

Roper Chantry



On William Roper's instructions, the Roper chantry was constructed in 1525, after the death of his father, John Roper.

It was one of the first brick buildings in Canterbury since the Romans. The original roof of oak panelling still survives.

As well as a fourteenth-century chantry in the Holy Trinity chapel at the north-west corner of the church, a second was established in 1402 by Edmund Roper, Ralph Roper, and John Rolling, paying £80 to King Henry IV. Located in the Roper (south) chancel aisle, the priests celebrated at St Nicholas' altar. In 1520, William Fayrebarne, a chantry priest, sought burial "in the ile before the chapell of saynt Nicolas where I syng masse", bequeathing more than six shillings to the church to secure his wishes. He also gave a printed liturgical book, called a processional, to the church.



The Roper family was wealthy and influential, having a great house on the other side of the street (the gateway still survives). Family members contributed to the parish church, an inventory from 1500 lists clothing, possibly made of silk, for the image of the "roode off pyte". Sir William Roper was elected to the House of Commons at least eight times and became High Sheriff of Kent in 1554-5. He had married Margaret, daughter of Sir Thomas More in 1521.

Margaret had rescued the head of her father following his execution ordered by Henry VIII, in 1535 and this relic of the saint is still in the Roper vault, below the Roper Chantry.

The Roper chantry was unusual because it had two chantry priests rather than one, who were paid an annual salary by the Roper family. John Bollyng, one of these priests, gave a martyrology (official list of saints) and a psalter (book of psalms), while another, Richard Stevyns, bequeathed a Bible to the Roper chantry in 1500.

As well as giving bequests to the chantry, some priests remembered their patron. In 1544 William Braborn gave a silver salt cellar with cover 'in remembrance' to Master William Roper to pray for the chantry priest's soul. Chantries were abolished as part of Henry VIII's Reformation, the last known Roper chantry priests from 1548 were Thomas Freman and Thomas Warde.



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