Finch & Co



A FINE AND DETAILED NORTHERN FRENCH LIMESTONE SCULPTURE OF ST CRISPIN

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LIMESTONE WITH TRACES OF ORIGINAL POLYCHROME
CIRCA 1480 – 1500
SIZE : 79 CM HIGH, 37 CM WIDE, 33 CM DEEP – 31 INS HIGH, 14½ INS WIDE, 13 INS DEEP
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LITERATURE

ST CRISPIN AND HIS BROTHER CRISPINIAN WERE MARTYRS OF ROMAN ORIGIN. THE CENTRE OF THEIR CULT WAS AT SOISSONS IN NORTHERN FRANCE WHERE THEIR RELICS LAY FROM THE 6TH CENTURY. IT WAS POPULARLY BELIEVED THAT THEY WERE OF LOCAL ORIGIN AND FRENCH HAGIOGRAPHERS MADE THEM NOBLE ROMANS AND BROTHERS WHO PREACHED IN GAUL AND EXERCISED THEIR TRADE OF SHOE MAKING SO AS TO AVOID LIVING FROM THE ALMS OF THE FAITHFUL. THEIR SHRINE WAS LATER REBUILT BY ST ELIGIUS.

AN UNLIKELY ENGLISH TRADITION CLAIMED THAT THEY FLED TO FAVERSHAM DURING THE PERSECUTIONS AND PLIED THEIR TRADE AT A HOUSE ON THE SITE OF THE SWAN INN IN PRESTON STREET, WHICH WAS VISITED BY ENGLISH AND FOREIGN PILGRIMS AS LATE AS THE 17TH CENTURY. AN ALTAR IN THEIR HONOUR IS IN FAVERSHAM PARISH CHURCH. THIS TRADITION MAKES MORE INTELLIGIBLE SHAKESPEARE'S MENTION OF THEM IN HENRY V'S FAMOUS SPEECH ON THE EVE OF AGINCOURT (HENRY V, IV, III) FOUGHT ON THEIR FEAST DAY THE 25TH OCTOBER. CRISPIN AND CRISPINIAN ARE THE PATRON SAINTS OF COBBLERS, SHOEMAKERS AND LEATHER WORKERS.

IN THIS EXCEPTIONAL 16TH CENTURY SCULPTURE ST CRISPIN IS SHOWN CUTTING AND SCORING LEATHER AT A BENCH, WEARING THE CLOTHES OF HIS TRADE, HIS FACE TURNED DOWN TO LOOK AT HIS WORK. ANOTHER BUT SLIGHTLY LATER FRENCH 16TH CENTURY SCULPTURE OF BOTH THE BROTHERS IS IN THE EGLISE SAINT PANTALÉON IN TROYES.