

## Savernake Cottage Hospital's very own Who's Who

**Name: John Kingstone Spratt 1858 - 1932**

Aka Jack Spratt; Jack of all trades, poet and Savernake Cottage Hospital supporter

Jack Spratt's Clock – taken from [www.woottonrivers.org.uk](http://www.woottonrivers.org.uk) (which no longer exists), but don't miss this wonderful video; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oOXhvzNxleo>

In 1911, George V was crowned; throughout the country villages looked for ways to mark this special occasion. Reverend Alcock, Wootton's incumbent, proposed the making of a public clock, the Coronation Clock. Estimates were obtained but were considered too high; instead, a counter proposal to hold a public dinner was carried. However, John Kingstone Spratt, born in Wootton Rivers in 1858, pursued the clock idea; he volunteered to make a church clock free of charge if the village would seek and then provide 'a few hundredweight of steel, iron, brass and lead'. As one can imagine, this proposal evoked considerable mirth and some derision. However, the village rose to the challenge - all sorts of fire irons, chaff cutters, gun metal, threshing wheels, perambulators and bedsteads were brought to Jack Spratt's home, a small thatched cottage, formerly the village school, now known as Clock House.

Jack Spratt's inspiring story is that of a farm worker, struggling to use all his talent and skill at a time when an education was difficult to attain. He started his working life on the farm aged 7 ploughing, bird scaring, etc. but the pay (starting at 2 pennies and rising to 2 shillings per day) was hardly a living wage. He went on to Nicholson's brewery in Maidenhead as a clerk, tinkering with watches and clocks in his free time. In 1881, he returned home to Wootton Rivers and started work as a 'clock man', repairing watches, clocks, mowers, pianos, harmoniums, music boxes and picture framing whilst also doing post work in the morning and evenings. He rapidly became known as Jack-of-all-trades. A London firm was approached to supply wheels and pinions - no reply was ever received. Help came from Messrs Whately & Co in neighbouring Pewsey - they offered to supply castings made from templates that were cut from wood by Jack Spratt himself. Mr Neale, the blacksmith, at his forge, shaped the steel and wrought iron parts.

Jack describes his work in his poem, "The Scrap Heap Clockmaker of Wootton Rivers".

The two great wheels, with 120 teeth each, were made from disused separators. A foot lathe was erected at the church; pivots were cut and all teeth, except for the big wheels, were finished here. The wheels and pinions were then fitted and the depth carefully struck off, holes drilled, bushing done with gunmetal or brass. The 'train' of the clock completed, Jack Spratt then adjusted the escapement and pendulum and the clock worked. Once the chiming and striking mechanism was to Jack's satisfaction, the clock was ready. On Coronation Day, Reverend Alcock, in the company of the village and the national press, solemnly dedicated St Andrew's Church Clock. Next day, the newspapers were full of the story, calling it the most rare and curious timepiece in all England. This incredible piece of Wootton Rivers craftsmanship not only had a unique chiming sequence, but was also able to keep accurate time to within 2 seconds a week!

In April 1932, some twenty years later, John Kingstone Spratt, known as "the Wizard of Wootton", 'Scrap-heap Clockmaker' or 'Jack Spratt', died. He's buried in Wootton Rivers churchyard and would be happy to know his clock lives on and is still much admired.

Sadly, the clock fell into disrepair; however, in 1977, villagers Dennis Dickens, Ken Taylor



(lock-keeper) and Peter Lewis (Jack Spratt's great grandson) together with Ramsbury's clock repairer, Mr White, decided it should be returned to working order. Like Jack Spratt, they gathered odd pieces of agricultural machinery and ironmongery and, as his great grandfather had done, Peter Lewis made a new clock face as well as repairing the clock as needed. The cost of these repair works was £150 (in the 1940's, local craftsman, Johnny Lovelock, had repaired the clock for the princely sum of ten shillings). Up until electrification of the clock, Den Dickens continued to wind the chimes daily (they rang four times per hour

with a differing chime each time) and the clock each week. Ron Chandler and Bill Alford, other Wootton residents, also assisted. The clock was restored for the Millennium at a cost of £6000 with the Cumbria Clock Company generously donating a new clock face to replace the corroded one. A good part of this sum went towards an electrical winding mechanism.

We learned that Jack Spratt also made the much loved Collecting Box House that stood in Savernake Hospital hallway for many years. One penny donated would bring the little man out of the door to raise his hat to you whilst the music box would play a tune. Dr Nick & Kate Maurice, have donated it to Friends of Savernake Hospital and it now stands at the entrance to the shop. It was been lovingly restored



by the late Chris Dixon whose wife Marie was Nanny to (amongst many others) Guy Opperman MP, the barrister who was the driving force in the Judicial Review carried out of the closure of services in Savernake Hospital in 2007.

In 1931 it seems that Jack Spratt was admitted to Savernake Cottage Hospital as a patient. So impressed was he with the treatment that he wrote a lengthy poem. A copy of this delightful little rhyme was given to us by Romaine Daw, who is a distant relative of Jack Spratt. It was also through Romaine that we discovered that Jack Spratt made the "Collecting Cottage" that so many people remembered standing in the entrance to the old Cottage Hospital. We do not know when Jack made this – but almost certainly after one of his stays in Savernake, a hospital to which he was very grateful and clearly loved. Patient record searches can be made once they are 100yrs old so maybe we'll find when that stone was removed eventually – a stone which we hear was saved at his request and later used as a pendulum for a clock! We're very grateful to Vonnice and Den Dickens of Wootton Rivers and to Romaine Daw for this wonderful insight into the life of Jack Spratt and look forward to seeing more letters that are still in existence!

### **My Impressions in Savernake Hospital**

My Doctor said "Yours is a hospital case,  
You must go to Savernake, it's a nice place,  
They'll soon put you right and will treat you well too",  
So I went and I found his words came quite true.  
Those doctors are the most clever Gentlemen,  
Dr Haydon soon spotted my trouble and then,  
They opened me to remove what caused the pain,  
Then nicely fitted me together again.  
The Prostate Gland they took away while I slept,  
It had stopped the passage and through that I'd wept.  
Years later they took from me quite a large stone,  
Which had caused me to utter, many a groan.  
They've a wonderful eye, which they placed over me,  
And with that everything inside they could see.  
There's hundreds of things they do I cannot mention,  
Such wonderful things are beyond my comprehension.  
Their excellent skill in the war that they wage,  
Against disease, just points to a miracle age.  
Yes doctors they are the more praiseworthy band  
I think they are some of the best in the land.  
Then there is Matron – the life of the place,  
She is surely running an excellent race,  
Always at her post, morning, noon, or at night,  
To relieve distress and make patients feel bright.  
A ministering Angel, she has won that title  
She knows and she does everything that is vital.  
Her greatest pleasure is to make others well,  
The Noblest Ideal, that I've ever heard tell.  
She lets our friends come to see us every day,  
Her kindness is Law, I just trust and obey,  
The Staff of good nurses, in uniforms white,  
Are models of cheerfulness, homely and bright  
Efficiency, Patience, Kindness and Care,  
Are virtues that if looked for may be found there.  
They'd come and attend to my wants with a smile,  
Tho I was a bit troublesome for a while.  
Still as I got better, the more pleased were they,  
And helped me get out in the sunshine each day.  
And then well enough, in the forest I'd roam,  
Because Savernake Hospital is a lovely home.  
Built upon the hill, mid life, giving fresh air,  
Adjoining the forest mid scenery rare,  
Splendid new wards have sprung up by leaps and bounds,  
The new Nurses Homes, too are built in the grounds.  
Great benefits for me the hospital's staffs done,  
Tender my heartiest thanks to each one.

A thankful patient  
J.K. Spratt July 1931