non-resident Cathedral Canons: Thomas Stokes (d. 1495) of Easton and Stamford

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Almost seventy years ago, Kathleen Edwards definitively established how few late medieval canons resided at their cathedrals.¹ Residence levels in the fifteenth century rarely rose above twenty per cent of the chapter and barely reached ten per cent at St Paul's and York.² Non-resident canons, those who chose not to reside at their cathedrals, have long been the butts of criticism. The fifteenth-century poem *The Daunce of Death* mocks them for their wealth, 'Sir dean or Chanon with many gret prebend ... in gret array your tresour to dispende' and for their pluralism, '... divers cures ... [and] riche personages'.³ They achieved almost pariah status among Protestant reformers and some nineteenth-century historians, and have rarely attracted much interest in their own right. At best they have been regarded as a 'necessary evil', a means of rewarding the higher clergy, those clerical high fliers who were the mainstay of royal and ecclesiastical administration. At worst their critics have castigated them as drones who siphoned off the wealth of their cathedrals, whose connection with them was little more than nominal. This article seeks to rescue non-resident canons from the condescension of their critics and subsequent historians using Thomas Stokes (d. 1495) as a case study. It seeks to do so by answering two fundamental related questions: what did non-resident canons do and where did they spend their time?

In many respects Stokes appears to be a stereotypical absentee canon with only a tenuous connection to the two cathedrals in which he held canonries. In 1475 he was appointed to the prebend of St Martin's in Dernestall in Lincoln Cathedral and in 1488 to the prebend of Bugthorpe in York Minster, both of which he held until his death.⁴ He did not enter residence at either cathedral and there is no record of him attending chapter meetings. This distant relationship is reflected in his will. He made no bequests to either cathedral,

The writing of this article has been immensely facilitated by the indefatigable efforts of Professor Alan Rogers. All historians of medieval Stamford owe him a great debt.

¹ K. Edwards, *The English Secular Cathedrals in the Middle Ages*, Manchester 1949, pp. 70-83.

² For a fuller analysis see D.N. Lepine, *A Brotherhood of Canons Serving God*, Woodbridge 1995, pp. 95-100.

³ F. Warren, ed., *The Daunce of Death*, Early English Text Society, Old Series vol. 181 (1931), pp. 40-43.

⁴ Lincolnshire Archives Office (hereafter LAO), Register XXI, f. 25r; J. Le Neve, *Fasti Ecclesiae Anglicanae 1300-1541: VI Northern Province*, compiled B. Jones, London 1963, p. 41. Register XXI, f. 25r, confirms that the Thomas Hewet or Stock installed in 1475 was Thomas Stokes, see J. Le Neve, *Fasti Ecclesiae Anglicanae 1300-1541: I Lincoln*, compiled H.P.F. King, London 1962, p. 90.

though he did remember one of his prebendal churches, Bugthorpe, with the gift of a vestment and 20s for its poor parishioners.⁵ He seems to have drawn the income and enjoyed the status his canonries conferred but had little other involvement with them.

Before answering the two central questions it is important to set out some context by outlining Stokes' origins and career. Born into an armigerous middle-ranking Northamptonshire gentry family, birth determined his career and success by giving him access to a university education and patronage.⁶ His father, John Stokes esquire (d. *c.* 1458), held a quarter of a knight's fee in Warmington and was a junior member of Henry VI's household, serving as serjeant of the gate. Both of Thomas's elder brothers, John and William, followed their father into service in the royal household but John's career was cut short by his early death in about 1458. William (d. 1485) was knighted for his service to Henry VI but suffered for his Lancastrian loyalty. He was attained in 1464-65 and not pardoned until 1469. Even so, he returned to royal favour and service in 1476-77. Their father's royal service resulted in the education of both William and Thomas at Henry VI's twin foundations of Eton and King's College, Cambridge. They were amongst the first scholars at Eton, William from 1441-44 and Thomas from 1445-47. Thomas followed William to King's College in 1447, was elected a fellow in 1451 and resigned his fellowship in 1457 having become rector of Easton on the Hill, Northamptonshire, in August 1456.⁷ At this stage he made an irrevocable commitment to the church by rapidly becoming ordained, as acolyte in December 1456, subdeacon in March 1457 and deacon in April 1457. By 1457 he had graduated as a master of arts. Stokes remained rector of Easton until his death in 1495. Other benefices followed at steady intervals: the vicarage of All Saints, Stamford, in 1468, a Lincoln canonry in 1475, the rectory of Buckworth, Huntingdonshire, in 1479, the prebend of South Muskham in Southwell Minster in 1485 and a York canonry in 1488. Though a pluralist, Stokes' pluralism was on a small scale. He resigned the vicarage of All Saints, Stamford in 1480, soon after his appointment to Buckworth and likewise gave up his Southwell canonry in 1488 on gaining a York prebend.

Access to these benefices came through a combination of birth and patronage. The Stokeses were, as we have seen, a gentry family of some standing in Northamptonshire with a record of long service to the crown. Thomas Stokes benefited greatly from the patronage of William Browne a

⁵ TNA, PROB 11/10, ff. 229v-30r. Printed in A. Rogers, 'Some kinship wills of the late fifteenth century from Stamford, Rutland and the surrounding area', *Rutland Record*, vol. 28 (2008), pp. 279-99.

⁶ For most of this paragraph see A. Rogers, 'Eton's first "Poor Scholar": Sir William Stokes of Warmington, Northamptonshire (*c.* 1425-1485) and his family in the fifteenth century', *Northamptonshire Past and Present*, vol. 64 (2011), pp. 5-21.

⁷ A.B. Emden, *A Biographical Register of the University of Cambridge to 1500* (hereafter BRUC), Cambridge 1963, p. 559.

wealthy and influential Stamford merchant and mayor of the Calais Staple, which is discussed more fully below, and Thomas Rotherham, bishop of Lincoln from 1472 to 1480 and archbishop of York from 1480 to 1500, to whom he owed his appointment to all three of his prebends.⁸ This connection began at Cambridge where they were contemporaries at King's College from 1447 until 1457. It is not clear whether Stokes formally entered Rotherham's service but an early seventeenth-century tradition describes him as 'Chaplain to ye Lord High Chancellor of England'.⁹ As Rotherham was chancellor from 1474 to 1483 and briefly in 1485 and Stokes received valuable patronage from him over a long period (from 1475 to 1488) this is quite probable. Such a well-born and well-connected university educated cleric was an attractive prospect for Crowland Abbey which appointed him to Easton and to the feoffees of Constance, countess of Wiltshire, who presented him to Buckworth.¹⁰ It was probably through William Browne's influence that the nuns of St Michael's Priory, Stamford appointed Stokes to the vicarage of All Saints there.¹¹

What then did Thomas Stokes do? His principal role was pastoral, as rector of Easton on the Hill, vicar of All Saints, Stamford and rector of Buckworth. Whether he carried out these duties personally and how well he performed them is an almost impossible question to answer as evidence of routine pastoral work by incumbents is scarce. There is, however, good evidence of a strong commitment to Easton, his first benefice and one that he held throughout his career. He wished to be buried in front of its high altar, presided over considerable rebuilding of the church and its rectory was his principal residence at least for the last decade of his life and probably for much longer.¹² It seems reasonable to conclude that he was an active pastor there, albeit with the aid of a curate.¹³ There is much less evidence of his role at All Saints, Stamford, between 1468 and 1480 though the proximity of Easton to Stamford, they are just three miles apart, enabled him to be active in both parishes. During this period he was increasingly involved in the affairs of William Browne, particularly in the foundation of his almshouse in 1475, and would therefore have spent a good deal of time in Stamford. All Saints was Browne's parish church and he probably contributed to the rebuilding of its vicarage in the

⁸ BRUC, pp. 489-91.

⁹ A Board of Donations which hung in the Audit Room, A. Rogers, *The Wardens: Managing a Late Medieval Hospital (Browne's Hospital Stamford, 1495-1518)*, Bury St Edmunds 2014, p. 322.

¹⁰ LAO, Register XX, f. 126v; Register XXI, f. 122r.

¹¹ LAO, Register XX, f. 148r.

¹² In the course of a lawsuit the plaintiff, William Fermour, visited Stokes at Easton in 1485 x 90 and Stokes issued a charter there in July 1491, A. Rogers, 'Fermour vs Stokes of Warmington: a case before Lady Margaret Beaufort's Council c. 1490-1500, *Northamptonshire Past and Present*, vol. 61 (2008), pp. 30-41; LAO, BHS 7/6/41).

¹³ One is known in 1526, *A Subsidy Collected in the Diocese of Lincoln in 1526*, ed. H.E. Salter, Oxford 1909, p. 136.

second half of the fifteenth century.¹⁴ Stokes does not seem to have played a wider or leading role in the religious life of Stamford. He did not become its rural dean and was not involved in Browne's revival of the guild of St Katherine. It is unlikely that he spent much time at Buckworth, Huntingdonshire, about twenty miles from the centre of his activities at Easton and Stamford, though he did make a bequest to it in his will. In addition, he fulfilled his pastoral obligations towards his prebendal church of St Martin's in Dernestall Lincoln by appointing vicars when vacancies arose.¹⁵

Although not the eldest son, the management and protection of the family estates were an important concern of Stokes after the deaths of his father and eldest brother John around 1458.¹⁶ By this time his older brother, William, had settled in Yorkshire in the service of the Darcy family and entered royal service in the same department that his father had served in. He was appointed escheator of Yorkshire in 1458 and knighted for his service at either the battle of Sandal in December 1460 or the battle of St Albans in March 1461. A staunch Lancastrian, William did not submit to the Yorkist regime and continued to resist by joining the besieged at Harlech. He was attained in 1465 and not pardoned until 1469. As a result, it was Thomas not William who inherited his mother's lands in Warmington, Tansor and Oundle on her death in April 1465. He retained custody of them until 1472 when he passed them to his brother. Despite his former Lancastrian loyalty, William rose in Yorkist service and favour being appointed keeper of New Park in Rockingham Forest in 1477, a position confirmed by Henry VII in 1485. He also enhanced the family's county status by serving as a JP for Northamptonshire and as feoffee of several of its leading families. On William's death in 1485 Thomas inherited his lands, perhaps in trust for two of William's illegitimate children, Thomas junior and Agnes, to whom he bequeathed them in 1495. For the last decade of his life Thomas senior managed the family estates.

In many respects, Stokes lived as a 'gentleman rector' as befitted his armigerous rank. The comfortable income from his benefices enabled him to live an expansive and luxurious gentry lifestyle. The rectory of Easton alone, valued at £19 8s 9d was sufficient for a comfortable lifestyle.¹⁷ Although the vicarage of All Saints, Stamford and the Lincoln prebend of St Martin's in Dernestall were much more modest benefices, worth 70s and a mere 3s 4d respectively, the rectory of Buckworth brought an income of £21 5s 2d and the prebend of Bugthorpe £34 7s 1½d.¹⁸ For the last fifteen years of his life he enjoyed an income of over £70 a year. Stokes' lifestyle can be partially

¹⁴ A. Rogers, *Noble Merchant: William Browne (c. 1410-1489) and Stamford in the Fifteenth Century*, Bury St Edmunds 2012, pp. 122, 241.

¹⁵ LAO, Register XXI, ff. 24v, 25v.

¹⁶ For this paragraph see Rogers, 'Eton's first "poor scholar"', pp. 11-14.

¹⁷ J. Caley and J. Hunter, eds, *Valor Ecclesiasticus*, 6 vols, London 1810-34, vol. 4, p. 285.

¹⁸ *Valor Ecclesiasticus*, vol. 4, pp. 144, 20, 259; the prebend of South Muskham in Southwell Minster was valued at £13 4s 5½d, *Valor Ecclesiasticus*, vol. 5, p. 2.

reconstructed from his will which though detailed is far from a complete inventory of his goods.¹⁹ It refers to three principal rooms, the hall, the great chamber and the white chamber, probably in the rectory in Easton.²⁰ The contents of one of them, the white chamber, is described in its entirety: a white sperver (canopy), hangings, a featherbed with a bolster, a piece of fustian, two pairs of sheets, two down pillows, a coverlet embroidered with branches and flowers, a 'cownter' (desk), a spruce chest and a 'garnyssh of newe vessel' (a set of dishes, usually a dozen, made of pewter). This, however, was probably the second best appointed room in the house. Another contained his 'largest featherbed' with a sperver of red silk and an embroidered coverlet. The presence of two spervers, conical canopies found in aristocratic households, confirms the high degree of luxury in his house. Stokes' wealth was also displayed in a substantial collection of plate, much of it silver gilt. Nine pieces are listed as well as six silver spoons and a dozen 'silver jewels'. The impression of luxury is reinforced by the napery bequeathed to him by his sister, a new tablecloth of fine diaper and six napkins. Stokes's clothing, his will lists a violet and a blue gown, both fur lined, matched his household possessions in displaying his wealth and status. Violet was a popular but expensive dye and the mink and marten fur of the lining was fashionable and costly.

Alongside his pastoral and family responsibilities, Stokes was much occupied with the affairs of William and Margaret Browne, particularly the foundation of their hospital in Stamford. This close association, which lasted throughout his life, grew out of the marriage of his sister Margaret to William Browne.²¹ The ties between the Brownes and the Stokeses were strengthened by a second marriage, that of his eldest sister Agnes (d. c. 1484) to William's older brother John (d. 1476) and by William Stokes acting as feoffee of William Browne. Thomas Stokes was a trusted advisor of William Browne, perhaps his spiritual advisor as well but he did not formally act as his chaplain, a position once held by John Trus. The high degree of trust between the two is evident in the frequency and regularity with which Stokes acted as his feoffee, eleven times over thirty years beginning in 1457 as he completed his studies at Cambridge. He acted as principal feoffee in 1488 when Browne made a final settlement of his considerable property and on Browne's death in 1489 he was charged with advising and assisting his sister whom Browne made the sole executor of his will. Margaret also placed great trust in him, appointing him her executor and bequeathing him the residue of her estate. In his own will Stokes made careful provision for the outstanding business arising from William Browne's estate.

¹⁹ TNA, PROB 11/10, ff. 229v-30r.

²⁰ They are unlikely to be in Browne's house in Stamford as Alan Rogers suggests as they do not match those referred to in Margaret Browne's will, A. Rogers, 'Some kinship wills', pp. 283-85.

²¹ For a full study of Browne and his family see Rogers, *Noble Merchant*; Rogers, 'Eton's first "poor scholar"', pp. 14-18.

The major achievement of Stokes' life was his contribution to the foundation of Browne's Hospital as co-founder and benefactor. The hospital was founded in 1475 by William and Margaret Browne as a joint almshouse for the poor and guildhall for the guild of All Saints, Stamford.²² Initially the Brownes funded it on an ad hoc basis but in the course of a decade from the mid 1480s it was re-founded as an independent corporation separate from the guild of All Saints with its own substantial endowments. Stokes played a central role in the re-foundation and was solely responsible for its completion after the deaths of William and Margaret Browne in 1489. Given the closeness of his links with his sister and brother-in-law and his later role he was probably involved from its inception but little is known about its initial foundation. From as early as 1461, he acted as feoffee in the acquisition of many of the properties later settled on the hospital, although it is not clear whether William Browne originally acquired them for this purpose. As vicar of All Saints, Stokes was directly involved in the new hospital. Most of the hospital buildings were in the parish and they included a new hall for its guild. From 1476 he regularly celebrated mass in its chapel which provoked a lawsuit with the rector of the neighbouring parish of St Michael's in which the chapel lay.

Stokes' role in the re-foundation of the hospital is much better documented. He was Browne's principal feoffee when the hospital was endowed in 1488. In 1489, after Browne's death he drew up a new petition for a royal licence to found the hospital and probably also drew up two prior petitions which came to nothing because of the death of the monarch. The first addressed to Edward IV before 1483 and the second to Richard III which, though granted in January 1485, lapsed on the accession of Henry VII. The new petition not only substituted the names of Henry VII and Queen Elizabeth for Richard III and Queen Anne but added the name of Sir Reginald Bray and Katherine his wife to the list of the hospital's beneficiaries. Including Bray as a beneficiary was a shrewd move. Not only was he an important local figure as steward of Stamford, he was a trusted and influential adviser and administrator of the new king. Even so, the granting of the licence was protracted, partly because Stokes was unwilling to pay the 200 mark (£133 6s 8d) fee for a second time. On production of the receipt for the original payment made in January 1485 he was granted the licence in November 1493 for a £50 fee. A year later the re-foundation was largely complete. In December 1494 the chapel was rededicated by Bishop Russell, a change of dedication from All Saints to Our Lady and All Saints, and the statutes completed. The statutes were formally promulgated in October 1495 just before Stokes' death later the same month.

Stokes' contribution to Browne's Hospital was two-fold, successfully completing its re-foundation and drawing up its statutes. It was sufficiently

²² For much of what follows in the next two paragraphs see N. Hill and A. Rogers, *Guild, Hospital and Alderman: New Light on the Founding of Browne's Hospital, Stamford 1475-1509*, Bury St Edmunds 2013.

important for him to be regarded as a co-founder of the hospital. The re-foundation between c. 1483 and 1494 was a crucial stage in the hospital's development as it marked a decisive break with the guild of All Saints and ensured its future as an independent corporation rather than a guild hospital. The statutes confirmed its independence by excluding the guild from its governance. How much the final form of the hospital was the work of Stokes and how much he was simply carrying out William Browne's plans is hard to determine. Though the statutes were very much the personal contribution of Stokes, a great deal was already in place by the time they were completed. Above all the basic form of the hospital was firmly established in 1475 when it was built. Architectural analysis has confirmed that it was a single build with little subsequent alteration.²³ The statutes are therefore likely to have formalised existing practice that had been instituted in 1475. The close relationship between Stokes and his sister and brother-in-law and the lack of any evidence of tension between them suggests that they shared the same concept of the hospital and its future development.

Browne's Hospital was in many ways a typical guild almshouse, one that combined provision for the poor and a meeting place for the guild.²⁴ Often founded by a wealthy merchant and managed by a craft or religious guild, such houses were intended to provide charity for the local poor, to commemorate the dead by offering prayers for the souls of their founders and benefactors and to reinforce social order by excluding the undeserving. Guild almshouses became widespread though not universal in towns during the fifteenth century. Between 1416 and 1455 eight London livery companies founded almshouses and by 1475 guild almshouses had been established in Abingdon, Brentford, Colchester, Hull, Sherborne, Shrewsbury, Thame and York (the Merchant Adventurers, St Anthony's, St Christopher's and the Merchant Tailors). By the Reformation guild almshouses had also been founded in Bishop's Lynn, Coventry, Ludlow, Newcastle and Shrewsbury. Carole Rawcliffe has identified a degree of 'fashion and ... aspiration' in these foundations that was expressed in an element of public display in their buildings.²⁵ Browne's Hospital certainly has conspicuous elements of display. Built of fine ashlar on the highest point in the town above the market place, its imposing south frontage and crenelated porch still dominates Broad St. It was a bold and highly visible statement not only of Browne's status and wealth but also his charity and piety which its location next to his house reinforced. With its re-foundation as an independent corporation by 1494 and after a dispute with the guild of All Saints between 1504 and 1508 the hospital ceased to be a guild almshouse though the guild seems to have continued meeting there until its demise after 1548.

²³ Hill and Rogers, *Guild, Hospital and Alderman*, pp. 26-33.

²⁴ C. Rawcliffe, 'Dives Redeemed? The guild almshouses of later medieval England', in L. Clark, ed., *Rule, Redemption and Representation in Late Medieval England and France, The Fifteenth Century*, vol. 8 (2008), pp. 1-27.

²⁵ Rawcliffe, 'Dives Redeemed?', p. 5.

In one important respect the hospital was already old fashioned in 1475. The choice of an 'infirmiry hall' plan for the accommodation of the paupers looked back to thirteenth-century models.²⁶ At Stamford the dormitory hall on the ground floor had ten beds divided by partitions to form separate chambers. Each chamber had a window but was not fully enclosed. Recent archaeological work has shown that though the chambers afforded full privacy, as set out in the statutes, the partitions did not rise to the ceiling as there are no mortices in the beams or joists.²⁷ There were probably doors but no fireplace. The only source of heat in the winter for the almsmen was the common hall on the north side. The chapel was at the end of the hall separated by a passage. The paupers would have been able to hear services from their cells but not see them. By 1475 this type of plan had been superseded by individual chambers either arranged around a courtyard or in rows. The last major almshouses with infirmiry halls had been built a generation earlier in the 1420s and 1430s at Higham Ferrers (1423), St Saviour Wells (1424-36) and Sherborne (1437). By the mid fifteenth century the grandest foundations, notably Ewelme (1448-50) and St Cross Winchester (1443-46), were built around courtyards. or in rows as at Abingdon (1442), Brentford (1446), and Whittington's Hospital London (1424).²⁸ Browne's Hospital was the last major medieval almshouse in England to be built using an 'infirmiry hall' design. Henry VII's Savoy Hospital (1512-19), though an infirmiry hall, owed its cross-shape to continental models and was intended to tackle large scale vagrancy by providing short term accommodation for the transient poor.²⁹ In contrast the almshouse Henry built at Westminster in 1502-4 was a traditional row of six two storey chambers.³⁰

Although old fashioned in its layout, Browne's Hospital was an otherwise typical guild almshouse. As at St Anthony's York and Trinity Hall (Merchant Adventurers) York the accommodation for the poor was on the ground floor with the guild hall and service rooms laid out on a grand scale above on the first floor.³¹ The guild hall at Browne's hospital, known as the Audit Room, is approached separately from the accommodation of the paupers through a fine porch, passageway and staircase. Lofty and well-appointed with a large fireplace and a decorated cornice for hangings, its grandest feature is the high quality stained glass of its four large windows. A screens passage separates the hall from a pantry, buttery and passageway to the kitchen. A similar emphasis on high quality glazing and fittings can be seen in the chapel of the hospital of

²⁶ N. Orme and M. Webster, *The English Hospital 1070-1570*, New Haven and London 1995, pp. 85-92, 133, 136-46.

²⁷ Hill and Rogers, *Guild, Hospital and Alderman*, pp. 34-35.

²⁸ Orme and Webster, *English Hospital*, pp. 133, 136-46

²⁹ *The Building Accounts of the Savoy Hospital, London, 1512-20*, ed. C.A. Stanford, Westminster Abbey Records Series, vol. 8 (2015), pp. 5-8, 12.

³⁰ C.M. Fox, *The Royal Almshouses at Westminster c. 1500 to c. 1600*, unpublished Ph.D thesis, University of London 2012, pp. 25, 150-3.

³¹ Rawcliffe, 'Dives Redeemed?', p. 27.

Holy Trinity (Merchant Adventurers) York.³² Like many other guild almshouses the hospital was founded by a leading merchant of great wealth. William Browne was one in a long line of merchant princes who founded almshouses for their communities that includes: Thomas Bond in Coventry, William Canning in Bristol, Ellis Davy in Croydon, John Hosier in Ludlow, James Terumber in Trowbridge and most notably Richard Whittington in London. The aims, functions and organisation of Browne's Hospital were similar to many other fifteenth-century foundations in combining charity with commemoration; it was a chantry as well as an almshouse. Like them its charitable provisions were an essential component of its religious function to pray for the soul of its founders and benefactors. It sought to provide for the respectable, deserving local poor.

The statutes of Browne's Hospital are Thomas Stokes' most notable achievement.³³ Although hospital statutes have survived in considerable numbers only rarely can they be attributed to a particular individual. Model sets of statutes are known to have circulated and were heavily drawn on when new foundations were being established. John Goodall has shown how three foundations, God's House at Ewelme, Whittington's Hospital, London and Ellis Davy's Almshouse at Croydon, all drew on the same model, even to the extent of quoting some of it verbatim.³⁴ Only one other cleric can be associated with hospital statutes, Thomas Bonifant, an Oxford theologian and fellow of Queen's College. In 1456 he was paid 20s for his work on the statutes of God's House, Ewelme. As the Ewelme statutes were largely based on a lost model and already in place, he was probably employed to revise them and made only minor changes. Stokes' statutes for Browne's Hospital are made up of thirty-one chapters. They have much in common with other sets but also like them contain significant individual variations.

The statutes regarding the paupers were broadly typical.³⁵ There were to be twelve, ten men and two women, one fewer than the usual thirteen found in larger houses. The two women were to act as '*matres-familiae*' by doing the washing and attending to the needs of the male paupers. Like most almshouses, the hospital's aim to look after the respectable poor was achieved by strict rules of admittance and careful regulation of behaviour. To be admitted paupers had to be of good character, 'lowly and devout', to be 'poor', to have no other means of getting a living and to know thoroughly the Lord's Prayer, Hail Mary and the Creed. Once admitted they were not allowed to work or to have goods

³² K. Giles, *An Archaeology of Social Identity: Guildhalls in York c. 1350-1630*, British Archaeological Reports British Series, no. 315 (2000), pp. 70-72.

³³ H.P. Wright, *The Story of the Domus Dei of Stamford: the Hospital of William Browne*, London 1890, pp. 459-74.

³⁴ J.A.A. Goodall, *God's House at Ewelme: Life, Devotion and Architecture in a Fifteenth-Century Almshouse*, Aldershot 2001, pp. 216-19.

³⁵ The best comparative analysis of almshouse statutes is Goodall, *God's House*, chapters 5 and 7.

or income worth more than four marks (£2 13s 4d). Their behaviour had to be exemplary. Those frequenting taverns, keeping hawks and hounds, brawling, quarrelling or causing discord or found guilty of other crimes were to be expelled. Lepers and those infected with other infirmities were also excluded. The weekly dole paid to paupers was 7d, somewhat less than most other larger almshouses. At Ewelme and Whittington's Hospital the sum was double, 14d, at Croydon 10d, and the Charterhouse, Hull, 8d.³⁶ Paupers were not allowed to be absent and the gates were closed at 7 pm in winter and 8 pm in summer.

In common with all almshouses, the paupers and priests at Stamford had precisely stipulated liturgical obligations. The daily round for the paupers began on rising when they went to the chapel for prayer: they said the Lord's Prayer and the Hail Mary five times and the Creed once. At 7 am they attended mass in the chapel. In the afternoon at 2 pm they returned to the chapel to attend prayers for the founders said by the two priests of the hospital, the warden and confrater. These consisted of the *Placebo* and *Dirige*, the *De Profundis* and a special prayer for Margaret and William Browne, Thomas Stokes and William Elmes (grandson of the Brownes and Stokes' successor as patron of the hospital) after which the paupers said the Lord's Prayer, Hail Mary and Creed. Their daily round finished in the evening with a repetition of the morning's prayers in the chapel before they went to bed. In addition, they were to find time during the day to say three psalms of the Virgin for the welfare of the founders' souls. On Sundays and feast days the paupers attended high mass at All Saints. If any were unable to attend due to infirmity or illness mass was said by one of the priests in the hospital chapel. The two priests were required to say a daily mass, one in the hospital chapel, the other in the Lady Chapel of All Saints parish church where Margaret and William Browne were buried. On Sundays and feast days the priests helped celebrate high mass and said vespers at All Saint's, and on Wednesdays and Thursdays they said requiem masses for the hospital founders.

Although broadly typical, these liturgical obligations were conspicuously less rigorous and onerous than those of many other almshouses. Elsewhere, both the paupers and priests were required to attend at least two daily offices, matins and an evening office, either vespers or compline, and in many places including Coventry, Croydon, Ewelme, Hull, Westminster, Whittington's and Wynard's at Exeter all the daily offices.³⁷ The gift of a copy of the *Myroure of Recluses*, a spiritual handbook for those wishing to lead a solitary religious life, to the hospital by John Trus 'chapleyn to the seyd Wylliam Brown sum tyme and prest in the seyd beyd howse' suggests that a more contemplative life was originally envisaged for the paupers in the hospital.³⁸ Trus begins his by saying 'Thys ys a good boke for holymen or women' and it was presumably intended for the use

³⁶ Goodall, *God's House*, pp. 112, 311-12.

³⁷ Goodall, *God's House*, pp. 149, 318.

³⁸ BL Harley MS 2372, f. 1.

of both the hospital priests and some of the paupers. The less onerous liturgical obligations Stokes set out in his statutes may be a more realistic assessment of the quality of the spiritual life possible in the hospital. What little is known of the early paupers suggests they were from modest social backgrounds, sometimes refractory and that between 1500 and 1517 there were often vacancies.³⁹

The organisational structure and administration of the hospital by two priests, the warden and the confrater, broadly followed the pattern set elsewhere.⁴⁰ Both were required to be resident and neither was allowed to hold another benefice or office. The statutes carefully set out the warden's responsibility to discipline the almsfolk, keep an accurate inventory, secure the common chest and seal and make annual accounts at Michaelmas. The warden received a salary of 10 marks (£6 13s 4d) and the confrater one of eight marks (£5 6s 8d) both modest when compared with other larger hospitals. At Ewelme, Heytesbury and Hull the master's salary was £10.⁴¹ The Guild of All Saints was excluded from the management and supervision of the hospital.⁴² The accounts were to be audited by Thomas Stokes or his successor, William Elmes, and the vicar of All Saints. The exclusion of the guild is particularly emphatic in the arrangements Stokes made for the appointment of the warden and twelve paupers after his death and that of William Elmes. It was to be vested in the dean of Stamford and vicar of All Saints. If they failed it passed in succession to the heirs of William Browne, the alderman of Stamford, the abbot of Crowland and the bishop of Lincoln. The statutes were to be read out four times a year in the chapel in the presence of the warden, confrater and paupers and afterwards recited and explained (*recitentur et declarentur*) in English.

The most striking feature of the statutes is the dominance of Thomas Stokes' voice. The preface reveals how much it became his hospital after the deaths of William and Margaret Browne in 1489.⁴³ There is no reference to the Brownes and Stokes is credited with the hospital's foundation. In the preface Stokes reserves to himself 'power and absolute authority' over the hospital including its statutes which were ordained, altered and subtracted 'at the pleasure of myself Thomas Stokk'. Each chapter uses the nominative singular case, '*volo et ordino*' rather than the nominative plural 'we' that might be expected as Margaret and William Browne were the principal founders. Stokes also appears on the seal he devised and gave to the hospital, on which he can be seen hands clasped in prayer. It was Stokes who appointed the first warden, John Coton, and the first confrater, William Hawkins. Subsequent narratives of the hospital regarded Stokes as the second founder after the Brownes and a generous benefactor.

³⁹ Rogers, *The Wardens*, pp. 27-9, 303-4.

⁴⁰ Orme and Webster, *English Hospital*, pp. 75-78.

⁴¹ Goodall, *God's House*, pp. 110-11, 310.

⁴² Wright, *Domus Dei of Stamford*, p. 463.

⁴³ Wright, *Domus Dei of Stamford*, pp. 459-60.



Fig. 1. The seal of Browne's hospital, Stamford, devised and given by Thomas Stokes. Engraving from Wright, *The Story of the Domus Dei of Stamford*, page iv.

Like many higher clergy, Stokes was an active patron of the arts, albeit on a smaller scale than bishops, magnates and monarchs.⁴⁴ He can be linked with several major projects, the west tower of Easton church, the priest's house there and the glazing scheme of Browne's Hospital but his only certain commission was the seal (**Fig. 1**) which he devised and gave to the hospital. This remarkably fine silver seal, now only known from an engraving, combines iconographic sophistication with a characteristic degree of self-promotion by Stokes. The principal image in the upper part is the Bosom of Abraham Trinity set in the middle of particularly elaborate canopies.⁴⁵ A crowned God the Father with flowing beard sits with a crucifix between his knees representing God the Son. Beneath his beard an ascending dove represents the Holy Spirit. Immediately below the dove is a cloth of souls held by the hands of God the Father. It is a comparatively rare image, only twelve sculptural examples have been identified so far, all of them English. Local examples seem to have been used in the composition of the seal's image. The Trinity element was probably modelled on the figure of the Trinity in the hospital chapel's south window which it closely resembles and the Bosom of Abraham is depicted in one of the tracery lights in St John's church Stamford.⁴⁶ The Bosom of Abraham Trinity is

⁴⁴ D.N. Lepine, '“Begun by me”: the artistic patronage of the late medieval higher clergy', in P. Binski and E.A. New, eds, *Patrons and Professionals in the Middle Ages*, Donington 2012, pp. 273-91.

⁴⁵ P. Sheingorn, 'The Bosom of Abraham Trinity: a late medieval All Saints image', in D. Williams, ed., *England in the Fifteenth Century*, Woodbridge 1987, pp. 273-95.

⁴⁶ Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments of England (hereafter RCHME), *An Inventory of Historical Monuments: the Town of Stamford*, London 1977, p. 17.

an especially fitting choice for the seal of a hospital dedicated to All Saints. The Trinitarian element of the iconography, known as the Trinity Throne of Grace, was widely used as a visual image of All Saints by the later middle ages. The Bosom of Abraham (the cloth of souls component) was particularly apt for a hospital for the poor as it is taken from the story of Dives and Lazarus in Luke 16: 19-31. After his death, the beggar Lazarus was taken up to heaven into Abraham's Bosom. A reference to Lazarus can also be found in the liturgy of the dead, in the *Dirige*, which was said daily in the hospital chapel. Thus, the iconography of the seal reflects both the dedication and function of the hospital, a rare degree of theological coherence. The bottom half of the seal contains the self-promotion: images of the current patron, Thomas Stokes and his successor William Elmes. Centrally placed in a niche in a masonry background is the figure of an ecclesiastic, hands folded in prayer, wearing an almuce, the fur hood cathedral canons were entitled to wear as a mark of their status. This presumably is Stokes himself, represented as both pious and high ranking; he styles himself as canon of York in the statutes. Below him are the arms of William Elmes his successor as patron.

The sophistication of the seal's iconography strengthens Stokes' claim to some credit for the glazing scheme of the hospital. This scheme has long been recognised as both outstanding and complex.⁴⁷ The unexpected presence of a sophisticated glazing programme in a hospital for the poor has recently been explained by its joint function as a guildhall.⁴⁸ It should also be seen in the context of the major church rebuilding taking place in Stamford in the second half of the fifteenth century which provided an opportunity for rivalry and display. Five churches were extensively rebuilt in this period, All Saints through much of it, St George's and St John's largely before Browne's Hospital was built in 1475 and St Martin's and St Mary's mainly afterwards.⁴⁹ As a result of the Browne family's lavish rebuilding of it, the church of All Saints stands clearly above the town, its tower more elaborate than the recently built ones of St John's and St Martin's and its spire a match for that of St Mary's. The rebuilding of Stamford's churches included some large-scale glazing schemes. Two notable ones were completed around 1450. Most of the scheme at St John's, which can be dated to 1451, is now lost but the surviving nave tracery light figures of saints and the cardinal virtues show its ambitious scope.⁵⁰ The series of windows of Garter Knights bequeathed to St George's by Sir William

⁴⁷ R. Marks, 'A late medieval glass-painting workshop in the region of Stamford and Peterborough', in P. Moore, ed, *Crown in Glory: A Celebration of Craftsmanship-Studies in Stained Glass*, Norwich 1982, pp. 29-39; R. Mills, 'King Solomon with a Quotation from Proverbs', *Vidimus*, 18 (2008), solely available on line: www.vidimus.org.

⁴⁸ Hill and Rogers, *Guild, Hospital and Alderman*, pp. 41-43.

⁴⁹ RCHME, *Stamford*, pp. xlvii-vii, 6-27.

⁵⁰ RCHME, *Stamford*, pp. 16-17; see also the Corpus Vitrearum Medii Aevi website (www.cvma.ac.uk).

Bruges, first Garter King of Arms, in 1449 was equally ambitious.⁵¹ In the light of these schemes it is not surprising to find William Browne commissioning the highest quality glass for the hospital and making the glazing scheme a principal feature of its design.

Thomas Stokes' claim to responsibility for the hospital glazing scheme principally rests on the presumption that the complexity of the iconography in the Audit Room is unlikely to have been devised by William Browne himself and postdates him. Stokes' closeness to William and Margaret Browne from the hospital's inception, his role as co-founder and benefactor from 1489 to 1495 and the presence of the Stokke rebus in the glass all suggest that he is likely to have had some influence. The iconography of the glass in the chapel windows, which dates from its construction in 1475, is relatively conventional and includes images of the Trinity, St James, St John the Baptist, St Michael and a female saint, perhaps St Katherine (a wheel survives in a fragment), and two of Our Lady.⁵² The prominence of the Virgin, known to be a particular devotion of Margaret Browne, and the inclusion of an image the Trinity Throne of Graces as a visual image of All Saints reflects the hospital's joint dedication to Our Lady and All Saints.⁵³ The Marian imagery, however, is unusually subtle and perhaps shows the influence of Stokes.⁵⁴ The two images of the Virgin are associated with the Incarnation. One, known as the *fenestra caeli*, shows her holding a window and is unique in English art. The beam of light coming through the window symbolises the moment of conception. The other, drawn from the Song of Solomon, shows her holding red roses and white lilies. Fragments of a closed door, lock and hinges preserved in the tracery lights suggest a third Marian image associated with the Incarnation, the *porta clausa*, a symbol of the Virgin's purity.

It is the glazing scheme in the Audit Room (the meeting room of the guild) that Stokes is most likely to have devised. Yet to be fully explained, the eight empty lower window lights may have had images now lost, it has been dated to the early 1490s, the period after the death of William Browne when Stokes completed the re-foundation and drew up the statutes. The presence of late fifteenth century glass there with the Stokk rebus rather than the nineteenth century copies found in chapel and the extensive use of Biblical quotations also suggest Stokes' involvement.⁵⁵ A significant part of the original glazing scheme survives in the upper light above the transom of three windows and that of the

⁵¹ The lavishness of Sir William's bequests to St George's is evident from his will, H. Stanford, *The Life of Sir William Bruges: First Garter King of Arms*, Harleian Society, vol. 111/12 (1970), pp. 85-87.

⁵² P. Hebgin-Barnes, *The Medieval Stained Glass of the County of Lincolnshire*, CVMA (GB), Summary Catalogue, vol. 3, Oxford 1996, pp. 289-92.

⁵³ For Margaret Browns's devotion to the Virgin see her will in, A. Rogers, 'Some kinship wills', pp. 283-86.

⁵⁴ Hebgin-Barnes, *Medieval Stained Glass of Lincolnshire*, p. xlv.

⁵⁵ William Elmes, Stokes' successor as patron from 1495 to 1504 also made a contribution. His arms appear in four windows.

fourth window can be reconstructed. The four windows comprise repeated pairs of figures, two of King David facing St Paul and two of Solomon facing Seneca.⁵⁶ Each figure is flanked by a prominent scroll rising to an arch above his head.⁵⁷ Five of the scrolls have survived as well as muddled fragments of a sixth. They are as follows:

East window: David: *Beatus [vir] qui timet dominum* (Blessed is the man that feareth the Lord), Psalms 111:1.

St Paul: *Que sursum sunt sapite non quae supra terram ad collo* (Mind the things that are above, not the things that are below), Colossians 3:2.

Second from east window: David: *Quis sapiens et intellegit. Hec in p[salmis]* (a contraction of '*Quis sapiens et custodiet haec et intellegit misericordias Domini*' Who is wise and will keep these things; and will understand the mercies of the Lord?), Psalms 106: 43.

St Paul: *Sapientia [enim huius m]undi stulticia est apud [Deum]* (For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God), 1 Corinthians 3:19.

Third from east window: Solomon: *Vir iracundus provocat rixas In pubis salo* (A passionate man stirreth up strifes), Proverbs 15: 18.

The sixth inscription that flanked Seneca is too muddled to reconstruct.⁵⁸ The few surviving complete words cannot be matched to anything written by either Seneca the elder or the younger and may well derive from one of several pseudo-Senecan compilations that circulated widely in the middle ages.⁵⁹

The placing of these four figures together and their pairing is highly unusual and has no known parallels in England. The choice was partly determined by the inscriptions that flank them. They are the authors of the inscriptions, or in the case of the Psalms and Proverbs those who, in the middle ages, were thought to have written them. The Biblical texts chosen warn against leading a worldly life and the importance of moderate behaviour. All four figures were associated with guidance on how to live a good life. King David as well as being the author of the Psalms (familiar from the daily offices) was a role model of the Christian life for the penitence he showed for his sins. Both Solomon, to whom the Book of Proverbs was attributed, and Seneca were personifications of wisdom. In the middle ages, Seneca was widely admired and quoted, often spuriously, as a moralist and thought to have corresponded with St Paul though this connection is not explicitly made in the pairings. The windows in the Audit Room can be read as an exhortation to put faith before worldliness. Thus, in its hall the guild sought to promote the religious values of late medieval society.⁶⁰

⁵⁶ Rosie Mills has convincingly identified the subject of the missing fourth window as a second pair of Solomon facing Seneca mirroring the double pairing of King David and St Paul, see Mills, 'King Solomon'.

⁵⁷ Hebgin-Barnes, *Medieval Stained Glass of Lincolnshire*, p. 293.

⁵⁸ Mills, 'King Solomon'.

⁵⁹ The Packard Humanities Institute's Classical Latin Texts available at its website (latin.packhum.org) was used to search for three clearly legible words among the fragments, *fulve*, *potestate* and *parabol[is]*.

⁶⁰ Giles, *Archaeology of Social Identity*, p. 78.

The audience, members of the guild of All Saints, who saw them at guild feasts, doubtless included some prominent and successful citizens of Stamford who were preoccupied with the pressures of worldly affairs. Though probably not highly Latinate, they would have recognised at least some of the Biblical quotations, particularly Psalm 111. It has not been possible to link the inscriptions with the copy of the *Myroure of Recluses* (an English translation of the *Speculum Inclusorum*) given to the hospital by John Trus.⁶¹ Although there are several references to King David and some to Solomon in the *Myroure*, none match the inscriptions in the windows which are in Latin and there are no references to either St Paul or Seneca.

It is also likely but not certain that Stokes had some part in the construction of the impressive west tower at Easton that was erected during his long incumbency (1456-95). Very closely modelled on two local towers, those of St John's and St Martin's Stamford, both of which can be dated to the mid fifteenth century, it is in the most up to date perpendicular style.⁶² All three towers share identical principal features: five stages, clasped buttresses, small square openings with quatrefoil tracery on the third stage, two-light windows on the fourth and large four-light belfry windows on the fifth, a band of quatrefoil decoration, an embattled parapet and lofty crocketed pinnacles. It is difficult to ascertain Stokes' precise role in building the tower. Although as rector he was only responsible for the chancel and not the rest of the church, his close association with the construction of a building of such high artistic quality as Browne's Hospital, his residence at Easton and his status as a wealthy and important local cleric suggest some involvement. Other fifteenth-century work at Easton, the waggon roof of the chancel, the stalls (fragments of which survive) and a bell may also be linked to Stokes. The Priest's House at Easton, which has been dated to 1474 x 1499, may have been built by Stokes for a curate. It is unlikely to have been for a chantry priest as the late thirteenth-century chantry at Easton had been dissolved in 1411 and Stokes did not found a permanent chantry there.⁶³

Stokes' piety was entirely conventional and unremarkable except for the preamble of his will which lays bear with unusual starkness the widespread medieval anxiety about death and judgement. In it he agonises about death, acknowledging that through the fall of the first Adam the whole human race is under sentence of death. A sorry creature from damaged stock (*ego de radice viciata propagates homunculus*), fearing 'tricky death running his rapid course wherever not sparing anyone his life with his threats and unexpected blow' (*mors triculenta rapido cursa ubilibet decurrens haud ulli parcens etati seuo minis inopinato*

⁶¹ BL Harley MS 2372.

⁶² RCHME, *An Inventory of the Historical Monuments in the County of Northampton*, 6 vols, London 1975-85, vol. 6, *North Northamptonshire*, pp. 51-55; RCHME, *Stamford*, pp. 15-17, 18-23.

⁶³ *The Priest's House Easton on the Hill, near Stamford, Lincolnshire*, National Trust Guide and Supplement 2006 and 2011.

que ictu deruit), he writes his will for the benefit of his soul.⁶⁴ Despite this, the bulk of his will is prosaic in the thoroughness and detail with which it settled his worldly affairs. His pious bequests were routine and comparatively modest for a cleric of his wealth and status. He bequeathed a vestment to each of his benefices and 20s to their poor parishioners, 13s 4d to each of the four Stamford friaries, 20s to the nuns of St Michael's, Stamford, and 12d to each pauper in Browne's Hospital. Stokes also established a temporary chantry setting aside £100 for two priests, one at Easton and one at Oxford, to pray for his soul and those of William and Margaret Browne. There is nothing to suggest that Stokes had a personal devotion to a particular saint. Rather he seems to have embraced the patron saints of his benefices. Easton, his Stamford parish and Browne's Hospital were dedicated to All Saints.

Although there is little evidence that Stokes was an active scholar at Easton and Stamford, the fruits of his learning are relatively abundant and can be seen in the hospital's statutes, its seal and the subtlety of its glazing scheme. His books have left only one trace, a brief reference to 'myn English books and a politroni' (a chronicle, perhaps a version of Higden's Polychronicon) in his will. Stokes was also a patron of education giving £100 for the 'exhibicioun' of two priests to serve a temporary chantry while the sum lasted. One of them was John Taylor, 'scholar of Oxford' who was to receive his stipend there 'by cause of his Lernyng'.⁶⁵

His skill in Latin ranges from the convoluted style of the preamble of his will to three sets of verses that have been attributed to him.⁶⁶ Two of the sets are on memorial brasses to members of the Browne family in All Saints church Stamford, those of William and Margaret and William's brother John (d. 1475) and his wife Agnes. Written in hexameters with leonine (internal) rhymes that scan well, all three demonstrate a high degree of skill in Latin. The twelve lines of verse on the brass of William and Margaret Browne are of particular interest. Most inscriptions on medieval monuments are short and largely formulaic with a limited range of standard variations.⁶⁷ Longer inscriptions tend to combine appeals for intercession with statements of lineage. When verses are included they tend be eulogies of the deceased's virtues and good works. The verses on William Browne's brass break all these conventions by addressing God directly,

⁶⁴ *In Dei nomine amen. Cum universum genus hominis per primi lapsum mortis sententiam excepiisset quolibet ipsa mors triculenta rapido cursa ubilibet decurrens haud ulli parcens etati seuo minis inopinato que ictu deruit filios Adam hinc est que ego de radice viciata propagates homunculus dum mihi sensus vicens et memoria dum que meus sui compos exstat de his que circumiacent fortune bonis ut anima profuit post corpus extinctum taliter sensum disponendum.* TNA, PROB 11/10, ff. 229v-30r. I am grateful to Robert Tibbott for assistance with the Latin translation.

⁶⁵ TNA, PROB 11/10, ff. 229v-30r.

⁶⁶ These verses have incorrectly been described as 'wretched Latin', a much-repeated judgement by the antiquary Francis Peck, W. Harrod, *The Antiquities of Stamford and St Martin's*, London 1785, p. 105.

⁶⁷ N. Saul, *English Church Monuments in the Middle Ages: History and Representation*, Oxford 2009, pp. 344-65.

not requesting prayers and not naming or referring to the deceased who are only identifiable by their merchant's mark and rebus respectively. The verses are an anguished plea to Almighty God for mercy rather than judgement by one who has sinned greatly.⁶⁸

*Rex regum, dominus dominantum, tu quia solus
Velle tuo suberit omne quod est vel erit.
Intravit terram corpus, sed spiritus ad te
Currere festinat tu deus, accipe me
In te sperantem fili deus et pater alme
Altitonansque Deus spiritus accipe me
Peccavi, mala multa tuli me paenitet huius
Ad te clamantem, tu deus, accipe me
Non intres, domine, indicare, mihi nisi primo
Digneris veniae reddere, quod satis est.
Et quia pro nostris animabus suscipiendis
Rex terrenus eras, tu deus, accipe me*

(King of Kings, Lord of Lords, because Thou art one and only
All that is and will be shall be subject to Thy will
My body entered the earth, but my spirit to Thee
Hastens to run, Thou God – accept me.
In Thee have I trusted, God the Son, kind Father
God the Holy Ghost who thunders from on high – accept me.
I have sinned and done much evil and repent of this.
To Thee O God, I cry – Accept me.
Enter not into judgement O Lord, unless first
Thou deign to give me Thy redeeming grace, which is enough.
And since for the sake of our salvation of our souls
Thou, a king, was on earth, O God – accept me.⁶⁹)

These lines, though they echo Biblical and liturgical phrases, are not a compilation of stock lines from other sources but a personal prayer for mercy. The authors of such ambitious inscriptions tended to be the educated clergy, men like Thomas Stokes, who often wrote them for members of their family as he seems to have.⁷⁰ Although William Browne probably had some Latin education it is doubtful whether he was sufficiently literate to compose such well-crafted verses.⁷¹ The ten-line verse to John and Agnes Browne though less anguished and more conventional also contains a direct appeal to Christ for

⁶⁸ R. Lamp, 'Foot inscriptions on three Lincolnshire brasses', *Transaction of the Monumental Brass Society* [hereafter *TMBs*], vol. 17 (2003), pp. 14-24.

⁶⁹ This translation, based on Lamp, is not intended to scan correctly.

⁷⁰ Saul, *English Church Monuments*, pp. 362-63.

⁷¹ The brass (and therefore the verses) has been dated stylistically to c. 1465, R. Emmerson, 'William Browne's taste in brasses', *TMBs*, vol. 12 (1978), pp. 322-25.

mercy.⁷² The third set of verses, on a brass plate at the foot of the stairs in Browne's Hospital, is written with a similar level of accomplishment. It celebrates a building with many homes (*habacula*) for the poor that will endure and is an adornment for the town, and the builder William Browne, but asks that it should not be regarded as a memorial for him but as a house of prayer.⁷³ Though probably written by Stokes, the plate was not put up until 1497, two years after his death.

To conclude, Thomas Stokes was in many respects a typical and unremarkable member of the higher clergy in that he was a non-resident canon with little further connection with the cathedrals that gave him wealth and status. He was a pluralist, albeit on a small scale, and like many fellow canons birth and patronage secured his advancement. His gentry lineage gave him access to education at Eton and King's College Cambridge and, through the patronage of Thomas Rotherham he was appointed to prebends in Lincoln and York, though unlike many he was not primarily engaged in diocesan or royal administration. Although he lived as a 'gentleman rector' at Easton and Stamford, because of his sister's marriage to William Browne he played an important role in the founding of a notable almshouse. In this and the management of the Stokes family estates he proved himself a capable administrator and man of business. At Browne's Hospital and Easton he was a patron of the arts. The seal he designed for the hospital shows unusual theological sophistication in its iconography which is also probably reflected in the glazing scheme there, both in the Marian imagery of the chapel and the moral exhortation of the Audit Room. His piety, fuelled by a pronounced fear of death, was entirely conventional. The hospital accounts are generous in their tributes to him. The seventeenth-century Donations Board relates that he carried out the trust placed in him with great care to his 'immortal praise' and his protégé, John Taylor (d. 1524), the second warden, describes him as a man of illustrious memory, worthy and right honourable who ruled the hospital laudably.⁷⁴ A more critical assessment would point out his self-important and autocratic management of the hospital. Even so, the life of Thomas Stokes and the range of his activities and sensibilities remind us not to stereotype non-resident canons and imagine them living comfortable and idle lives in agreeable country rectories. Although not present at their cathedrals, many lived useful and pious lives to the benefit of their communities.

⁷² For the text see R. Lamp, 'The Browne brothers, All Saints, Stamford, Lincolnshire', *Pegasus-onlinezeitschrift*, 2010.

⁷³ For the text and dating see Hill and Rogers, *Guild, Hospital and Alderman*, p. 20.

⁷⁴ Rogers, *The Wardens*, p. 322; P.A. Newton, 'William Browne's Hospital at Stamford: a note on the early history and the date of the buildings', *Antiquaries Journal*, vol. 46 (1966), pp. 283-86.