

Transactions
OF THE
Cambridgeshire and
Huntingdonshire
Archæological Society.

(FOUNDED A.D. 1900).

VOLUME I. PART II.

[ISSUED TO SUBSCRIBERS FOR 1902-1903.]

EDITED BY THE REV. C. H. EVELYN WHITE, F.S.A.

Honorary Secretary and Treasurer.

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ST. JOHN'S HOSPITAL, HUNTINGDON.

In early times the term "Hospital" was used to signify a place of shelter or entertainment for travellers and pilgrims. Wayfarers were taken in and provided for by the religious persons in charge of them much as they are to this day by the few monks who inhabit the hospices of the Great St. Bernard or other Alpine passes.

Under different conditions these hospitals, hostels, or hotels (for the words have a family connection) served as inns and places of rest. Spenser says in the "Fairy Queen"—

"They spy'd a goodly castle, placed
Foreby a river in a pleasant dale
Which, chasing for that evening's *hospital*
They thither marched."

Those who could afford it made an offering to the common fund, but for those who could not, the hospital, before the era of workhouses and "casual wards", afforded gratuitously timely shelter and simple food. Expenses were met by the endowment which the founder provided and various were the gifts and legacies by which from time to time that source of income was augmented. As an example of the assistance rendered to the Hospital of which we are speaking, we quote the following:—

"Isabel de Brus, daughter of Earl David (the founder) in her widowhood, to warm the poor and weak, did give ten thousand turfe, yearly, out of the turbary of Cunnington, to dig and take out of the marsh or fen of the said town where they would choose to hold to the hospital and the poor brethren and infirm of that place."

Others granted a yard of land (i.e. from 20 to 30 acres) for the benefit of the foundation.

Thus supported and enriched by friends many of these hospitals became wealthy and were incorporated bodies, consisting of a master, brethren and occasionally other members. To the care of the poor and sick, many added almshouses for the aged and infirm as well as schools for the children. Christ's Hospital, founded by King Edward VI., is a notable instance of a large charitable endowment devoted entirely to the purposes of education.

The Hospital of St. John the Baptist in Huntingdon is an example of these institutions, which appear to have been common in England about the twelfth century, towards the close of which it was probably founded by David, Earl of Huntingdon and Prince of Scotland (the "Sir Kenneth" of Sir Walter Scott's "Talisman"), who was then most likely the possessor of Huntingdon Castle.

Mr. Carruthers, in his *History of Huntingdon* says that the Roll in which the endowment of the Hospital would probably be found is missing from the records of the Exchequer, so that the precise date of the foundation cannot be ascertained. The earliest presentation of a Master to the Hospital which occurs in the Rolls of the diocese of Lincoln (of which Huntingdonshire then formed part) is in the year 1261, and from that date onwards Masters were from time to time appointed by the "community," afterwards "the Bailiffs and Burgesses," subsequently "the Mayor, Aldermen and Burgesses" of the town of Huntingdon. The custom seems to have been that each Master having been nominated as aforesaid, was then presented by the Bishop of Lincoln and inducted by his direction. Not that this mode of procedure was pursued without interruption and dispute. The Crown in the reign of Edward II. and again in that of Henry VIII., laid claim to the nomination of the Mastership, and in 1812 the affairs of the Hospital were

thrown into Chancery. Eventually the Court declared that the office of Master of the Hospital, which had for some time been held by the Mayor for the time being, was incompatible with the character of a member of the Corporation. In consequence of this, Sir John Arundel, Knight, who then held it, resigned, and a Clerk in Holy Orders having been nominated by the Corporation was inducted by the Bishop's mandate to the Archdeacon of Huntingdon, as in former times—the last Master so nominated and inducted was the Rev. John Pycock, M.A., now Rector of Clifton, Beds. St. John's Hospital and Grammar School Foundation, as it is now officially called, is administered by a body of Governors under a Scheme of the Charity Commissioners, and the office of Master has been abolished. There are eight almshouses for poor women (generally widows) connected with the Charity, each has a house and five shillings a week so that the original intention of the founder is still, to a great degree, carried out, though the methods employed have been adapted to modern requirements.

The present Grammar School was probably part, if not the whole, of the chapel of the ancient Hospital, and must have been built soon after the year 1263, when "Master John de Lendsay and John de Weldon, Commissaries of the Bishop of Lincoln, granted to the Hospital the right to have a chapel, chaplain, bell, burying ground and Sacrament." The style is late Norman and much enriched with characteristic ornamental mouldings. The West doorway was found at the restoration to be in excellent preservation, and with the exception of two or three new shafts, is just as it must have been originally though the entrance has been blocked by stonework. On the left is a small window round which runs a zig-zag moulding. Above is a string course of billet moulding forming the base of an arcade of five arches which has partly been restored, the second and fourth being pierced to form windows. The vesica shaped opening and the belfrey which complete the gable are both modern. On the north and south sides

are fine arches, suggesting the existence of aisles, the East end shows a transitional arch of much later date which possibly may have led to a chancel of which no traces now remain. The arch has been filled in with a stone wall in which a window in the early perpendicular style has been inserted to give necessary light to the interior of the building.

Many Grammar Schools date from Queen Elizabeth's reign, when the old religious houses having been destroyed their endowments were diverted to the purposes of education. Then it was that the Norman facade just described was enveloped in a coating of red brick and decorated with a gable of the form then common—the arches and columns on the North and South sides remaining unconcealed to tell of the early history of the fabric. The schoolmaster's house, a picturesque collection of gables, which existed down to about thirty years ago, was built in 1561, and provided quarters for boys who came from a distance and boarded with the head master.

In 1875, Mr. Dion Boucicault, the well-known actor and dramatic author, became interested in the town in consequence of the death of his son, who was killed in a collision on the Great Northern Railway, at Abbott's Ripton, and buried in the cemetery at Huntingdon. It was suggested to him as he desired a permanent memorial, that he should restore the Grammar School, then in a somewhat dilapidated state and becoming rapidly unsuitable for its purpose. This he decided to do, and in the removal of portions of the Elizabethan brickwork the Norman door and arcading above came to light. The base however was found to be so far below the level of the modern street that it became necessary to raise the whole some three or four feet. This involved complete rebuilding and the operation was carried out with the utmost care, each stone being numbered and put in its corresponding position though the whole fabric was placed on a higher foundation. The Elizabethan shell thus disappeared and the Norman Chapel of the Hospital

as far as possible restored to its original beauty. For many years it had been used as the chief Schoolroom and on its benches in their turn had sat Oliver Cromwell and Samuel Pepys, and later many local worthies. But the present age requires better school accommodation than a single room affords; so class rooms of the most approved type have now been erected by the Governors on a more convenient site between the head master's house and the playing field, and it is probable that the old chapel of the Hospital of St. John will in future be used as a Library, Museum and Lecture-room.

F. GERALD VESEY.

THE TRANSACTIONS
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1910

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

PHYSICS DEPARTMENT

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VOLUME I.

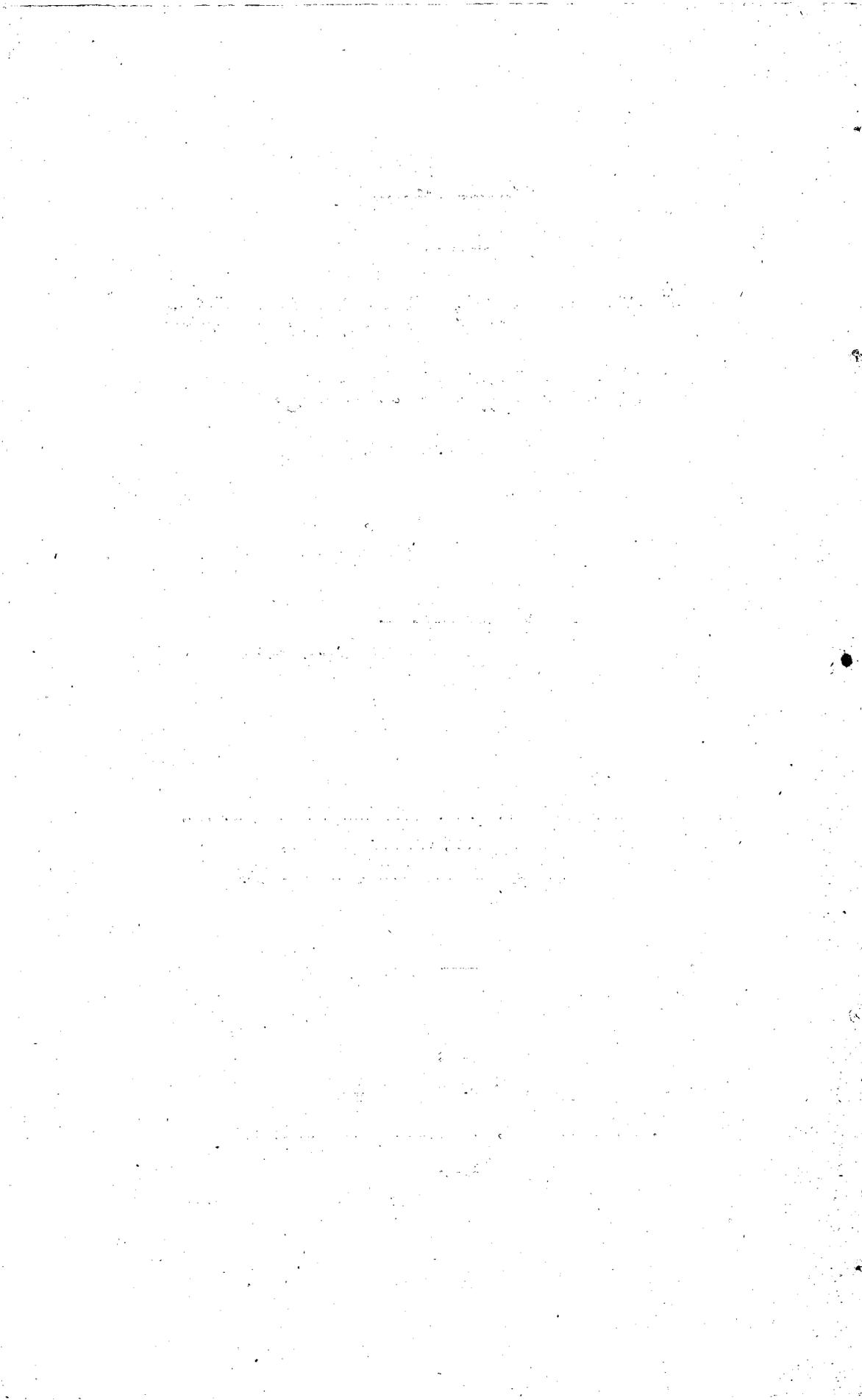
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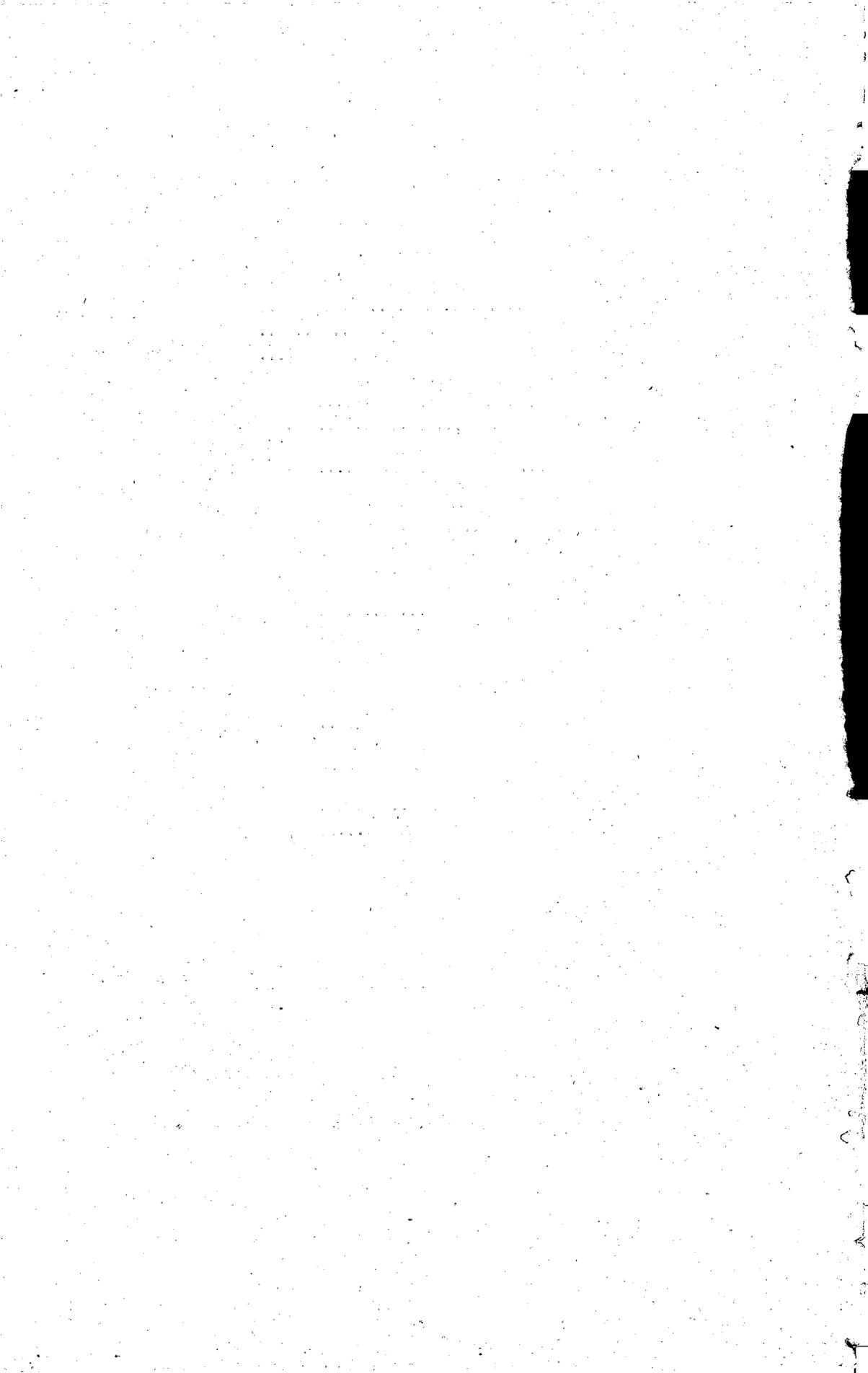
[The *History of the Church and Parish of Rampton, Cambs.*, referred to in this Volume, is unavoidably held over for the first part of Vol. II., which it is hoped will be issued to the 1904 Subscribers within the next six months. It will also contain the accounts of the meetings held in 1902, and papers relating thereto, &c., with numerous illustrations, most of which have been specially prepared and are already printed.—Ed.]

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