

‘To Knowe a Gentilman’  
Men and Gentry Culture in Fifteenth-  
Century Yorkshire

Alison James

PhD

Centre for Medieval Studies

University of York

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## **Abstract**

This is a study of gentry culture, specifically the culture of gentry males in fifteenth century Yorkshire. Its aim is to examine what it meant to be a gentleman in this period, looking at how gentry males defined themselves as gentlemen, what was expected of them and what they expected of others. A single county has been chosen to allow for more detailed examination of the evidence than would be possible in a wider study, with this county in particular chosen for the richness and variety of its sources. The range and quality of sources is important, for this is an interdisciplinary study which makes use of a varied collection of evidence in order to gain the fullest picture possible of gentry culture in this period. Through a series of case studies, each focusing on a particular piece, or collection of pieces, of evidence to include chancery documents, wills, letters, art and architecture, I will identify several themes integral to the construction of identity for gentry males. In looking specifically at gentlemen, rather than gentlewomen or the gentry in general, this thesis will consider questions not only of status but also of gender, a combination of factors that have seldom been considered in previous scholarship. It is hoped that this new perspective, combined with the interdisciplinary nature of the study, something that has also seldom been attempted, will prove useful in gaining a greater understanding of what it meant to be a gentleman in late medieval England. By extension, it is intended that this will contribute towards a greater understanding of late medieval society as a whole.

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## Abbreviations

BL	British Library
CFR	Calendar of Fine Rolls
CPR	Calendar of Patent Rolls
EcHR	Economic History Review
EHR	English Historical Review
EETS. OS	Early English Text Society. Old Series
IPM	Inquisitions Post Mortem
NYRCO	North Yorkshire County Record Office
RP	Parliament Rolls
TE	Testamenta Eboracensa
TNA	The National Archives
VCH	Victoria County History
YAA. RS	Yorkshire Archaeological Society. Record Series
YAS. RS	Yorkshire Archaeological Society. Record Series
YML	York Minster Library

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## **‘To Knowe a Gentilman’ Men and Gentry Culture in Fifteenth-Century Yorkshire**

### **Introduction**

In August of 1497 Sir Ralph Eure, deputy steward of Pickering, was riding towards Brompton with a small party of friends. On the way he met a group of servants belonging to the household of Sir Roger Hastings, a man with considerable local influence and a strong sense of his own importance. On several occasions in the recent past the two men had clashed, Eure being quite determined to enforce his authority and Hastings equally determined to flout it. By 1497 the matter had made its way into the law courts, beginning when Hastings claimed that his manor had been attacked by a party of more than four hundred men led by Eure. This was followed by a string of accusations and counter-accusations as each side strove to prove that they were in the right. Hastings accused Eure, as deputy steward, and Sir Ralph Cholmley, as steward of Pickering, of overstepping the bounds of their authority, of unwarranted aggression towards him and of disturbing the king's peace. Eure and Cholmley responded by claiming that Hastings did not pay his taxes, encroached on the forest and was a notorious troublemaker who terrorised the neighbourhood with his large band of followers. The depositions from the court records of the Forest of Pickering vary in their accounts of what occurred on this particular occasion depending on whose side of the argument is being recounted, but the overall story is the same. Hastings' servants were obstructing the roadway and refused to move aside, at which point Eure lost his temper and struck out, declaring 'ye false hurson kaytiffes, I shall lerne you curtesy and to knowe a gentilman'.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Bell Turton (ed.) *The Honor and Forest of Pickering*, North Riding Record Society, New Series, I (1894), pp. 176-7.

Whilst it may seem little more than a casual threat, this statement has significant implications when it comes to understanding what it meant to be a gentleman in this period. It suggests that, in Eure's mind at least, a 'gentilman' was something distinct, a particular type of man who could and should be recognised. For Sir Ralph Eure, on this occasion, the position of gentleman seems to have been closely linked with respect for status. Courtesy, the understanding of hierarchy, precedence and the appropriate behaviour stemming from it, was of importance to late medieval society.<sup>2</sup> Eure's anger was prompted by the failure of inferiors to behave with what he deemed the 'proper' courtesy. As a gentleman he demanded a certain kind of treatment, demands that were enhanced by the inferior status of those he was dealing with. The servants who, by their own account, passed by 'without ony Curtesie or Reverence makyng' failed to recognise his superior status.<sup>3</sup> In doing so they refused to acknowledge him as a gentleman, an insult so serious it warranted an immediate and aggressive response. The incident provides a useful starting point for this thesis because it indicates that, for some men at least, there was a coherent sense of what it meant to belong to this privileged group, a group defined by status and gender. For this one particular gentleman on this one particular occasion, precedence, authority and social status were of special significance. Other gentlemen in different situations may have had different ideas, indeed Eure's own comprehension of what it meant to be a gentleman might have varied in different circumstances. The aim of this study is to try to gain some understanding of what

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<sup>2</sup> Mark Addison Amos, '“For Manners Make Man” Bordieu, De Certeau, and the Common Appropriation of Noble Manners in the *Book of Courtesy*' in Kathleen Ashley and Robert L.A. Clark (eds.) *Medieval Conduct* (Minneapolis, 2001), p. 28.

<sup>3</sup> Turton (ed.) *Honor and Forest of Pickering*, pp. 202-3.

these ideas were, to look at how gentry males defined themselves as gentlemen, what was expected from them and what they expected of others. The question this thesis hopes to address, in short, is this; how did one 'knowe a gentilman' in fifteenth-century Yorkshire?

Over the past few decades, scholars have shown an increasing interest in the late medieval gentry. For a long time grouped with the nobility, and as a consequence often pushed into the background, they are now widely regarded as 'an important and worthy subject for academic research'.<sup>4</sup> In 1981 Nigel Saul produced his study of the gentry of fourteenth-century Gloucester, in which he examined the emergence, development and character of the gentry as a distinct social group.<sup>5</sup> Two years later Michael Bennett examined the gentry of Cheshire for the same period, whilst Susan Wright wrote about the gentry of fifteenth-century Derbyshire.<sup>6</sup> In 1986 Saul turned to the gentry of fourteenth-century Sussex.<sup>7</sup> In the same year a more general collection of essays was published, edited by Michael Jones and looking at the gentry of late medieval Europe.<sup>8</sup> More than one of these short studies examined the English gentleman, the essay by Christine Carpenter serving as a precursor for her monograph on the lesser aristocracy of Warwickshire.<sup>9</sup> Carpenter's study of

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<sup>4</sup> Raluca Radulescu and Alison Truelove, 'Editor's Introduction', in Raluca Radulescu and Alison Truelove (eds.) *Gentry Culture in Late Medieval England* (Manchester, 2005), p. 1.

<sup>5</sup> Nigel Saul, *Knights and Esquires: The Gloucester Gentry in the Fourteenth Century* (Oxford, 1981).

<sup>6</sup> M.J. Bennett, *Community, Class and Careerism. Cheshire and Lancashire Society in the Age of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (Cambridge, 1983); Susan M. Wright, *The Derbyshire Gentry in the Fifteenth Century*, Derbyshire Record Society, 8 (1983).

<sup>7</sup> Nigel Saul, *Scenes From Provincial Life. Knightly Families in Sussex 1280-1400* (Oxford, 1986).

<sup>8</sup> M. Jones, *Gentry and the Lesser Nobility in Late Medieval Europe* (Gloucester, 1986).

<sup>9</sup> D.A.L. Morgan, 'The Individual Style of the English Gentleman' in Jones (ed.) *Gentry and the Lesser Nobility*, pp. 15-35; C. Carpenter, 'The Fifteenth-Century English Gentry and their Estates',

Warwickshire was one of several more county-specific works to appear in the first half of the next decade, alongside Simon Payling's examination of the gentry of fifteenth-century Nottinghamshire and Eric Acheson's consideration of gentle society in fifteenth-century Leicestershire.<sup>10</sup> Following these county-specific studies, the latter half of the 1990s and the early years of the twenty-first century saw a move into more general examinations of the English gentry. Particular attention has been given to the origins of this group by Peter Coss and Maurice Keen.<sup>11</sup> In 2005, an attempt has been made to examine gentry culture, taking the form of a collection of essays edited by Raluca Radulescu and Alison Truelove, covering a wide range of topics including chivalry, education and visual culture.<sup>12</sup>

All these studies acknowledged, and spent some time in attempting to address, the problem of trying to make any clear definition of the terms 'gentlemen' and 'gentry'. These difficulties stem from the fact that, for contemporaries, 'gentleman' had no single, specific meaning and 'gentry', as a class designate, is a modern scholarly construct.<sup>13</sup> To deal with the first of these issues, 'gentlemen' had at least two interpretations. In a narrow sense it could refer to a specific subset of the

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pp. 36-60, *ibid*; Christine Carpenter, *Locality and Polity. A Study of Warwickshire Landed Society, 1401-1499* (Cambridge, 1992).

<sup>10</sup> Simon Payling, *Political Society in Lancastrian England. The Greater Gentry of Nottinghamshire* (Oxford, 1991); Eric Acheson, *A Gentry Community: Leicester in the Fifteenth Century, c. 1422-c. 1485* (Cambridge, 1995).

<sup>11</sup> P.R. Coss, 'The Formation of the English Gentry', *Past and Present*, 147 (1995), pp. 38-64; M. Keen, *Origins of the English Gentry* (Stroud, 2002); P. Coss, *The Origins of the English Gentry* (Cambridge, 2003).

<sup>12</sup> Maurice Keen, 'Chivalry' in Radulescu and Truelove (eds.) *Gentry Culture*, pp. 35-49; Nicholas Orme, 'Education and Recreation', in *ibid.*, pp. 63-83; Thomas Tolley, 'Visual Culture', in *ibid.*, pp. 167-82.

<sup>13</sup> A.L. Brown, *The Governance of Late Medieval England 1272-1461* (Stanford, 1989), p. 148; Coss, 'Formation of the English Gentry', p. 40; Keen, 'Chivalry', p. 38.

lower aristocracy, the rank below knights and esquires. From the thirteenth century, as Peter Coss has argued, there were gradual developments in the ordering of the aristocracy, as a result of which the hierarchy became increasingly defined.<sup>14</sup> The nobility, as the parliamentary peerage, were distinguished and separated from the lesser aristocracy.<sup>15</sup> At the same time the lesser aristocracy began to develop from an ‘undifferentiated group of lesser landowners’ into a more ordered hierarchy.<sup>16</sup> This was a slow process. The titles of knight and esquire were in regular use by the fourteenth century. The term of gentleman appeared rather later, coming gradually into wider use after the first few decades of the fifteenth century.<sup>17</sup> It appears from the people to whom the term was applied that gentlemen in this sense occupied a position between esquires and peasants, although precisely who could be attributed this rank, and in what circumstances, is not clearly defined. The right to call oneself a gentleman was dependent on a wide range of factors, including land, wealth, occupation, familial connections and office-holding.<sup>18</sup> There were no specific rules about who was and who was not a gentleman, something that, according to Philippa Maddern, may well have been deliberate. Certainly, she argues, the ‘breadth, vagueness and flexibility’ of such terms as ‘gentle’ and ‘gentleman’ rendered them ‘particularly valuable’ to contemporaries.<sup>19</sup> Without a list of criteria to be met, gentle

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<sup>14</sup> Coss, ‘Formation of the English Gentry’, p. 51.

<sup>15</sup> K.B. McFarlane, *The Nobility of Later Medieval England* (Oxford, 1973), pp. 6-8.

<sup>16</sup> Saul, *Knights and Esquires*, p. 6. For a detailed discussion of these changes see Saul, *Knights and Esquires*, pp. 6-20.

<sup>17</sup> Acheson, *Gentry Community*, p. 34; Carpenter, *Locality and Polity*, p. 46.

<sup>18</sup> Carpenter, *Locality and Polity*, p. 48; Coss, ‘Formation of the English Gentry’, p. 50.

<sup>19</sup> Philippa Maddern, ‘Gentility’, in Radulescu and Truelove (eds.) *Gentry Culture*, p. 26.

status, and all the advantages that went with it, was available to a much wider group of aspirants.

As Sir Ralph Eure's outburst, with which this introduction began, demonstrates, 'gentleman' could also mean something more inclusive. Eure was a knight; he had not recently, if ever, occupied the rank of gentleman. In 1495 a commission of array recorded him as an esquire, but he did not threaten to teach these men how to know a squire.<sup>20</sup> He appears to be using 'gentilman' in a much more inclusive sense, one which could conceive of knights, esquires and gentlemen as possessing a common identity. As Maddern points out, this usage of 'gentleman' can be traced back at least to the 1420s.<sup>21</sup> Clearly, the concept of a lesser aristocracy characterised by the shared cultural values of gentility was familiar to contemporaries. 'Gentlemen' in the fifteenth century could include the entire range of what we might now think of as the 'gentry', and unless I specify the rank of gentleman, it is this inclusive meaning of 'gentlemen' that is adopted throughout this thesis.

However, whilst 'gentry' may be, as G.E. Mingay has argued, 'an indispensable term', it is one we must be careful in applying.<sup>22</sup> 'Gentry' is a modern category of analysis, the word itself first coming into use in the early-modern period.<sup>23</sup> It implies a sense of unity, an existence of the lesser aristocracy as a

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<sup>20</sup> CPR Henry VII, p. 52.

<sup>21</sup> Maddern, 'Gentility', pp. 18-9.

<sup>22</sup> G.E. Mingay, *The Gentry. The Rise and Fall of a Ruling Class* (London and New York, 1976), p. 1.

<sup>23</sup> Felicity Heal and Clive Holmes, *The Gentry in England and Wales, 1500-1700* (Houndmills, 1994), p. 15.

homogenous social unit with a shared ideology, about which scholars have yet to agree. Peter Coss sees evidence of a ‘recognizable’ gentry by the mid-fourteenth century, suggesting that their existence as a unified group can be traced back to this point, but not everyone agrees with this assessment.<sup>24</sup> Susan Wright points to ‘an enormous gulf, economic, political and social’ between the knights and esquires on one hand and gentlemen on the other.<sup>25</sup> A similar ‘economic chasm’ is described by Eric Acheson and was enough for him to exclude gentlemen from his assessment of the gentry altogether.<sup>26</sup> Whilst Simon Payling did not recognise such a significant difference between the upper and lower gentry, he has argued that, even in the fifteenth century some members of the gentry had more in common than others. Payling suggests that the long established ‘ancient aristocracy’ of a region had more in common than new arrivals.<sup>27</sup> It is by no means certain that ‘the gentry’ formed an undivided social unit in this period.

The existence of clear boundaries between the gentry and those above and below them has also been questioned.<sup>28</sup> Radulescu and Truelove described the gentry as ‘an amorphous, ever-fluctuating group of individuals’, highly permeable, particularly at their lowest level.<sup>29</sup> As a result, and as has been argued by Acheson, gentlemen, as the lowest rank of the gentry, may have had more in common with

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<sup>24</sup> Coss, ‘Formation of the English Gentry’, p. 51.

<sup>25</sup> Wright, *Derbyshire Gentry*, p. 6.

<sup>26</sup> Acheson, *Gentry Community*, p. 43.

<sup>27</sup> Payling, *Political Society*, pp. 19-20.

<sup>28</sup> For a summation of the difficulties see Coss, ‘Formation of the English Gentry’, p. 42.

<sup>29</sup> Radulescu and Truelove, ‘Editors’ Introduction’, p. 1.



peasants than with esquires, knights or noblemen, at least in economic terms.<sup>30</sup> The idea that distinction may have been difficult at this level has also been suggested by Jeremy Goldberg. Unlike Acheson, however, Goldberg points to more important factors than wealth in determining who belonged to the gentry, namely ‘cultural values and ideology’.<sup>31</sup> The possibility that there was a specifically gentry culture has been investigated further by the collection of essays edited by Radulescu and Truelove.<sup>32</sup> As Nicholas Orme, one of the contributors to this volume, points out, whilst the gentry may have done some of the same things as other members of society, they ‘did not necessarily do things in the same way’.<sup>33</sup> A specifically aristocratic culture and ideology would have served to separate the gentry from peasants and merchant classes even without obvious distinctions of wealth. It may not have made divisions between gentry and nobility quite so clear-cut, as Maurice Keen has indicated, since some aspects of noble and gentle culture were shared. Keen points to chivalry in particular as something that ‘was so largely derivative’ of the nobility that it does not support a theory of entirely distinctive identities.<sup>34</sup> This shared interest has also been highlighted by Christine Carpenter, Richard Keauper and Nigel Saul.<sup>35</sup> J.R. Lander, Anthony Pollard, and Chris Given-Wilson have found other similarities in the attitude of the aristocracy as a whole towards land-holding

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<sup>30</sup> Acheson, *Gentry Community*, p. 43.

<sup>31</sup> P.J.P. Goldberg, *Medieval England. A Social History 1250-1530* (London, 2004), pp. 114-5.

<sup>32</sup> Radulescu and Truelove, ‘Editors’ Introduction’, p. 14.

<sup>33</sup> Orme, ‘Education’, p. 81.

<sup>34</sup> Keen, ‘Chivalry’, pp. 46-7.

<sup>35</sup> Carpenter, *Locality and Polity*, p. 49; Richard Keauper, *Chivalry and Violence in Medieval Europe* (Oxford, 1999), p. 111; Nigel Saul, ‘Chivalry and Art: The Camoys Family and the Wall Paintings in Trotton Church’ in Peter Coss and Christopher Tyerman (eds.) *Soldiers, Nobles and Gentlemen. Essays in Honour of Maurice Keen* (Woodbridge, 2009), p. 97.

and lineage.<sup>36</sup> Clearly there are points of confluence between the culture and interests of the nobility and the gentry. The question remains as to whether there are enough to justify Kate Mertes' argument that there was too much similarity in the culture and ideology of the upper and lesser aristocracy to make any meaningful division between the gentry and the nobility.<sup>37</sup>

This thesis seeks to further investigate the nature of the gentry's cultural identity. More specifically it aims to identify features in the cultural identity of gentry males. As such, it is necessary to consider not only issues of status, but also those of gender. One of the most important factors that influenced the way in which gentry identity was expressed was the desire to project an image of masculinity. Yet gentlemen have, thus far, seldom been examined as men and never in any great detail. One of the reasons for this is the relatively recent development of masculinity studies, still sometimes viewed with hostility by scholars who deem further study of the male elite unnecessary.<sup>38</sup> Feminist historian Natalie Zemon Davis as early as the 1970s recognised the need to study men in order to understand the history of women, but more than twenty years later it was still considered prudent to add a defensive preface to the volume of essays edited by Claire Lees when attempting to do just that.<sup>39</sup> The majority of historical writing has been, indeed often still is, about men. It

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<sup>36</sup> J.R. Lander, *Crown and Nobility 1450-1509* (London, 1976), p. 15; A.J. Pollard, 'The Richmondshire Community of the Gentry During the Wars of the Roses' in C. Ross (ed.) *Patronage, Pedigree and Power in Later Medieval England* (Gloucester, 1979), p. 43; C. Given-Wilson, *The English Nobility in the Late Middle Ages* (London, 1996), p. 72.

<sup>37</sup> Kate Mertes, 'Aristocracy' in Rosemary Horrox (ed.) *Fifteenth Century Attitudes. Perceptions of Society in Late Medieval England* (Cambridge, 1994), p. 44

<sup>38</sup> Cf. D.M. Hadley, 'Introduction: Medieval Masculinities' in D.M. Hadley (ed.) *Masculinity in Medieval Europe* (Harlow, 1999), pp. 2-3.

<sup>39</sup> Davis is quoted by Fenster from a paper given in 1975, stating 'We should not be working on the subjected sex any more than a historian of class should focus exclusively on peasants':- Thelma

has not however been about masculinity. This is an important distinction.<sup>40</sup> Men are not and never have been a single, homogenous group by which all women are oppressed equally. Masculinity is not a natural constant, dictated solely by biological sex. Masculinity, as category of gender is, in Derek Neal's words, 'something made'.<sup>41</sup> It is a social construct, subject to variations of time and place, fluid, constantly evolving and subject to challenge.<sup>42</sup> At any point there may be a number of constructions of masculinity co-existing and coinciding. As such, masculinity may be historicised.<sup>43</sup>

As the earliest works on medieval masculinity acknowledged, being a man could mean something different from one group of males to another. This, in turn, had an effect on the way that they expressed their identity. The first of these works, a collection of essays edited by Claire Lees, was published in 1994, followed five years later by two further collections edited by Dawn Hadley and Jacqueline Murray respectively.<sup>44</sup> In all three a deliberate effort was made to cover a wide geographical and chronological framework. The essays in Lees' collection covered such diverse themes as what it meant to be male in the Middle Ages, the responsibilities of

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Fenster, 'Preface: Why Men?' in C.A. Lees (ed.) *Medieval Masculinities. Regarding Men in the Middle Ages* (Minneapolis and London, 1994), pp. ix-xiii.

<sup>40</sup> H. Brod, 'The Case for Men's Studies' in H. Brod (ed.) *The Making of Masculinities. The New Men's Studies* (Boston, 1987), p. 40.

<sup>41</sup> Derek Neal, 'Masculine Identity in Late Medieval English Society and Culture' in Nancy Partner (ed.) *Writing Medieval History* (London and New York, 2005), p. 175.

<sup>42</sup> Hadley, 'Introduction', pp. 3-4; Todd W. Reeser, *Masculinities in Theory* (Chichester, 2010), p. 2-3.

<sup>43</sup> Joan W. Scott, 'Gender. A Useful Category of Analysis', *American Historical Review*, 91, 5 (1986), pp. 1067-8.

<sup>44</sup> Lees (ed.) *Medieval Masculinities*; Hadley (ed.) *Masculinity in Medieval Europe*; J. Murray (ed.) *Conflicted Identities and Multiple Masculinities in the Medieval West* (New York and London, 1999).

matrimony in medieval Venice, and the representation of non-Christian males in the Castilian epic.<sup>45</sup> In Hadley's collection individual essays stretched from the gender significance of Anglo-Saxon burial rights, effeminacy and Byzantine eunuchs, and ideas of masculinity as presented through fourteenth-century literature.<sup>46</sup> Finally, Murray's volume covered topics that included the attitudes of religious males towards sexual desire, the formation of a masculinity based on university education, and civic masculinity in late medieval London.<sup>47</sup> The diverse nature of these collections of essays succeeds in highlighting the fact that masculine identity was dependant on factors such as class, ethnicity, religion, and age. Manhood and masculinity, as Janet Nelson argues, could be presented 'in radically different, indeed contradictory forms'.<sup>48</sup>

Some characteristics of masculinity reoccur with a frequency that suggests they were common to men of diverse social groups. Vern Bullough characterised the main features of medieval masculinity as 'impregnating women, protecting dependants, and serving as provider to one's family', characteristics that are

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<sup>45</sup> Vern L. Bullough, 'On Being Male in the Middle Ages', pp. 31-45; S. Mosher Stuard, 'Burdens of Matrimony. Husbanding and Gender in Medieval Italy', pp. 61-71; L. Mirrer, 'Representing "Other" Men. Muslims, Jews, and Masculine Ideas in Medieval Castilian Epic and Ballad', pp. 169-86, all Lees (ed.) *Medieval Masculinities*.

<sup>46</sup> D.M. Hadley and J.M. Moore, '“Death Makes the Man”? Burial Right and the Construction of Masculinity in the Early Middle Ages', pp. 21-38; S.F. Tougher, 'Images of Effeminate Men: The Case of Byzantine Eunuchs', pp. 89-100; M.J. Ailes, 'The Medieval Male Couple and the Language of Homosociality', pp. 214-237, all Hadley (ed.) *Masculinity in Medieval Europe*.

<sup>47</sup> J. Murray, 'Mystical Castration. Some Reflections on Peter Abelard, Hugh of Lincoln and Sexual Control', pp. 73-91; R.M. Karras, 'Separating the Men from the Goats. Masculinity, Civilization and Identity Formation in the Medieval University', pp. 189-213; S. McSheffrey, 'Men and Masculinity in Late Medieval London Civic Culture. Governance, Patriarchy and Reputation', pp. 243-78, all Murray (ed.) *Conflicted Identities*.

<sup>48</sup> Janet Nelson, 'Monks, Secular Men and Masculinity, c. 800', in Hadley (ed.) *Masculinity in Medieval Europe*, p. 131.

identified in several essays and which we might therefore expect to find as features of gentry masculinity.<sup>49</sup> Impregnating women as an aspect of heterosexual behaviour, for example, was highlighted by Michael Bennett as an important part of military masculinity in Anglo-Norman England, whilst Jo Ann McNamara argued that ‘engaging in sex, if only in the sense of boasting to other men and joining with them in common celebration of the subordination of women’ was necessary to the construction of masculinity in general.<sup>50</sup> For some groups of men, as Shaun Tougher has demonstrated in reference to Byzantine eunuchs, the failure to perform in this respect could be seen as failure as a man.<sup>51</sup> Even men in holy orders, forbidden from engaging in sex, could still be affected by the perception that the desire to have sex was a particularly masculine characteristic. As Robert Swanson has argued, these men were saved from being rendered unmanly by representing the absence of sex as a deliberate and difficult choice, the triumph of masculine mind over feminine body.<sup>52</sup> In this case the proof of masculinity lay in the ability to resist man’s ‘natural’ inclination towards sexual activity, to the extent that, in Jo Ann McNamara’s words, ‘temptation came to anchor masculine chastity’.<sup>53</sup> Even so, as Patricia Cullum argues, this idea was not fully absorbed by clerics themselves, some of whom risked punishment in order to prove that they were ‘real men’ through fornication and

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<sup>49</sup> Bullough, ‘On Being Male’, p. 34.

<sup>50</sup> J.A. McNamara, ‘The Herrenfrage. The Restructuring of the Gender System, 1050-1150’, in Lees (ed.) *Medieval Masculinities*, p. 8; M. Bennett, ‘Military Masculinity in England and Northern France c. 1050-1225’, in Hadley (ed.) *Masculinity in Medieval Europe*, pp. 71-88.

<sup>51</sup> Tougher, ‘Images of Effeminate Men’, p. 100.

<sup>52</sup> R.N. Swanson, ‘Angels Incarnate: Clergy and Masculinity from Gregorian Reform to Reformation’, in Hadley (ed.) *Masculinity in Medieval Europe*, pp. 160-77.

<sup>53</sup> J.A. McNamara, ‘An Unresolved Syllogism. The Search for a Christian Gender System’, in Murray (ed.) *Conflicted Identities*, p. 9.

fighting.<sup>54</sup> In spite of drives by the Church to make abstinence a quality of masculinity, the absence of sex could still serve to render men unmasculine.

The importance of authority and control over others has been argued as another feature common to a wide variety of masculinities. McNamara suggests that control over females in particular was so important that ‘men without women... came dangerously close to traditional visions of femininity’.<sup>55</sup> Control over women has also been seen as important in such diverse settings as late medieval English towns, medieval Germany and the city states of medieval Italy.<sup>56</sup> The focus in all cases is on the control over women’s sexuality, seen as a threat to male chastity and a threat to masculine honour.<sup>57</sup> There is less indication that control over the sexuality of other men had equal importance. Jeremy Goldberg’s study of craft masters and their households in later medieval towns found that control over the sexuality of dependants was ‘central to the authority of the master’ within his own home, but the greatest concern seems to have been to maintain the chastity of female household members.<sup>58</sup> Susan Mosher Stuard, in her discussion of husbanding in medieval Italy, sees control over wives as particularly important, something that ‘might come to

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<sup>54</sup> P.H. Cullum, ‘Clergy, Masculinity and Transgression in Late Medieval England’, in Hadley (ed.) *Masculinity in Medieval Europe*, pp. 195-6.

<sup>55</sup> McNamara, ‘The Herrenfrage’, p. 8.

<sup>56</sup> P.J.P Goldberg, ‘Masters and Men in Later Medieval England’, in Hadley (ed.) *Masculinity in Medieval Europe*, pp. 56-70; M. Cinca, ‘Women and Hummingbirds are Easy to Tame: Aristocratic Masculinity and the Early German Love Lyric’, in Hadley (ed.) *Masculinity in Medieval Europe*, pp. 199-213; Mosher Stuard, ‘Burdens of Matrimony’, pp. 61-71.

<sup>57</sup> C.R. Kinney, ‘The (Dis)Embodied Hero and the Signs of Manhood in Sir Gawain and the Green Knight’, in Lees (ed.) *Medieval Masculinities*, pp. 47-57; McNamara, ‘An Unresolved Syllogism’, pp. 1-24.

<sup>58</sup> Goldberg, ‘Masters and Men’, pp. 63, 67.

outweigh all other considerations when a man was judged by his society'.<sup>59</sup> As husbands medieval men were often also fathers, another area where control and authority have been seen as crucial. William Aird's essay on the relationship between William the Conqueror and his eldest son argues that medieval fathers needed to keep control over their children even into adulthood. Tension was caused because sons, particularly heirs, could not occupy their full adult role whilst fathers continued to occupy theirs.<sup>60</sup>

Aird also highlights the importance of autonomy in this period; high-status males needed to be able to direct their own lives and control their own resources, something that William Rufus was unable to do whilst his father continued to hold a tight rein.<sup>61</sup> With autonomy came responsibility for one's own actions. Real men were expected to be able to control themselves, as is illustrated by Conrad Leyser, who sees self-control as an important feature of both lay and religious masculine identity.<sup>62</sup> Self-control also features prominently in Shannon McSheffery's assessment of urban masculinity in late medieval London, where a man's good conduct was regarded as an indication that he was a 'real man'.<sup>63</sup> Both these essays refer largely to sexual impulses, although this is not the only area where 'real' men were expected to control themselves. Andrew Taylor discusses how men of the military classes were expected to show no fear in the face of danger, not necessarily

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<sup>59</sup> Mosher Stuard, 'Burdens of Matrimony', p. 69.

<sup>60</sup> W.M. Aird, 'Frustrated Masculinity: The Relationship between William the Conqueror and his Eldest Son', in Hadley (ed.) *Masculinity in Medieval Europe*, pp. 39-55.

<sup>61</sup> Aird, 'Frustrated Masculinity', pp. 46-50.

<sup>62</sup> C. Leyser, 'Masculinity in Flux: Nocturnal Emmissions and the limits of Celibacy in the Early Middle Ages', in Hadley (ed.) *Masculinity in Medieval Europe*, p. 120.

<sup>63</sup> McSheffrey, 'Men and Masculinity', p. 258.

because they were unafraid but because this was what was required of them as men.<sup>64</sup> Only Louise Mirrer, examining the Castilian aristocracy, really advocates the idea of uncontrolled impulse as a feature of medieval masculinity. Mirrer sees physical aggression as an important indicator of manliness, a development that she suggests may have been encouraged by a long history of warfare in the region, combined with the influence of Muslim concepts of masculinity.<sup>65</sup>

Several of the essays in these collected volumes highlight themes of masculinity that may have some bearing on the way in which gentlemen expressed their identity. Two more recent volumes, focusing on masculinity and holiness, have a less obviously direct bearing, although it is important to remember that members of the clergy could also be gentlemen, as some were members of gentle families. The conclusions reached by these volumes, the first published in 2004 and edited by P.H. Cullum and Katherine Lewis, the second published more recently and edited by Jennifer Thibodeaux, are similar to those reached by earlier essays on masculinity and holiness.<sup>66</sup> A recurring theme is the difficulties facing men who wished to be seen as masculine whilst barred from two of the most obvious means of expressing masculinity, viz. sex and violence.<sup>67</sup> The absence of two seemingly fundamental aspects of masculinity could be construed as positives if non-performance could be

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<sup>64</sup> A. Taylor, 'Chivalric Conversation and the Denial of Male Fear', in Murray (ed.) *Conflicted Identities*, pp. 160-88.

<sup>65</sup> Mirrer, 'Representing "Other" Men', pp. 169-86.

<sup>66</sup> P.H. Cullum and K.J. Lewis (eds.) *Holiness and Masculinity in the Middle Ages* (Cardiff, 2004); Jennifer Thibodeaux (ed.) *Negotiating Clerical Identities. Priests, Monks and Masculinity in the Middle Ages* (London and New York, 2010).

<sup>67</sup> In particular J. Murray, 'Masculinizing Religious Life : Sexual Prowess, the Battle for Chastity and Monastic Identity', in Cullum and Lewis (eds.) *Holiness and Masculinity* , pp. 24-42; C. Diskant Muir, 'Bride or Bridegroom? Masculine Identity in Mystic Marriages', in Cullum and Lewis (eds.) *Holiness and Masculinity*, pp. 58-78.



represented as an act of will rather than a lack of ability.<sup>68</sup> Religious men were able to create for themselves an alternative form of masculinity, in which, as Jacqueline Murray argues, ‘the battle for chastity’ was central.<sup>69</sup> Differing circumstances resulted not in a sense of inferiority or unmanliness, but rather in a different construction of what it meant to be a man. As E. Pettit put it, spiritual life in the cloister could represent ‘an alternative, yet equally authoritative form of masculinity’.<sup>70</sup>

To date there have been two general monographs on medieval masculinities that have particular relevance to a study of gentry culture and identity. The first was produced by Ruth Karras in 2003, looking at the development of masculinity through the education and socialization of adolescent boys in the aristocracy, the universities and in towns.<sup>71</sup> For the aristocracy, Karras places considerable emphasis on chivalry and the martial image, seeing physical aggression as a key feature of what it meant to be a man of the knightly class. She argues, in fact, that violence ‘was the fundamental measure of a man’.<sup>72</sup> She does not suggest that it was the only feature, also acknowledging the importance of birth, honour and gentle conduct, but there can be no doubting the significance that she attributes to it.<sup>73</sup> The idea that the use of

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<sup>68</sup>E. Pettit, ‘Holiness and Masculinity in Aldheim’s “Opus Geminatum De Virginitate”’, in Cullum and Lewis (eds.) *Holiness and Masculinity*, pp. 8-23; Murray, ‘Masculinizing Religious Life’, pp. 24-42.

<sup>69</sup> Murray, ‘Masculinizing Religious Life’, p. 27.

<sup>70</sup> Pettit, ‘Holiness and Masculinity’, p. 18.

<sup>71</sup> Ruth Mazo Karras, *From Boys to Men. Formations of Masculinity in Late Medieval Europe* (Philadelphia, 2003).

<sup>72</sup> Karras, *Boys to Men*, p. 21.

<sup>73</sup> Karras, *Boys to Men*, pp. 35-7, 60-5.

violence was an important characteristic of masculinity for late medieval aristocrats is shared by others.<sup>74</sup> Garthine Walker, looking at crime and gender in early modern England believes that ‘violence and masculinity were connected’, a similar conclusion to that reached by Trevor Dean in respect of the medieval period.<sup>75</sup> Discussing aristocratic attitudes towards crime, he goes so far as to suggest that ‘the dominant and enduring ideal of masculine conduct was violent confrontation’.<sup>76</sup> Christopher Fletcher, whilst he does not suggest that violence was imperative, argues for ‘the centrality of physical energy, strength and constancy’ in medieval concepts of ‘manhood’, ideas that are all closely tied to the ideal of the fighting man.<sup>77</sup> Whilst Karras’ views are shared by other scholars, there is some question as to how applicable her findings are to the aristocracy as a whole. Her study is somewhat skewed, for whilst it is ostensibly about aristocratic youths, the focus is in reality much narrower, looking at what she terms ‘the military arm of the aristocracy,...those who actually fought in tournament or in battle, or imagined themselves doing so’.<sup>78</sup> It is hardly surprising to find that those who thought of themselves as fighting men should have attributed particular significance to violence as part of their identity. That the evidence used is primarily related to chivalric literature, romance, didactic work and the occasional biography, may also explain the martial slant that Karras presents. Whilst she acknowledges that many knights’ lives ‘bore little relation’ to the ideals expressed within these works, she does not

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<sup>74</sup> Kaeuper, *Chivalry and Violence*, p. 2.

<sup>75</sup> Garthine Walker, *Crime, Gender and Social Order in Early Modern England* (Cambridge, 2003), p. 33.

<sup>76</sup> Trevor Dean, *Crime in Medieval Europe* (Harlow, 2001), p. 23.

<sup>77</sup> Christopher Fletcher, ‘Manhood and Politics in the Reign of Richard II’, *Past and Present*, 189 (2005), p. 21.

<sup>78</sup> Karras, *Boys to Men*, p. 23.

venture far from this source material.<sup>79</sup> The possibility that there may have been other forms of aristocratic masculinity, better suited perhaps to those who did not fight, is not explored.

The second and more recent monograph is by Derek Neal, entitled *The Masculine Self in Late Medieval England*. This work looks at a different range of the social spectrum, examining ideas of masculinity among what Neal understands as the middling sort of man in fourteenth- and fifteenth-century England.<sup>80</sup> Here the lesser gentry are grouped with townspeople and better-off peasants, an unusual approach in itself when few if any studies have attempted to place these groups together.<sup>81</sup> Masculinity for the groups under scrutiny is seen as a co-operative rather than a competitive entity, something that ‘enabled a man to maintain his place among his peers without encroaching on, or endangering, theirs’.<sup>82</sup> This idea is not original to Neal. Kim Phillips, in an article on sumptuary legislation, argues for this same kind of complicit masculinity, an argument that was first put forward by R.W. Connell.<sup>83</sup> Phillips argues that being a man in medieval England meant ‘asserting one’s positive identity within a masculine hierarchy’, including the acknowledgement that some men were of higher status.<sup>84</sup> For Neal, unmaleness is equated with behaviours that

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<sup>79</sup> Karras, *Boys to Men*, p. 22

<sup>80</sup> Derek Neal, *The Masculine Self in Late Medieval England* (Chicago, 2008).

<sup>81</sup> Studies of the gentry will occasionally group the lesser gentry with the lower orders, for example see Acheson, *Gentry Community*, pp. 43-4. I am not aware of any other study of masculinity that has done so.

<sup>82</sup> Neal, *Masculine Self*, p. 7.

<sup>83</sup> R. W. Connell, *Masculinities* (Cambridge, 1995), p. 79.

<sup>84</sup> K.M. Phillips, ‘Masculinities and the Medieval English Sumptuary Laws’, *Gender & History*, 19, 1 (2007), p. 24.

destabilise relationships between men - dishonesty, imprudence and a lack of self-control.<sup>85</sup> He does not attribute the same importance to the ability to use violence as Karras, indeed any uncontrolled impulse, including violence and sex, is for Neal the antithesis of what it meant to be a man.<sup>86</sup> He also suggests that the lesser sort of landowner may have had more in common with non-aristocratic men of similar wealth than they did with men of their own social group, although this impression may be the effect of Neal's methodology. By putting such different groups together he makes it a difficult task to distinguish between what may be differing forms of masculinity.

The studies by Karras and Neal, both encompassing the gentry, present quite contradictory impressions of how the desire to demonstrate masculinity could affect the way in which gentlemen expressed their identity. Whilst both make interesting points, there are clear gaps in their arguments. If, as Karras argues, martial prowess was the sole measure of a knight, then we must ask how those who did not fight were perceived. Were non-combatant gentlemen considered less manly than those who fought? Or was fighting less important than Karras believes? Neal's lack of consideration of the martial element of gentry identity is equally problematic. Martial symbolism featured large when gentlemen chose to represent themselves. It is one of the most obvious places where the expression of status and masculinity coincided. Status was heavily bound-up in martial imagery, even for those who had little or no experience of combat, as Rachael Dressler has argued in relation to the preference of the aristocracy for representing themselves as knights in armour on

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<sup>85</sup> Neal, *Masculine Self*, pp. 40-2, 63, 119.

<sup>86</sup> Neal, *Masculine Self*, p. 119.

their tombs.<sup>87</sup> A similar point has been made by Nigel Saul, who suggests that, by the fifteenth century, this kind of martial imagery was associated more ‘with lordship, an institution’ than ‘knighthood, a profession’.<sup>88</sup> The significance of the placement of tombs as marks of status has also been examined. In 1989 Pamela Graves explained how the interior of the parish church could be utilised in the construction of social identities, allowing for the ‘presencing’ of local elite through the placement of tombs and benefaction towards the church.<sup>89</sup> Expensive displays highlighted the wealth and importance of the donor, something which has also been noted by Richard Marks. Possessions and commissions could be used to assert status, even in a devotional setting, where, Marks suggests, display ‘might be motivated as much by the competition and material betterment as by the desire for personal salvation’.<sup>90</sup>

The role played by conspicuous display as an indicator of status has also been noted elsewhere. In reference to secular buildings, Phillip Dixon and Beryl Lott have argued that the late medieval castle-type structure was ‘a shell for the overt symbolism of power’, whilst in more recent years scholars such as Nicholas Cooper and John Goodall have pointed to the social, hierarchical significance of architectural features such as hall and battlements.<sup>91</sup> The architecture of war, according to

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<sup>87</sup> R. Dressler, ‘Steel Corpse. Imagining the Knight in Death’ in Murray (ed.) *Conflicted Identities*, pp. 135, 148.

<sup>88</sup> Nigel Saul, *English Church Monuments in the Middle Ages* (Oxford, 2009), p. 235.

<sup>89</sup> C. Pamela Graves, ‘Social Space in the English Medieval Parish Church’, *Economy and Society*, 18, 3 (1989), pp. 297-322.

<sup>90</sup> Richard Marks, ‘An Age of Consumption: Art for England c.1400-1547’ in Richard Marks and Paul Williamson (eds.) *Gothic Art for England. 1400-1547* (London, 2003), p.21.

<sup>91</sup> Phillip Dixon and Beryl Lott, ‘The Courtyard and the Tower: Contexts and Symbols in the Development of Late Medieval Great Houses’, *Journal of the British Archaeological Association*, 146

Goodall, was ‘clearly understood to convey status.’<sup>92</sup> That it might equally be used to *confer* status has been argued by Matthew Johnson, who suggests that castles were ‘in part constitutive, not reflective of social status’.<sup>93</sup> Charles Coulson has also argued for an association between martial imagery and status in aristocratic houses, albeit for a slightly earlier period, where fortification, he suggests, was, like the right to bear arms, an appurtenance of rank.<sup>94</sup> He contends that this use of martial imagery was not limited to the aristocracy, but shared by those who aspired to join their number.<sup>95</sup> A large house and a sizeable household could be used to demonstrate a man’s importance. Lifestyle, dress, leisure activities and possessions have been viewed as indicators of status.<sup>96</sup> Eamon Duffy, in his extensive and long-ranging study of *horae*, suggests that books of hours may have been particularly significant in this regard.<sup>97</sup> As luxury items designed, unlike most books, to be used in a public setting, these were ‘books for anyone who mattered, or anyone who aspired to matter’.<sup>98</sup>

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(1993), p. 99; Nicholas Cooper, ‘The Gentry House in the Age of Transition’ in David Gaimster and Paul Stamper (eds.) *The Age of Transition. The Archaeology of English Culture 1400-1600* (Exeter, 1997), p. 116; John A.A. Goodall, ‘The Architecture of War’ in Marks and Williamson (eds.) *Gothic Art for England*, p. 188.

<sup>92</sup> Goodall, ‘Architecture of War’, p. 187; John A. Goodall, *The English Castle 1066-1650* (New Haven and London).

<sup>93</sup> Matthew Johnson, *Behind the Castle Gate. From Medieval to Renaissance* (London and New York, 2002), p. 13.

<sup>94</sup> Charles L. H. Coulson, *Castles in Medieval Society. Fortresses in England, France and Ireland in the Central Middle Ages* (Oxford, 2003), pp. 72, 100.

<sup>95</sup> Coulson, *Castles*, pp. 361-2.

<sup>96</sup> P.M. Kendall, *The Yorkist Age* (London, 1962), p. 227; M. Keen, *English Society in the Later Middle Ages 1348-1500* (London, 1990), pp. 160-70.

<sup>97</sup> Eamon Duffy, *Marking the Hours. English People and their Prayers 1240-1570* (New Haven and London, 2006), p. 4.

<sup>98</sup> Duffy, *Marking the Hours*, p. 4.

Scholars have thus recognized the effect that a desire to demonstrate status had on various forms of material culture in the late medieval period. The effect of gender on patronage and material culture has been less extensively examined, although this topic has received increasing attention in recent years. In 2002 Johnson considered masculinity in his discussion of castles, arguing that military conceptions in the fourteenth century were intimately bound-up with ideas of masculinity and knighthood.<sup>99</sup> A few years later Amanda Richardson investigated the implications of gender and space in dwellings in medieval England, focusing on royal women and palaces, whilst Amanda Flather has looked at the use of space as a tool for marking out and maintaining gender and status roles over a wide range of society in the early modern period.<sup>100</sup> Space and its use in the delineation of status and gender identity within religious buildings have also received some attention. In 1999 Roberta Gilchrist investigated how space, imagery and hierarchy could be used to emphasise gender as well as ‘personal, family and community identities’ within religious buildings.<sup>101</sup> The particular importance of the placement and style of funeral monuments in this respect has been investigated by Peter Sherlock for the sixteenth century. He concluded that ‘memorialization reflected social order, which was in large part built around a gender hierarchy’.<sup>102</sup> Commemoration may have been

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<sup>99</sup> Johnson, *Behind the Castle Gate*, p. 30.

<sup>100</sup> Amanda Richardson, ‘Gender and Space in English Royal Palaces c. 1150-c. 1547: a Study in Access Analysis and Imagery’, *Medieval Archaeology*, 47 (2003); Amanda Richardson, ‘Women, Castles and Palaces’ in M.C. Shaus (ed.) *Women and Gender in Medieval Europe: An Encyclopaedia* (New York, 2006); Amanda Flather, *Gender and Space in Early Modern England* (Woodbridge, 2006).

<sup>101</sup> Roberta Gilchrist, *Gender and Archaeology* (London and New York, 1999), p. 87.

<sup>102</sup> Peter Sherlock, ‘Patriarchal Memory: Monuments in Early-Modern England’, Morgan Cassidy-Welch and Peter Sherlock (eds.) *Practices of Gender in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe* (Turnhout, Belgium, 2009), p. 281.

affected in the same way during the medieval period, but medieval monuments have not often been considered in this light. Rachael Dressler has attempted to associate particular styles of commemoration with masculinity, but Nigel Saul's recent study of medieval tombs, for example, pays far more attention to issues of status, as does Simon Roffey's examination of chantry chapels, the latter arguing that the location and visibility of tombs served to illustrate the commemorated individual's role within the community.<sup>103</sup> This thesis will provide further discussion of how a consideration of gender may aid our understanding of the way in which gentlemen expressed ideas about identity through patronage and visual culture, encompassing a wide range of source materials including houses, tombs, churches and a book of hours.

For this study, I have chosen to focus on a single county. Placing geographical limits allows for more detailed analysis than would be possible if this were an examination of gentry culture nationwide. It does, however, present some limitations. The north, rightly or wrongly, was believed by contemporaries to be different from the south.<sup>104</sup> Derek Keene argues that the division between two regions was 'particularly strong'.<sup>105</sup> Northerners may, as Keith Dockray suggests, have had 'more in common with each other than with the men of the midlands and the south'.<sup>106</sup> 'Being a gentleman' did not necessarily mean the same thing in

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<sup>103</sup> Dressler, 'Steel Corpse', pp. 135-67; Saul, *English Church Monuments*, pp. 37-44, 58, 93; Simon Roffey, *The Medieval Chantry Chapel. An Archaeology* (Woodbridge, 2007), pp. 105, 159.

<sup>104</sup> A.J. Pollard, *North-Eastern England During the Wars of the Roses* (Oxford, 1990), p. 20.

<sup>105</sup> Derek Keene, 'National and Regional Identities' in Marks and Williamson (eds.) *Gothic. Art for England*, p. 50.

<sup>106</sup> Keith Dockray, 'Richard III and the Yorkshire Gentry c.1471-1485' in P.W. Hammond (ed.) *Richard III. Loyalty, Lordship and Law* (London, 2000), p. 48.



Yorkshire as it did in Kent or Cornwall, Northamptonshire or Norfolk. The situation in each county, or at least in each region, could be different and is thus deserving of individual examination. Furthermore, county boundaries make a somewhat artificial, if useful, marker for division. Properties could cross shire divisions and a number of Yorkshire families held property outside of Yorkshire. The Eures, for example, held extensive properties in the North Riding and Northumberland, the Harringtons in the West Riding and Lancashire, the Redmans in the West Riding and Cumberland. Others held land outside of the north; the Plumptons possessed considerable property in Nottinghamshire, and the Mauleverers held land in Cornwall.

This study is limited to those who had a significant territorial interest in Yorkshire, generally in the form of the family patrimony. Whether these men therefore thought of themselves as Yorkshire men is one question this thesis should help to answer. Whilst scholars such as Michael Bennett advocate the idea of county communities, this idea has received little support from other scholars.<sup>107</sup> Neither Anthony Pollard nor Christine Carpenter, writing on north-eastern England and Warwickshire respectively, considers such communities likely.<sup>108</sup> An alternative to the ‘county community’ has been suggested by C.E. Moreton, who proposes the idea of ‘a county of communities’ made up of knights, esquires and gentlemen but based on much smaller geographical regions than the shire.<sup>109</sup> This idea has been argued for Yorkshire in respect of Richmondshire, the Honours of Pickering and

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<sup>107</sup> Michael J. Bennett, ‘A County Community: Social Cohesion Amongst the Cheshire Gentry, 1400-1425’, *Northern History*, 8 (1973), pp. 23-44.

<sup>108</sup> Pollard, *North-Eastern England*, p. 153; Christine Carpenter, *The Wars of the Roses. Politics and Constitution in England, c. 1437-1509* (Cambridge, 1997), p. 58.

<sup>109</sup> C.E. Moreton, ‘A Social Gulf? The Upper and Lesser Gentry of Later Medieval England’, *Journal of Medieval History*, 17, 3 (1991), p. 261.

Knaresborough.<sup>110</sup> Such studies suggest that gentry concerns were predominantly local rather than county-wide, possibly due to Yorkshire's size. The majority of families possessed only one or two manors and even those with several preferred to concentrate them in a relatively small area.<sup>111</sup> Indeed, as Anthony Pollard has shown, the consolidation of more widely spaced lands into a single patrimony could be considered a theme of the period.<sup>112</sup>

This is an interdisciplinary study which looks at a wide range of evidence including government and ecclesiastical records, art and architecture. It is only through the examination of such different types of evidence that we may gain a fuller understanding of gentry culture and, through this, a greater understanding of what it meant to be a gentleman. Yorkshire itself has been selected primarily for the richness of its sources. The county provides a range and quality of evidence that is ideal for a study of this kind. Each source offers different kinds of information that may be combined to create a more complete picture. The Plumpton letters, for example, one of only a few gentry letter collections to survive from this period, offer an uncommonly personal perspective on the lives and attitudes of fifteenth-century gentlemen. As private correspondence, they reveal more of self-expression and interaction with others, priorities and concerns, all important indicators of identity,

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<sup>110</sup> Pollard, 'Richmondshire Community', pp. 37-59; Rosemary C.E. Hayes, 'Ancient Indictments for the North of England, 1461-1509' in A. J. Pollard (ed.) *The North of England in the Age of Richard III* (Stroud, 1996), pp. 19-45; Ruth Wilcock, 'Local Disorder in the Honour of Knaresborough, c. 1436-1461 and the National Context', *Northern History*, 41, 1 (2004), pp. 39-80.

<sup>111</sup> The Constables, for example, possessed extensive lands all within the boundaries of Holderness in the East Riding, the Gascoignes in the West Riding.

<sup>112</sup> For an example of determination to consolidate lands see A.J. Pollard, 'Richard Clervaux of Croft: A North Riding Squire in the Fifteenth Century', *Yorkshire Archaeological Journal*, 50 (1978), pp. 155.

than is available through many other types of source material. The records of the ecclesiastical court of York, commonly known as the cause papers, though not unique, are also unusual. The selection of diocesan court records found at York is unrivalled for the fifteenth century.<sup>113</sup> The detailed depositions contained in the cause papers, in this case those of eleven witnesses whose testimony survives for the Saville v. Harrington matrimonial dispute, also allow a window into the private lives and personal motivations of fifteenth-century gentlemen. These records provide not only a description of who did what, but also afford an idea of what may have prompted any particular behaviour, through an understanding of the norms and expectations that gentry males faced as husbands and heads of families. Other types of evidence used within this thesis are more readily available, but equally useful in examining gentry culture. Books of hours like that belonging to the Redmans of Kearby were produced in vast numbers and their survival rate reflects this. Nor is it difficult to find a collection of tombs such as that at the church of St Mary, Swine, or a fifteenth-century manor house as can still be seen at South Cowton, although these are particularly well-preserved examples. These particular sources have been chosen not for their uniqueness, but for their usefulness. The Redman book of hours provides an insight into the motivations and concerns of the gentlemen who used it. The very possession of a book of hours can be seen to say certain things about its owner, but it is the tailoring to suit an individual user, with specific prayers and devotions, that may be most revealing. It is through the specific devotional requirements of gentlemen that we learn what was important to them. The choice of prayers and devotions help to uncover how these men saw themselves and their place in the world. Tomb monuments such as those at Swine, Thornhill and South Cowton,

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<sup>113</sup> R.H. Helmholz, *Marriage Litigation in Medieval England* (Cambridge, 1974), p. 12.

along with secular, domestic architecture such as South Cowton castle, provide yet another perspective. Their appearance, their presence within the landscape and their relationship to the elements that surrounded them are all important indicators of how gentlemen represented themselves within the community. Analysis of such evidence can tell us both how gentlemen saw themselves and how they wished to be seen.

Through examination of these sources, this thesis aims to address some of the lacunae in the literature about fifteenth-century gentlemen as highlighted by the above historiography. Gentry studies have not yet paid particular attention to gender, although all deal with topics that might be considered relevant to it: land, wealth, public office, social networks, marriage and family. Gender studies have seldom focused on the gentry, although this group has sometimes been encompassed within the aristocracy as a whole. In focusing on the gentry of fifteenth-century Yorkshire I will explore the way in which identity was constructed for this social group, in this particular place and at this particular time. The emphasis here will be on the upper rather than the lesser gentry. Of the ten families to be examined closely within this thesis, all but two were of knightly rank. Within this subset of the gentry, there is considerably more information available relating to the head of the family than there is to lesser members. This bias towards the top levels of the gentry, and towards eldest sons, is the result of the sources available rather than any deliberate design, but it may nonetheless have some effect on the conclusions reached. The gentry culture uncovered here may be more relevant to the upper gentry than the lesser members of this status group, a qualification that must be kept in mind.

In order to best make use of the variety of evidence available, this thesis has been divided into five chapters, each of which makes use of case studies. Chapter 1 takes the example of a property dispute that occurred after the death of Sir Robert Hilton of Swine in 1432. His property passed to his two daughters, effectively terminating a line of Hiltons at Swine that had lasted more than a hundred years. The manner in which the resultant struggle for possession of Hilton's lands played out, and the motivations behind it, provides an introduction to some of the themes that will recur throughout the thesis. It sheds light on the importance of land and lineage, of family and place, and examines, through the reactions of those involved, what was considered an 'appropriate' response for men of gentle status.

Chapter 2 looks at the role played by family, kinship and social networks in the construction of gentry culture and identity. It investigates how gentlemen went about identifying themselves not just as men, but as men of the gentry, through their interaction with a whole range of others. This case study focuses on a collection of correspondence relating to the Plumpton family of Plumpton. Dating from the mid-fifteenth to the mid-sixteenth centuries, these letters provide evidence of the interaction of Sir William and Sir Robert Plumpton, successive heads of the Plumpton family, with people ranging from the king to a group of poor tenants, from close family to personal enemies. How a gentleman behaved as husband and father, and as neighbour, friend, lord and servant, may all help to illustrate the characteristics of gentry identity. The nature of this source, as letters, provides a far greater insight into the interaction of gentlemen with each other and with those outside of their own privileged group than perhaps any other type of evidence. Through these letters it is possible to see not only how gentlemen behaved, but what

others thought about this behaviour. Through letters it may be possible to discover not only what these men did but why they did it.

Chapter 3 examines aspects of family, focusing specifically on the importance of lineage for the Savilles of Thornhill. It considers first their chapel in the church of St Michael and All Angels, Thornhill, constructed in the 1440s by Sir Thomas Saville, the first Saville lord of Thornhill. Though Sir Thomas' own tomb does not survive, it was intended to form a key feature of what became a family mausoleum; his son and grandson were both buried there and his image, accompanied by an instruction to pray for his soul, appears in one of the windows. The nature of Sir Thomas' chapel, its appearance, even its very presence within the church close to his primary residence, may say a great deal about the way in which gentlemen used material culture to identify and project an image of themselves within the community. In this case it demonstrates how Sir Thomas saw himself and how he wished to be seen. The second piece of evidence is a matrimonial dispute involving this same Sir Thomas and which forms part of the records of the diocesan court of York. In 1441 Sir Thomas married Christina Harrington, thereby uniting two of Yorkshire's most prominent families. Two years later Christina sued for an annulment, resulting in the eleven witness depositions that still survive. Not only is the record fairly complete, it is one of only a few extant matrimonial disputes to involve the gentry and offers an unrivalled insight into the workings of medieval marriage for this social group. The depositions given by Christina Harrington's witnesses are unusually detailed and provide descriptions of private, intimate scenes that are seldom if ever recorded within any other type of source material. Combined,

these two pieces of evidence will be used to investigate the importance of family, lineage and place for gentlemen.

Chapter 4 looks further at the role played by material culture in the construction of gentry identity. It does this first through an examination of the house, church and tombs at South Cowton, all apparently built, rebuilt, or refurbished by Sir Richard Conyers in the last decades of the fifteenth century. Examination of the work he carried out here may help to illustrate the meaning and uses of art and architecture in the construction and presentation of gentry identity. It builds upon and contributes to the discussion of Chapter 3, for Sir Richard Conyers' situation, though sharing some similarities with that of Sir Thomas Saville, was not entirely the same. His motivations may thus have been different. The Redman of Kearby Hours presents a different type of material object. As a book it was a high status item, possession of which said something about the wealth and sophistication of its owner, as well as his or her piety. The contents of this book, specifically tailored to suit its user, provide an insight into the devotional concerns of the Yorkshire gentleman who purchased it. The manner in which the Redmans chose to identify themselves and the devotional trends with which they identified may say a great deal about how they saw themselves and their place in the world. The public use of such an item, as well as the choices made about what was to be included within it, again may tell us something of how these men saw themselves and how they wished to be seen.

Finally, Chapter 5 looks into the significance of martial symbolism in the construction of gentry identity in this period. The image of the fighting knight is a

familiar one, but one that appears to have been increasingly distant from reality. Fighting was no longer automatically part of an aristocratic male's life in the fifteenth century, as gentlemen took on more bureaucratic roles. Yet martial imagery, in the form of heraldry, armoured tomb effigies and fortified houses, is unavoidable when looking at the fifteenth century gentry. The aim of this chapter is to examine just how important the image of the fighting knight was in the construction of identity for gentry males. In it I will ask if men, in order to be considered gentlemen, needed to be seen as fighting men and, if this was the case, whether representation had to coincide with reality. In order to do this I will focus on three families, the Babthorpes, the Gascoignes and the Nortons, examining the lifestyles adopted by several generations. The Babthorpes pursued military careers throughout the fifteenth century, the Gascoignes made their fortune in the law before moving into primarily martial service and the Nortons pursued legal careers throughout the period in question. The way in which these men chose to represent themselves will help us to identify whether the image of the fighting knight, one of the most readily identified images of aristocratic males, was indeed an integral requirement of being a gentleman. It will allow us to investigate whether it was possible to be considered a gentleman without reference to the aristocracy's traditional martial role.



## Chapter 1

### The Constables and the Hiltons of Swine

1432. Dec 1. Westminster. CPR Hen VI, v.ii, p. 275

Commission of oyer and terminer to John Martyn, James Strangways, John Cottesmore, John Sayvile, knight, William Normanvyle, knight, and William Scargill and to two or more of them including Martyn, Strangways or Cottesmore, on complaint of Godfrey Hilton, knight, that John Constabull of Hedon in Holderness, esquire, John Foston of the same, esquire, John Constabyll of Halsham, esquire, John Melton of Killom, esquire, Robert Constabill of Flaynburgh, esquire, William Mounseux of Lesset, esquire, Thomas Cumberworth of Arrowom, knight, William Byrstell of Byrstell, esquire, Thomas Constabyll of Catfosse, esquire, John Wenslawe of Bransburton, esquire, William Twyer of Gaunstede, esquire, William Rysom of Rysom, esquire, John Constabyll of Frismash, esquire and other malefactors to the number of 140 persons, armed and arrayed in manner of war, broke the closes and houses of the said Godfrey at Swyn and Wystede, felled his trees, reaped his crops, made hay of his grass, and carried off such crops and trees to the value of 40*l.* and depastured with cattle grass to the like value; also they assaulted him and his men and servants at Leven, Wessand and Rysse, Hunmanby ‘on the wolde’ and York, and so threatened his tenants at Swyn and Wystede that for a long time they dared not abide there nor at Leven, Wessand nor Rysse. For 20*s* paid to the hanaper.

On the 1<sup>st</sup> December 1432 a commission of oyer and terminer was issued to investigate an accusation of property invasion in several Yorkshire manors.<sup>114</sup> The record states that the accuser, Sir Godfrey Hilton, named no less than thirteen

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<sup>114</sup> Swine, Winestead, Leven, Wassand, and Rise, 1Dec 1432, CPR Hen VI, vol. II, p. 275.

gentlemen who, accompanied by ‘other malefactors to the number of 140 persons, armed and arrayed in manner of war’ supposedly descended on his property at Swine, Winestead, Leven, Wassand and Rise. According to Godfrey they broke his closes and entered his houses, carrying off crops and trees to the value of £40 and so badly frightening his tenants ‘that for a long time they dared not abide there’.

According to the Patent Rolls he also claimed that he and his servants were assaulted on four of these manors, as well as in York. As always in such cases it is difficult to determine whether the events described really took place. At the very least we can say that the version of events recorded, presumably Hilton’s version, is unlikely to be accurate. The actions his assailants were accused of - reaping crops, making hay and pasturing cattle - cannot be done at the same time of year, let alone on the same day. In many ways, however, the reality of the situation is beside the point. It is not so much the event itself that matters, but the circumstances that surrounded it. Why did Godfrey Hilton and his neighbours come into conflict, and why did he deem it necessary to appeal to royal authority? Who are the opponents he names, and why should they come together at all? All the main protagonists were gentlemen and, whether consciously or not, their actions and reactions were directed by the fact that they were high-status males. This case presents an insight into many of the most pertinent themes in an investigation of fifteenth-century Yorkshire gentry culture. Its purpose here is to serve as an overview of the subject, illustrating how perceptions of what was appropriate for high-status males and the pressures to conform to these ideas shaped the behaviour of late medieval gentlemen. Many of the issues apparent here will be discussed in more detail later in the thesis.

Hilton's apparent insistence that the accused came 'armed and arrayed in manner of war' need not be taken literally. An accusation of 'force and arms' was a legal formality that may not have had any bearing on reality.<sup>115</sup> Men like Brian Middleton and John Nelson, at the end of the century, could throw accusations of attempted murder back and forth as much as they liked, but neither could prove that there was any real intent 'to bett & slee' or to have 'killed & murdred'.<sup>116</sup> In some cases, reported violence may have been, to use Payling's words, 'more apparent than real'.<sup>117</sup> This does not mean that real violence never occurred. Indeed Rosemary Hayes' examination of indictments from this region suggests that the gentry were guilty of 'real violence...more often than was good for a society in which they played a leading part'.<sup>118</sup> Forcible entry, by John Bellamy's estimation, was 'probably the most common crime committed by the upper classes' and bands of up to five hundred men were not unheard of.<sup>119</sup> Gentlemen might have to rely on legal methods ultimately to settle their disputes, but they were not averse to helping matters along with some extra-legal activities.<sup>120</sup> Bribery and intimidation seem to have been commonplace and a great number of cases were settled out of court long before a verdict could be reached, suggesting that the threat of prosecution could serve to

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<sup>115</sup> W.M. Ormrod, *Political Life in Medieval England 1300-1450* (Gloucester, 1995), p. 110; Walker, *Crime, Gender and Social Order*, p. 27.

<sup>116</sup> William Brown (ed.) *Yorkshire Star Chamber Proceedings*, Yorkshire Archaeological Society. Record Series, 41 (1909), pp. 11-3.

<sup>117</sup> S.J Payling, 'Murder, Motive and Punishment in Fifteenth-Century England. Two Gentry Case Studies', *EHR*, 113 (1998), p. 1.

<sup>118</sup> Hayes, 'Ancient Indictments', p. 45.

<sup>119</sup> John G. Bellamy, *Criminal Law and Society in Late Medieval and Tudor England* (Gloucester, 1984), pp. 65, 68.

<sup>120</sup> R Lander, *Conflict and Stability in Fifteenth-Century England* (London, 1969), p. 165; Richard W. Keauper, *War, Justice and Public Order. England and France in the Later Middle Ages* (Oxford, 1988), p. 142; Wilcock, 'Local Disorder', p. 57.

encourage recalcitrant parties to reach an agreement.<sup>121</sup> In Godfrey Hilton's case, whilst it is possible to say who gained possession of the manors in question, it is not possible to say how that state of affairs was reached.

What Hilton claimed may not have happened. What was important was that it could have. One-hundred-and-forty men seems like a significant number, but each gentleman named would have had to provide no more than ten or eleven individuals. A man like John Constable of Halsham, with lands in Halsham, Burton Constable, Newton Constable, and Thralesthorp, would probably have been able to round up several more than that.<sup>122</sup> As lord he could call on a significant number of servants, tenants, friends and relatives, all of whom contributed to his perceived 'worship', something that was 'of ever-present concern' to the fifteenth-century aristocracy.<sup>123</sup> To be relied upon and deferred to by others was to be recognised as a man of power and influence.<sup>124</sup> In such circumstances it was enough for such dependants merely to exist and be seen to exist, but some gentlemen inevitably decided to make greater use of what could constitute a private army. Sir Ralph Bigod, for example, might deny involvement when his servants were accused of having come to market 'defencible Arraied in maner of warre & like to a newe Insurrection...walked up & don the towne, facyng & bracyng with great words of menaces', but they were

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<sup>121</sup> David Tilsley, 'Arbitration in Gentry Disputes: The Case of Bucklow Hundred in Cheshire, 1400-1465' in Diana D.S. Dunn (ed.) *Courts, Counties and the Capitol in the Later Middle Ages* (Stroud and New York, 1996), p. 59.

<sup>122</sup> George Poulson, *The History and the Antiquities of the Seigniary of Holderness*, vol. I (Hull, 1840), p. 75.

<sup>123</sup> Rosemary Horrox, *Richard III. A Study of Service* (Cambridge, 1989), p. 6.

<sup>124</sup> Bullough, 'On Being Male', p. 34.

almost certainly acting under his instructions.<sup>125</sup> Sir Roger Hastings was apparently making a similar use of tenants and servants to terrorise the local countryside, riding about with great numbers of them, ‘more like men of war than men of peas’.<sup>126</sup> Peter de Rome’s use of servants for threatening purposes was apparently more specific; in 1407 a warrant was put out for his arrest to gain surety that he would not harm Richard Gascoigne or his men.<sup>127</sup> The use of intimidation, even if incidents did not always result in actual violence, seems to have been common. Those in authority tended to err on the side of caution because it was always feared that what began as a private feud could escalate into widespread disorder. The one-hundred-and-forty men Hilton described, if they really existed, were too much of a danger to public order to be allowed to roam the countryside doing as they pleased. It was in the Crown’s interest to see that they were dispersed, precisely what Hilton was counting on when he made his complaint.

This decision to bring the force of law into private quarrels is typical of gentry males in general, although not of the aristocracy as a whole. Whilst the nobility did not shun the law courts, the gentry all but monopolized them.<sup>128</sup> This difference points to a significant disparity in outlook between the higher and lesser aristocracy when it came to deferring to the Crown, something that was almost certainly prompted by their different levels of autonomy. Whilst the nobility could afford to flout authority to a certain extent, the gentry seldom possessed this level of individual power. A noble patron might be able to protect them from the

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<sup>125</sup> Brown (ed.) *Yorkshire Star Chamber*, pp. 13-15.

<sup>126</sup> Turton (ed.) *Honor and Forest of Pickering*, p. 188.

<sup>127</sup> CPR, Hen IV, vol. II, pp. 351-2.

<sup>128</sup> A. Harding, *The Law Courts of Medieval England* (London, 1973), pp. 93-4.

consequences of their actions, but such favour was by no means lasting or guaranteed. Once lost from one lord it might be impossible to acquire from another, something that Sir William Plumpton discovered after he had angered the earl of Northumberland. No one could be found willing to intervene on his behalf for fear of offending the earl and he was warned off from ‘medling betwixt lords’.<sup>129</sup> The readiness of gentry males to resort to the law indicates their relative weakness. Faced with the necessity of bowing to royal authority, they found a way to utilise it to their own advantage. The weaker their position the more reliant they were on the law, so that it was often the recourse of gentry females. As a result, we might expect to find that the frequent use of law, with its tacit admission of weakness, had a detrimental effect on the perceived masculinity of gentlemen. This does not seem to be the case. Rather, the necessity of this action for gentry males seems to have rendered it acceptable. Quite often there was simply no more effective alternative. In Godfrey Hilton’s case taking the matter into his own hands was not really an option. His main power base was in Lincolnshire and he could not afford to neglect these lands in order to occupy and defend the disputed Yorkshire manors.<sup>130</sup> His complaint was a reaction to the weakness of his position, the threat of legal intervention a strategy to strengthen his case.

Part of Godfrey’s strategy relied on demonstrating that his opponents were the aggressors in the situation. This was evidently something that could be believed,

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<sup>129</sup> Joan Kirby (ed) *Plumpton Letters and Papers*, Camden Fifth Series, Volume 8 (Cambridge, 1996), No. 28, pp. 51-3.

<sup>130</sup> Although the younger brother of Robert Hilton of Swine, Yorkshire, Godfrey married the Lutterell heiress with lands in Lincolnshire, for which he was granted full seisin 28<sup>th</sup> May 1419, CFR Henry V, vol. XIV, p. 277. He also appears in the Patent Rolls for Lincolnshire frequently from the 1430s, taking an oath with several of the gentry of the county in 1434 CPR Henry VI, vol. III, p. 381, acting as JP at least 8 times, CPR Henry VI, vol. IV, p. 473, vol. V, p. 591, vol. VI, p. 670.

for had large scale, organised violence been out of the question there would have been no point in Godfrey, or anyone else, making such claims. The frequency with which such accusations were made in fifteenth-century Yorkshire indicates that the combination of gentlemen and violent acts was considered a likely one. No fewer than five similar commissions were issued for Yorkshire in 1432 and this was not an unusually high number for any given year.<sup>131</sup> But it is not only the supposed inclination of gentlemen towards violence that is important in this case. The particular roles that the accused are alleged to have taken are equally significant. In naming only thirteen of his assailants, all holding the rank of esquire or above, Godfrey clearly singled them out as the leaders of the assault. None of the others, most of whom are likely to have been the tenants of the gentry accused here, were named at all. The prominence that Godfrey ascribed to gentlemen over those of lesser rank is not merely an expression of his ignorance of the latter's identity. It represents a recognition on his part, and an expected recognition on the part of those in authority, of the role gentry males played in relation to the lower orders. The implication is that gentlemen would act as leaders of their communities. This was not just their own view on the matter, but seems to have been shared by those expected to follow them. The presence of a gentleman provided a focal point for any action and gave even the most unofficial of movements a kind of legitimacy, at least as far as those taking part were concerned. As the Pilgrimage of Grace demonstrated in the early sixteenth century, the lower orders were not happy without aristocratic leadership. Lacking aristocratic involvement they attempted to press members of the local gentry into acting as leaders, an indication of the deeply ingrained perception that this was the gentry's designated role. In naming gentlemen as the leaders of an

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<sup>131</sup> CPR Henry VI, vol. II, pp. 198, 219, 273, 275.

expedition Godfrey was conforming to preconceived notions of how gentry males were expected to behave.

The reality of the situation, in so far as this can be ascertained, seems to have been rather different. If violence occurred at all, it almost certainly did not occur as the Patent Rolls recorded it. This was a quarrel about inheritance, not forcible occupation, sparked by the devolution of the Hilton properties onto two heiresses. When Sir Robert Hilton, Sir Godfrey's brother, died in 1431 the Hilton patrimony was divided between his two daughters, Isobel, widow of Robert Hildyard, and Elizabeth, wife of John Melton (Pedigree B, p. 63). Between them these two women inherited a sizable amount of property in Holderness, as well as what was probably the most important piece of land as far as Godfrey was concerned, Swine itself. With the death of Sir Robert, the Hiltons of Swine ceased to be the Hiltons of Swine, a situation Godfrey was apparently not willing to allow. It was unfortunate for him that his nieces' claims were supported by some of the most powerful gentry in Holderness, at least two of whom were almost as closely related as he was. Godfrey's accusation served as a strategy to bolster his own rather dubious claims. Not only is it unlikely that the supposed assault of armed men ever took place, it is questionable whether Godfrey was ever in possession of the disputed manors at all.

Like so many late medieval disputes among this social group, Godfrey Hilton's quarrel was firstly about competition for land, the gentry's 'most prized possession'.<sup>132</sup> Conferring status, land was also a more secure form of income than

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<sup>132</sup> Carpenter, *Locality and Polity*, p. 3.



many other options.<sup>133</sup> Men not fortunate enough to inherit substantial property were forced to make their own way in the world and this could be a very uncertain business. A younger son might secure an heiress, as did Godfrey Hilton himself, but not every gentle family could afford to alienate enough wealth from the heir to make this possible.<sup>134</sup> The most common route to advancement was through service, whether military or otherwise. This could bring considerable power and wealth, but it seldom brought stability. For a soldier, there were obvious dangers to life and limb, but in all types of service men were dependant on both the good-will and the survival of their patrons. The power that gentry males derived from land-based lordship was in contrast relatively secure. There was, however, more to its significance than this. From such lordship the late medieval gentleman derived his authority over others. A manor brought with it the location for a private household, the means to marry and thus to produce heirs, as well as a ready-made body of dependants in the form of tenants. It placed a gentleman in his proper context and was clearly deeply significant in asserting gentle status. Those without land aspired to own it, particularly, perhaps, when their rise to gentle status was relatively recent.<sup>135</sup> The Danbys and the Pigots, who entered the gentry as lawyers, and the Ellis family, who acquired their fortune through trade, all rushed to invest their money in country estates.

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<sup>133</sup> Anthony Smith, 'Litigation and Politics: Sir John Fastolf's Defence of His English Property' in Tony Pollard (ed.) *Property and Politics: Essays in Later Medieval English History* (Gloucester, 1984), p. 60.

<sup>134</sup> S.J. Payling, 'The Economics of Marriage in late Medieval England. The Marriage of Heiresses' in *ECHR*, 54, 3 (2001), p. 424.

<sup>135</sup> Saul, *Scenes From Provincial Life*, p. 20.

To possess land was a mark of status, but the family seat was even more important. In such cases, as Peter Coss argues, it is ‘impossible to exaggerate the earnestness with which a gentry family looked to the maintenance of its inheritance’.<sup>136</sup> Swine was the Hiltons’ traditional seat, something that seems to have been a considerable factor in Godfrey’s decision to take action. The Hiltons of Swine were a junior branch of a County Durham family, although they had been established at Swine for over a century. The last two Hilton lords of Swine had even been sheriff of Yorkshire five times between them.<sup>137</sup> Their prominence had allowed Godfrey, the younger of two sons, to make an advantageous match with the Lutterell heiress, a move that took him away from Swine, but that evidently failed to sever his sense of connection with it. Had his elder brother Robert left a male heir when he died in 1431 Godfrey would probably have continued to concentrate on his wife’s Lincolnshire interests, but as it was Robert left only two daughters. The nearest male, on whom, had Robert chosen to use it, a tail male would have rested, was his brother Godfrey (Pedigree B).<sup>138</sup> With two heiresses the Yorkshire property would not only be divided, it would cease to be associated with the Hiltons at all. Swine was not their only Yorkshire property, but it was undoubtedly the most important one – hence they were the Hiltons of Swine, and several generations were buried in the church there.

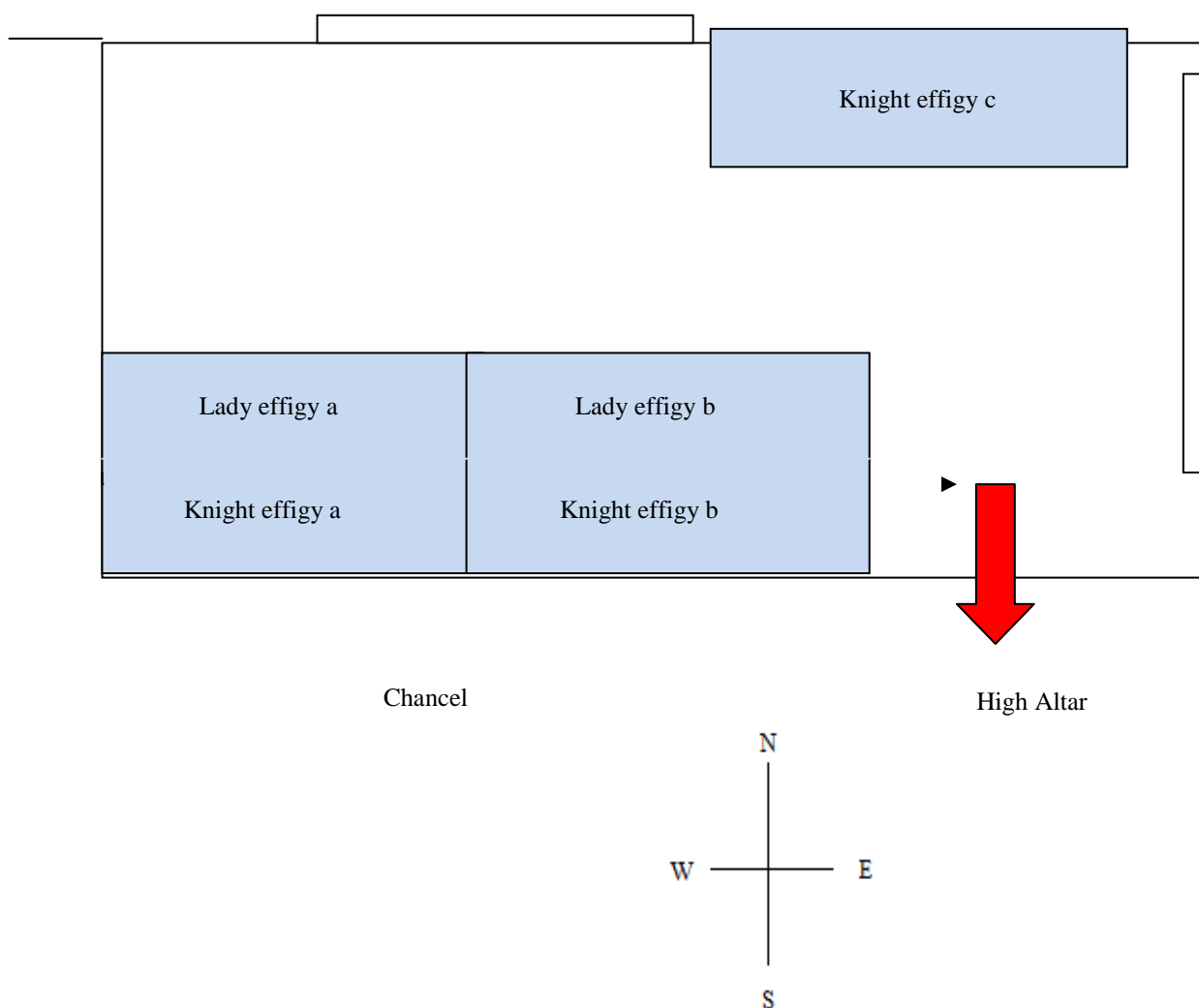
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<sup>136</sup> Peter R. Coss, *The Langley Family and its Cartulary. A Study in Late Medieval “Gentry”* (Oxford, 1974), p. 10.

<sup>137</sup> There had been Hiltons at Swine since the early fourteenth century, K.J. Allison (ed.) *Victoria County History, Yorkshire East Riding*, vol. V, p. 151. Robert Hilton, knight, Godfrey’s brother, had himself been sheriff of Yorkshire three times in 1417, 1423, and 1427, and MP for the county four times. His father had been sheriff of Yorkshire twice, W. Mark Ormrod, *Lord Lieutenants and High Sheriffs of Yorkshire, 1066-2000* (Barnsley, 2000), pp. 75, 82.

<sup>138</sup> There is evidence of the use of tail male in the East Riding itself as early as 1413, with a ratification of such to Thomas Griffith, C.V Collier (ed.) *Documents of Burton Agnes* (Hull, 1913), pp. 15-6.

**Figure 1 Plan of the ‘Hilton Chapel’ at St Marys church, Swine**



The extant church of St Mary, Swine, was originally part of a late twelfth-century Cistercian nunnery of St Mary, to which it was adjacent.<sup>139</sup> Little remains of the latter, which is now a farm, although it was originally situated to the north of the church. The church itself is built on a rectangular plan with a tower at the western

<sup>139</sup> Nikolaus Pevsner, *The Buildings of England. Yorkshire: York and the East Riding* (Hammondsworth, 1972), p. 240-1; G.H.R. Kent (ed.) *VCH Yorkshire. East Riding. Vol VII* (Oxford, 2002), pp. 109, 114.

end and a vestry on the southern side.<sup>140</sup> The floor is not level, but slopes down quite significantly from east to west in a series of wide steps. Within the church there are a total of seven effigies. Two of these, stone figures of a male and female dating from the early-fourteenth century, minus their tomb chests but probably representing members of the Lascelles family, are situated in a window alcove in the southern wall of the nave. Any identifying heraldry has long since disappeared, but the Lascelles were lords of the manor in this period and thus make the most likely candidates.<sup>141</sup> The remaining five effigies, complete with tomb chests, stand within what would have been a private chapel in the north-east corner of the church (fig. 1). Unlike the main body of the building the chapel floor is level. Whilst the eastern end is slightly lower than the chancel, accessed via a shallow step, the western end is at least a foot higher than the nave (fig. 2). This western end is enclosed by a wooden screen dating from the sixteenth century, featuring the arms of the Meltons, the Hiltons' successors at Swine. By the mid-nineteenth century the southern side of chapel was separated from the chancel by iron bars, although these have since been removed.<sup>142</sup>

Within the chapel there are three tomb chests, two bearing the effigies of a husband and wife, and a third bearing a single knight (figs. 2 and 3). All can be identified as representing members of the Hilton family by the presence of the laurel

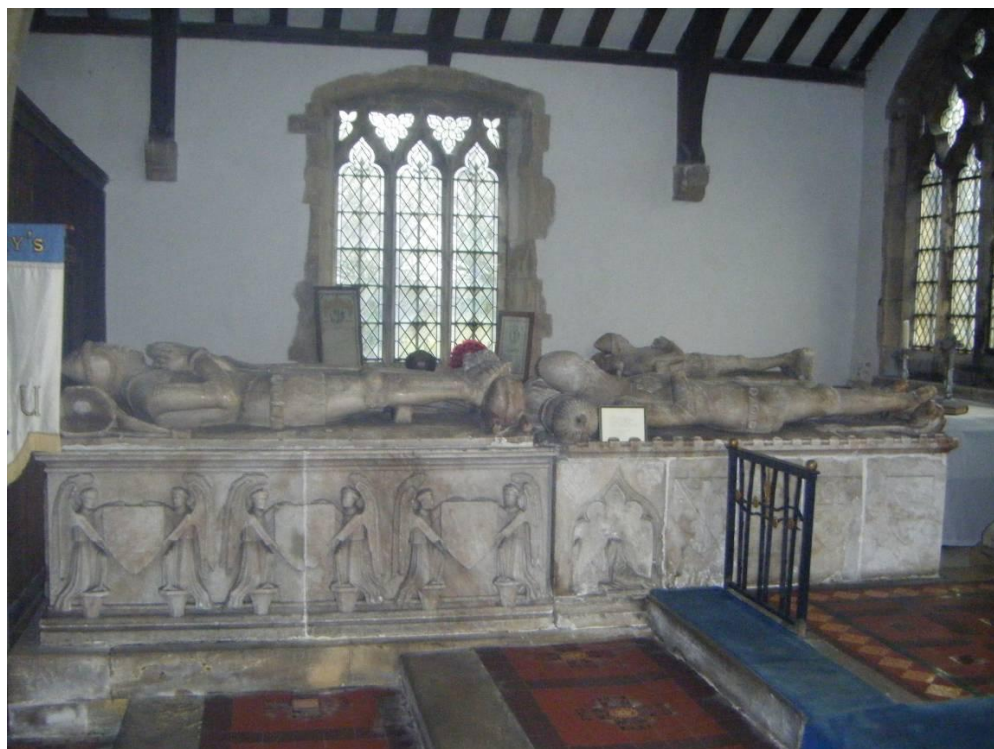
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<sup>140</sup> Pevsner, *Buildings of England: York and the East Riding*, p. 240-1.

<sup>141</sup> These figures were already badly mutilated in the seventeenth century, as noted in the Warburton papers, BL Lansdowne MSS 899-999.

<sup>142</sup> Jane Rosemary Crease, *Incomparable Sepulchres. The Alabaster Chest Tomb in Yorkshire c.1350-c.1580. Vol. I*, unpublished University of York PhD thesis (2008), p. 289.

**Figure 2** The Hilton chapel, St Marys church, Swine, with the effigies of knights a and b in foreground. The sixteenth-century wooden screen can be seen on the left.



**Figure 3** Hilton effigy, knight c, St Marys church, Swine, early 15<sup>th</sup> century.



**Figure 4 Hilton knight a, St Marys church, Swine, early 15<sup>th</sup> century. Note the wreath on the jupon, previously the emblem of the Lascelles and adopted by the Hiltons after marriage to the Lascelles heiress.**



wreath emblem on the jupons of the knights (fig. 4).<sup>143</sup> These arms originally belonged to the Lascelles but were adopted by the Hiltons upon marriage to the Lascelles heiress, through whom the manor of Swine was acquired.<sup>144</sup> It can thus be safely assumed that the chapel in St Mary's church was intended as the private chapel of the Hiltons of Swine. Such utilisation of the parish church as a family mausoleum by the local gentry was common in fifteenth-century Yorkshire.<sup>145</sup> By

<sup>143</sup> T. Tindall Wildridge, *Holderness and Hullshire. Historic Gleanings* (Hull, 1886), p. 82.

<sup>144</sup> Philip Lankester, *Medieval Monuments in St Mary's Swine. Church Monuments Society Symposium visit 29 July 2006.*

<sup>145</sup> M.G.A. Vale, *Piety, Charity and Literacy Among the Yorkshire Gentry, 1370-1480*, Borthwick Papers, 50 (1976), p. 8; Jonathan Hughes, *Pastors and Visionaries. Religion and Secular Life in Late Medieval Yorkshire* (Woodbridge, 1988), p. 15.

monopolising space in the church, the centre of late medieval life, the gentry emphasised their own centrality in local affairs, expressing their importance in much the same way that the nobility might patronise an important religious house. A collection of family tombs signified a family's longstanding dominance of the area, in a sense legitimising a gentleman's lordship tradition. A collection like this also provided a kind of visual pedigree by which a man could point to the importance of his antecedents and by extension himself.

Whilst it is clear that these figures were intended to represent the Hiltons of Swine, it is more difficult to identify them as individuals. The dating of tombs with any accuracy is always difficult.<sup>146</sup> The Hilton effigies are stylistically very similar. All three take the form of alabaster tomb chests, on which the males are represented in armour and the women in the dress appropriate to high-status widows in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries.<sup>147</sup> There is very little difference in the style of armour in which the men are depicted; all three wear conical helmets, aventails, have plate gauntlets and jupons over fluted armour. All have their pointed sabatons resting on a lion. The three men and two women are depicted in the same pose, hands clasped in prayer on their chests, and the men share similar facial features, with heavy-lidded eyes, long, shallow noses and moustaches but no visible beards. Whilst these effigies do not appear to have been created at the same time – knight and lady b have been dated to the 1370s, whilst knights a and c appear to date from the first few decades of the fifteenth - there is little else to distinguish between

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<sup>146</sup> Arthur Gardner, *Alabaster Tombs of the Pre-Reformation Period in England* (Cambridge, 1940), p. 23.

<sup>147</sup> Margaret Scott, *Medieval Dress and Fashion* (London, 2003), pp. 129-36.

them.<sup>148</sup> It is highly probable that one of the tombs still standing represents the last Sir Robert Hilton, but scholars have so far failed to reach an agreement on which.<sup>149</sup> Jane Crease's survey of alabaster tomb chests in Yorkshire favours the westernmost tomb, knight and lady a, and I am inclined to agree with this assessment.<sup>150</sup> The design of the tomb chest, featuring pairs of angels supporting a shield between them (fig. 2) is almost identical to that which appears on the end of the tomb chest of Chief Justice William Gascoigne (figs. 36-7), suggesting that they may have both been created at a similar date.<sup>151</sup> Gascoigne died in 1422, Sir Robert Hilton in 1431. Even more significantly, antiquarian records show that this tomb originally featured the arms of Hilton and Constable of Halsham, with whom the last Sir Robert Hilton was allied by marriage (Pedigree B, p. 63).<sup>152</sup>

Combined, the evidence provides a strong argument for knight a representing the last Sir Robert Hilton. There is every reason why he should have been buried at Swine. As Sir Godfrey's attempts to hold onto the manor suggest, the Hiltons were concerned with continuity and longevity of lordship and Swine was their traditional burial place. Had Godfrey's attempts to retain control of his brother's lands been successful we would expect that he too would have been buried in here. In the event

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<sup>148</sup> Fred H. Crossley, *English Church Monuments, AD 1150-1550* (London, 1921), p. 216; Gardner, *Alabaster Tombs*, p. 51; Brian and Moira Gittos, 'A Survey of East Riding Sepulchral Monuments Before 1500' in Christopher Wilson (ed.) *Medieval Art and Architecture in the East Riding of Yorkshire* (Leeds, 1989), p.102.

<sup>149</sup> Kent (ed.) *VCH, East Riding*, p. 117 suggests that it is one of the knights with his wife, whereas T. Tindall Wildridge, *Holderness and Hullshire. Historic Gleanings* (Hull, 1886), pp. 10-1, implies that it is the tomb which stands alone.

<sup>150</sup> Crease, *Incomparable Sepulchres*, p. 294.

<sup>151</sup> Gardner, *Alabaster Tombs*, p. 15.

<sup>152</sup> BL Lansdowne 894.



Godfrey was buried not at Swine but at Irnham in Lincolnshire, in the church patronised by his wife's Lutterell relations. He is possibly represented by a small brass in the chancel. This is in keeping with the Lutterell tombs, but somewhat less impressive than the grand Hilton alabasters.<sup>153</sup> It may, of course, always have been his intention to be buried alongside his wife's forbears and to continue their traditions by adopting the same style of monument. In a similar way, his ancestors adopted the arms of the Lascelles heiress in order to better establish themselves at Swine (fig. 4). Although gentle status was almost entirely defined through the male line, the prestigious name and extensive lands that an heiress brought could be deemed more important than the fact that these benefits came from a female. In any case it was not the female whose identity was being assumed, so much as that of her illustrious male antecedents.

The significance of Swine as the burial place of the lords of the manor is further illustrated by the fact that the Meltons, successors of the Hiltons, continued to use it as such. Their tombs have not survived, but there was at least one brass, commemorating the son of the first Melton Lord of Swine, who predeceased his father by almost twenty years.<sup>154</sup> Historically, the Meltons were associated with Kilham, but in burying his son at Swine John Melton demonstrated that it was not only he who was to be associated with the lordship from then on, but rather the Melton family in general. Whether or not Godfrey did indeed have a legal right to the property, as the *Victoria County History* suggests, there is no question that many

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<sup>153</sup> Arthur Abbott, *History of the Parishes of Irnham and Corby* (Lincoln, 1927), pp. 40-1, 53.

<sup>154</sup> Kent (ed.) *VCH. East Riding*, p. 117.

of his peers would have considered his to be a legitimate claim.<sup>155</sup> The connection of the Hilton family with Swine was not something any gentry male in his position would have been willing to give up lightly. The connection between family and place was evidently of considerable importance to Godfrey's image of himself as a gentleman.

If Godfrey's concern for the Hilton property rested on the continuation of the family line at Swine then he needed to disinherit his nieces and become the new lord of the manor. This was not necessarily a selfish action. By claiming Swine for himself he ensured that the Hilton line would continue there, something that was as much for the benefit of past and future Hiltons as it was for himself. By maintaining the family possessions he helped to maintain its position in gentle society.<sup>156</sup> The legal, as opposed to the moral, right of his actions depends almost entirely on the age and marital status of Elizabeth Hilton, who would appear to have been the younger of the two daughters. Isobel Hilton's age is unknown, but she was old enough to have borne her husband Robert Hildyard five children prior to his death in 1428.<sup>157</sup> Elizabeth, however, does not appear to have married before her marriage to John Melton. Unless there was a specific reason why Elizabeth remained unmarried, and there is no reason to think that there was, it seems probable that Isobel was some

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<sup>155</sup> Kent (ed.) *VCH. East Riding*, p. 111. However, if this claim existed it was ultimately unsuccessful, because John Melton was being referred to as 'of Swine' in 1449. DDCC/133/3, *East Riding of Yorkshire Archives and Records Services*. Godfrey Hilton died in 1459, CFR Henry VI, vol. XIX, p. 245.

<sup>156</sup> Gudrun Tscherpel, 'The Political Function of History: The Past and the Future of Noble Families' in Richard Eales and Shaun Tyas (ed.) *Family and Dynasty in Late Medieval England. Proceedings of the 1997 Harlaxton Symposium* (Donnington, 2003), pp. 88-9.

<sup>157</sup> Peter Townend (ed.), *Burke's Landed Gentry*, 18<sup>th</sup> edition (London, 1969), p. 298; Joseph Foster (ed.) *The Visitations of Yorkshire* (London, 1875), pp. 50-1.

years older than her sister. If this were the case then the distribution of the lands between the two women, with Elizabeth receiving the larger and more important manor of Swine, requires some explanation. The problem is not insurmountable, however. Isobel seems to have taken Winestead on her marriage, for her husband was credited as lord of Winestead by right of his wife, a title he cannot have gained after his father-in-law's death as Hildyard predeceased Sir Robert Hilton by three years.<sup>158</sup> At the time of Isobel's marriage Robert Hilton probably still hoped to provide himself with a son – his wife Joan might have been too old for child-bearing, but had she died a second marriage could have produced a boy. In these circumstances Robert would not part with the main Hilton seat, but a secondary manor. Elizabeth may have received Swine after her father's death because Isobel's share of the inheritance was already too significant to receive this manor as well as Winestead.

Godfrey's right to take charge of Elizabeth's person and possessions is dependent on whether or not she was an unmarried minor at the time of Robert Hilton's death. Protection of dependants, particularly minors and females, was expected of gentry males. Until Elizabeth was married or came of age it was Godfrey's specific duty to do just this. If she had already married John Melton, however, the situation would be rather different; in this case the protection of her rights would be the responsibility of her husband. Robert Hilton might well have arranged such a match. There could be no objection to a Melton groom on the basis of his lineage, for the Meltons were a well-established Yorkshire gentry family with an archbishop in their recent past, John Melton's father was a knight and he himself

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<sup>158</sup> Townend (ed.), *Burke's Landed Gentry*, p. 298.

would go on to be twice sheriff of Yorkshire. If Elizabeth was indeed married by 1432, then Godfrey had neither legal nor moral rights in this case. Husband trumped uncle, for once a woman was married she ceased to be the responsibility of her natal family. An uncle might show an interest, but he was not obliged to do so, nor was her marital family obliged to let him. Care of his niece, however, was probably not foremost on Godfrey's mind. This is indicated by his actions regarding Winestead, another of the Hilton manors. This property unquestionably belonged to Isobel, a widow with children over whom Godfrey had no duties of guardianship, yet Godfrey still tried to claim it as his own. It would appear that he was not acting in his nieces' interests, so much as he was acting in his own. As a later incident involving his own son's inheritance indicates, Godfrey Hilton was a man most unwilling to relinquish control over lands he felt he had a right to. His son had to pursue him through the courts before he would hand over lands that should have come to him on the death of his Lutterell mother.<sup>159</sup>

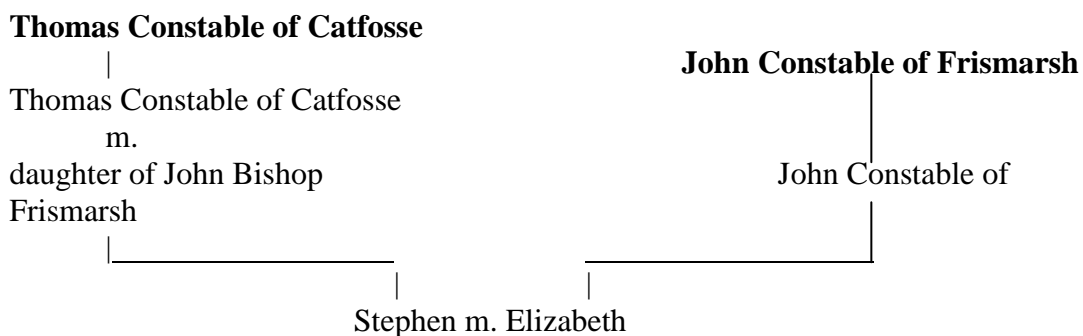
So far, then, it is apparent that Godfrey's motivation for defending these particular properties is not as straightforward as at first it appeared. His claim upon this land is not nearly as secure as he implies, indeed he may have no legal claim at all. Similarly, the position of the men he accused is rather more complex than it seems. The most immediately notable feature of those named by the commission is that five out of thirteen were from the Constable family. This can hardly be a coincidence. Whilst the precise relationship between Robert, Thomas and the three John Constables is uncertain, all appear to have come from separate branches of the numerous Constable family residing in Holderness. The frequent repetition of these

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<sup>159</sup> TNA C 1/71/126.

### Pedigree A - Constable of Catfosse and Frismarsh

Names in **bold** refer to those who were also named by the commission of oyer and terminer of 1432.



Pedigree taken from:

George Poulson, *The History and Antiquities of the Seigniary of Holderness*, Volume I (Hull, 1840), p. 437.

three names in particular makes it difficult to trace specific individuals in the records. John of Halsham and Robert of Flamborough may have been cousins, and a Thomas Constable, junior, was one of the witnesses to the will of John Constable of Halsham in 1449, possibly the same Thomas named here.<sup>160</sup> At some point in the early to mid-sixteenth century the heiress of the Constables of Frismarsh would marry the heir of the Constables of Catfoss (Pedigree A), so these two branches were probably not very closely related a hundred years before. This of course assumes that the four degrees of kinship prohibited by canon law had been adhered to, but such was not always the case.<sup>161</sup>

<sup>160</sup> Lankester, *Medieval Monuments in St Mary's Swine*.

<sup>161</sup> Helmholz, *Marriage Litigation*, p. 78.

The very number of Constables named in this accusation points to a close-knit kinship network among gentry males. This may explain the involvement of so many in the name of their relatives, but it does not explain why any of them were involved to begin with. The answer to this lies in the fact that the Constables were by no means the unruly interlopers that Godfrey implies. At least two of them, Robert Constable of Flamborough and John Constable of Halsham, were his nephews (Pedigree B). If Elizabeth Hilton was already married at this point we may also include John Melton. There is evidence of a friendly relationship between the Hiltons of Swine and the Constables, particularly those of Halsham, going back into the fourteenth century, when they regularly acted as witnesses on each other's legal documents.<sup>162</sup> As late as 1430, a year before his death, Robert Hilton was acting as witness to a grant of land made to Robert Constable of Flamborough.<sup>163</sup> Not only were the Constables and the Hiltons close neighbours, but in the later fourteenth century they were doubly connected by marriage. Robert Hilton of Swine married Joan Constable, sister of Marmaduke and aunt of the same Robert Constable accused here, whilst John Constable of Halsham was married to Maud Hilton, sister of Robert and Godfrey and mother of the John of Halsham named as an assailant by

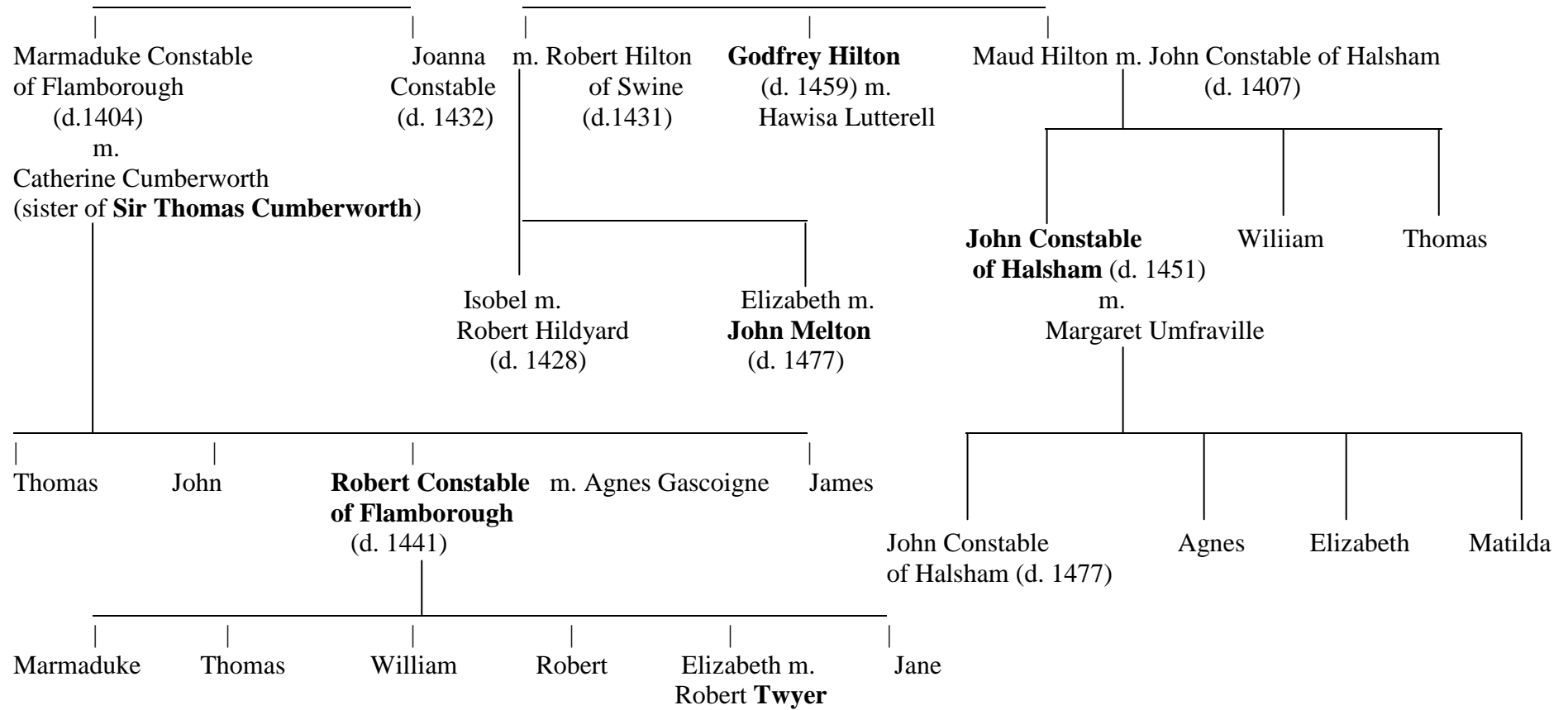
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<sup>162</sup> Grant in special tail witnessed by John Constable, Robert Hilton, John Mounseux, 12 April 1374, William Brown (ed.), *Yorkshire Deeds, Vol. III*, Yorkshire Archaeological Society, Record Series, 68, (1922), p. 79; Land grant witnessed by Robert Hilton, Robert de la Twyer, William Constable, 24 July 1402, DDCC/141/68/p24/a; Robert Hilton, John Constable of Halsham, Robert Twyer, 1 March 1407, BC/III/2/11; Robert Hilton, John Constable of Halsham, William de la Twyer, 30 September 1419, DDRI/35/1, all *East Riding of Yorkshire Archives and Records Service*.

<sup>163</sup> Charles Travis Clay (ed.) *Yorkshire Deeds, Vol. V*, Yorkshire Archaeological Society, Record Series, 69 (1926), p. 168.

### Pedigree B - Hilton of Swine, Constable of Flamborough and Constable of Hilton

Names in **bold** refer to those who were also named by the commission of oyer and terminer of 1432.



Pedigree compiled from:

‘Hildyard of Winstead ‘ in Joseph Foster (ed.) *Visitations of Yorkshire* (London, 1875), pp. 50-1

‘Sir Robert Hilton’ and ‘Sir John Melton’ in W.M. Ormrod, *Lord Lieutenants and High Sheriffs of Yorkshire 1066-2000*, (Barnsley, 2000, pp. 82, 100.

George Poulson, *The History and Antiquities of the Seigniary of Holderness*, Volume I (Hull, 1840), pp. 186, 192, 277, 437.

Wills of Robert Constable of Flamborough, 1400, Marmaduke Constable of Flamborough, 1404, John Constable of Halsham, 1407, all TE, I, pp. 264-5, 337-8, 350.

Wills of Robert Hilton of Swine, 1429, Joanna, widow of Robert Hilton of Swine, 1432, John Constable of Hedon in Holderness, 1449, Robert Constable of Bossall, 1454, John Melton of Aston, 1455, all TE II, pp. 16-7, 23-5, 158-9, 174-7, 184.

Will of Robert Twyer of Gaunstead, 1478, TE III, p. 242.

Instruction to give Godfrey Hilton and his wife Hawisa Luttrell full seisin of lands late of Godfrey Luttrell, as Hawisa is sister and heir, 28<sup>th</sup> May 1419, CFR Henry V, vol. XIV (London, 1934), p. 277

Instruction to give Godfrey Hilton, son and heir of Sir Godfrey Hilton, knight, lands late of his father, 24<sup>th</sup> November 1459, CFR Henry VI, vol. XIX (London, 1939), p. 248.

Lands late of Robert Constable of Flamborough in keeping of William de la Pole until full age of Robert Constable his son and heir, 16<sup>th</sup> July 1441, CFR Henry VI, vol. XVII (London, 1937), p. 199



Godfrey (Pedigree B).<sup>164</sup> Evidence that these family networks were still active in the 1430s can be found in the will of Joan Hilton, Robert Hilton's widow. In it she mentions her nephew Robert Constable, his mother Catherine, John Constable of Halsham and his wife Margaret Umfraville.<sup>165</sup> This same John was made supervisor of her will.

This complicated web of relationships indicates that at least two of the Constable males named in Godfrey's accusation had a close familial interest in the Hilton property. As heiresses it was all but inevitable that their male relatives should attempt to intervene in Isobel and Elizabeth's inheritance, both women and land were considered things that ought to be under masculine control. But the matter was complicated by a lack of unchallengeable males with this right. The Constables had as good a claim as Godfrey Hilton. The latter may have been uncle to Isobel and Elizabeth on their father's side, but both Robert Constable of Flamborough and John Constable of Halsham were their cousins, who given their close geographical proximity may have considered that they had a greater right to exercise their familial influence than a man whose main interests were outside of the county.

The likelihood that they would choose to exercise this interest may be indicated by closer examination of these men as individuals. Robert Constable of Flamborough died in 1441 and is unlikely to have been particularly old at the time, for whilst he had fathered at least six children, at least four of whom were alive at the

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<sup>164</sup> Grant by Robert Hilton of Swine to Thomas son of John Constable of Halsham (younger son of John and Maud, daughter of Robert Hilton), 3 August, 1411, Clay (ed.) *Yorkshire Deeds. Vol. V*, p. 99; Poulson, *Holderness*, vol. II, p. 198.

<sup>165</sup> Will of Joan, widow of Robert Hilton, knight, of Swine, 1432 in TE II, pp. 23-5.

time he made his will, his heir Robert was still in his minority and became a ward of the king.<sup>166</sup> His relative youth is also attested by the fact that he was able to name his uncle as supervisor after his death. All this points to a man who cannot have been much more than forty years old in 1432 and who could have orchestrated resistance to Godfrey Hilton's attempts on Swine and its associated manors. A concern for the welfare of dependants is expressed in his will, where he instructs his son and heir Robert to support his other son, William, and his two daughters.<sup>167</sup> Such familial concern might easily have stretched to female cousins, prompting him to intervene to ensure that they received their rightful inheritance. Alternatively, intervention on his part may represent a desire to exert influence over the Hilton properties. As one of the prime landowners in Holderness he had a vested interest in maintaining the position of superiority that this provided. He had a far better chance of doing this if he kept an adult male like Godfrey Hilton out of possession. Robert Constable's prominence in local government, particularly as sheriff of Yorkshire in 1437, is certainly suggestive of a man who was interested in the amount of influence he could wield.<sup>168</sup>

Robert Constable's cousin, John Constable of Halsham, betrays a similar, perhaps an even greater interest in holding positions of authority. Sheriff of Lincolnshire and Yorkshire, and knight of the shire for the latter county more than once, John Constable had the most prominent career of the Constables of his

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<sup>166</sup> July 16 1441, CFR Henry VI, vol. XVII, p. 191.

<sup>167</sup> Will of Sir Robert Constable of Flamborough, 1441, TE II, pp. 80-1.

<sup>168</sup> CFR Henry VI, vol. XVII, p. 4.

generation.<sup>169</sup> Perhaps so much royal service was not worth the effort it took, for in 1440 he acquired an exemption from being made sheriff of any county, valid for the rest of his life.<sup>170</sup> By this point he was probably past his prime, something that seems to have been a major factor when several of the Yorkshire gentry sought similar exemptions in the fifteenth century.<sup>171</sup> Like the Hiltons at Swine, John's branch of Constables was particularly linked with its main seat. The tomb of this man or his son still stands in All Saints' church, Halsham and takes the form of an alabaster representation of the knight-in-armour of so many gentlemen's tombs.<sup>172</sup> The large number of shields depicted on it, whilst being a common feature on such monuments, indicates a concern for the family genealogy. In his will he specified that he wished to be buried close to his ancestors.<sup>173</sup> Like Robert Constable, John was concerned that his dependants should be provided for, but unlike his relative John's concerns reached far wider, to include rewards to his servants and a remission of taxes to his tenants at Halsham, Burton Constable, Newton Constable, Marton, Thurlethorpe, Dunnington, Maunby, Thearne, and Kirkby-under-Knolle.<sup>174</sup> Several factors may have motivated such generosity on John's part, but a serious regard for his responsibilities as lord may well have been among them. Lordship was not just about land ownership, the way a gentleman behaved within that role was equally important. In showing concern for his tenants a lord underlined his position of

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<sup>169</sup> CFR Henry VI, vol. XVI, p. 221; in 1440 and 1445, CFR Henry VI, vol. XVII, pp. 149, 331.

<sup>170</sup> CPR Henry VI, vol. III, p. 374.

<sup>171</sup> This was true of William Ryther, kn, in 1437 and Richard Waterton, esq, in 1443. CPR Hen VI, vol. III, p. 10; CPR Hen VI, vol. IV, p. 239.

<sup>172</sup> Pevsner, *Buildings of England: York and the East Riding*, p. 240-1.

<sup>173</sup> Will of Sir John Constable of Holderness, 1449, TE II, pp. 158 -9.

<sup>174</sup> TE II, pp. 158 -9.

authority over them. Such a man might well be expected to put up a spirited defence of property that he had an interest in, as John did in the Hilton inheritance, however tenuous his claim.

Once it is realised that the Constables were probably the main force behind the conflict with Godfrey Hilton, there are evident reasons why most of the other men should have been drawn in. Not only were most of them lesser gentry in an area dominated by the Constables, but as the Hilton-Constable pedigree demonstrates all but three of them can be readily tied to the family by blood or marriage.<sup>175</sup> The presence of so prominent a Lincolnshire knight as Thomas Cumberworth, for example, seems difficult to explain until it is discovered that his sister Catherine was Robert Constable of Flamborough's mother (Pedigree B).<sup>176</sup> Cumberworth evidently had close and longstanding ties with the Constable family, for in 1425 he was an executor for the will of one Robert Constable, as he would be supervisor for his nephew Robert's will.<sup>177</sup> It is likely that the Robert Twyer married to Robert Constable's daughter Elizabeth was the son of the William Twyer, esquire, in Godfrey's plaint (Pedigree C). Robert Twyer's will of 1478 mentions his father William as having bequeathed him a collection of books in French and Latin, with vestments and plate specifically to be used as heirlooms.<sup>178</sup> Not only do these items speak of a relatively wealthy, educated and pious man, the intention that they should be passed down through the generations indicates a man with a strong sense of family continuity. This same William Twyer appears to have been married to the

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<sup>175</sup> These three are John Foston, William Byrstell and William Rysom.

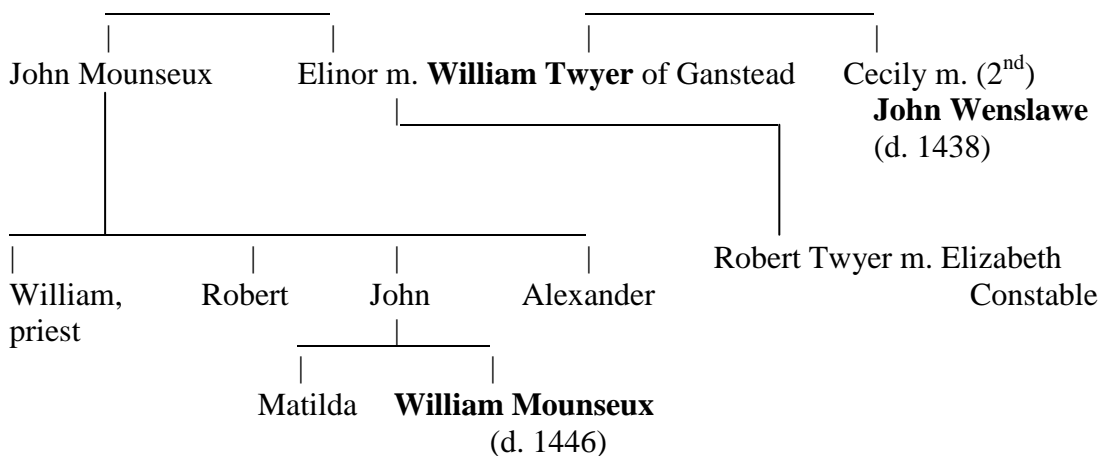
<sup>176</sup> Sheriff of Lincolnshire 1415, CFR Henry V, vol. XIV (London, 1934), p. 129.

<sup>177</sup> CPR Henry VI, vol. I, p. 248; will of Robert Constable, TE II, pp. 80-1.

<sup>178</sup> Will of Robert Twyer of Gaunstede, 1478, TE III, p. 242.

### Pedigree C - Mounseux, Twyer and Wenslawe

Names in **bold** refer to those who were also named by the commission of oyer and terminer of 1432.



Pedigree compiled from:

Joseph Foster (ed.) *The Visitations of Yorkshire* (London, 1875), p. 150.  
 George Poulson, *The History and Antiquities of the Seigniry of Holderness*, Volume I (Hull, 1840), pp. 186, 192, 277.  
 Will of Robert Twyer of Gaunstede, 1478, TE III, p. 242.

great aunt of William Mounseux, whilst Twyer's brother-in-law was none other than John Wenslawe, both of whom were named by Godfrey Hilton (Pedigree C).<sup>179</sup> That the majority of these men were closely related can be no coincidence and speaks strongly of the relationship between masculinity and kinship. Clearly in such cases family interest reached far outside the immediate, nuclear family.

Family was certainly a factor in the involvement of these men, but it is unlikely to have been their sole motivation in choosing to support the Constables.

<sup>179</sup> Poulson, *Holderness*, vol. I, pp. 186, 192.

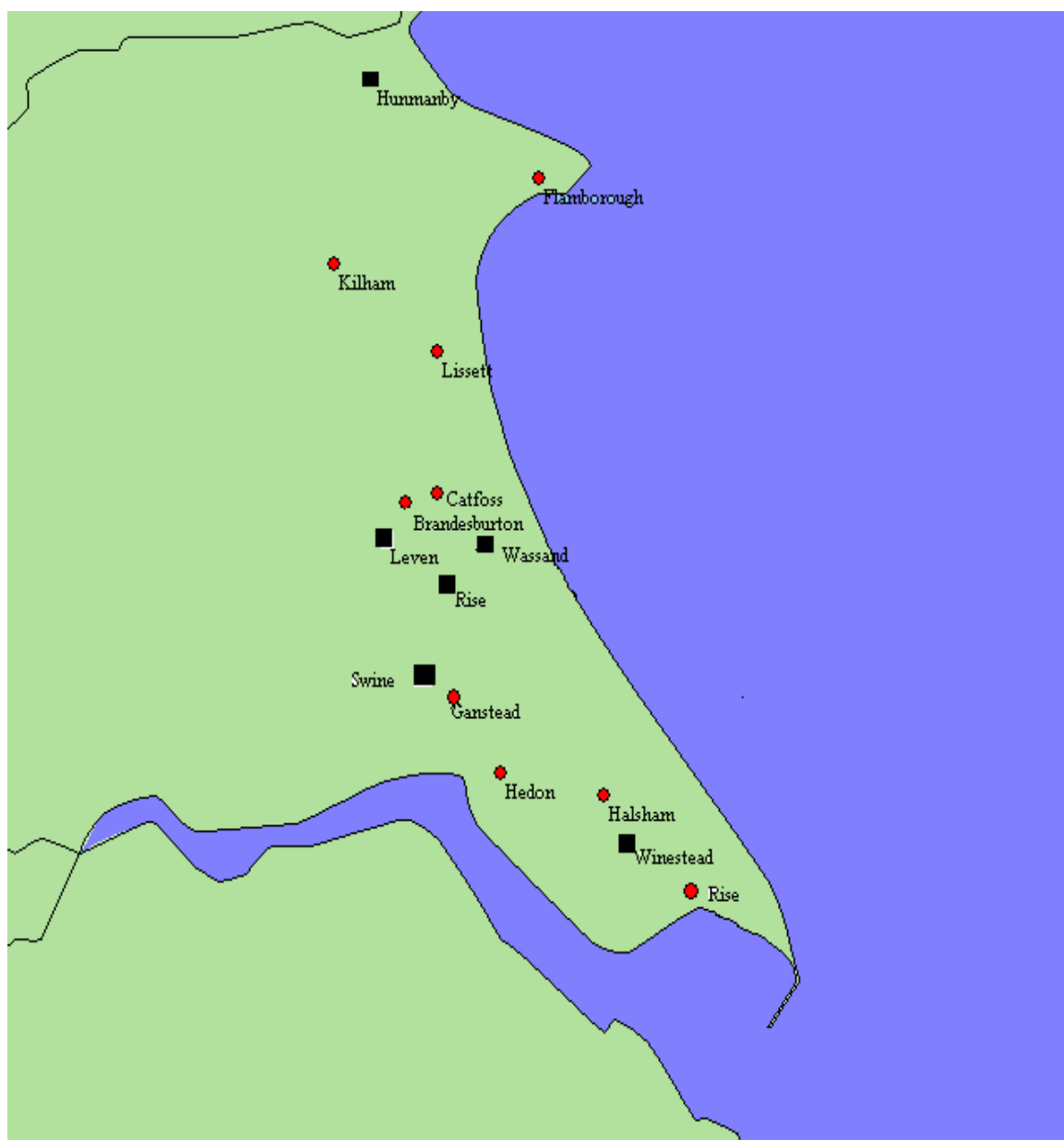
Almost all of them, and the land they were accused of invading, were located in Holderness in the East Riding (fig. 5). Swine is within ten miles of the homes of John Constable of Hedon, John Foston, John Constable of Halsham, William Bystell and John Wenslawe. It is further from the home of William Rysom, but he lived only a few miles distant from Halsham. In the north of Holderness Robert Constable and William Mounseux were further from Swine, but they were considerably closer to Hunmanby, another place mentioned by Hilton as a scene of dispute and where Robert Constable acquired land at some point.<sup>180</sup> Living so close to them, the ownership of these properties was no doubt of some concern to the gentry named here, even without additional factors of kinship. With boundaries uncertain and titles often difficult to prove, disputes over property could be both long-lived and extremely expensive. There was the distinct possibility that Godfrey Hilton, given the chance, would be an acquisitive neighbour. By supporting the Constables, these men made a conscious choice, one not devoid of self-interest. The Constable family were important residents in the area, closely connected with numerous Holderness families, whilst Godfrey Hilton was a knight with interests largely in another county. The Constables were in a position to provide assistance when it was needed, or to create trouble if they felt themselves to have been slighted. Godfrey Hilton's reach, in both cases, would have been restricted by his distance from the East Riding. His youth may have been spent with these same men, but his wife had come into her Lincolnshire inheritance more than ten years previous to Robert Hilton's death, meaning that contact between them would have been limited.<sup>181</sup>

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<sup>180</sup> R.B. Pugh (ed.) *Victoria County History, Yorkshire East Riding*, vol. II (London, 1974), p. 233.

<sup>181</sup> Instruction to give Godfrey Hilton and his wife Hawisa Luttrell full seisin of lands late of Godfrey Luttrell, as Hawisa is sister and heir, 28 May 1419, CFR Henry V, vol. XIV (London, 1934), p. 277.

**Figure 5 Map of the Holderness, showing the proximity of the disputed Hilton manors to the homes of those accused.**



### Key

- Disputed Hilton Lands
- Places of origin of accused gentry

This lack of contact was probably all the more important when some of these men appear to have known each other very well. In all likelihood, John Foston dealt regularly with John Constable of Hedon as both came from the same location, and the paths of many of these men undoubtedly crossed with some frequency. Besides Hilton's complaint, several can be found associated again when they were among those summoned to take an oath of loyalty as prominent gentry of the shire in 1434.<sup>182</sup> From the evidence of legal documents and official commissions it is clear that some of these men were particularly close associates. There are some obvious groupings. For example, John Constable of Halsham, John Melton and William Twyer appear repeatedly together, with the latter two most often acting as witnesses to the agreements of the former.<sup>183</sup> When John Constable of Halsham was made sheriff of Lincolnshire in 1435 John Wenslawe was one of those to stand mainprise for him, whilst John Wenslawe and John Melton, with the sons of John Constable of Halsham and Robert Constable of Flamborough, all appeared on commissions together throughout the 1450s.<sup>184</sup> Robert Constable of Flamborough and William Mounseux were among those being investigated for overcharging common pasture in Esthorpe and Lounesburgh with their cattle in 1430 and the same William Mounseux and a John Constable were attempting to prosecute one Robert Johnson in 1441 for

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<sup>182</sup> Those listed include John Melton, knight (possibly the same John Melton or his father), John Constable of Halsham, Thomas Constable of Catfosse, esq, William Mounseux of Barneston, esq, May 1 1434, CPR Henry VI, vol. II, p. 378-9.

<sup>183</sup> For example 27 Apr 1440, DDCC/141/68/p40/b; 7 March 1448/9, DDCC/133/3, both *East Riding of Yorkshire Archives and Records Service*.

<sup>184</sup> May 24 1435 CFR Henry VI vol. XVI, p. 234; CPR Henry VI, vol. V, pp. 319, 378, 389, 479, Henry VI, vol. VI, pp. 118, 408, 488, 682, not including commissions of array.



debt and trespass.<sup>185</sup> Separately, the name of William Bystell appears only in connection with Thomas Constable of Catfoss, and suggests a tie between the two.<sup>186</sup>

It is almost unnecessary to point out that these men shared further common ground in terms of status, for all but one, the knight Thomas Cumberworth, were esquires. As a result there was likely a sense of shared interests between them, which may in turn have contributed to a feeling that as gentry males they were part of a distinct group. When it came to individual importance, however, there were significant differences. John Foston and William Byrstell make no appearance in central government documents such as the Close, Patent and Fine Rolls and from this we may assume they were either unimportant or particularly successful in dodging the Crown's demands for administrative assistance. At the other end of the scale, some of these men acted as sheriff - John Constable of Halsham was sheriff of Lincolnshire in 1434-5, sheriff of Yorkshire in 1436, and knight of that same shire at least twice in 1440 and 1445.<sup>187</sup> John Melton was sheriff of Yorkshire twice in 1453 and 1460 and Robert Constable was sheriff of Yorkshire once.<sup>188</sup> To act in any official capacity could be an onerous task, so much so that those who did possessed either a strong sense of duty or, more likely, were particularly ambitious for power and influence. The desire to wield authority may well have influenced the decision to band together, at least for those who pursued official positions of local authority. The death of Robert Hilton would have created a vacuum in terms of local influence. The Constable family, the prime movers in Holderness, sought to fill that gap. As some

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<sup>185</sup> 7 Feb 1430, CCR Henry VI, vol. II, p. 12; CPR Henry VI, vol. III, p. 465.

<sup>186</sup> 29 Nov 1431, DDRI/41/1, *East Riding of Yorkshire Archives and Records Service*.

<sup>187</sup> CFR Henry VI, vol. XVI, pp. 221, 234, 303, vol. XVII, pp. 149, 331.

<sup>188</sup> CFR Henry VI, vol. XIX, pp. 74, 101; CFR Henry VI, vol. XVII, p. 4.

of the most influential and substantial landowners in the region they may well have felt that this position of power was theirs by right. The marriage of John Melton, an intimate associate of the Constables, to one of the Hilton heiresses may even have been arranged so that Hilton lands remained in the Constable sphere.

What at first appeared to be no more than a straightforward example of property invasion has thus been revealed as something far more complicated. The situation that arose from the death of Robert Hilton in 1431, leaving as heirs two daughters and effectively terminating the Hiltons of Swine, reveals some of the most significant themes of fifteenth-century gentry identity. Land-holding was an important part of being a gentleman, bringing income, influence and prestige and there was particular significance in a manor which formed the core of a family's patrimony. Swine had been connected with the Hilton family for over a hundred years and its loss was not something Godfrey, as the last male of the line, could allow with equanimity. As far as he was concerned he had a justifiable reason in attempting to stop the family line from dying out at its traditional seat, even to the extent of disinheriting his nieces. Land, influence, the family line, and a sense of place were all clearly worth fighting for, and as Godfrey's appeal to the law shows, it was not necessary to rely solely on violence. It was unfortunate for Godfrey that, as cousins to the heiresses and influential local gentry, the Constables had a considerable interest in keeping him out. At least two of them were very closely related to the Hiltons of Swine, a relationship that probably provided them with a sense of their right to be involved. As some of the most important gentry in Holderness the Constables and their associates may also have preferred to see the Hilton power-base broken up rather than under a strong and possibly acquisitive

single lord. With a secure footing Godfrey Hilton might have challenged their dominance of the region. As it was their complicated network of kin, neighbours and friends put them in a far stronger position than their rival and eventually resulted in their success. Isobel and Elizabeth kept their lands and the Constables maintained their position as Holderness' premier gentry family.

This entry in the Patent Rolls allows for a glimpse of gentry homosocial relationships at work.<sup>189</sup> Through an examination of Godfrey Hilton's alleged assailants we may see an indication of the vast and complicated networks that could be created among the gentry, based on ties of blood, marriage, locality, and self-interest. From this one example, it would appear that status was a factor in the creation of such groups. As gentlemen in a period when definitions of the lower aristocracy were becoming increasingly crucial, the determination to keep the lower orders out must have had an effect on the relationships of those who were 'in'.<sup>190</sup> Location was also apparently a factor, for almost all of the gentry in this source originate from Holderness in the East Riding. This in itself indicates that the Yorkshire gentry in the fifteenth century may have been subject to a much more localised sense of regional identity than that of the 'county community'.<sup>191</sup> If the shire was as important as the smaller regional units within it we would expect to see more than one man, and one related by marriage at that, from outside of this narrow district. A similar effect to that present here has been highlighted by Anthony Pollard

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<sup>189</sup> For further discussion of the concept of homosociality see Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men. English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York, 1985).

<sup>190</sup> Carpenter, *Locality and Polity*, p. 45.

<sup>191</sup> Moreton, 'A Social Gulf?', p. 261; Pollard, 'Richmondshire Community', pp. 37-59; Hayes, 'Ancient Indictments', pp. 19-45; Wilcock, 'Local Disorder', pp. 39-80.

for the gentry of Richmondshire, who formed a community ‘almost as introspective as it was close-knit’, existing as part of a complicated web of alliance and neighbourhood.<sup>192</sup> Almost all of the men recorded in response to Sir Godfrey’s plaint lived within a few miles of each other and would have come into contact on a regular basis. The tendency of the Crown to group regions for administrative purposes may have fostered a sense of community among these men. As neighbours they transacted private business with one another and acted as witness on one another’s documents. Frequent interaction seems to have encouraged marriage alliances, whilst connections of marriage encouraged closer relationships in terms of business. The Constable network demonstrates a particular reliance on kin and proximity, two things that can be argued as important in the formation of a wide range of medieval relationships.<sup>193</sup> It is this theme of relationship and interaction between gentlemen that will be discussed further in the next chapter.

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<sup>192</sup> Pollard, ‘Richmondshire Community’, p. 51.

<sup>193</sup> Jack Goody, *The European Family. An Historico-Anthropological Essay* (Oxford, 2000), p. 61.

## Chapter 2

### **Social Networks, Kinship and Family: The Plumptons**

This chapter looks at the networks to which gentlemen in fifteenth-century Yorkshire belonged. In it I shall investigate how gentlemen formed connections, who they formed them with and why. I will examine the significance of status, lordship and service, kinship, and gender in dictating how gentlemen were expected to behave. This in turn will be used to consider how social networks and family ties contributed to the construction of culture and identity for gentry males. The evidence for this discussion comes from the Plumpton correspondence, a hitherto underutilised collection of letters written to and by the Plumptons of Plumpton over a period of more than sixty years. Through an examination of the attitudes expressed within these letters, I intend to explore how the behaviour of gentlemen in their different roles, as husband and father, as neighbour, friend, lord or servant, contributed to an understanding of their ideas about gentility. I will begin by looking at the importance and implications of hierarchy, asking how gentlemen signified their position to others through language and behaviour. I will then go on to consider the importance of collective identity, as members of the aristocracy, of the gentry, and of a lineage. Finally, I will look at the dynamics of specific familial relationships, examining how gentlemen conducted themselves as fathers, sons and husbands.

Letters have long been recognised as an excellent source for social history, providing a unique and singularly important perspective on the mentality of

individuals.<sup>194</sup> The Plumpton correspondence, a collection of more than two hundred letters written to and by members of the Plumpton family between the mid-fifteenth and the mid-sixteenth centuries, is one of only a few gentry letter collections to have survived from the period.<sup>195</sup> Letter-writing may have been common among the fifteenth-century gentry, but there is comparatively little evidence available. Indeed the Plumpton letters themselves only exist as seventeenth-century transcriptions.<sup>196</sup> Other examples from Yorkshire are scattered around local record offices and private collections, but I have been unable to trace any which pre-date the sixteenth century.<sup>197</sup> The Plumpton letters thus constitute an important source for the social history of this period. So far, however, they have been largely overlooked. Scholars have tended to ignore this collection, which deals primarily with legal matters, in favour of others that more obviously demonstrate personal and private concerns. The Paston letters, for example, are far more familiar, having been the subject of considerable study.<sup>198</sup> Whilst it is true that the writers of the Plumpton letters are seldom as ‘chatty’, to use Norman Davis’ word, as their Norfolk contemporaries, it would be unfair to suggest, like Davis, that their correspondence is of limited

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<sup>194</sup> Sarah Rhiannon Williams, *English Vernacular Letters, c. 1400-1600: Language, Literacy and Culture*, unpublished PhD thesis (University of York, 2001), pp. 3-8.

<sup>195</sup> The others are those of the Pastons, Stonors, and Armburghs.

<sup>196</sup> Joan Kirby (ed.) ‘Introduction’, *Plumpton Letters and Papers*, Camden Society, Fifth Series, 8 (1996), pp. 18-21.

<sup>197</sup> For example, a considerable amount of material related to the Fairfax family of Gilling survives from the fourteenth century onwards, but there are no letters until the 1580s. North Riding Record Office, ZDV(F).

<sup>198</sup> The letters themselves have been published three times, most recently in Norman Davis (ed.) *Paston Letters and Papers of the Fifteenth Century*, EETS, SS. 20, 21 (2004). Some recent works based around the Paston letters include Teo Juvonen, ‘Everyday Possession: Family and Identity in the Correspondence of John Paston’, in Arja Nurmi, Minna Nevala and Minna Palander-Collin (eds.) *The Language of Daily Life in England* (Amsterdam and Philadelphia, 2009), pp. 292-312; Joel T. Rosenthal, *Margaret Paston’s Piety* (Basingstoke, 2010).

interest.<sup>199</sup> There are few direct references to the mundane realities of everyday life, but there are clear indications of how the relationships of those appearing within these letters functioned on a daily basis. Correspondents might not baldly state what was important to them, but the repeated sending of letters on any given subject makes their concerns apparent. The way in which one gentleman spoke to another, or to a nobleman, or a servant, indicates how he saw himself in relation to others. Once we begin to examine the Plumpton letters, their potential contribution to a study of gentry relationships is evident.

There are, however, various points that need to be considered when using letters as a source for any kind of history. Letters were written according to strict conventions and to serve a particular purpose. Not all were preserved, with those that were kept often relating to business or property matters. As a result, surviving evidence represents only a limited selection of gentry interaction. In order to make use of a letter, it is helpful to know who wrote it, how they wrote it and why. Of these three points, the first need not overly concern us here, since there is no way of determining who actually wrote the Plumpton letters. The sender is almost always identified, but without the originals it is impossible to say who penned their own letters and who used scribes. As Alison Truelove has pointed out, this is a major hindrance in using the Plumpton correspondence for a study of literacy.<sup>200</sup> It may be less significant in a study of relationships, however, where authorship is more important than who put pen to paper. The composition of a letter and its actual writing were conceived of as two separate acts, of which the former was by far the

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<sup>199</sup> Davis, *Paston Letters*, p. xxi.

<sup>200</sup> Alison Truelove, 'Literacy' in Radulescu and Truelove (eds.) *Gentry Culture*, p. 88.

most important.<sup>201</sup> Letters might be autograph, dictated to a scribe or composed on vague instructions to a third party. Distortion of meaning could be a problem with this last type of letter, but it is unlikely that this was a common occurrence. The use of a scribe would probably result in a more formal and polished letter, since professionals would have been more familiar with the conventions of letter-writing than ordinary men and women, but not at the expense of meaning. The gentry would hardly have continued to make extensive use of scribes if they were unreliable.<sup>202</sup> A letter written from dictation could be as faithful to the sender's intentions as an autograph letter.<sup>203</sup> It was authored by the person who dictated it, not the person who wrote it down. We may thus be reasonably confident that letters generally said what the sender intended.

Fifteenth-century letters were written according to a fairly strict set of conventions, the *ars dictaminis*. All, more or less, began with a salutation, moving on to an exordium, narration, petition and conclusion.<sup>204</sup> Letters tend to be highly formulaic, relatively short and dependant on stock phrases, something that Malcolm Richardson attributes to the influence of royal missives.<sup>205</sup> The relative status of sender and recipient, rather than the closeness of the relationship between them, dictated the form and tone of their correspondence. The form of salutation, for

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<sup>201</sup> Jeffrey Kittay, 'Utterance Unmoored: The Changing Interpretation of the Act of Writing in the European Middle Ages', *Language in Society*, 17, 2 (1988), pp. 214-5.

<sup>202</sup> Rebecca Krug, *Reading Families. Women's literate Practice in Late Medieval England* (Ithaca and London, 2002), p. 17.

<sup>203</sup> Anne Crawford, *Letters of Medieval Women* (Stroud, 2002), p. 5.

<sup>204</sup> Williams, *English Vernacular Letters*, pp. 44-7.

<sup>205</sup> Malcolm Richardson, 'The Fading Influence of the *Ars Dictaminis* in England After 1400', *Rhetorica*, 19. 2 (2000), pp. 229-30.



example, was directly related to status. There is a clear difference between Edward Barlow's greeting of Sir Robert Plumpton as 'Right reuerent & my singular good master, I commend me to your good mastership', a standard greeting from those who were in a position of service, and that of John, Lord Scrope of Masham, whose 'Trusty and welbeloued I greet you wel', was the usual greeting of those in a position of superiority.<sup>206</sup> 'Right worshipfull' was the appropriate form of address for men of comparable status, as when gentlemen addressed other gentlemen. For relatives it was 'Right worshipfull' cousin, father or brother, and for non-kin like Richard Cholmley, when he addressed Sir Robert Plumpton, 'Right worshipfull Sir'.<sup>207</sup>

Strict adherence to convention gives little scope for personal expression. It does, however, serve to illustrate the importance of status recognition. Deviation was rare, but for this reason may be all the more significant. Some letters were less formal than others. The Gascoignes of Gawthorpe, for example, wrote letters to Sir Robert Plumpton III that were short and to the point. They also addressed Sir Robert informally. John Gascoigne began a letter with an abbreviated 'Brother, I recommend me vnto you', whilst his son Sir William Gascoigne addressed Sir Robert simply as 'Uncle Plompton'.<sup>208</sup> That one of these men was Sir Robert's brother-in-law and the other his nephew is unlikely to be coincidental. Informality may not always equate with closeness between the parties involved; Sarah Williams has argued that it did not.<sup>209</sup> Yet there does seem to be some connection in the

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<sup>206</sup> Kirby (ed.) *Plumpton Letters*, No. 114, pp. 112-3; No. 1, p. 24.

<sup>207</sup> Respectively, cousin Richard Tunstall, son-in-law John Tong and brother-in-law Robert Eyre. Kirby (ed.) *Plumpton Letters*, No. 56, 118, 156, pp. 73, 115, 146; No. 111, p. 109.

<sup>208</sup> Kirby (ed.) *Plumpton Letters*, No. 148-9, p. 141.

<sup>209</sup> Williams, *English Vernacular Letters*, pp. 223-4.

Plumpton correspondence. Close family members did not necessarily dispense with convention, but it would seem that informality was only an option for those who were closely related. This connection has also been noted by Alison Truelove regarding the Paston and Stonor letters.<sup>210</sup> Whether those who used informal language were adopting wider conventions is difficult to say. Letter writing manuals do not survive from this period, but a hundred years later this kind of distinction was recommended. *The English Secretarie*, published in 1586, suggested that, from:

one absent friend to another; it seemeth the Character therof, shoulde according there unto be simple, plaine, and of the lowest and meanest stile, utterly devoyde of anye shadowe of hie and loftye speches.<sup>211</sup>

Fifteenth-century correspondents may have been working to a similar pattern. Deviation from the form, however slight, can therefore be regarded as an indication of the nature of the relationship between sender and recipient.

Whatever the relationship between the parties involved, letter-writing was generally considered too laborious a task to be undertaken without a specific aim.<sup>212</sup> This was generally in order to gain something, as a result of which letters owe much in style to the formal petition.<sup>213</sup> For this reason, protestations of respect and

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<sup>210</sup> Truelove, 'Literacy', p. 95.

<sup>211</sup> Angel Day, *The English Secretarie, 1586* (Menston, 1967), p. 18.

<sup>212</sup> H.S. Bennett, *The Pastons and Their England. Studies in an Age of Transition* (Cambridge, 1951), p. 115.

<sup>213</sup> Richardson, 'Fading Influence', p. 230; Williams, 'English Vernacular Letters', p. 27.

affection cannot be taken at face value. For example, when William Catton addressed Sir Robert Plumpton III as:

Right honourable and my [...] <most trusty> good master. In as humble a wyse as I can thinke or say, I commend me to your sayd mastershipp. And Sir, according to my duty, I thank you of all gentle mastership vnto me shewed, and to my frinds,

his effusive praise was almost certainly prompted by the desire to secure a position for his brother.<sup>214</sup> Words of respect and affection do not necessarily represent real feelings. Similarly, a lack of affective language does not necessarily mean that the sender and recipient were not close. Those most likely to share feelings of affection generally lived in close proximity to one another and would in most cases have been able to express their affection in person. In the event that they could not, they would probably have passed the message verbally through a trusted representative rather than writing it down.<sup>215</sup> In either case the message, and the feeling it represented, would not have been recorded. This does not mean that it was not felt.

This last point raises a wider issue regarding the use of letters as a source for relationships, namely that those who could speak face-to-face did not need to write to one another. As a result, letters represent only a small fraction of the interaction of late medieval gentlemen with others. Added to the fact that a large number of letters have not survived, it is apparent that this source provides a very small window onto

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<sup>214</sup> Kirby (ed.) *Plumpton Letters*, No. 58, pp. 74-5.

<sup>215</sup> R.A. Houston, *Literacy in Early Modern Europe 1500-1800* (Harlow, 1988), p. 1; Williams, *English Vernacular Letters*, p. 61.

the lives of fifteenth-century gentlemen. The greater part of what gentlemen said and did, and who they did it with, will not be recorded here. As Karen Cherewatuk and Ulrike Wiethaus argue, when dealing with letters it is important to remember we are dealing with an ‘incomplete puzzle; we simply do not know the number of missing pieces’.<sup>216</sup> This does not mean that letters should be ignored. Correspondence may have its limitations, but it is nonetheless one of the best sources available to us for a study of relationships. The Plumptons seldom adhered to social expectations of gentle behaviour. It is this failure to conform, and the consequent reaction of those around them, which makes the Plumpton letters a particularly interesting source.

By the beginning of the fifteenth century, the Plumptons were a well-established, prosperous and well-connected gentry family. Based at Plumpton in the West Riding, the family had occupied this manor for at least two hundred years. They owed their position and prosperity, enhanced by a marriage to the Foljambe heiress in the mid-fourteenth century and marriage with the daughter of the first Lord Scrope of Masham a few years later (Pedigree D, p. 86), to a long-standing connection with the earls of Northumberland. The association with the Scropes would prove unfortunate after Archbishop Scrope’s rebellion in 1405, when Sir William Plumpton I was executed, but resulted in only a temporary set-back.<sup>217</sup> Sir William’s son, Robert Plumpton II, received a pardon that same year and the family’s substantial holdings in Yorkshire and Nottinghamshire, confiscated by the

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<sup>216</sup> Karen Cherewatuk and Ulrike Wiethaus, ‘Introduction: Women Writing Letters in the Middle Ages’ in Karen Cherewatuk and Ulrike Wiethaus (eds.) *Dear Sister. Medieval Women and the Epistolary Genre* (Philadelphia, 1993), p. 15.

<sup>217</sup> C. Given-Wilson, *The Royal Household and the King’s Affinity: Service, Politics and Finance in England, 1360-1413* (New Haven and London, 1986), p. 218.

Crown, were soon regained.<sup>218</sup> So too was their prominence in both shires, a position they would continue to occupy for almost sixty years.<sup>219</sup>

A far more serious crisis for the family as a whole seemed to occur in 1461. In this year Sir William Plumpton II's second son died. Sir William, head of the family from 1421, had produced two sons and six daughters in his marriage to Elizabeth Stapleton (Pedigree D). The eldest, Robert, died in his early teens and before his marriage to Lord Clifford's daughter could be consummated. The death of the younger, another William, after having fathered two girls, meant that Sir William had no male heir. He had two heiresses, his granddaughters Margaret and Elizabeth, but the possibility of their inheritance posed something of a problem. Without a male heir the Plumpton lands would be divided on Sir William II's death. More seriously still, the Plumptons of Plumpton would cease to exist, the same fate which overtook the Hiltons of Swine. The crisis, however, was not quite what it seemed. As Sir William was shortly to reveal, he already had a son, born as the result of a clandestine marriage with one Joan Wintringham. The boy, the future Sir Robert Plumpton III, was already more than ten years old and, once the civil court of York acknowledged the legitimacy of the marriage, provided Sir William with a male heir who could inherit the patrimony intact and continue the lineage.<sup>220</sup> The

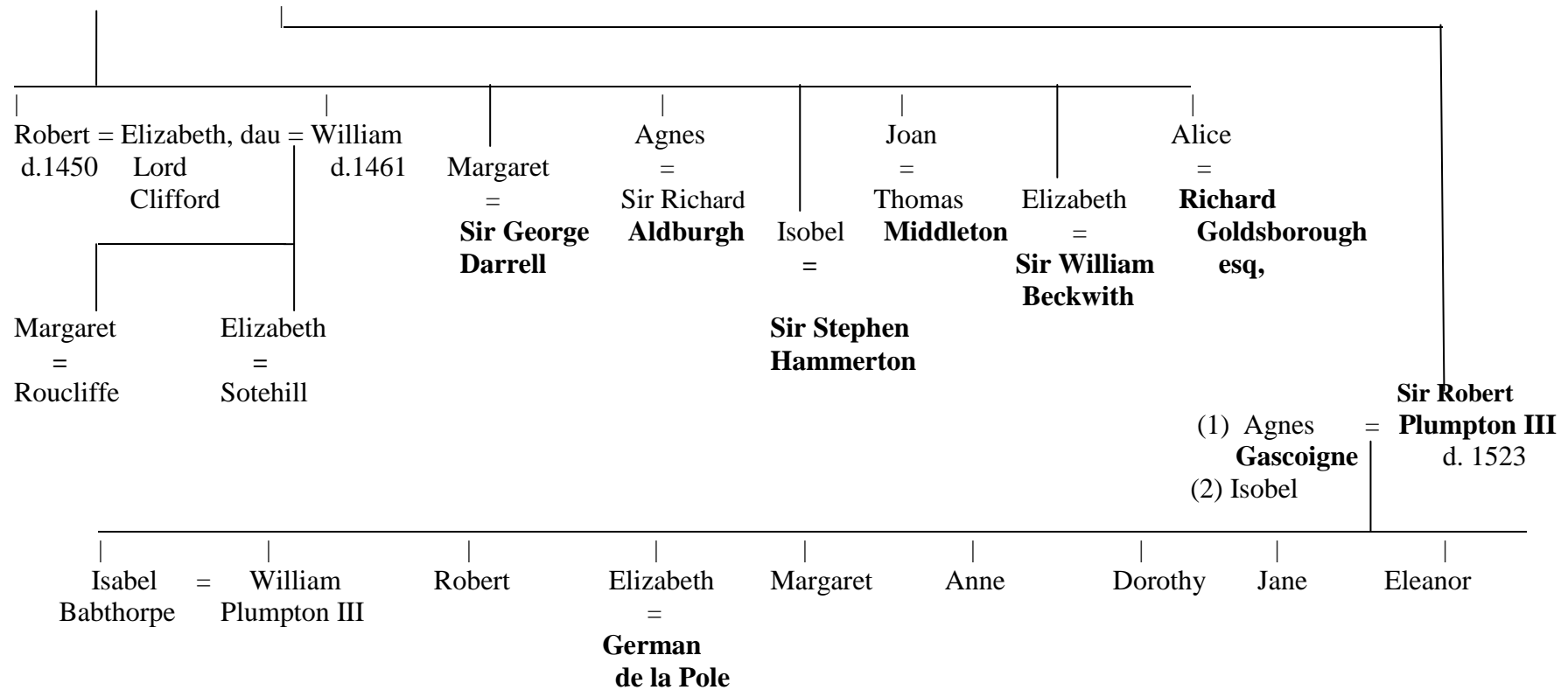
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<sup>218</sup> CPR Hen IV, vol. II, p. 70; In August of 1405, Sir William's widow Alice was awarded a maintenance grant of £40 for herself and her children whilst she petitioned for the return of her own lands, seized along with her husband's property. CPR Hen IV, vol. II, pp. 45, 63.

<sup>219</sup> In 1434 Sir William Plumpton II was important enough in Yorkshire and Nottinghamshire that he was required to swear an oath of loyalty in both counties, CPR Hen VI, vol. II, pp. 378, 409; A. Gooder, *Parliamentary Representation*, YAS RS, 91 (1935), p. 175.

<sup>220</sup> The certificate issued in 1468 by Dr William Poteman, official of the civil court of York, acknowledged that Joan was Sir William's wife, married in secret some fifteen years earlier, and that their child Robert was therefore legitimate. Kirby (ed.) 'Appendix II', *Plumpton Letters*, p. 263.





Pedigree compiled from:

Joseph Foster (ed.) *Visitations of Yorkshire* (London, 1875), pp. 386-7

J.W Clay (ed.) *Dugdale's Visitation of Yorkshire with Additions* (Exeter, 1894), pp. 190-1.

Joan Kirby (ed.) *The Plumpton Letters and Papers*, Camden Fifth Series, Volume 8 (Cambridge, 1996).

'Sir William Plumpton' in W.M. Ormrod, *Lord Lieutenants and High Sheriffs of Yorkshire 1066-2000* (Barnsley, 2000), p. 88.

'Robert Plumpton in A. Gooder, *Parliamentary Representation*, YAS. RS, 91 (1935), pp. 174-6.

circumstances of Robert's birth made him more vulnerable to challenge than if his legitimacy had been unequivocal, but this was not an insurmountable difficulty. The court of York had already acknowledged the existence of the marriage and the gentry, in general, seem to have accepted it too. The Gascoignes, another of the West Riding's most prominent families, believed Robert III's rights to be quite secure. This is indicated by their determination to secure an alliance with him, in spite of Sir William's apparent reluctance to commit Robert to the union.<sup>221</sup>

The only real problem for the Plumpton family in this matter arose from Sir William's timing. Prior to announcing the existence of the future Robert Plumpton III, Sir William arranged the marriage of his granddaughters. As his heirs presumptive he was able to demand a much higher price for the girls than if it had been known that they were unlikely to inherit. The Sotehills and the Roucliffes paid for heiresses; Elizabeth alone brought in more than £380 as part of an agreement with Henry Sotehill that also released Sir William from the responsibility of feeding, clothing and housing the girl.<sup>222</sup> Heiresses were an accepted gamble among the late medieval aristocracy – the production of a male heir at any point prior to a woman's inheritance would supersede her claims - but in this case it was a gamble that the Sotehills and Roucliffes could not win.<sup>223</sup> They were understandably unhappy to discover they had been cheated. Such blatant dishonesty may well have undermined Sir William's reputation, for as both Philippa Maddern and Derek Neal have argued,

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<sup>221</sup> Kirby (ed.) *Plumpton Letters*, No. 27, pp. 48-50.

<sup>222</sup> Kirby (ed.) 'Appendix I', *Plumpton Letters*, pp. 230-4.

<sup>223</sup> Payling, 'Economics of Marriage', p. 423.



honesty was a highly valued trait for men of this social group.<sup>224</sup> The Plumpton letters give no indication that he was concerned by this, although as a gentleman he probably should have been. This was not, however, the most serious consequence of his dishonesty. Intended to help secure the lineage and its position, Sir William's deception actually served to undermine it. The Sotehills and the Roucliffes refused to relinquish their claims on the Plumpton property, continuing to challenge Sir Robert III's legitimacy, and thus his rights as heir, well into the sixteenth century. As a result, the Plumpton's hold on their lands was never really secure.

The Plumpton letters reveal in Sir William II a man who was overbearing and in all probability extremely difficult to deal with. This may have been true of many of his contemporaries. Sir Roger Hastings, whose feud with Sir Ralph Eure began this thesis, was notorious for his aggressive sense of self-importance, refusing to pay his taxes, seizing land that did not belong to him, assaulting tenants and attempting to intimidate the community.<sup>225</sup> Other examples could be found among the Yorkshire gentry. Yet Sir William Plumpton's behaviour was extreme even by these standards, occasioning shock that is recorded in the letters themselves, and hinting at a man who believed he was untouchable.<sup>226</sup> To a certain extent he was correct in this belief. As understeward of Knaresborough for the earl of Northumberland, a menial-sounding office that actually rendered its holder de facto steward of a significant piece of royal land, Sir William occupied an enviable position.<sup>227</sup> Whilst he

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<sup>224</sup> Philippa Maddern, 'Honour Among the Pastons: Gender and Integrity in Fifteenth-Century English Provincial Society', *Journal of Medieval History*, 14, 4 (1988), p. 362; Neal, *Masculine Self*, pp. 40-2.

<sup>225</sup> Turton (ed.) *Honor and Forest of Pickering*, pp. 176-203.

<sup>226</sup> For example, Kirby (ed.) *Plumpton Letters*, No. 19, 29, pp. 42-3, 51-3.

<sup>227</sup> The steward of Knaresborough was the earl of Northumberland himself.

possessed the favour of the earl he was largely protected from the hostility of other gentlemen. A case in point is the long-term quarrel between himself and Sir John Mauleverer, who more than once accused him of corruption and dishonesty, threatening on one occasion to ‘deele with you & yours, bothe by the lawe and beside the lawe’.<sup>228</sup> The earl intervened and Plumpton’s crimes, such as they may have been, went unpunished.<sup>229</sup>

Sir William was fortunate in his lord and the extent of his favour, but anyone in service could expect certain benefits. As the Plumpton letters show, these expectations were readily expressed. One of the most frequently made requests was for protection from enemies. This could include intervention to allow an individual freedom from harassment, as well as protection from the law. Thomas Scarborough appealed to the earl of Warwick for his intervention with Sir William Plumpton II, the result of which was a letter from the earl requesting that Sir William leave Thomas to occupy his close in peace.<sup>230</sup> A Master Anthony asked Sir Robert Plumpton III’s assistance to avoid arrest, whilst Thomas Ward lobbied the earl of Northumberland to persuade Sir William Gascoigne to release him from prison.<sup>231</sup> Other types of favour might also be requested. John Johnson asked Sir William Plumpton II for assistance when he wanted to gain the gratitude of a man from York, whilst Robert Greene and Thomas Thorpe were among those requesting assistance on behalf of others.<sup>232</sup> Long-term, trusted servants like Edward Plumpton had a

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<sup>228</sup> Kirby (ed.) *Plumpton Letters*, No. 19, p. 42.

<sup>229</sup> Kirby (ed.) *Plumpton Letters*, No. 20, pp. 43-4.

<sup>230</sup> Kirby (ed.) *Plumpton Letters*, No. 13, pp. 37.

<sup>231</sup> Kirby (ed.) *Plumpton Letters*, No. 36, pp. 58-9; No. 29, p. 54.

<sup>232</sup> Kirby (ed.) *Plumpton Letters*, No. 16, 49, 60, pp. 39, 68-9, 75.

substantial claim on the men they served, however humbly expressed this claim might be. When he wanted assistance to marry London widow Agnes Drayate, Edward reminded Sir Robert Plumpton III of past and future service:

For now your good & discret answere may be my making, for & she & I  
fortune, by God & your meanes, togyther our too goods & substance  
wyll make me able to do you good service, the which good seruice & I,  
now & at all tymes, is & shalbe yours.<sup>233</sup>

Sir Robert appears to have recognised his obligations in this respect, for Edward did indeed marry Agnes.

Service was, by its very nature, an unequal relationship, but one that was also mutually beneficial.<sup>234</sup> In providing a service, a gentleman expected that the favour would be returned. The reciprocal nature of the arrangement was sometimes explicit. Sir John Kendal, prior of St John, thanked Sir Robert Plumpton III for his assistance to his nephew, ‘praying you so to contynew; and ye may be assured if ther be any thing that I may do for you or for any of yours, ye shall alway find me redy, to my power’.<sup>235</sup> The practical rewards involved go some way to explaining its appeal for gentlemen, who could be quite competitive in seeking out opportunities to render service. As Sir William Plumpton II discovered when he eventually lost Henry Percy’s favour, there was no shortage of gentlemen ready to take another’s place in

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<sup>233</sup> Kirby (ed.) *Plumpton Letters*, No. 121, pp. 118-9.

<sup>234</sup> P.J.P. Goldberg, ‘What Was a Servant?’ in Anne Curry and Elizabeth Matthew (eds.) *Concepts and Patterns of Service in the Later Middle Ages* (Woodbridge, 2000), p. 2.

<sup>235</sup> Kirby (ed.) *Plumpton Letters*, No. 117, p. 115.

service to a nobleman.<sup>236</sup> Further down the social scale, Stephen Eyre was so keen to serve Sir Robert Plumpton III that he sent a letter offering his assistance in whatever capacity the latter wished, before he had even been asked.<sup>237</sup> Similarly eager to please, Robert Warcop, on hearing that one of his villeins had trespassed against a servant of Sir Robert's, wrote assuring Sir Robert that he would deal with the matter as the latter saw fit.<sup>238</sup> The inequality inherent in rendering service does not appear to have concerned these or any other gentleman within this correspondence. There were considerable advantages to be gained from it. In addition to the obvious rewards, Rosemary Horrox has argued that service to someone of higher status actually conferred status on the servant.<sup>239</sup> By serving a great man, a gentleman was himself identified as someone who possessed a measure of power and influence. As such, gentlemen could expect to be addressed with respect by those they served, even the very highest in the land. The earl of Warwick and the duke of Gloucester, two of the most powerful magnates in the kingdom, both sent letters to Sir William Plumpton II. Though somewhat abrupt, both were polite, greeting him as 'Right trustie and welbolued'.<sup>240</sup> There appears to have been an expectation that their requests would be met, but they *were* requests. Both 'desire and pray' Sir William's compliance, they did not demand it.<sup>241</sup>

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<sup>236</sup> Sir William was quickly replaced as understeward by Sir William Gascoigne. For a discussion of Plumpton's reaction to his replacement, see below, pp. 93-5.

<sup>237</sup> Kirby (ed.) *Plumpton Letters*, No. 66, p. 79.

<sup>238</sup> Kirby (ed.) *Plumpton Letters*, No. 99 p. 102.

<sup>239</sup> Rosemary Horrox, 'Service' in Rosemary Horrox (ed.) *Fifteenth-Century Attitudes. Perceptions of Society in Late Medieval England* (Cambridge, 1994), pp. 61-78., p. 67.

<sup>240</sup> Kirby (ed.) *Plumpton Letters*, No. 13, 22, pp. 37, 46.

<sup>241</sup> Kirby (ed.) *Plumpton Letters*, No. 13, 22, pp. 37, 46.

The same phrase can be found in correspondence sent to successive heads of the Plumpton family by the earls of Northumberland.<sup>242</sup> The long-term connection between these two families meant that the earls, unlike the other magnates who appear within this collection of correspondence, could also appeal to the Plumptons' 'loue'. On two separate occasions Sir Robert Plumpton III was requested to array 'as ye loue me, and will answere to the king at your perill' and on another occasion 'as ye intend the pleasure of the kings highness and as ye loue me'.<sup>243</sup> His father Sir William Plumpton II had received similar requests. One such, in 1475, asked that Sir William intervene in a quarrel between two of the earl's tenants. The earl wrote, 'Cousin, as ye loue me, that ye wil endeour your selfe for the performance of the praemisses, wherin you shal deserue great thank of God, and to mee right great pleasure'.<sup>244</sup>

The use of 'cousin' in this context deserves special attention. It was a term of address the earls of Northumberland used frequently in writing to the Plumptons. Sir William II, on more than one occasion, was referred to by the Percy earl as 'welbeloued cosine'.<sup>245</sup> His son Sir Robert III was similarly favoured by the next earl.<sup>246</sup> A general letter from the fifth earl, addressed to Sir Robert Plumpton, Sir William Ingleby, Sir William Beckwith and John Gascoigne, esquire, indicates that the Plumptons were not the only gentlemen in Northumberland's service to receive such distinct signs of favour. The letter greets these men collectively as 'my right

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<sup>242</sup> Kirby (ed.) *Plumpton Letters*, No. 21, 24, 36, 54, pp. 47, 49, 58, 72.

<sup>243</sup> Kirby (ed.) *Plumpton Letters*, No. 35, 63, p. 57, 77.

<sup>244</sup> Kirby (ed.) *Plumpton Letters*, No. 23, pp. 46-7.

<sup>245</sup> Kirby (ed.) *Plumpton Letters*, No. 21, 23, 24, pp. 45-7.

<sup>246</sup> Kirby (ed.) *Plumpton Letters*, No. 36, 53, 63, pp. 58, 71-2, 77.

heartily beloved cousins and frinds'.<sup>247</sup> 'Cousin' in the late medieval period, had a variety of meanings. It might refer to the children of aunts and uncles, as it does today, or to a whole range of distantly related individuals. Originating from the Latin *consanguineus*, meaning of the same blood, it referred specifically to blood relatives. No such relationship is traceable between these men and the earl, whose own pedigree is well documented, and it is therefore unlikely that 'cousin' is being used here in this context.<sup>248</sup> Rather, it would appear that the earls were making use of an alternative meaning, one that used cousin as a way of implying friendship and intimacy.<sup>249</sup> They did not mean to imply that these men were relatives, but that they were friends.

The language of kinship was a mark of distinction used here to encourage better service. Noblemen like the earls of Northumberland did not need flattery to get things done, but they apparently considered it a useful expedient when dealing with gentlemen. By referring to these men as 'cousins and frinds' the earl acknowledged their importance. Gentlemen evidently liked to think of themselves as belonging to the same group as the nobility. This was not the same as equality. In reality, gentlemen could not claim any kind of parity with a nobleman like the earl of Northumberland. The evidence of the Plumpton letters indicates that they did not need to. No letters from the Plumptons to noblemen survive, but there is a telling example sent by the fifth earl to Sir Robert III. Having failed to accompany the earl on a mission in his capacity as warden of the East March, excuses had clearly been

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<sup>247</sup> Kirby (ed.) *Plumpton Letters*, No 47, p. 68.

<sup>248</sup> G.E. Cokayne, *The Complete Peerage* (London, 1945), x, p. 464.

<sup>249</sup> Middle English Dictionary, published electronically at <http://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/med/>

made and accepted. Northumberland acknowledged that Plumpton had been prepared to go, ‘not oonly to your great labor but also to your cost & great charg, therefore I take me oonly to your good wyll and thankfull disposicion, for the which I hartely thank you, and am right well content and pleased that ye remain still at home’.<sup>250</sup> Northumberland was gracious in his acceptance of Sir Robert’s apology, but an apology needed to be made.

Sir Robert’s apparent readiness to supply this apology is indicative of his understanding of place. He saw no difficulty in behaving with deference towards a man of the earl’s status; he did not regard it as out of keeping with his sense of dignity. Sir Robert was fully conscious of his importance as a gentleman. As a man whose legitimacy, and therefore his right to the Plumpton name, lands and position, was questionable, he could be over-sensitive on the subject. Having received a letter from the Prior of Newburgh that was apparently lacking in due deference, Sir Robert’s response, although it does not survive, clearly voiced his displeasure in no uncertain terms. The Prior’s apologies were profuse and he humbly begged for forgiveness on the grounds that ‘I comaunded the officer to write to you in my name, but I saw not the same after’.<sup>251</sup> Sir Robert was not a man who was likely to give deference without reserve. That he could and would behave with deference towards a man of higher status suggests that this was not in any way detrimental to his understanding of gentlemanly behaviour. It suggests that neither gentility nor masculinity were matters of superiority or inferiority, so much as the recognition of ‘proper’ place. This kind of complicit masculinity accords with the conclusions reached by Kim Phillips in a study of the later medieval English sumptuary laws.

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<sup>250</sup> Kirby (ed.) *Plumpton Letters*, No. 57, p. 74.

<sup>251</sup> Kirby (ed.) *Plumpton Letters*, No. 71, pp. 82-3.

Masculinity for the lesser aristocracy, she suggests, was dependent on a man knowing where he belonged and behaving accordingly.<sup>252</sup>

As such, service was not only an acceptable aspect of identity for gentry males, it actually performed a valuable role in reinforcing it. The culture of service was a manifestation of hierarchy that confirmed a gentleman's place in the proper order of things. The greater the master, the greater the servant by association, something that has led Chris Given-Wilson to suggest that a position in royal service was more sought after than any other.<sup>253</sup> The Plumpton evidence appears to contradict this, since the Plumptons were preoccupied with service to the earldom of Northumberland, not the Crown. This was not merely a matter of opportunity, as Sir William II in particular went to considerable lengths in pursuit of service to the earldom. He abandoned the Percies when they were stripped of their title by Edward IV in the late 1460s, attaching himself instead to their replacement, John Neville. When the king reinstated the Percies as earls in 1470, Sir William again attempted to change sides. In actively seeking to serve the earl, rather than the Crown, Sir William was not necessarily seeking out the lesser master. Taken in context, Northumberland was the greater power; the distance of Yorkshire from the court, the earl's proximity and his considerable influence in the north combined to make him the most attractive and potentially useful patron. Sir William was not concerned with the specific identity of the earl, only that he should continue to derive power and influence from the earldom. It was unfortunate, then, that noblemen appear to have had a different understanding of what the service of gentlemen ought to entail, namely loyalty to an individual, or at least to his lineage, rather than just his position.

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<sup>252</sup> Phillips, 'Masculinities', pp. 24, 33.

<sup>253</sup> Given-Wilson, *Royal Household*, p. 56.



Shortly after his reinstatement as earl, Henry Percy removed Sir William from office as understeward of Knaresborough. This position was instead conferred on Sir William Gascoigne, a gentleman whose loyalty to the Percies had never openly wavered.

Sir William Plumpton immediately began a campaign of protest, complaining to all who would listen that he should be reinstated. He lobbied the earl incessantly, at the same time trying to persuade any man of influence he could find to speak on his behalf. One of those approached was Sir William Hastings, the king's lord chamberlain, who like all the others refused to interfere. According to Godfrey Greene, Plumpton's representative in London, Hastings complained 'that it seemed by your labor & mine that we wold make a jelosie betwixt my lord of Northumberland & him'.<sup>254</sup> Plumpton's friends counselled against trying to force the issue, warning 'that labour should rather hurt in that behalve then availe', but he refused to be swayed.<sup>255</sup> Sir William did not have to like the earl's decision to replace him, but as a gentleman he did have to accept it. He was entitled to expect some reward for previous good service, but he could not demand it, for whatever their expectations as servants, gentlemen did not make demands of their masters. The direct approach of John Taylor, who told Sir Robert III 'Sir, I thinke, if it please your mastership, I haue deserved a dobellett in labouring to shoue your mastership a pleasure', does not seem to have been common.<sup>256</sup> To hope for a reward was one thing, to ask for it something different. In doing so, Taylor may have unintentionally

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<sup>254</sup> Kirby (ed.) *Plumpton Letters*, No. 28, pp. 53-4.

<sup>255</sup> Kirby (ed.) *Plumpton Letters*, No. 28, pp. 53-4.

<sup>256</sup> Kirby (ed.) *Plumpton Letters*, No. 131, p. 128.

indicated that he was not a gentleman. Likewise, Sir William's response to his dismissal indicated that he did not know how to behave. In arguing against the earl's decision, Sir William signalled that he either did not understand or did not respect the hierarchy. He did not know his proper place or how to behave within it. This undermined his position as a gentleman, for as Mark Addison Amos has argued, courtesy was 'central to aristocratic self-consciousness and distinction'.<sup>257</sup> An understanding of how to treat men of varying status was a key element of noble behaviour and the Plumpton letters clearly demonstrate that this was just as important for gentlemen.<sup>258</sup> Sir William's conduct was so far outside of what was acceptable that his contemporaries were scandalised. We must feel for Godfrey Greene, who clearly understood the error of his employer's ways but could do nothing to stop him from embarrassing them both.<sup>259</sup>

The Plumpton letters highlight the importance of service relationships in the construction of identity for gentry males. This is not, however, the only type of relationship present within this correspondence. It is perhaps not even the most important. The emphasis placed on familial ties supports the often made argument that family, in particular lineage, was a vital part of aristocratic identity.<sup>260</sup> The gentlemen within this correspondence show a clear preference for interacting with kin. Both Sir William Plumpton II and his son Sir Robert Plumpton III chose to deal

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<sup>257</sup> Amos, 'For Manners Maketh Man', p. 28.

<sup>258</sup> Jonathan Nicholls, *The Matter of Courtesy. Medieval Courtesy Books and the Gawain Poet* (Woodbridge, 1985), p. 19.

<sup>259</sup> Kirby (ed.) *Plumpton Letters*, No. 28, pp. 53-4.

<sup>260</sup> Given-Wilson, *English Nobility*, p. 72; Mertes, 'Aristocracy', p. 47; David Crouch, *The Birth of the Nobility. Constructing the Aristocracy in England and France 900-1300* (Harlow, 2005), pp. 124-131.

predominantly with family members (Pedigree D, pp. 86-7). Out of twenty-one marriages contracted by the Plumpton family in the fifteenth century, more than half resulted in a lasting connection with the spousal family, and evidence from previous centuries confirms that this was not a new trend. From the thirteenth century the Plumptons were regular witnesses on the deeds of the Middleton family, continuing throughout our period.<sup>261</sup> The connection with the Goldboroughs appears to have been almost as old, going back to the first half of the fourteenth century when the Plumptons acted as witnesses to a charter of 1339.<sup>262</sup> Similar evidence can be found linking them with other relatives including the Aldbroughs, Gascoignes and Beckwiths.<sup>263</sup> The majority of those employed by the Plumptons on an official basis were related by blood or marriage. Joan Kirby points to two individuals, Geoffrey Townley and Robert Girlington, who almost certainly were related although their precise connection is unknown.<sup>264</sup> Godfrey Greene, labouring throughout the 1460s and 1470s in the pursuit of his master's sometimes dubious legal rights, was probably a cousin of Sir William Plumpton II.<sup>265</sup> Edward Plumpton, who performed similar tasks in the 1480s and 1490s for Sir Robert III, appears to have been similarly related (Pedigree D).

As is demonstrated within several of these letters, family members were also the first point of call in times of need. William Catton asked Sir Robert Plumpton III

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<sup>261</sup> For the 13<sup>th</sup> century, Clay (ed.) *Yorkshire Deeds*. Vol. V, pp. 106-7. For the 15<sup>th</sup> century, Charles Travis Clay (ed.) *Yorkshire Deeds*, Vol. IV. YAS. RS, 65 (1924), p. 19; Charles Travis Clay (ed.) *Yorkshire Deeds*, Vol. VI, YAS. RS, 76 (1930), pp. 151-2.

<sup>262</sup> Brown (ed.) *Yorkshire Deeds*, Vol. III, p. 70.

<sup>263</sup> Brown (ed.) *Yorkshire Deeds*, Vol. III, p. 71; Clay (ed.) *Yorkshire Deeds*, Vol. IV, p. 19.

<sup>264</sup> Kirby (ed.) 'Introduction', p. 4.

<sup>265</sup> 'Appendix' in Kirby (ed.) *Plumpton Letters*, p. 319.

to help his brother gain a position, Sir William Calverley requested aid for a nephew and William Rawkshaw, chaplain to the earl of Northumberland, thanked Sir Robert for giving aid to an unspecified kinsman.<sup>266</sup> Both John Darneton, Abbot of Fountains, and Robert Eyre attempted to intervene on behalf of relatives for things they were owed.<sup>267</sup> These are but a few examples where a specific kin relationship was stated, leaving aside those, as with Thomas Middleton who wrote to his father-in-law Sir William Plumpton II, when it went unmentioned.<sup>268</sup> The clear preference for and reliance on kin demonstrated within these letters is indicative of a familial identity among this social group. It suggests that gentlemen identified, first and foremost, with those who were related to them. They saw themselves as part of a broad family network, membership of which resulted in and was demonstrated through mutual assistance and concern for the good of the family as a whole.

Kinship, however, and the understanding of what was required because of it, could be flexible.<sup>269</sup> A familial tie did not always ensure harmonious relationships. During the fifteenth century the Plumptons were at variance with the Roucliffes, Sotehills, Beckwiths, and Babthorpes.<sup>270</sup> These were all kin. It may be significant that they were also affinal kin. Certainly marriage did not mean that all those involved would be on good terms. Sir Henry Vavasour, whose daughter was about to marry the son of Sir John Everingham, clearly had his doubts about Sir John's

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<sup>266</sup> Kirby (ed.) *Plumpton Letters*, No 58, pp. 74-5; No. 62, p.77; No. 72, p. 83.

<sup>267</sup> Kirby (ed.) *Plumpton Letters*, No. 76, p. 85; No. 77, p. 86.

<sup>268</sup> Kirby (ed.) *Plumpton Letters*. No. 14, pp. 38-9.

<sup>269</sup> Janet Finch, 'Individuality and Adaptability in English Kinship' in Marianne Gullestad and Matrine Segalen (eds.) *Family and Kinship in Europe* (London and Washington, 1997), p. 131.

<sup>270</sup> Kirby (ed.) *Plumpton Letters*, No. 6, 127, pp. 13-5, 28-9, 124-5. For the dispute with the Babthorpes see Chapter 5.

honesty. Sir Henry went so far as to put a clause in his will instructing that Sir John should be made to fulfil his obligations, ‘and also vexed not nor trouble not me by untrue subjeccions and senestre means, as he hath in tymes past’.<sup>271</sup> The Plumpton worked with both affinial and consanguinial connections, but there was an apparent preference for those related by blood. Godfrey Greene and Edward Plumpton, the most regularly used of the Plumpton connections, both appear to have been blood-kin.<sup>272</sup> Robinet Plumpton, whose services Sir William II also used for the arrangement of delicate matters, was the latter’s illegitimate son.<sup>273</sup> There is enough evidence within the Plumpton letters to suggest that gentlemen felt a particularly strong connection with their blood kin.

Equally important, however, to the functioning of harmonious kin relationships was the existence of shared interests. Conflicting interests could result in dispute and division within the family. The Plumpton’s quarrels were with families where the rightful possession of land could be disputed, their closest associations where there was no such conflict. None of the Plumpton’s most regular correspondents – Godfrey Greene, William Goldesbrough, Edward Plumpton, German de la Pole – had any claim on Plumpton property. Nor did they possess any property that the Plumpton could lay claim to themselves, as was the case with the Beckwiths and the Babthorpes. Land was clearly a divisive factor, even among close relatives. German de la Pole, for example, was involved in acrimonious dispute with

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<sup>271</sup> TE IV, pp. 164-5.

<sup>272</sup> ‘Appendix’ in Kirby (ed.) *Plumpton Letters*, p. 319. See also Pedigree D.

<sup>273</sup> Kirby (ed.) *Plumpton Letters*, No. 26, pp. 48-9.

his own grandmother for the rightful possession of a piece of land.<sup>274</sup> Relations between William Vavasour and his nephew John had deteriorated so badly over an alleged promise of land that William reiterated his denial in his will, stating categorically that, ‘I never made hym any such promesse, nor intendith to do, and thak in charge of my saull, and as I will answer afor God’.<sup>275</sup>

In most circumstances, relatives worked together to their mutual benefit, something that may have been prompted by a connection between the ‘worship’ of a family and the wealth and power of its members.<sup>276</sup> A gentleman was expected to show an interest in the welfare of his relatives both close and distant. Contrary to the assessment of McCullough, Heath and Fields, who argue that ‘individual aid or antagonism is proportional to the degree of relatedness’ in this period, I have found no evidence of a linear relationship between the closeness of a relation and the amount of assistance they received.<sup>277</sup> Siblings within the Plumpton sphere were no more likely to be favoured than cousins, for example. Only one group of relatives could be assured of receiving a gentleman’s assistance. These were his children, for gentry males appear to have had a particular responsibility to protect and provide for this group.

Provision for children was a standard feature of Yorkshire gentry wills and could amount to a considerable sum, depending on the number and sex of the

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<sup>274</sup> Kirby (ed.) *Plumpton Letters*, No. 158, 178, pp. 149-50, 164-5.

<sup>275</sup> TE IV, pp. 228-30.

<sup>276</sup> Maddern, ‘Honour Among the Pastons’, p. 358.

<sup>277</sup> John M. McCullough, Kathleen M. Heath, Jessica D. Fields, ‘Culling the Cousins: Kingship, Kinship and Competition in Mid-Millennial England’, *History of the Family*, 11 (2006), p. 61.

offspring in question. Thomas Fitzwilliam left 300 marks for the marriage of his one daughter, whilst Sir Hugh Hastings left his eldest daughter 400 marks and her two sisters 300 marks each for the same purpose, at the same time directing that certain manors should be given to his younger sons for the terms of their lives.<sup>278</sup> Marriage, for daughters, would appear to have been the ultimate aim, whilst sons could be provided for through grants of land, money, or the arrangement for an education that meant they would be able to provide for themselves. Richard Gascoigne, for example, was quite specific in his will, instructing that his son was to be educated ‘Oxoniae vel Londini’, the path of a man intended to take up a career in law.<sup>279</sup> The two bastard sons of Sir Ralph Bigod were to follow less exalted paths as befitted their illegitimate status, both being apprenticed to crafts in London.<sup>280</sup> In general the provision matched the father’s means. Most gave what they could, but this might not be much. Sir John Stapleton, for example, could only afford £20 for one younger son and household items for another.<sup>281</sup> Whatever his failings as a gentleman in other respects, Sir William Plumpton II was able to adequately provide for his daughters. All six married knights, esquires or gentlemen (Pedigree D, p. 87). The husbands all came from families that could afford to support them in a style appropriate to their station. In this respect he did what a gentleman was supposed to do.

There is further evidence that provision for children was an important aspect of gentry masculinity within the Plumpton letters themselves. Robert Eyre, for example, felt able to request the money he was owed ‘for I haue put my selfe vnto

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<sup>278</sup> TE V, p. 45; TE III, pp. 273-8.

<sup>279</sup> TE I, p. 403.

<sup>280</sup> TE V, pp. 55-7.

<sup>281</sup> TE II, pp. 181-3.

more charge since I was with you then I had before, for I haue maryed another of my daughters'.<sup>282</sup> His willingness to state the matter so baldly may indicate a certain pride in the ability to provide in this way, even if he now found himself short of funds. The ability to marry his children demonstrated his wealth and status, both of which reflected positively on him as a man. His readiness to do so indicated his paternal care in properly providing for a daughter. That provision was a particularly masculine, even a specifically paternal responsibility, is indicated by another of the letters. In December of 1464, Brian Roucliffe wrote to Sir William Plumpton II requesting the money he was owed:

for and ye know how it stands with mee here, I trust uerily yee would tender mee the more. And, Sir, the rather I pray you, for I purpose to haue your son John Roclif to court [...] at beginning of this next term, where my charge of him in array and other expenses shal increase to the drible, as God knowes.<sup>283</sup>

What is particularly interesting here is his use of the words 'your son' rather than 'my son', as would have been more accurate. John Roucliffe, at the time of his father's letter, had recently married Sir William's granddaughter and heir presumptive. This may have given John certain claims on Sir William's assistance, claims that Brian Roucliffe was trying to strengthen. In referring to John as Sir William's son he emphasised the bond between them and implied that there was a specifically paternal responsibility that could be appealed to in just such a situation.

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<sup>282</sup> Kirby (ed.) *Plumpton Letters*, No. 143, p. 136.

<sup>283</sup> Kirby (ed.) *Plumpton Letters*, No. 11, p. 35.



He created a fictive paternal relationship, playing on the importance of blood even though there was, in this case, no consanguinial relationship.

John Roucliffe was, at the time of his father's appeal for financial support, an adolescent. So too was Dorothy Plumpton, writing to her father Sir Robert Plumpton III in 1506. In her letter she made various requests, which, though couched in humble terms, she clearly expected would be met. She leaves little doubt that it was Sir Robert's duty as her 'most entyerly beloved good, kind father' to see that she was not left in need.<sup>284</sup> Sir Robert was expected to show a similar concern for another of his daughters, also in her teens. When Randall Manwering wished to marry Plumpton's daughter Eleanor her supposed enthusiasm was put forward as a reason why the match should go ahead.<sup>285</sup> Financial suitability was a concern, indeed Manwering's willingness to take Eleanor for considerably less than he could reasonably ask was one of the main points argued in his favour. It was not, however, the only issue. Eleanor's welfare was expected to carry some weight with her father, for German, her brother-in-law and nephew of the prospective groom, swore:

He is as godly & as wyse a gentleman as any is within m. myle of his hed...if that she were myne owne born syster I had lever that she had him, knowing him as I do, than a man of vj times his land.<sup>286</sup>

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<sup>284</sup> Kirby (ed.) *Plumpton Letters*, No. 201, pp. 182-3.

<sup>285</sup> Kirby (ed.) *Plumpton Letters*, No. 194-5, pp. 177-8.

<sup>286</sup> Kirby (ed.) *Plumpton Letters*, No. 194, p. 177.

Whilst it is seldom easy to determine the age of children mentioned in wills, the type of provision being made indicates that a large number of recipients were quite young. The majority of girls out of their teens, for example, who had any prospect of marriage, would probably already have been found husbands. Whilst this indicates that gentlemen may have had a greater responsibility to provide for offspring pre-adulthood, this responsibility did not apparently end once they reached maturity. German de la Pole, married to Sir Robert Plumpton's daughter Elizabeth, was relying on his father-in-law's continued concern for the welfare of his daughter. On making a plea for assistance, German emphasised the imminent plight of his wife should her father fail to give aid.<sup>287</sup> In one letter he wrote that his:

poor wyfe, your daughter, recomends hir vnto you... and prayeth you of your daly blessing, & we desire hartely the knowledge of your prosperous health, worship, & welfare.<sup>288</sup>

Evidently Sir Robert was expected to show an interest in the welfare of a child long since married, whether or not his assistance was actually forthcoming. Evidence that some fathers did indeed feel such a concern is demonstrated by a provision made by Thomas Markenfield in his will. Fearing that his daughter's in-laws would prove difficult in the matter of dower, he left her an annual income.<sup>289</sup> Thomas evidently felt a continued obligation to care for his daughter even though he had already done his duty in providing her with a

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<sup>287</sup> Kirby (ed.) *Plumpton Letters*, No. 213, p. 194.

<sup>288</sup> Kirby (ed.) *Plumpton Letters*, No. 212, p. 192.

<sup>289</sup> TE IV, pp. 124-6.

suitable spouse, in this case one of the Conyers of Hornby, a family well-able to support her themselves.

It is notable that most expressions of concern, within the Plumpton letters and elsewhere, relate to daughters. This suggests the possibility that gentlemen had a greater responsibility to protect and provide for daughters than sons. Perhaps daughters, as females and thus regarded as more helpless than males, were believed to need special care.<sup>290</sup> It is difficult to assess any difference between the attitudes of gentlemen towards sons and daughters, given the limited source material, although the Plumpton correspondence does provide one opportunity for a direct comparison. Sir Robert Plumpton III received letters from his daughter Dorothy and his eldest son, the future Sir William III, both of which children were in their mid-teens at the time of writing. A comparison between the two may allow us to investigate whether there was any difference in the way that fathers interacted with male and female children, and thus if they regarded them in a different light because of their gender.

There is no immediately obvious reason why the letter from Dorothy Plumpton to her father Sir Robert III has been kept; unlike so many of the Plumpton letters it does not relate to business matters.<sup>291</sup> Rather, this is an essentially personal letter between a father and daughter, a relationship that is signalled from the opening address, ‘Ryght worshipfull father, in the most humble manner that I can, I recommend me vnto you’. Appeals are made specifically as a daughter and throughout she refers to Sir Robert as her ‘most entyerly beloved good, kind father.’

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<sup>290</sup> J. Cadden, *Meanings of Sex Difference in the Middle Ages. Medicine, Science and Culture* (Cambridge, 1993), p. 181.

<sup>291</sup> Kirby (ed.) *Plumpton Letters*, No. 201, pp. 182-3.

The subject of the letter itself implies a positive relationship between the two. Dorothy had been placed in service with her step-mother's mother, Lady Neville. She was apparently unhappy there, for she had previously written to her father asking to be brought home, although this letter does not survive. Whether or not this first appeal would have been successful is debateable, but in any case Dorothy appears to have changed her mind before she received a reply. Her grandmother, she says, having heard of her unhappiness, had been particularly kind to her and Dorothy requested that her father send a letter 'thanking hir good ladyship of hir so loving and tender kindness shewed vnto me, beseeching hir ladyship of good contynewance therof.' Whether this had actually happened, or Lady Neville had heard about Dorothy's complaints and was unhappy with the girl's ingratitude, is unimportant for our present purposes. What matters is that Dorothy clearly believed her father had a duty of care towards her. She expected that Sir Robert would be concerned about her welfare and, if all was not well, that he would do something about it. Her wellbeing could be seen as a reflection on his ability to perform his duties as a gentleman. Dorothy even hints that failure to perform would be harmful to his reputation, stating 'yt is thought in this parties, by those persones that list better to say ill than good, that ye have litle favour vnto me'. People, Dorothy suggests, have noticed that Sir Robert is not behaving as a gentleman should. Her appeals, whilst couched in affectionate terms, are based as much on her father's concern for his reputation as on any love he felt for her person.

The idea that a father's concern for his children was based on his desire to be seen as a proper gentleman is also present in the first of two letters written by Sir

Robert's son William.<sup>292</sup> This letter, like the one written by Dorothy, was an appeal to the paternal duty of care. In this case, William urged his father on to the protection of the Plumpton inheritance, still at risk from the Sotehill and Roucliffe claimants in 1503. There are some resemblances between the two letters. William, like Dorothy, begins 'Right worshipful father', before expressing an interest in the good health of his mother and siblings.<sup>293</sup> This was a standard opening for children writing to parents and represents William's adherence to convention.<sup>294</sup> He refers throughout to his father as 'Sir', also according to convention, although his overall tone is rather lacking in respect. This is a clear difference from the tone adopted by Dorothy. William was impatient with what he saw as Sir Robert's lack of activity, venturing to 'marvell greatly' at his cautious behaviour. Sir Robert was too credulous, according to his son. More importantly, others believe him to be naive. William baldly informed his father that 'your frinds trowes ye believe fayr words & fayr heightes, & labors not your matters'. He expected Sir Robert to care that he was being spoken about in detrimental terms, and there can be little doubt from this letter that to be taken for a fool was a serious slight to a gentleman's honour. William evidently agreed with this assessment of his father's naivety, urging him to act, as 'your frinds thinks that thes indytements ar for you, and it be shewed to the king of his counsell. Both my cousin Gascon and my brother Elson, as your counsell, gives you so to do'. By William's reckoning his father was less than a gentleman on more than one count; not only had he placed himself in a position where others were able to speak ill of him, he was also failing to adequately protect the patrimony, something that

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<sup>292</sup> Kirby (ed.) *Plumpton Letters*, No. 176, p.162.

<sup>293</sup> Kirby (ed.) *Plumpton Letters*, No. 176, p.162.

<sup>294</sup> Linda Ehrsam Voights, 'A Letter from a Middle English Dictaminal Formulary', *Speculum*, 56 (1981), p. 580.

would result in damage to the family as a whole. William's willingness to express this belief in a letter implies a level of assurance in his own position. The contrast with Dorothy's letter suggests that his assurance was at least partly based on gender. William could write thus to his father because he was the heir to the patrimony, but this was itself based on the fact that he was a male.

These two letters indicate that there was some difference between the relationship that a gentleman had with daughters and with sons, or at least with the son and heir. William's letter to Sir Robert is much more assertive than that written by Dorothy and he makes no appeal to any supposed affection on his father's part. Yet the essential similarities between these two letters may be more significant than the differences. Both children imply that their father has a duty of care to protect their interests, even though the type of care they required differed. The essential responsibility to see that their needs were met was unaffected by their gender. Furthermore, a second letter from William to his father indicates that, as with female children, the responsibility of a gentle father to provide for his sons did not automatically end at adulthood.<sup>295</sup> Seeking assistance in securing his wife's inheritance, William adopted a much more respectful stance than in his previous letter. In this second letter he made no demands for action, instead 'beseeching' it, if Sir Robert should see fit. His hope, rather than expectation, that the required assistance would be forthcoming was based entirely on his position as Sir Robert's son, something that is clearly signalled by his choice of words in signing-off, 'By

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<sup>295</sup> Kirby (ed.), *Plumpton Letters*, No. 218, p. 198. William's wife was Isobel Babthorpe, heiress general of the Babthorpes of Babthorpe. For more on this see also Emma Hawkes, 'Isabel Plumpton: A Life in Law', *Yorkshire Archaeological Journal*, 75 (2003), pp. 91-7 and Chapter 5 of this thesis.

your owne son to his litle power'. It seems that Sir Robert was not obliged to assist an adult son, but it was possible that, as a father, he might do so.

Gentlemen, then, were expected to care for their children, male and female, and to demonstrate that care by ensuring that their needs were met. Whether they were also expected to demonstrate care through displays of affection is more difficult to determine. Within the Plumpton letters, affective terms are used most frequently by women. Men who were close might demonstrate this by an abbreviation of the formality of their letters, as in an example written by Ralph Ryther to Sir Robert Plumpton III, requesting a couple of rabbits for his park, but they did not write to each other using affective or emotive terms.<sup>296</sup> By far the most emotionally expressive letter within this collection was written by a woman, one Katherine Chadderton.<sup>297</sup> The fact that she was almost certainly writing on behalf of a man, her husband William Chadderton, in order to heal a quarrel between him and her brother George, suggests the possibility that gentlemen could not write to each other in such a way. Katherine's letter is affectionate, apologetic and submissive. She begins 'My best brother', variations on which are repeated four times, and played for pity throughout, writing 'it is not vnknowne that I am right sickly, & my harte wold haue bene gretly comforted to haue spoken with you'. She admits her husband may have been in the wrong, something she is unlikely to have done without his permission, but which he was apparently unable to do himself. By using a female as an intermediary he was able to save face. As a gentleman, the expression of affection and apology utilised by his wife would have been an admission of weakness.

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<sup>296</sup> Kirby (ed.) *Plumpton Letters*, No. 96, p. 101.

<sup>297</sup> Kirby (ed.) *Plumpton Letters*, No. 2, pp. 24-5.

On the evidence of the Plumpton correspondence, it would appear that the use of affective language was considered to be inappropriate for gentlemen. The only occasion where its use seems to have been regarded as acceptable was when gentlemen addressed their wives. This is evident in the letters written by Sir Robert Plumpton III to his first wife Agnes. In the two letters that survive as part of this collection, Sir Robert addressed her as ‘My deare [...] hart’ and ‘Best beloved’.<sup>298</sup> On the first occasion he signed himself off as ‘your owne louer’ and on the second ‘your louing husband’.<sup>299</sup> Further examples elsewhere indicate that it was not only acceptable to express affection towards wives through the semi-private medium of letters, but to show this affection in front of others. In his will of 1518, for example, Sir Brian Stapleton felt free to make a rather touching bequest to his daughter of a ring ‘which was the last token betwixt my wyffe & me’, unnecessary information that hints at real sentiment.<sup>300</sup> Even more striking is the brass commissioned by Robert Hatfield of Owston on the death of his wife in the early fifteenth century, showing the couple holding hands with an epitaph that declared they had been ‘right fully in love’.<sup>301</sup>

Hatfield’s brass indicates that affection for a wife was not something that gentlemen needed to conceal. The inscription on his tomb was a highly public, if possibly unusual, declaration of love. Hand-holding does not seem to have been common on tombs in Yorkshire and I know of no similar inscriptions, but a great

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<sup>298</sup> Kirby (ed.) *Plumpton Letters*, No. 162, p. 152; No.185, p. 169.

<sup>299</sup> Kirby (ed.) *Plumpton Letters*, No. 162, p. 152; No.185, p. 170.

<sup>300</sup> TE V, pp. 94-5.

<sup>301</sup> Saul, *English Church Monuments*, p. 99.



many monuments do not survive.<sup>302</sup> Gentlemen regularly requested burial beside their wives in a permanent, physical demonstration of a bond that lasted beyond death. There was apparently nothing ‘unmanly’ about a gentleman demonstrating regard for his wife. Indeed whilst she lived he was expected to show concern for her welfare. On one occasion, Robert Greene excused himself from attending on Sir Robert Plumpton III on account of his wife’s illness. As he explained

I am some what in hevyness, for such sickness as my wife hath, once or twice at the least euery day, puts hir in ioperty of hir life with a swonnying, that...I passé not from hir.<sup>303</sup>

This may not seem like the most effusive expression of concern, but given that Greene and his entire family relied on the employment Sir Robert offered, failure to act in his service represented a significant risk. That Greene was willing to chance his employer’s displeasure in order to stay with his dangerously ill wife indicates that he had some regard for her. That he felt it could be used as an excuse for his absence implies such concern was both expected and respected.

It is possible that the expression of affection for wives was a matter of convention rather than real feeling. As Sarah Williams has noted, husbands in fifteenth-century gentry letters commonly expressed more affection than wives, a conclusion that is borne out by the Plumpton letters.<sup>304</sup> Both of Sir Robert Plumpton

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<sup>302</sup> B. And M. Gittos, ‘Survey of East Riding Sepulchral Monuments’, p. 104.

<sup>303</sup> Kirby (ed.) *Plumpton Letters*, No. 48, p. 68.

<sup>304</sup> Williams, *English Vernacular Letters*, p. 258.

III's wives addressed him as 'Right worshipful Sir', with 'Sir' used throughout the letters.<sup>305</sup> Isobel, the second Lady Plumpton, signed herself off as 'your bedfellow', but this was the only real indication of their specific relationship as husband and wife.<sup>306</sup> Otherwise these women used the language of service, and comparisons can be drawn between the role of husband and the role of master.<sup>307</sup> Wives were subject to their husbands' authority and, it would appear, accountable to them for their actions. This accountability may explain Elizabeth Greene's anxiety in acting on her husband's behalf. In a letter to Sir Robert Plumpton III she displayed considerable reluctance to act in Robert Greene's absence, finishing with a heartfelt exclamation, 'God send my husband home, so that I complain no further for noe remedy, as my trust is in your mastership'.<sup>308</sup> Responsibility was apparently not something she was comfortable with, suggesting that her husband generally took charge.

Some gentlemen seem to have placed considerable trust in their wives. Sir Robert Plumpton III left both Agnes and Isobel Plumpton in charge of his affairs whilst he was away.<sup>309</sup> Agnes at least was no passive partner in this, her request to 'send me word how you speed in your matters againe, as soon as ye may', implying that Sir Robert had enough respect for her understanding and abilities to allow her an

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<sup>305</sup> Kirby (ed.) *Plumpton Letters*, No. 170, 171, pp. 158-9; No.186, pp. 170-1; No. 186, pp. 172-3; No. 199, p. 181.

<sup>306</sup> Kirby (ed.) *Plumpton Letters*, No. 199, p. 181.

<sup>307</sup> Diane Wiatt has noted this same tendency of wives to use the language of service in the Paston letters. Diane Wiatt, '“No Writing for Writings Sake”: The Language of Service and Household Rhetoric in the Letters of the Paston Women' in Karen Cherewatuk and Ulrike Wiethaus (eds.) *Dear Sister. Medieval Women and the Epistolary Genre* (Philadelphia, 1993), pp. 122-38; Sara Butler, 'Runaway Wives: Husband Desertion in Medieval England', *Journal of Social History*, 40, 2 (2006), p. 337.

<sup>308</sup> Kirby (ed.) *Plumpton Letters*, No. 55, pp. 72-3.

<sup>309</sup> Kirby (ed.) *Plumpton Letters*, No. 162, 168, 170, 171, 185, 186, 188, 199, pp. 152, 156, 158-9, 169-70, 172, 181.

integral role in his affairs.<sup>310</sup> Gentlemen quite often named their wives among their executors, although few showed as much faith as Nicholas Conyers of Stokesley, who made his wife his sole executor.<sup>311</sup> The majority of mothers were left in charge of their children on the father's demise, something that may be more significant than Joel Rosenthal is willing to allow. He argues that 'such a clause is to be expected: to whom else was he apt to leave them?', but the fact remains that a man was not obliged to allow his wife any responsibility in this regard.<sup>312</sup> Thomas Fulthorpe, for example, clearly specified in his will that his son William and daughter Agnes were to be left in the care of Randolph Bulmer, even though his wife was still living.<sup>313</sup> This is a far cry from Henry Eure, who in 1476 instructed that his son Robert was to 'obey the rewll and governaunce of my foresaid wiff, moder to the said Robert' or face severe financial penalties.<sup>314</sup> Men like Eure saw no difficulty in recognising a wife's worth. They were quite happy to give a useful, helpful, faithful wife her due respect.

If medieval marriage can be considered a service relationship, it follows that this relationship, though unequal, was not one-sided. A husband was responsible for the welfare of his wife in much the same way that a master was responsible for the welfare of his servants. This was manifested most obviously in a responsibility to provide, a concern that is raised repeatedly within the Plumpton letters. The

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<sup>310</sup> Kirby (ed.) *Plumpton Letters*, No. 186, p. 171.

<sup>311</sup> TE IV, pp. 128-9.

<sup>312</sup> Joel T. Rosenthal, *Patriarchy and Families of Privilege in Fifteenth-Century England* (Philadelphia, 1991), p. 193.

<sup>313</sup> TE III, p. 241.

<sup>314</sup> TE III, p. 223.

possibility that a prospective husband would not be able to adequately provide for his wife was voiced in several cases. Unspecified friends of Agnes Drayate cautioned against rushing into marriage with Edward Plumpton because he could not provide twenty marks of jointure.<sup>315</sup> We are told of no objection to him personally; indeed his desperation on the point indicates that it was the only stumbling block. Godfrey Greene similarly doubted the prospects of a London mercer who wanted to marry his sister, for ‘Lyuelode he hase none...What he is worth in goods I cannot wytt; mercers deals nott all together with their proper goods’.<sup>316</sup> That Randall Manwering could provide for a wife was considered a significant point in his favour. German de la Pole, speaking on Manwering’s behalf when he wished to marry one of Sir Robert Plumpton III’s daughters, was explicit on this point. Not only could he provide for a wife but ‘as for such esew as God sendeth them, it is no doubt but he wyll provyd for them that they shall live like gentlemen or gentlewomen, which God soever suffreth’.<sup>317</sup>

The responsibility to provide for wives, like the responsibility to provide for children, may be considered one of the most important features of gentry masculine identity. There was nothing wrong with a wife who brought wealth to the marriage, indeed quite the contrary, as is demonstrated by Edward Plumpton’s enthusiasm to marry Agnes Drayate. As a wealthy widow she was a good catch and Edward was obviously familiar with the state of her affairs, so familiar that he could inform Sir Robert Plumpton III:

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<sup>315</sup> Kirby (ed.) *Plumpton Letters*, No. 121-3, pp. 118-21.

<sup>316</sup> Kirby (ed.) *Plumpton Letters*, No. 10, p. 33.

<sup>317</sup> Kirby (ed.) *Plumpton Letters*, No. 194-5, pp. 177-8.

She hath xx mark of good land within iii myle of London, & a ryall maner buyld [...] thervpon, to giue or sell at hir pleasure. She hath in coyne in old nobles *cl*, in ryalls – *cl*, in debts *xlli*, in plate *cxli*, with other goods of great valour: she is called worth *iiij<sup>xx</sup>li* beside her land.<sup>318</sup>

Whilst these details may have been included to encourage Sir Robert that he could be assured of a good investment should he agree to help his cousin, they were no doubt of some considerable attraction to Edward himself. The ready acknowledgement of this fact is in contrast to more modern concepts of masculinity, which tend to regard men who are supported by women as lacking in masculinity.

Whilst most men would probably have preferred a wife of means, this was not a requirement. Objections to a spouse on financial grounds in the Plumpton letters are one-sided; provision was a male responsibility, not a female one. The ability to keep a wife in the proper style was a test of a gentleman's worth and it is quite clear that failure to provide was regarded as a serious fault. Sir Stephen Thorpe was criticised on just these grounds. His wife Isobel was not properly cared for, according to her sister Katherine Chadderton, who reported that he 'cometh all day to my hosband and seyeth the feyrest language thateuer [...] ye hard. But all is rong, he is euer in trouble'. As a result, she says, Isobel 'liueth as heauy a life as any gentlewoman borne'.<sup>319</sup> In neglecting to keep his wife in the appropriate style Sir Stephen failed as a husband and as a gentleman. There is perhaps the slightest hint of

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<sup>318</sup> Kirby (ed.) *Plumpton Letters*, No. 121, p. 118.

<sup>319</sup> Kirby (ed.) *Plumpton Letters*, No. 2, p. 25.

smugness in Katherine's pride in her own husband, who was such a good provider that they could afford to keep several servants, something that she evidently felt increased her own standing in the community.<sup>320</sup> The ability to provide was such an important part of a husband's responsibilities that this attribute, or the lack of it, eclipsed all others. Women as wives were expected to display a much wider range of qualities than men as husbands. The list of qualities ascribed to Agnes Drayate, when Edward Plumpton attempted to promote her as the perfect wife, cannot be found in descriptions of potential husbands. Not only was she 'goodly & beautyfull, womanly & wyse, as euer I knew any, none other dispraised, of a good stocke & worshipfull', but a woman that 'God hath indued with great grace & vertue', 'amyable & good, with great wysdome and womanhood'.<sup>321</sup> The qualities attributed to Randall Manwering, who German de la Pole was attempting to praise in a similar manner, were quite different. Besides being described as 'godly & wyse', his character otherwise received very little attention.<sup>322</sup> Manwering's main attribute was his wealth. His ability to provide made him a good prospect.

The ability to provide, then, was one of the key responsibilities of a gentry husband, just as it was one of the most important aspects of gentry fatherhood. The roles that gentlemen played as husbands and fathers were not so very different. But whilst the Plumpton letters indicate how a man was supposed to behave as husband and father, they do relatively little to indicate the necessity of these roles for gentry males. They do, however, indicate marriage was considered to be desirable for

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<sup>320</sup> Kirby (ed.) *Plumpton Letters*, No. 2, p. 25.

<sup>321</sup> Kirby (ed.) *Plumpton Letters*, No. 121-3, p. 118-21.

<sup>322</sup> Kirby (ed.) *Plumpton Letters*, No. 194, p. 177.

males. Prospective grooms are portrayed as enthusiastic, husbands as happy and committed to the union.<sup>323</sup> The information these letters provide about attitudes towards fatherhood is even more limited. We can see that fathers were prepared to provide for children once they had them, but there is little indication of whether or not the arrival of these children was welcomed. For the heir to the patrimony legitimate children were a necessity; failure to produce a legitimate son would result in the termination of the lineage, something that may be viewed as failure as a gentleman.<sup>324</sup> Whether marriage and the production of children were as important for all gentlemen is difficult to judge. Provision for sons did not apparently involve finding them wives in the same way that provision for daughters meant finding them husbands.<sup>325</sup> Money was almost uniformly left in wills for the marriage of female children but I have found no examples of such provision being made for males. Sixteenth-century pedigrees record fewer gentlemen marrying than gentlewomen. In the case of the Plumpton, for example, all six of Sir William II's daughters and four out of five of Sir Robert III's were found appropriate husbands. In contrast, of the seven sons of one generation of the Middletons of Stockeld, the first died young and only the second was definitely married.<sup>326</sup> The Burdetts of Denby had four sons and five daughters; only two of the sons are recorded as having married but all five of the daughters were.<sup>327</sup> An analysis of genealogical evidence from across a range of Yorkshire gentry families suggests that marriage was often limited to first and

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<sup>323</sup> Kirby (ed.) *Plumpton Letters*, No. 10, 194, pp. 33, 177.

<sup>324</sup> Rosenthal, *Patriarchy*, p. 41.

<sup>325</sup> Wright, *Derbyshire Gentry*, p. 46.

<sup>326</sup> Foster (ed.) *Visitations of Yorkshire*, pp. 286-7.

<sup>327</sup> Foster (ed.) *Visitations of Yorkshire*, p. 337.

second sons, from those at the top like the Eures and Stapletons, to those at the bottom like the Burdetts and Ormesbys.<sup>328</sup>

If the sons of many gentlemen remained unmarried, then marriage and fatherhood are unlikely to have been considered crucial aspects of gentry identity. To count them as such would have effectively rendered a large number of males less than men. It is entirely possible, however, that the marriages of younger sons were not always recorded. The heralds were only interested in marriages that increased the prestige of the family as a whole and younger sons could not always expect to make grand alliances. Nor would any children they produced necessarily form an integral part of the lineage. In the absence of more detailed records, it is ultimately impossible to quantify how many gentlemen married. The significance of successful provision for wives and children, as demonstrated by the Plumpton letters, points to the conclusion that marriage and fatherhood would not have been desirable for men who were unable to provide. Whilst I cannot therefore say whether a man who was unmarried and without children was viewed as less of a man than those who had both wife and children, it is possible to argue that a man who had these things needed to fulfil his responsibilities towards them. If he failed to do so he would be accounted less of a gentleman.

The evidence of the Plumpton letters indicates that gentlemen, as servants, lords and neighbours, husbands and fathers, had to conform to a set of conventions. They were expected to understand and acknowledge the hierarchy, through which their own position as men of high status was confirmed. They were expected to deal

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<sup>328</sup> Foster (ed.) *Yorkshire Pedigrees*, pp. 204-5, 332, 337, 629.



respectfully and honestly with each other, thereby enhancing their own 'worship' and allowing a social system of reciprocity based largely on trust to continue to function effectively. It was understood that a gentleman's first responsibility was to his kin, and to his children in particular, whose welfare was supposed to be a major concern. The man who failed to provide for his immediate family in a manner appropriate to their status, or who failed to meet any of the expectations of how a gentleman was supposed to conduct himself, was in danger of rendering himself less than a man and certainly less than a gentleman. This brings us back to the Plumpton themselves and Sir William Plumpton II in particular. He failed to acknowledge the hierarchy, failed to treat his fellow gentlemen with respect, failed to demonstrate the proper care for dependants. He had no respect for the rules of marriage or inheritance. The lineage was undermined when he produced an heir whose legitimacy was suspect and the patrimony put in jeopardy. As a result of his actions the family as a whole suffered. It was this that was perhaps his most serious failing. His conduct might have been more readily excused if his attempts at manoeuvring and manipulation had been successful. As it was, his failure to act like a gentleman called his right to be known as a gentleman into question.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Place and Lineage: The Savilles of Thornhill**

The aim of this chapter is to investigate the importance of place and lineage in the construction of gentry culture. Previous discussion within this thesis has touched on this subject, but this chapter offers a further, more detailed investigation through the examination of two very different types of evidence. The first of these is the Saville chapel, situated within the parish church of St Michael and All Angels, Thornhill, apparently built in the mid 1440s by Sir Thomas Saville. The second takes the form of a matrimonial dispute that came before the diocesan court of York in 1443, recording an action by Christina Harrington to have her marriage to the same Sir Thomas annulled. Combined, this evidence will be used to explore the ways in which place and family could be connected for gentry males. I will begin by examining Sir Thomas' decision to construct a chantry chapel, giving consideration to his reasons for building when, where and in the form that he did. In the 1440s, the Savilles were relatively new arrivals at Thornhill, having inherited the manor through an heiress. Sir Thomas' actions may thus be used to draw some conclusions about the importance of establishing place for gentry males. I will then go on to examine the Saville-Harrington matrimonial dispute. This too may be used to investigate connections between place and lineage, in this case from the perspective of Sir Thomas Harrington, Christina Harrington's brother-in-law and the main orchestrator of the match. In dealing with family and marriage, this chapter will inevitably build upon some of the themes raised in the last. I shall therefore finish by drawing the Plumpton and Saville evidence together in order to assess what these

three very different types of source contribute to our understanding of the significance of family, lineage and place for fifteenth-century gentlemen.

The Saville chapel within the church of St Michael and All Angels, Thornhill occupies the north-eastern corner of the church and was originally constructed in two bays, later extended to three. It is surrounded by screens which separate the interior physically, and obscure it visually, from the rest of the church. It appears to have been built by Sir Thomas Saville during the mid 1440s. This date is inscribed into one of the northern windows, two of which (windows a and b in fig. 6) seem to be original to its construction.<sup>329</sup> An image of Sir Thomas appears at the bottom of window b, showing him as a knight in armour, kneeling in prayer alongside his first wife Margaret Pilkington (fig. 7). Beneath him are the words:

Orate pro anima Thome Savill militis qui hanc capellam fieri fecit anno  
Domini MCCCCXLVII.

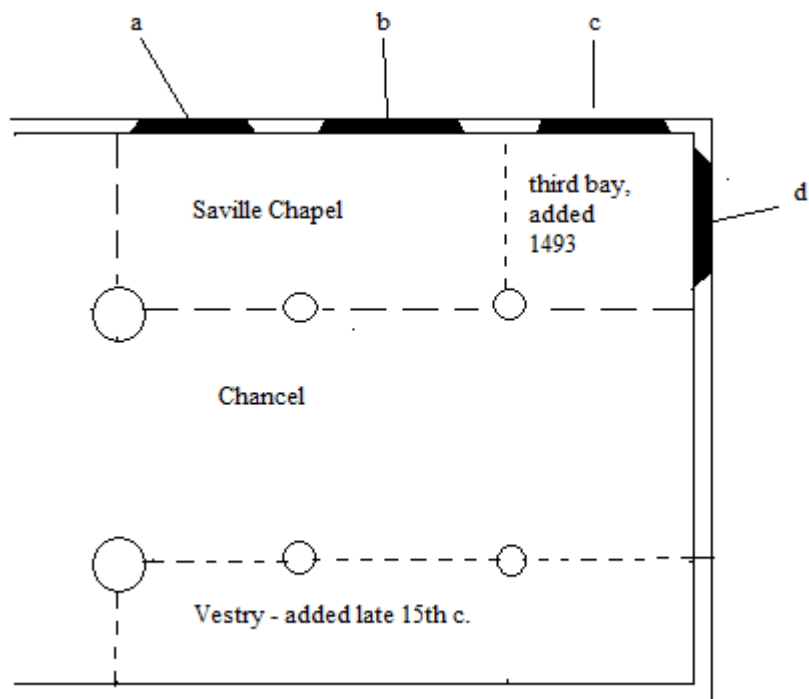
Windows c and d (fig. 6) are of a later date, inserted at the expense of one William Saville, Sir Thomas' grandson, in 1493.<sup>330</sup> Window c represents scenes from the Life of the Virgin and window d the Last Judgement, both of which were common subjects for church glazing, although the particular representation of the Last Judgement is highly unusual in that it shows the admission of the elect into heaven

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<sup>329</sup> Leslie Stuart Jones, *St Michael and All Angels, Thornhill: A Catalogue of the Medieval Glass Contained in Seven of the Windows of the Church Together with Material Relating to the History and Restoration of the Same*, unpublished B.Phil. dissertation (University of York, 1971), pp. 13-29.

<sup>330</sup> Peter Ryder, *Medieval Churches of West Yorkshire* (Hunstanton, 1993), p. 72.

**Figure 6 Plan of the Saville chapel, St Michael and All Angels, built c. 1447.**



**Figure 7 Sir Thomas Saville kneeling in prayer, north window (b) of the Saville Chapel, St Michael and All Angels, Thornhill, dating from 1447.**



**Figure 8** The East window in the Saville chapel (d), added in the later fifteenth century, depicting the Last Judgement.



**Figure 9** Fourteenth-century effigy in Saville chapel, St Michael and All Angels, Thornhill, representing one of the Thornhills of Thornhill.



without reference to the damned (fig. 8).<sup>331</sup> Further investigation of this particular window is beyond the scope of this thesis, although it has received some attention elsewhere.<sup>332</sup> The chapel was originally intended to contain the tomb of Sir Thomas and his first wife, instructions for which were left in his will.<sup>333</sup> No trace of this monument now remains. Sir Thomas' tomb was apparently in place when his son, Sir John Saville, requested in his will to be buried in proximity to it, but seems to have disappeared by the seventeenth century.<sup>334</sup> Dodsworth did not mention it, although he does record the alabaster tomb attributable to Sir John Saville and the wooden tomb dating from the sixteenth century, both of which are still extant.<sup>335</sup> The chapel presently contains monuments representing members of the Saville family down to the early twentieth century, along with the stone effigy from the tomb of one of the Thornhills of Thornhill.<sup>336</sup> Dating from the fourteenth century, this lies on the floor next to the north wall, although the tomb chest itself has disappeared (fig. 9).

Chantry chapels all served an intercessory function. Kreider and Roffey both agree that this was their primary purpose and it is likely that Sir Thomas Saville's main aim in founding a chantry was the salvation of his soul.<sup>337</sup> This was the purpose

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<sup>331</sup> Richard Marks, *Stained Glass in England During the Middle Ages* (Toronto, 1993), p. 82.

<sup>332</sup> Hilary Wayment discussed it briefly in an article on Sir Thomas' grandson, Sir John Saville, and there has been a relatively recent study by Jasmine Allen focusing on a portion of this window. Hilary Wayment, 'Sir John Savile, Steward of Wakefield 1482, d. 1505', *Yorkshire Archaeological Journal*, 68 (1996), pp. 183-4; Jasmine Allen, 'A Vision of the Holy City', *Vidimus*, 27 (2009). Available at <http://vidimus.org/issues/issue-27/panel-of-the-month>.

<sup>333</sup> J.W. Clay (ed.) *Halifax Wills*, Part I, pp. 9-10.

<sup>334</sup> TE III, pp. 270-1.

<sup>335</sup> J.W. Clay (ed.) *Dodsworth's Yorkshire Church Notes 1619-1631*, YAS.RS. 34 (1904), pp. 67-8.

<sup>336</sup> Crease, *Incomparable Sepulchres*, p. 299.

<sup>337</sup> Alan Kreider, *English Chantries. The Road to Dissolution* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, 1979), p. 91; Roffey, *Medieval Chantry*, p. 19.



of the chantry he requested be established, with masses to be said for himself, his wife and his ancestors ‘in the parish church of Thornhill on the altar of S. Mary, near my tomb’.<sup>338</sup> There are signs, however, that salvation was not his only concern. The first of these is in the construction of the chapel itself since, strictly speaking, a chantry did not require a physical presence. A chantry priest needed an altar at which to celebrate mass, but an existing altar could be used. A physical structure, and the tombs that so often accompanied chantries, were not a necessary part of the foundation.<sup>339</sup> In drawing the attention of the congregation and reminding them who to pray for they might serve an intercessory purpose, as Nigel Saul has argued regarding funereal monuments.<sup>340</sup> But it was not their only job. The construction of a chapel, often separated from the main body of the church by barriers like the wooden screens that surrounded the Hilton chapel at Swine or the masonry screen that divided the Waterton chapel from the nave at Methley, may actually have hindered intercession, since it made access to the tombs, even visual access, more difficult. At Thornhill the screens surrounding the Saville chapel would have made it hard for anyone on the outside to read the inscription in window b (figs. 6 and 7) that demanded prayers for the soul of Sir Thomas Saville. Yet it was imperative, if salvation was his prime concern, that this directive should be seen and obeyed.

It is possible to see additional concerns at work here. In building a chapel where he did, Sir Thomas was able to assert his position, and that of his descendants, as lords of the manor. It was the lord’s right to patronise the local church and a

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<sup>338</sup> Clay (ed.) *Halifax Wills*, pp. 9-10. In actuality the chantry continued much longer, still being in existence in the sixteenth century. William Page (ed.) *Certificates of the Commissioners Appointed to Survey the Chantries, Vol. II*, Surtees Society, 92 (Durham, 1893), p. 292.

<sup>339</sup> K.L. Wood-Legh, *Perpetual Chantries in Britain* (Cambridge, 1965), pp. 37-8; Roffey, *Medieval Chantry*, p. 118.

<sup>340</sup> Saul, *English Church Monuments*, p. 163.

chantry chapel was a particularly conspicuous form of charity. Like the majority of chapels and tombs in this period, the Saville chapel was a deliberate intrusion on liturgical space.<sup>341</sup> Its location to the north of the high altar, a position identified by Marks as being of particular prestige in any medieval church, served to highlight the Savilles' place at the head of the community.<sup>342</sup> The very presence of the chapel thus served to validate Sir Thomas' lordship. This was particularly important because, before Sir Thomas, there had been no Savilles of Thornhill. Prior to this the family were based at Elland and Tankersley, relatively minor manors but ones that they had occupied since the early fourteenth century.<sup>343</sup> Thornhill was a recent acquisition, part of the inheritance of Elizabeth, Sir Thomas' mother and heiress of Simon de Thornhill (Pedigree E).<sup>344</sup>

Sir Thomas' decision to move his family's main seat requires some explanation. Gentlemen, as we have seen, did not lightly relinquish one seat in favour of another. Godfrey Hilton, as the last male of his line, was determined to see that the Hiltons of Swine did not end with the death of his brother Sir Robert though Godfrey himself was already established elsewhere.<sup>345</sup> The Plumpton spent decades defending Plumpton against the Sotehills and the Roucliffes. The Babthorpes were

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<sup>341</sup> Simon Roffey, 'Constructing a Vision of Salvation: Chantries and the Social Dimension of Religious Experience in the Medieval Parish Church', *The Archaeological Journal*, 163 (2006), p. 127; Graves, 'Social Space', p. 311.

<sup>342</sup> Richard Marks, *Image and Devotion in Late Medieval England* (Stroud, 2004), p. 23.

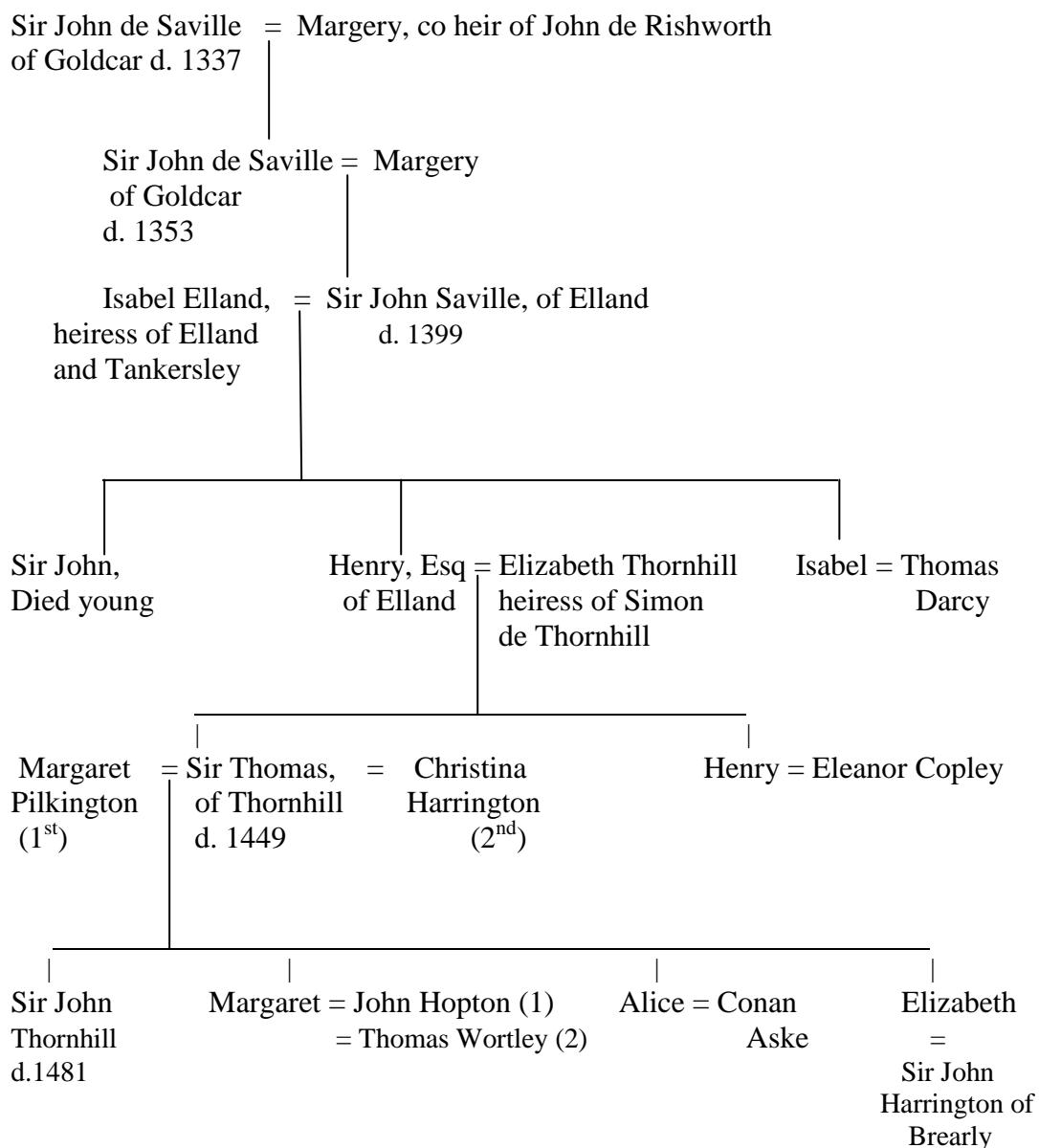
<sup>343</sup> J.W. Clay, 'The Savile Family', *Yorkshire Archaeological Journal*, XXV (1920), p. 4; David Hey, *Medieval South Yorkshire* (Ashbourne, 2003), p. 88.

<sup>344</sup> Samuel Lewis, *A Topographical Dictionary of England*, pp. 335-7. Available at British History Online.

<sup>345</sup> See Chapter 1.



### Pedigree E – The Savilles



Pedigree compiled from:

J.W. Clay, 'The Savile Family', *Yorkshire Archaeological Journal*, XXV (1920), pp. 4-15

Joseph Hunter, *Lupset* (London, 1851), pp. 12-23.

'Sir John Saville' in W.M. Ormrod, *Lord Lieutenants and High Sheriffs of Yorkshire 1066-2000* (Barnsley, 2002), p. 90.

Thomas Dunham Whitaker, *Leidis and Elmete* (York, 1816), pp. 310-22

Wills of Sir John Saville of Elland 1399, Sir Thomas Saville of Thornhill, 1449, Sir John Saville of Thornhill 1481 all in Clay (ed.) *Halifax Wills*, pp. 1, 9-10, 21-2

just as aggressive in their defence of Babthorpe from the rival Plumpton claimant.<sup>346</sup>

In all these cases the main manor was more rigorously defended than other properties, even though it was not necessarily the most profitable possession under dispute. This indicates that gentlemen felt a particularly strong connection with this manor above all others and that it was their job, as gentlemen, to cultivate and maintain this connection. In the case of external threat this meant putting up a legal and in some cases a physical defence. When the threat was internal, for example when the lineage was in danger of dying out in the absence of a male heir, gentlemen responded in an equally determined but different way. With only one surviving son and no grandsons, Sir Edward Redman could not be certain that the Redmans of Harewood would continue. His solution was a clause in his will that required his granddaughter to marry a member of the family, or failing this ‘any that height Redman’, thus ensuring that his family name would continue at the family seat.<sup>347</sup> In the south of England, Peter Coss has highlighted a similar compromise made by the Langleys, who arranged that the heiress Isabel de la Pole should marry into an unrelated family by the name of Langley so that continuity would appear to be preserved.<sup>348</sup> In the absence of direct heirs, Sir Thomas Colville of Dale, fearing he would not return from fighting in France, made assuming the name of Colville a condition of his nephew’s inheritance.<sup>349</sup> It was evidently so important that gentlemen maintain the connection with a particular place that this connection, when it was missing, could be manufactured.

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<sup>346</sup> For both of these, see Chapter 2. For the Babthorpes also see Chapter 5.

<sup>347</sup> TE V, p. 23.

<sup>348</sup> Coss, *Langley Family*, p. 3.

<sup>349</sup> William Brown, *Ingleby Arncliffe and its Owners* (Leeds, 1901), pp. 94-6.

In choosing to move the family seat from Elland to Thornhill, Sir Thomas severed what was a relatively long-term connection between place and family. As son and heir he did not need the maternal inheritance to establish an independent base. Thornhill was no more conveniently situated than his other manors, nor was it necessarily more comfortable. Tankersley at least was perfectly habitable – his second wife even spent some time living there during their short-lived marriage.<sup>350</sup> There is only one readily apparent reason why Sir Thomas should choose to move the family seat; Thornhill was a larger and more prosperous manor than Elland or Tankersley.<sup>351</sup> The enthusiasm that Yorkshire gentlemen demonstrate for expanding and consolidating their holdings indicates that the size of the patrimony was important, so this was undoubtedly a factor. Sir Richard Clervaux, who spent more than twenty years purchasing land around his main manor of Croft, provides an unusually well-documented example of this, but he was not alone.<sup>352</sup> The Gascoignes demonstrate a similar enthusiasm for increasing their possessions around Gawthorpe, an expansion that resulted in at least one violent confrontation with their Redman neighbours.<sup>353</sup>

Any manor gave a man the opportunity to live like a gentleman. More land, in most cases, generated more wealth with which to support an impressive house and a substantial household, both indicators of status.<sup>354</sup> A more prosperous manor

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<sup>350</sup> Harrington c. Saville, Records of the Diocesan Court of York, Borthwick Institute, York, F201.

<sup>351</sup> Joseph Hunter, *Lupset* (London, 1851), pp. 12-6.

<sup>352</sup> Pollard, 'Richard Clervaux', p. 155.

<sup>353</sup> Hayes, 'Ancient Indictments', pp. 32-3.

<sup>354</sup> P. W. Fleming, 'Household Servants of the Yorkist and Early Tudor Gentry' in Daniel Williams (ed.) *Early Tudor England* (Woodbridge, 1989), p. 21; Anthony Emery, 'Late Medieval Houses as Expressions of Social Status', *Historical Research*, 78 (2005), pp. 141-3.

provided greater resources for conspicuous consumption, extensive patronage, and for displays of largesse, all of which have been highlighted as important aspects of aristocratic identity.<sup>355</sup> Furthermore, a large manor, acquired as a whole or through gradual consolidation, could provide a base for the creation of a private park, something that would allow a gentleman to engage in hunting, the ultimate aristocratic pastime.<sup>356</sup> There is no documentary evidence of a park at Thornhill, but the Gascoignes had one at Gawthorpe, the Wortleys at Wortley and Sir Richard Conyers created his own at South Cowton.<sup>357</sup> Given that Thornhill was a larger and more prosperous manor than Elland, it is reasonable to conclude that by moving the Saville seat, Sir Thomas sought to increase the family's prestige. Possession of Thornhill, whether or not the Savilles occupied the manor, would have brought the same increase in resources. But by basing the family at Thornhill Sir Thomas gave them a better opportunity to demonstrate their improved position. His actions indicate that gentlemen were not just concerned with maintaining the geographical place of their families. It was equally important to maintain and if possible improve their status through the acquisition of land.

Two additional factors probably made Sir Thomas' decision to move the Savilles' *caput* easier. The first was the existence of maternal ancestors at Thornhill. Sir Thomas' mother Elizabeth was the heiress of Simon de Thornhill (Pedigree E, p. 129), meaning that Sir Thomas was a direct heir of the blood. The significance of

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<sup>355</sup> Marks, 'Age of Consumption', p. 21; Phillips, 'Masculinities', p. 23; Emery, 'Late Medieval Houses', p. 144; Howard Kaminsky, 'Estate, Nobility and the Exhibition of Estate in the Later Middle Ages', *Speculum*, 68, 3 (1993), p. 703; Joel T Rosenthal, *The Purchase of Paradise. Gift Giving and the Aristocracy, 1307-1485* (London and Toronto, 1972), pp. 3-4.

<sup>356</sup> Orme, 'Education and Recreation', p. 81.

<sup>357</sup> Hey, *Medieval South Yorkshire*, p. 81; see Chapter 4.

this should not be underestimated. Gentlemen were prepared to adopt the lands of an heiress wife, but this was generally done when the man in question had no lands of his own. It was a younger son, for example, who established the Hiltons of Swine after marriage to the Lascelles heiress, and similarly a younger son of the Conyers of Sockburn who married the Norton heiress and adopted the Norton lands as his own.<sup>358</sup> Ralph Bowes, who established the Bowes of South Cowton through Sir Richard Conyers' heiress, was an eldest son, but he is something of an anomaly.<sup>359</sup> When the heir to a family married an heiress, her lands were usually subsumed into his own. Sir William Plumpton IV and his descendants, for example, retained Plumpton as their base even after substantial acquisitions were made through marriage with the heiress Isabel Babthorpe. Likewise Halnath Mauleverer, who married the heiress of Alex Lutterell at the beginning of the fifteenth century, but retained the Mauleverer's main seat at Allerton.<sup>360</sup> It was perhaps more acceptable for Sir Thomas Saville, as direct heir to the Thornhills of Thornhill, to move the family seat than it would have been if his connection with the Thornhills was only one of marriage.

Sir Thomas's decision to move the family seat was probably also influenced by the fact that this was not the first time, nor even the second, that the Savilles had adopted the lands of an heiress as their main seat (Pedigree E). Their earliest traceable property was at Goldcar near Huddersfield, a manor that J.W. Clay

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<sup>358</sup> See Chapter 2; Thomas Dunham Whitaker, *A History of Richmondshire in the North Rising of the County of York*, Vol. II, (York, 1823), pp. 182-3; Foster (ed.) *Visitations of Yorkshire*, vol. II, pp. 200-1; J.W. Clay, *Dugdale's Visitation of Yorkshire with Additions* (Exeter, 1894), pp. 71-77.

<sup>359</sup> William Page (ed.) *VCH, North Riding, vol. I* (Oxford, 1892), p. 73; Frederick William Dendy (ed.) 'Dalton's Visitation' in *Visitations of the North*, Surtees Society, 122 (London, 1912), p. 131.

<sup>360</sup> Foster (ed.) *Visitations of Yorkshire*, p. 67.

believes was acquired via an heiress, since the Saville arms could be found here quartered with those of Goldcar.<sup>361</sup> Marriage with the heiress Isabel Elland in the mid-fourteenth century brought Elland and Tankersley to the family, after which the Savilles of Goldcar became the Savilles of Elland. In choosing to adopt the lands of his mother Elizabeth de Thornhill, who inherited Thornhill from her father Simon, Sir Thomas was conforming to family precedent.<sup>362</sup> The readiness of the Savilles to move their main seat when they acquired a better property indicates that the practical advantages that came with a more prosperous manor may have been more important than long-term connections with a particular place.

Sir Thomas' efforts to create the impression that the Savilles belonged at Thornhill demonstrates that a long-term association with place was clearly still significant, however. Some indication of these efforts can be seen in the manor house at Thornhill. Almost nothing now remains of the structure, although Pevsner has dated what little there is to the fifteenth century.<sup>363</sup> This assessment is supported by an artist's rendering taken of the more extensive remains when Whitaker visited in the early nineteenth century (fig. 10).<sup>364</sup> At this point a substantial section of the front elevation remained, standing two storeys high and incorporating four windows. Two, situated one above the other, comprised single cinquefoiled lights with pointed labels. Another, situated on the ground floor towards what would have been the centre of the building, was single light trefoiled beneath a pointed label. The fourth

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<sup>361</sup> Clay, 'Savile Family', p. 4.

<sup>362</sup> Clay, 'Savile Family', p. 4; Charles Clay, *Early Yorkshire Families*, YAS. RS. 135 (1973), p. 25; Hey, *Medieval South Yorkshire*, p. 88.

<sup>363</sup> Nikolaus Pevsner, *The Buildings of England and Yorkshire: The West Riding* (Hammondsworth, 1959), p. 503.

<sup>364</sup> Thomas Dunham Whitaker, *Loidis and Elmete*, (York, 1816), p. 310.

**Figure 10 Engraving of the manor house at Thornhill, constructed in the mid-15<sup>th</sup> century, as it appeared in 1816. Taken from Whitaker's *Loidis and Elmete*, p. 310.**



and largest window was above this, consisting of two cinquefoiled lights within a sharply pointed arch. All of these are consistent with a fifteenth-century date.<sup>365</sup> The style of house is also suggestive. Most likely of the courtyard type and surrounded by a moat, as evidenced by the ditch that still surrounds the site, it is consistent with a style popular in this region in this period. Further examples can be found at East Haddersley and Methley, both of which date from the first part of the fifteenth century.<sup>366</sup> Since the Savilles inherited the manor at around this time, it plausible that they were responsible for the rebuilding or substantial remodelling of the manor

<sup>365</sup> Margaret Wood, *The English Medieval House* (London, 1965), pp. 358-62.

<sup>366</sup> These were home to the Fitzwilliams and the Watertons respectively, and le Patourel dates significant modifications at both sites to the fifteenth century. H.E. Jean le Patourel, *The Moated Sites of Yorkshire* (London, 1973), pp. 25, 62.

house.<sup>367</sup> Their contribution in some respect is attested by the placement of the Saville arms between the windows. Three of these could still be seen in 1816 and, if only for the sake of symmetry, it is likely that there were several more. Situated close to the church, at the centre of the community, the Saville house at Thornhill provided a constant reminder of their status as lords of the manor. Combined with their patronage of the church, the family's presence at Thornhill would have been unavoidable.

Patronising the local church was, according to Pamela Graves, one of the key ways for late medieval people to demonstrate their importance in the community.<sup>368</sup> Any patronage of the church of St Michael and All Angels by the Savilles would thus have underlined the importance of the family, but the decision to create a chantry chapel was of particular significance. The majority of chantries established by the gentry were accompanied by the tombs of their founders and his or her descendants. This was the case for the Fitzwilliams at Sprotborough, the Marmions at Tanfield, and the Burghs at Catterick.<sup>369</sup> It seems also to have applied to the Tempests at Bracewell and the St Quintins at Harpham.<sup>370</sup> Sir Thomas Markenfield's request to be interred 'among the beriall of myn ancetors' is quite typical of the wills of fifteenth-century gentlemen.<sup>371</sup> Sir Thomas Saville did not have paternal ancestors at Thornhill, although his will makes it clear that he was to be buried there.<sup>372</sup> The

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<sup>367</sup> Clay, 'Savile Family', pp. 5-6.

<sup>368</sup> Graves, 'Social Space', p. 311.

<sup>369</sup> Page (ed.) *Certificates of Chantries*, pp. 106-8, 113, 155-6.

<sup>370</sup> TE II, pp. 260-1; TE V, pp. 54-5.

<sup>371</sup> Clay (ed.) *Halifax Wills*, pp. 9-10.

<sup>372</sup> TE IV, p. 124.



size of his chapel, constructed in two bays that allowed room for at least two more tombs, suggests that he was to be the first of many. The Saville chapel was intended to serve as a family mausoleum which, to use Paul Binski's words in respect of late medieval tombs, amounted 'to an encastlement of the family, a celebration of the line of ancestry and descent'.<sup>373</sup> Sir Thomas could not point to Saville predecessors in order to validate his position, but the indication that there would be successors was the next best thing. The Saville chapel indicated that the Savilles were here to stay.

At the same time, references to the Savilles' blood relationship with the previous lords served to indicate that they were not completely new arrivals to the manor. As the eldest son of the Thornhill heiress Sir Thomas was the natural heir to the manor. This fact was advertised, firstly, through the quartering of the Saville and Thornhill arms. These arms combined appear numerous times within the glass of windows a and b, as shields and on the surcoat of the kneeling donor portrait at the bottom of window b (figs. 6 and 7).<sup>374</sup> The quartering of arms was the usual practice for the descendants of an heiress and the meaning of these shields would have been immediately apparent to observers. A similar strategy was adopted by Ralph Bowes on assuming control of South Cowton, inherited through his wife, Margeret Conyers.<sup>375</sup> Although these are no longer extant, the church at South Cowton appears to have been decorated with the arms of Bowes and Conyers impaled. In the 1920s

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<sup>373</sup> Paul Binski, *Medieval Death. Ritual and Representation* (Avon, 1996), p. 106.

<sup>374</sup> T. Charlesworth, *Guide to the Church of St Michael and All Angels, Thornhill* (York, 1950), p. 20; Jones, *Catalogue of the Glass*, pp. 28-9.

<sup>375</sup> Page (ed.) *VCH, North Riding, I*, p. 73; Dendy (ed.) 'Dalton's Visitation', p. 131.

these could be seen on the remnants of some late fifteenth-century floor tiles.<sup>376</sup> In both cases continuity with the previous lord was emphasised, thereby serving to strengthen the position of the present lord.

The Savilles sought to further demonstrate their connection with the previous lords of Thornhill by adopting the latter's crest. This can be found on the tomb of Sir John Saville I of Thornhill, Sir Thomas' son. Sir John's tomb takes the form of an alabaster tomb chest, surrounded by eighteen weepers beneath ogee arches and interspersed with shields, the heraldry on which, originally painted, has disappeared. On top of the chest are the recumbent figures of Sir John Saville and his wife (fig. 11). Lady Saville is fashionably attired in a wide-necked gown with a tight fitting bodice and sleeves, the mantle over her shoulders is held in place by a decorative cord passing across her chest. Her clothing dates her to the later decades of the fifteenth century.<sup>377</sup> Sir John Saville is represented as a knight in fluted armour, clean-shaven, bare-headed and short-haired, wearing a Yorkist livery collar of suns. In form this effigy is very similar to that of Sir William Ryther at Ryther, dated by Gardner to 1475, as is the tomb chest, indicating a similar date of construction, possibly in the same workshop.<sup>378</sup> Sir John's hands are clasped in prayer on his chest, his feet rest on a lion, whilst his head rests on a helm, upon which is the crest of a maiden's head crowned (fig. 12). This is the crest of the Thornhills of Thornhill.<sup>379</sup> The absence of Sir Thomas Saville's tomb, or any description of it,

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<sup>376</sup> Crease, *Incomparable Sepulchres*, p. 287.

<sup>377</sup> Crease, *Incomparable Sepulchres*, p. 300.

<sup>378</sup> Gardner, *Alabaster Tombs*, pp. 66-9.

<sup>379</sup> Charlesworth, *Guide to the Church of St Michael and All Angels*, p. 15; Crease, *Incomparable Sepulchres*, p. 299.

**Figure 11** The tomb of Sir John Saville and his wife, situated in the Saville chapel, St Michael and All Angels, Thornhill, c. 1481.



**Figure 12** Detail from the tomb of Sir John Saville, his head resting on a helm featuring the crest of the Thornhills of Thornhill, a maiden's head crowned.



makes it impossible to determine whether this crest was adopted immediately on accession to Thornhill. It is a feasible, given Sir Thomas' determination to cement the place of the Savilles as lords here, to suggest that it was. In any case, its appearance on the tomb of one of the Saville lords of Thornhill is akin to the action of the Hiltons of Swine, who adopted the Lascelles' chaplet and had it emblazoned on their tomb effigies (fig. 4). By adopting the Thornhill crest as their own the Savilles asserted continuity. In adopting the Thornhill crest on their tombs, the Savilles again pointed to their lordship through hereditary right.

Further reference can be found to maternal ancestry, and by extension to the Savilles' hereditary right as lords of Thornhill, in the subject of one of the chapel's north windows. Windows a and b (fig. 6) are square-headed and consistent with an earlier date than the chapel itself, suggesting that they may have formed part of the original building, prior to the construction of the Saville chapel.<sup>380</sup> The glass in both these windows however is consistent with having been commissioned by Sir Thomas Saville at the same time as the chapel, something that is explicitly stated in window b.<sup>381</sup> The figures in both windows are similar in form, and the same colours are used throughout; white glass with black paint, yellow stain, pot metal blue and pot metal red. Window a depicts the Crucifixion. Its three main lights, from left to right, originally showed the Virgin, Christ on the Cross and St John.<sup>382</sup> Window b (fig. 13) has been the subject of some debate, being wrongly identified by Whitaker and Fowler during the nineteenth century as depicting three separate images of the Holy

<sup>380</sup> John Harvey, *The Perpendicular Style 1330-1485* (London, 1978), p. 69.

<sup>381</sup> Ryder, *Medieval Churches*, p. 72; Jones, *Catalogue of the Glass*, p. 139.

<sup>382</sup> Whitaker, *Leidis and Elmete*, p. 320.

Family or ‘scenes from the life of some female saint’ respectively.<sup>383</sup> The subject has since, very convincingly, been identified by L.S. Jones as representing the Holy Kindred.<sup>384</sup> It is this latter window that concerns us here.

The Holy Kindred is an apocryphal genealogy designed to explain certain references in the New Testament to some of the disciples as Jesus’ cousins. Otherwise known as the three Marys, it refers most commonly to the three daughters of St Anne: the Virgin Mary, mother of Jesus; Mary Clophas, mother of James Minor, Joseph the Just, Simon and Jude; and Mary Salome, the mother of James Major and John the Evangelist. All of these individuals are depicted within window b of the Saville chapel. Like window a this comprises three lights. That on the left depicts Mary Clophas, her four children and her husband, whilst that on the right depicts Mary Salome, her husband and her two children. These infants can be identified by their saintly emblems; St John, in his mother’s arms, holds an open book, whilst St James holds a pilgrim’s staff and wears a cap decorated with a miniature shell.<sup>385</sup> The central light shows St Anne, the Virgin and the infant Jesus. The head of Joachim, the Virgin’s father, is just visible behind his wife’s right shoulder.

The Holy Kindred were popular across Europe for much of the middle ages, with representations increasingly common after the beginning of the fifteenth

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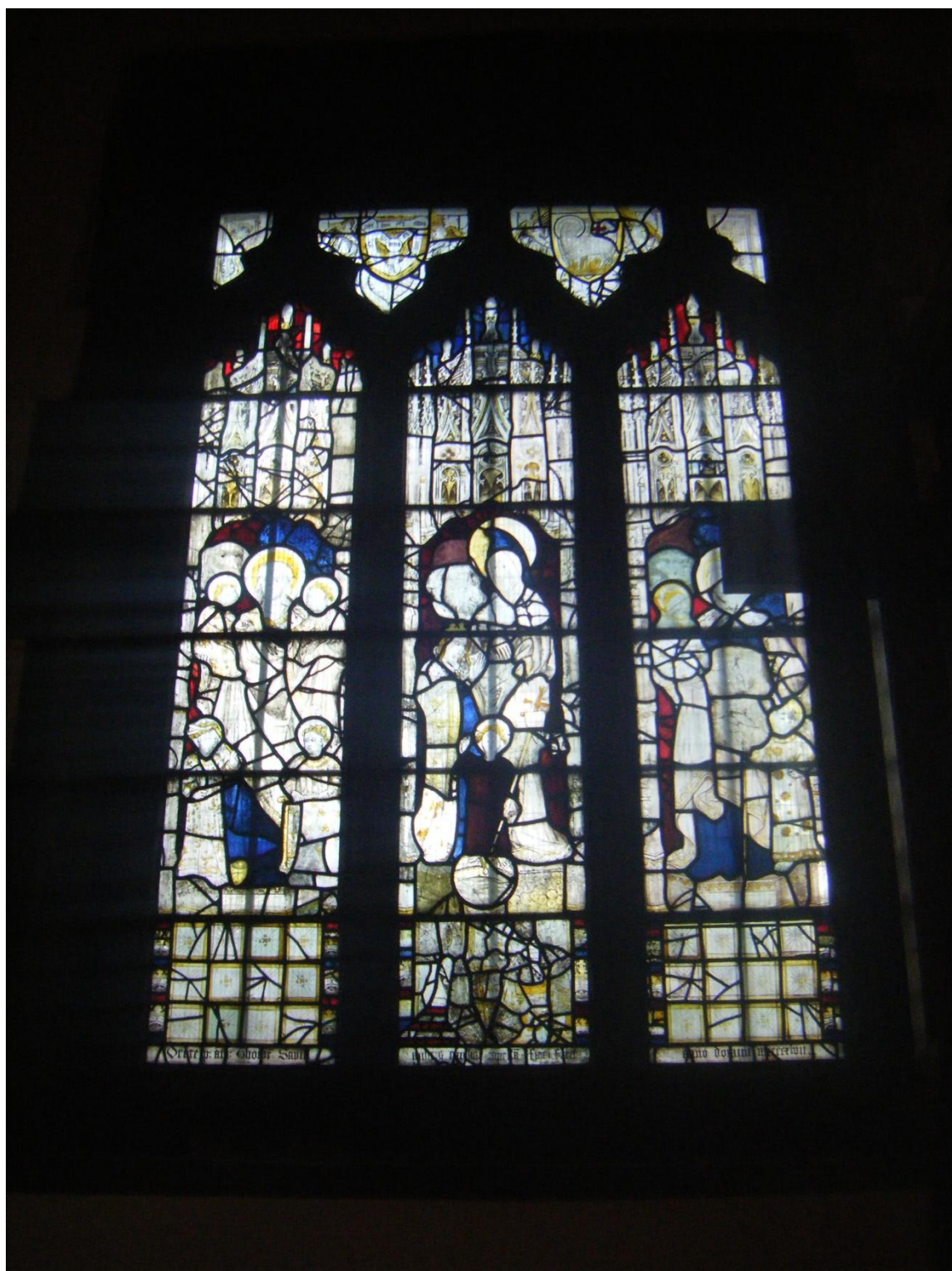
<sup>383</sup> Whitaker, *Leidis and Elmete*, pp. 319-20; James Fowler, ‘On the Painted Glass at Thornhill’ *YATJ*, 1 (1870), p. 70.

<sup>384</sup> Jones, *Catalogue of the Glass*, pp. 20-1.

<sup>385</sup> Jones, *Catalogue of the Glass*, pp. 22-4.



**Figure 13** The north windows in the Saville chapel (b), c. 1447. Three separate images of the Holy Family are depicted, with the figure of Sir Thomas Saville kneeling in prayer in the bottom of the central light.



century.<sup>386</sup> Sir Thomas Saville's decision to have the Kindred depicted within one of the windows of his new chapel was not without precedent, indeed there is an almost identical window in the Minster at York which dates to around 1415, as well as two very similar windows in parish churches within the city.<sup>387</sup> The Holy Kindred was an entirely fitting subject for a chapel dedicated to the Virgin Mary.<sup>388</sup> As such it could represent no more than an interest in the cult of the Virgin on Sir Thomas' part. Her special intercessory powers, combined with the belief that she was particularly inclined to use them, made her an extremely popular focus of devotion in this period.<sup>389</sup> Sir Thomas' other window, window a, also featured the Virgin, suggesting that she may have been intended to form the centre of the chapel's decorative scheme.

It is possible, however, to see some additional meaning in Sir Thomas' choice of the Holy Kindred as a subject for one of his chapel windows. It was here that he chose to place the image of himself, rather than the Crucifixion window, something that Millie Naydenova-Slade considers to be particularly significant.<sup>390</sup> The Holy Kindred, she argues, were a popular method used by the aristocracy for representing kinship ties, specifically those formed by marriage, a point that has also

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<sup>386</sup> Millie Naydenova-Slade, 'Late Medieval Holy Kinship Imagery and Family Commemoration: the Evidence from Thornhill, West Yorkshire and Latton, Essex' in Caroline M. Barron and Clive Burgess (eds.) *Memory and Commemoration in Medieval England* (Donington, 2010), pp. 218-9.

<sup>387</sup> S. Brown, 'Our Magnificent Fabrick'. *York Minster: An Architectural History c. 1220-1500* (Swindon, 2003), p. 284; Naydenova-Slade, 'Late medieval Holy Kinship Imagery', p. 226.

<sup>388</sup> Clay (ed.) *Halifax Wills*, pp. 9-10.

<sup>389</sup> Clarissa W. Atkinson, *The Oldest Vocation. Christian Motherhood in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca and London, 1991), p. 241; Nigel Morgan, 'Texts and Images of Marian Devotion in Fourteenth Century England' in Nicholas Rogers (ed.) *England in the Fourteenth Century* (Stamford, 1993), pp. 44-5.

<sup>390</sup> Naydenova-Slade, 'Late medieval Holy Kinship Imagery', pp. 224-6.

been made by P. Sheingorn.<sup>391</sup> The Savilles had only recently acquired Thornhill through marriage and so, Naydenova-Slade suggests, Holy Kinship imagery was a particularly apt way for Sir Thomas to celebrate this. Further to this, I would add that the Holy Kindred was especially appropriate in this case because it was genealogy in which the female line was important. By drawing parallels between the Kindred and his own family, who owed their position at Thornhill to inheritance through a female, Sir Thomas was able to further strengthen the Savilles' claims to be lords of the manor. The fact that gentlemen felt the need to make such a connection, to tie themselves with previous lords in a demonstration of continuity, is indicative of the importance of place as an aspect of gentry identity. In order to be considered a 'proper' gentleman, a man had to demonstrate that he, and his family, belonged. The possession of a manor was not just a practical requirement for those who aspired to live like gentlemen, the long-term occupation of a manor was an important validation of status in its own right.

The Saville-Harrington matrimonial dispute offers a different perspective on the importance of place and lineage. This case forms part of a collection of records of proceedings held before the Court of York over the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, known collectively as the cause papers.<sup>392</sup> It comprises Christina Harrington's initial complaint, the depositions of eleven witnesses all called on her behalf and the final verdict reached by the court. The case itself can be easily summarised. In 1443 Christina, widow of Sir Robert Harrington, petitioned the court

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<sup>391</sup> The tendency of the aristocracy to use images of the Holy Kinship in order to illustrate their own illustrious kin connections has been noted elsewhere. P. Sheingorn, 'Appropriating the Holy Kinship: Gender and Family History' in K. Ashley and P. Sheingorn (eds.) *Interpreting Cultural Symbols. St Anne in Late Medieval Society* (London, 1990), pp. 169-98.

<sup>392</sup> Harrington c. Saville, Records of the Diocesan Court of York, Borthwick Institute, York, F201.



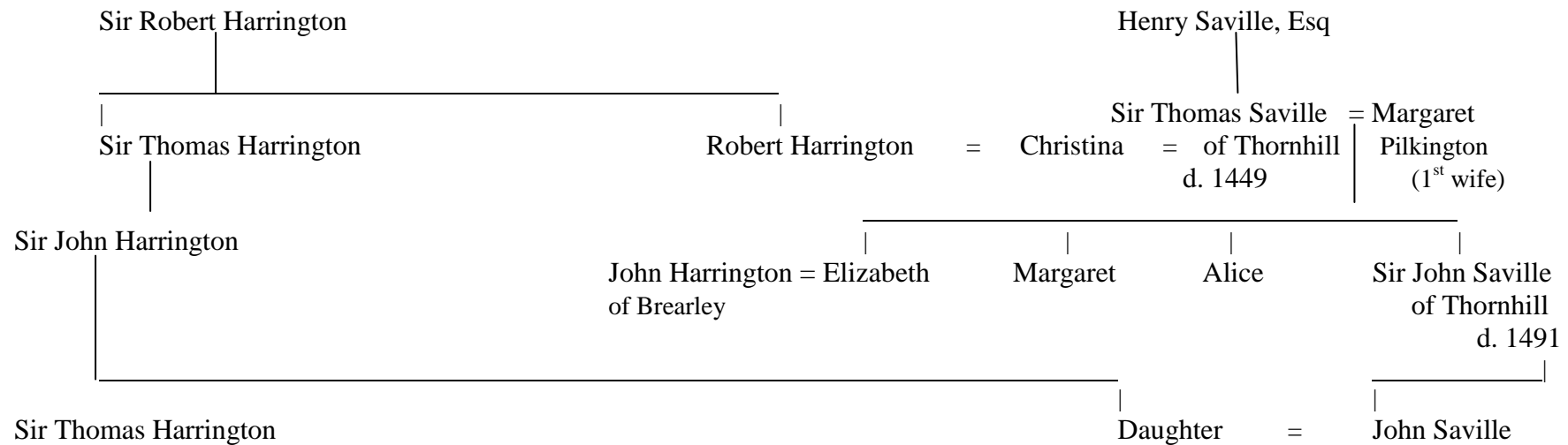
of York for an annulment of her marriage to Sir Thomas Saville. She claimed that two years earlier she had been forced into the match by Sir Thomas Harrington, the elder brother of her deceased husband (Pedigree F, p. 146), who she said had threatened her with the loss of her dower lands if she refused to comply. Sir Thomas may have resisted his wife's attempts to have their marriage terminated, although no evidence of this survives. In any case Christina's suit was ultimately successful. A few months after proceedings were begun the marriage was annulled.

There are several points that need to be addressed before using this source. Firstly, it is important to be aware that most marriages never came under the scrutiny of the ecclesiastical courts. Intervention was required only when there was a serious issue, in most cases marriages where the union was not being enforced, less commonly those where the union was to be dissolved.<sup>393</sup> Statistically, such disputed unions represent only a tiny fraction of medieval marriages. Add to this the fact that gentlemen and gentlewomen are little represented within these records and it is apparent that any gentry marriage appearing within the cause papers must be considered an extremely unusual case. The Harrington-Saville case cannot be taken as representative of the norm. Its usefulness lies in what it reveals about contemporary cultural practices. The opinions expressed by the deponents demonstrate attitudes towards marriage in this period. They reveal something of what contemporaries saw as the purpose of marriage, the way in which marriages were arranged and the manner in which husbands and wives were expected to behave. In addition, the Harrington-Saville case provides detailed descriptions, often including the words supposedly spoken, of individual incidents of married existence.

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<sup>393</sup>Helmholz, *Marriage Litigation*, pp. 25, 75.

### Pedigree F - The Harringtons and the Savilles



Pedigree compiled from:

J.W. Clay, 'The Savile Family', *Yorkshire Archaeological Journal*, XXV (1920), pp. 4-15.

Joseph Hunter, *Lupset* (London, 1851), pp. 12-23.

Thomas Dunham Whitaker, *Leidis and Elmete*, pp. 310-22.

Will of Sir Thomas Saville of Thornhill, 1449, in Clay (ed.) *Halifax Wills*, pp. 9-10

Will of Sir John Saville of Thornhill, 1481, TE III, pp. 270-1.

Will of Thomas Harrington, TE III, pp. 270-1.

Unusually, even for the cause papers, we also have scenes of home life, something that is seldom if ever portrayed as clearly in any other source.<sup>394</sup> In a period for which our knowledge of gentry marriages is often severely limited, it may prove invaluable in aiding our understanding of marriage among the late medieval aristocracy.

This is not to say that this record is comprehensive. Much useful information, from an academic point of view, may be missing. The cause papers were never intended to be a complete record of marriage, still less of social practice in general. In the case of an annulment, the court was only interested in matters pertaining to the existence of a prior contract, evidence that the parties were more closely related than the four degrees of kinship dictated by canon law, impotence, or evidence that consent was not freely given.<sup>395</sup> The depositions here were shaped by a need to establish if Christina was coerced into marriage. We are unlikely to know if the witnesses volunteered additional information, since the Church was only interested in what it saw as the relevant details. We cannot know how closely the accounts represent the words of the deponent, or to what extent they represent the interviewer's interpretation of what was said. Even the most conscientious of records, in which an attempt was made to write down depositions word for word, could be subject to distortion. Whilst these depositions were almost certainly given in English – it is unlikely that the servants who make up the majority of Christina's witnesses would have been able to speak anything else - they were recorded in Latin

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<sup>394</sup> Letters, examined in the last chapter, are probably the best alternative, although the nature of medieval letters and their reasons for survival mean that there is seldom as much information of day-to-day life as we might wish. For further discussion of the limitations of letters as a source of this kind see Chapter 2.

<sup>395</sup> Helmholz, *Marriage Litigation*, pp. 79-94; Frederick Pederson, 'Romeo and Juliet of Stonegate': *A Medieval Marriage in Crisis*, Borthwick Paper, No. 87 (1995), pp. 10-1.

and edited by the scribe. Translation, from speech to writing and from one language to another, may have resulted in inaccuracy and misinterpretation. This is not just someone's version of events, but rather a version of a version. It is, as Bronach Kane has described the cause papers in general, a 'mediated account' that may not have been accurate to begin with.<sup>396</sup> Christina chose her witnesses because she could presumably expect them to support her version of events. The information they provided did not have to be true, but it did have to be believable. If it travelled too far from the reality of married life there would be no chance of the court accepting it.<sup>397</sup> The issues of authority and power, lineage, the relationship of husband with wife, the interaction between gentry males of similar status, and the importance of sexual reputation that it allows us to examine must therefore all have been familiar aspects of late medieval married life among the gentry.

Among the variety of concerns demonstrated by this source, one stands out. The Saville-Harrington marriage was primarily about land. Sir Thomas Harrington, according to six of the witness depositions, was the main force behind the marriage.<sup>398</sup> The witnesses all agreed that he placed Christina under extreme duress. Several described her weeping on her way to church and Harrington himself freely admitted that he had to threaten and cajole her into agreeing to go through with it. His ability to compel Christina to give her consent hinged on dower. As the widow of Robert Harrington, Sir Thomas's younger brother (Pedigree F), Christina was entitled to at least a third of her late husband's property. But entitlement was one

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<sup>396</sup> Bronach Kane, *Impotence and Virginitly in the Late Medieval Court of York*, Borthwick Paper, No. 114 (2008), p. 7.

<sup>397</sup> Kane, *Impotence and Virginitly*, p. 7.

<sup>398</sup> These were Thomas Harrington, John Bradshall, William Edylston, John Ikyndon, Christina Fleming and John Hambeshed.

thing and possession another. It was not unheard of for a widow's dower to be withheld, and a woman left in this situation faced destitution.<sup>399</sup> Sir Thomas Markenfield was so concerned about this prospect for his own daughter that he left a provision in his will, stating that she was to receive an allowance from his estate in the event that her in-laws refused to part with it.<sup>400</sup> 'Use of force' in cases of annulment generally had to constitute severe threat of physical violence, but it is possible that, in accepting a plea based on threat to property, the court recognised the severity of Christina's situation.<sup>401</sup> In any case it appears to have been the threat to her dower that prompted Christina's unwilling acquiescence to the match.

Land would also appear to have been one of Sir Thomas Harrington's main reasons for wanting this marriage to take place. Christina's dower, in all likelihood, would originally have come from the Harrington patrimony. It would revert back to the Harrington family on her death, but in the mean time represented something of a problem for Sir Thomas. The burden of providing for widows, as Rowena Archer has discussed, could represent a severe drain on the resources of aristocratic families.<sup>402</sup> As the widow of a younger son Christina's claims were smaller than they would have been if she had been married to the head of the family, but they might still be substantial. Since she was a relatively young woman they would probably

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<sup>399</sup> Jennifer C. Ward, *English Noblewomen in the Middle Ages* (London and New York, 1992), pp. 36-7.

<sup>400</sup> TE IV, pp. 124-6.

<sup>401</sup> Helmholz, *Marriage Litigation*, pp. 91-2.

<sup>402</sup> Rowena A. Archer, 'Rich Old Ladies: The Problem of Late Medieval Dowagers' in Tony Pollard (ed.) *Property and Politics: Essays in Later Medieval English History* (Gloucester, 1984), pp. 19-22.

also have been extremely long-lasting.<sup>403</sup> Sir Thomas thus had a clear interest in maintaining some control over her dower lands. His determination to do this, by any means necessary, is indicative of the strength of his continued sense of ownership. It would appear that, as far as Sir Thomas was concerned, Christina's dower never left the patrimony. This was Harrington land and it was his right, as head of the family, to control it.

In order to maintain control over Christina's dower, Sir Thomas had two choices. Either he could try to stop his sister-in-law remarrying, a difficult task in a period when marriage could be contracted without permission, clerical assistance or witnesses, or he could see that she married someone he trusted to protect his interests.<sup>404</sup> He chose the second option. Several factors made Sir Thomas Saville an appealing candidate. The Savilles in 1441 were one of the wealthiest gentry families in Yorkshire and Sir Thomas was at their head.<sup>405</sup> He was of solidly aristocratic blood, with a pedigree that could be traced back to the twelfth century, and possessed marital connections with several of the region's most important families, including Lord Darcy (Pedigree E).<sup>406</sup> From Sir Thomas Harrington's point of view, a connection with the Savilles may also have been politically expedient. The Savilles had a long history of service with the Duke of York.<sup>407</sup> The Harringtons were long-

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<sup>403</sup> Christina's age is not recorded, but Sir Thomas Harrington was forty years old in 1441. As the wife of his younger brother she was probably a few years younger than this. Gooder, *Parliamentary Representation*, p. 202.

<sup>404</sup> Helmholz, *Marriage Litigation*, p. 26; Brooke, *Medieval Idea of Marriage*, p. 54.

<sup>405</sup> Clay, 'Savile Family', pp. 4-6; Charles Clay, 'Early Yorkshire Families', YAS. RS. 135 (1973), p. 25.

<sup>406</sup> Clay, 'Early Yorkshire Families', p. 24.

<sup>407</sup> Clay, 'Savile Family', pp. 4-6.

time servants of the duchy of Lancaster.<sup>408</sup> A marriage between the two families could potentially bridge a political gap. It could also make changing sides, as Sir Thomas Harrington was shortly to do, easier. Members of the Harrington family were responsible for the capture of Henry VI in 1465 and Sir Thomas himself fought for York at Blore Heath in 1459 and Wakefield in 1460, where he was killed.<sup>409</sup> There was clearly much to recommend the match as far as Sir Thomas Harrington himself was concerned. He does not seem to have considered Christina's evident unwillingness to be much of an issue. Marriage, as far as Sir Thomas Harrington was concerned, was a matter to be settled between gentlemen. Christina's own opinion was largely irrelevant.

In providing his widowed sister-in-law with a husband, Harrington performed his duty as head of the family. Not only did he secure an advantageous alliance that would benefit the family as a whole, he also ensured that Christina would be provided for in a manner appropriate to her status. Saville was in many ways an ideal husband; wealthy, of good blood and by all appearances inclined to treat his new wife well. Christina's personal aversion to marrying a man who was upwards of twenty years her senior was the sole stumbling block in what could have been an extremely successful union.<sup>410</sup> Provision for dependants, as the Plumpton letters demonstrate, was a key aspect of gentry masculine identity. In arranging the marriage Harrington behaved like a gentleman. But in her refusal to co-operate,

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<sup>408</sup> Sir Thomas Harrington's father was standard bearer to Henry V, CPR II Hen V, p. 195. Sir Thomas himself fought several times for the king in France and served repeatedly as MP for Yorkshire. Gooder, *Parliamentary Representation*, pp. 202-4.

<sup>409</sup> CPR Ed IV, vol. I, pp. 460-1; Gooder, *Parliamentary Representation*, p. 204.

<sup>410</sup> As noted earlier, Christina was a relatively young woman, probably somewhere in her early to mid-thirties. At the time of his death in 1449, Sir Thomas Saville appears to have been somewhere in his sixties. Clay (ed.) *Halifax Wills*, pp. 9-10.

Christina failed to perform what Harrington saw as her proper role as a member of the family. Her continued resistance was contrary to the benefit of the family and in direct disobedience to the head, neither of which he could allow. Authority over dependants, both male and female, can be seen as an important aspect of identity for gentry males.<sup>411</sup> Once his authority was challenged Harrington had no choice but to force the issue.

Sir Thomas Harrington had at least three reasons for wanting this marriage to take place. It allowed him to maintain some control over Christina's dower lands, cemented a connection with the wealthy and powerful Saville family and reinforced his authority as a gentry male. Sir Thomas Saville's motivations may have been rather different. There were several reasons why a gentleman might want to marry a particular woman. Study of the Plumpton letters indicated that these included wealth, potential alliances, the opportunity to procreate and the potential for a harmonious existence.<sup>412</sup> Similar requirements have been identified by Colin Richmond in his study of the Paston letters.<sup>413</sup> Sir Thomas Saville, as one of the wealthiest knights in Yorkshire, did not need to marry for money. Nor, since he already had a son and a grandson, did he need to marry for the sake of producing an heir (Pedigree F).<sup>414</sup> The potential for an alliance with the Harringtons, a family with a long and distinguished

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<sup>411</sup> Anthony Fletcher, *Gender, Sex and Subordination in England, 1500-1800* (New Haven and London, 1995), p. xv.

<sup>412</sup> For a further discussion of what gentlemen looked for in a wife see Chapter 2.

<sup>413</sup> Colin Richmond, *The Paston Family in the Fifteenth Century. Endings* (Manchester and New York, 2000), p. 55.

<sup>414</sup> 'Flower's Visitation' in *Visitations of the North. Part II*, Surtees Society 133 (1921), p. 41; Whitaker, *Leidis and Elmete*, p. 311; Gooder, *Parliamentary Representation*, p. 197; Ormrod, *Lord Lieutenants*, p. 90.



history in service to the Lancastrian kings, may have appealed to him.<sup>415</sup> Two subsequent marriages between the Savilles and the Harringtons in the following decades confirm that a connection was felt to be desirable (Pedigree F). In the middle of the fifteenth century Sir Thomas Saville's daughter married John Harrington of Brearley.<sup>416</sup> Two decades later Saville's grandson, Sir John Saville II, married Harrington's granddaughter.<sup>417</sup> This suggests that, as Rosenthal has argued, the male relatives of a bride could add significantly to her attractiveness.<sup>418</sup>

One further element is suggested by the evidence. Sir Thomas Saville was perhaps also motivated by an attraction to Christina's person. The Plumpton letters indicate that this could be a factor when a gentleman sought a bride. The beauty of Agnes Drayate was considered a point in her favour when Edward Plumpton wished to marry her.<sup>419</sup> Randall Manwering was so taken with Eleanor Plumpton that he was prepared to take her with a considerably smaller dowry than he could reasonably expect.<sup>420</sup> Both support Jennifer Ward's belief that beauty and character were contributory factors when gentlemen chose a bride.<sup>421</sup> None of the witnesses

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<sup>415</sup> Sir Thomas Harrington's father was standard bearer to Henry V, CPR II Hen V, p. 195. Sir Thomas himself fought several times for the king in France and served repeatedly as MP for Yorkshire, Gooder, *Parliamentary Representation*, pp. 202-4.

<sup>416</sup> The precise relationship between John Harrington of Brearley and the main branch is not ascertainable. He may well have been a younger brother or nephew of Sir Thomas Harrington. Whitaker, *Leidis and Elmete*, p. 311; Clay, 'Savile Family', p. 7.

<sup>417</sup> Frederick Walter Dendy (ed.) 'Flower's Visitation' in *Visitations of the North, Vol I.*, Surtees Society, 122 (London, 1912), p. 41.

<sup>418</sup> Joel T Rosenthal, 'Aristocratic Marriage and the English Peerage, 1350-1500: Social Institution and Personal Bond', *Journal of Medieval History*, 10, 3 (1984), p. 187.

<sup>419</sup> Kirby (ed.) *Plumpton Letters*, No.121, pp.118-9. Both this and the following example are discussed in Chapter 2.

<sup>420</sup> Kirby (ed.) *Plumpton Letters*, No. 194, p.177.

<sup>421</sup> Ward, *English Noblewomen*, p. 28.

commented on Christina Harrington's appearance, but attractiveness is in any case entirely subjective. The depositions suggest partiality on Saville's part, John Bradshall describing an incident before the marriage on which occasion Saville urged Sir Thomas Harrington to continue to try and persuade his sister-in-law, in spite of the fact that she had already refused to marry him. The primary advantage of the match, a connection with the Harrington family that could be, and indeed was, achieved by other means, hardly seems worth the effort it took to force Christina to agree. It is difficult to account for Sir Thomas Saville's enthusiasm without considering the possibility that he wanted Christina for herself, not just for what marriage with her could bring.

The belief that Saville desired Christina for herself is further supported by his conduct after the wedding. He seems to have done all he could to try and make it a success, behaving with a patience and restraint that much impressed William Edylston in particular. Despite the lack of conjugal relations, the couple were apparently on friendly terms. This is recounted by Edylston and Thomas Harrington, with four other witnesses reporting how they ate meals together, an act that was significantly described by Thomas Cartwright as being 'in the manner of man and wife'. According to the statements given by the witnesses, theirs was not a marriage of constant friction. Saville wished to consummate the match, but he never forced the issue. Several of the witnesses, including Isabella and Christina Fleming, servants who would be in a position to know, recounted how he got as far as being in the same bed as his wife on two consecutive nights after the ceremony. William Hoton had heard something similar from a woman named Alicia, possibly another servant. Saville's badgering of his wife on this subject was reported by John Buth,

who recounted an argument between the couple at Thornhill that may well have been a common occurrence. Sir Thomas, according to Buth, pleaded with his wife to perform her conjugal duties and sleep with him. Christina responded that she never would. Something similar was heard and reported by John Hambeshed on another occasion, when Saville charged Christina with disobedience.

There would thus appear to be no lack of enthusiasm on Saville's part, in fact quite the contrary. Yet whilst several witnesses were adamant about Saville's desire to sleep with his wife, the majority, including Thomas Harrington, William Edylston, Joan Cuthbert, Christina and Isabella Fleming were equally certain that it did not happen. Even those who admitted they did not know for certain, like William Hoton, who was willing to admit to very little at all, and John Hambeshed, generally believed that there was no sexual intercourse. This raises some questions for Charles Donahue, who suggests the possibility that Sir Thomas may have been impotent.<sup>422</sup> The witnesses, Donahue argues, are protesting too much in a bid to protect Saville's reputation, the plea of force a fiction accepted by the court in deference to his rank. This argument cannot be sustained. There is no evidence to support the suggestion that Saville was impotent and even if he had been it would not have formed a valid argument for annulment in this case. The Church set a proscribed period of three years before impotence cases could be brought and only two had lapsed since Christina married Saville.<sup>423</sup> It was necessary that Christina's witnesses provide evidence of non-consummation, since compliance on her part at any point would have validated the union, but it was not the focus of her argument. Consent, not

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<sup>422</sup> Charles Donahue, *Law, Marriage and Society in the Later Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 2008), p. 168.

<sup>423</sup> Butler, 'Runaway Wives', p. 346.

consummation, was the only real requirement of a valid marriage.<sup>424</sup> What was important here was that she had maintained her resistance to the union, not that Saville had been unable to perform. On the contrary, the witnesses make clear that he could and would have done so if not for Christina's refusal to consent.

Whilst Donahue's argument that Sir Thomas Saville was impotent does not stand-up to scrutiny, it is possible that the insistence of the deponents was intended to help him save face. For a gentleman to be divorced by his wife must have been a humiliating enough experience without casting slurs on his manhood. Christina evidently had no wish to be married to Saville, but the depositions indicate that they had managed to exist on peaceful terms. Christina accused Harrington of forcing her to agree to the match, not Saville, and there was nothing to be gained by criticising him. If, as seems to be the case, he did not contest Christina's action for annulment, there was much to lose. The whole case seems to hinge on cooperation, not only in Saville's apparent acquiescence but also Sir Thomas Harrington's obliging admission of guilt. The parties would appear to have reached some agreement before the matter ever came before the court. The description of events, including Saville's behaviour, given by the witnesses may have been accurate or embroidered, but they are uniform in presenting a positive picture of Saville's gentlemanly conduct. In all, six out of the seven witnesses who were able to comment on the matter stated that the marriage was not consummated because Christina refused. Although John Buth and John Hambeshed demonstrate that on some occasions she was confident enough to refuse Saville's attempts at persuasion point-blank, most of the witnesses

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<sup>424</sup> Helmholz, *Marriage Litigation*, p. 26; Christopher N.L. Brooke, *The Medieval Idea of Marriage* (Oxford, 1989), p. 54; Jacqueline Murray, 'Individualism and Consensual Marriage: Some Evidence From Medieval England' in Constance M. Rousseau and Joel T. Rosenthal (eds.) *Women, Marriage and Family in Medieval Christendom* (Kalamazoo, Michigan, 1998), p. 145.

emphasised Christina's supplication and Saville's clemency. Joan Cuthbert attributed Christina's successes with her husband to her placating manner, Isabella Fleming to her tears. The most colourful account of the wedding night was provided by Thomas Harrington, in which Christina was described as threatening to kill herself and eventually succeeding in eliciting promises that she would not be assaulted.

Saville's failure to consummate the marriage, we are told, was not for want of desire or want of ability. It was entirely due to his willingness to accede to his wife's pleas. Christina, according to William Edylston, appealed to his 'courtesy'. Saville's compliance with her requests did not make him less of a man or less of a gentleman, because he *chose* to comply. He had the power to grant or deny Christina's requests and he was able, in spite of his own wish to consummate the marriage, to control his desires. Self-control, according to Derek Neal, was a vital characteristic of gentry masculinity.<sup>425</sup> Control over sexual impulse, something that has been argued as a feature of clerical masculinity in this period, was apparently not limited to those in holy orders.<sup>426</sup> None of the witnesses give the impression that Saville was less of a man because he failed to have sex with his wife. William Edylston quite clearly thought the opposite, finding Saville's willingness, and ability, to restrain himself worthy of particular note. Non-consummation could be seen as a mark of his, status specific, 'manly' conduct, provided that consummation was desired.

Examination of the evidence relating to the Savilles of Thornhill thus provides several useful insights into the significance of place, lineage and family to

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<sup>425</sup> Neal, *Masculine Self*, p. 119.

<sup>426</sup> Swanson, 'Angels Incarnate', pp. 160-77.

the construction of gentry identity. In addition, the Harrington-Saville case offers some suggestions as to how the relationships gentlemen formed, and their conduct within these relationships, could affect the way that they were perceived as gentlemen. Combined with an examination of the Plumpton letters, there are several points worthy of note, many of which would greatly reward further investigation. Perhaps the most obvious of these is the importance of land in making a man a gentleman. The Plumptons were determined to protect their own property and acquire the property of others. The Savilles were prepared to uproot themselves no less than three times in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries for the sake of association with larger, more prosperous manors. Sir Thomas Harrington's desire to maintain control of the parts of the Harrington patrimony that passed to his former sister-in-law as dower is simply another aspect of the same concern. The possession of land was a requirement of gentility. The acquisition of property meant an increase in importance, whilst its loss had a correspondingly negative effect on status.

Whilst any land was important, land with which a family had been associated for generations appears to have been more significant than that which had been recently acquired. The main manor was always more aggressively protected than any others, demonstrating that the connection between a gentleman and place had to be maintained. This connection was so vital that when missing it could be fabricated. Sir Thomas Saville's connection with Thornhill was not entirely artificial, the manor having come to him through his mother, but he worked very hard to emphasise his hereditary claims. A gentleman who possessed no link with a property would have had to work even harder. The Savilles' willingness to move the family seat in order that they might be situated on a more prosperous manor, indicates that practical

advantages were more important than a long-term connection. But their determination to stress that there was in fact a long-term connection indicates that place was still extremely important. Without a strong claim to place, a gentleman could not be considered a real gentleman.

The Saville-Harrington matrimonial dispute, combined with the evidence of the Plumpton correspondence also suggests a few more points regarding the importance of marriage for gentry males. It would appear that marriage, as Colin Richmond has argued, was both a sexist and a mercenary business.<sup>427</sup> The opinions of gentlewomen about their prospective partners were largely overlooked by gentlemen within the Plumpton letters. Godfrey Greene, who considered discounting a potential husband for his sister on account of his uncertain income, gave no indication that he had even considered what his sister thought about the match.<sup>428</sup> German de la Pole wrote at great length about the enthusiasm of Randall Manwering to marry Eleanor Plumpton, but at no point did he mention if she wanted to marry him.<sup>429</sup> Gentlewomen may have had a voice in these arrangements, but if so we do not hear it. In the case of Christina Harrington, where her voice can be very clearly heard, it is evident that the gentlemen involved chose to disregard her opinions completely. Marriage was, overwhelmingly, a matter to be arranged by men.

Marriage for gentlemen would also seem to have been arrangement where personal feelings were secondary to other, further-reaching concerns. Family, and

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<sup>427</sup> Richmond, *Paston Family*, pp. 33-4.

<sup>428</sup> Kirby (ed.) *Plumpton Letters*, No. 10, p. 33.

<sup>429</sup> Kirby (ed.) *Plumpton Letters*, No. 194, p. 177.

the advantages to family that could accrue from the right marriage, were the most important considerations when a spouse was chosen. Sir Thomas Harrington arranged the marriage of his sister-in-law in order to protect Harrington family interests. The Plumptions looked for similar advantages when arranging the marriage of family members. This is not to say that affection, even love, could not be part of marriage. The Plumpton correspondence presents several marriages that resulted in close affective ties; Sir Robert Plumpton II and his first wife Agnes, Robert Greene and his wife Elizabeth, Edward Plumpton and his London widow. The marital dispute between Christina Harrington and Sir Thomas Saville indicates that this too may have been a marriage for love, if sadly only on one side. But marriage was not primarily about love. As consideration of the evidence relating to the Plumptions, the Savilles and the Harringtons has shown, it was first and foremost a means of cementing and if possible improving status. It was through the ability not only to marry, but to make the right marriage, that gentle status was confirmed. Masculinity was confirmed by the way a man behaved once he had entered that institution.



## Chapter 4

### Visual Culture: The Conyers of South Cowton and the Redman of Kearby Hours

This chapter looks further at the role played by material culture in the formation of identity for gentry males. In it I will examine how patronage was shaped by concerns of status and gender and how particular forms of patronage contributed to a gentleman's masculine image. I will do this through two case studies. The first examines the house, church and tombs at South Cowton, all built, rebuilt, or refurbished by Sir Richard Conyers in the last decades of the fifteenth century. Conyers' reasons for building, and the style in which he chose to build, were affected by his status as a gentleman. His actions at South Cowton allow an investigation into how gentlemen constructed and projected their identity in the wider community. The second case study centres on the Redman of Kearby Hours. One of a large number of *horae* still in existence, this example can be securely identified as coming from fifteenth-century Yorkshire. Books of hours were ostensibly private items, intended for personal devotions, but they were used in public, meaning that these too contributed to the construction of a gentleman's identity in the community. They may also demonstrate something of a more private identity through an examination of their contents. Partly standardised – all included the Hours of the Virgin, for example - there was nonetheless considerable room for personalisation. It is through the personal choices made about what prayers to include that we may learn something of the interests and concerns of those who used *horae*. Combined, both studies allow for an investigation into how visual culture contributed to the construction of gentry identity. We will look first at Sir Richard Conyers and South Cowton.

Sir Richard Conyers was a member of the Conyers of Hornby, one of Richmondshire's richest and most powerful families.<sup>430</sup> His father, Christopher Conyers, was steward of Middleham for its Neville lords, a position that proved extremely advantageous in providing for his twenty-five offspring, all apparently the result of a single marriage.<sup>431</sup> At least three of his sons married heiresses, an unusually high number that was probably directly related to his noble connections. Richard was not fortunate in this regard - his first wife, Alice Wycliffe, was not an heiress - but his father may have provided for him in another way.<sup>432</sup> Tony Pollard has counted no less than seventeen small parcels of land acquired by Christopher Conyers, he surmises, for the purposes of establishing his younger sons with lands of their own.<sup>433</sup> Richard may have been the recipient of land in Newton, where Christopher owned at least one manor.<sup>434</sup> A Richard Conyers is recorded as resident at Newton-le-Willows in 1460 and this could be the same man who later settled at South Cowton.<sup>435</sup>

If Richard received lands from his father it would probably only have been on a life-term basis. Even rich gentry with extensive holdings were reluctant to separate land from the patrimony permanently and it was a standard feature of such

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<sup>430</sup> Pollard, 'Richmondshire Community', p. 53.

<sup>431</sup> Foster (ed.) *Visitations of Yorkshire*, pp. 71-2.

<sup>432</sup> Alice Wycliffe's brother Robert inherited the Wycliffe patrimony. Foster (ed.) *Visitations of Yorkshire*, p. 377.

<sup>433</sup> Pollard, *North Eastern England*, p. 83.

<sup>434</sup> Some of Christopher Conyers' manors are listed in Pollard, *North-Eastern England*, p. 83.

<sup>435</sup> CPR Hen VI, vol. VI p. 577.

grants that they should revert back to the main heir on the death of the recipient. Sir Ralph Rither left his second son Harry lands on these terms, whilst Sir Hugh Hastings provided for three sons, destined for careers in the Church, with lands that would revert to the main heir at their death or ‘what tyme it happen eny...be promoted to eny benefice or benefices spirtuell to the yerely value of xl marc’.<sup>436</sup> Edmund Mauleverer was extremely fortunate to receive ‘a sufficient estate in lawe in landez and tenementez...to hafe to hym and his heyres male of his body lawfully begotyn for euer’; this was not standard practice.<sup>437</sup>

There is no reason to think, as Christine Carpenter does, that there was anything ‘humiliating’ about receiving lands as the gift of father or brother.<sup>438</sup> Land, however it was acquired, provided those who held it with a measure of independence and authority over others, both important features of gentility and masculinity. A life-time grant, however, did have its disadvantages. Gentlemen, as we have already seen, were extremely conscious of place.<sup>439</sup> A lineage could not be built on property that reverted back to the main branch after the original recipient’s death; it needed to be passed down through the generations. As a result, gentlemen may have been less attached to manors that were not, in any permanent sense, theirs. There is no sign that Sir Richard Conyers tried to associate himself with any location before his acquisition, relatively late in life, of South Cowton. The main difference between this and any earlier manors was one of tenure. South Cowton was not granted just for a life term. It was acquired from Richard, duke of Gloucester, as a hereditary

<sup>436</sup> TE V, p. 125-7; TE IV, pp. 275-6.

<sup>437</sup> Brown, *Ingleby Arncliffe*, pp. 134-5.

<sup>438</sup> Carpenter, *Locality and Polity*, p. 123.

<sup>439</sup> See Chapters 1 and 3.

holding, after Conyers' death passing to his daughter and her husband, Ralph Bowes.<sup>440</sup> It was Sir Richard's personal property in a way that a life grant of land from his father was not.

The precise date at which Sir Richard acquired the manor of South Cowton is uncertain. A grant from the duke of Gloucester as lord of Middleham, it cannot have occurred before 1471, when the duke inherited the lordship following the death of the former lord, the earl of Warwick. It must also have been some time before 1487, when a charter now in the British Library states that the house was newly completed.<sup>441</sup> Pollard's estimation that it may have been granted together with an annuity from Richard III in 1484 is plausible, but it could have been received earlier.<sup>442</sup> Neither house nor church gives a firm date, although there are signs that work was carried out concurrently on both structures. The same arms, Conyers impaled with Wycliffe, the family of Sir Richard's first wife, appear on both buildings and it is likely that these were in place before his second marriage. Conyers is unlikely deliberately to have excluded his second wife, Katherine Bowes, from his scheme for salvation. Almost certainly, the majority of structural work was completed before Sir Richard's second marriage, perhaps even before the end of his first, suggesting an earlier rather than a later date. Unfortunately, there is no way of knowing when the marriage to Katherine Bowes took place. Any estimate between the mid-1480s and 1502, when Sir Richard died, is as valid as any other.<sup>443</sup>

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<sup>440</sup> Page (ed.) *VCH, North Riding, I*, p. 73; Dendy (ed.) 'Dalton's Visitation', p. 131.

<sup>441</sup> BL Additional Charters 66451.

<sup>442</sup> Pollard, 'Richmondshire Community', p. 56.

<sup>443</sup> Arthur Gardner refers to Sir Richard as having died in 1493, but it is more likely that Anthony Emery is correct in his assessment of a later date. The only Richard Conyers, knight of Yorkshire listed in the Fine Rolls died in 1502. Gardner, *Alabaster Tombs*, pp. 65-6; Anthony Emery, *Greater*

Sir Richard's undertakings at South Cowton initially appear highly ambitious. House and church, if not entirely new, seem to be quite substantially altered. St Mary's church is relatively small, comprising a rectangular nave slightly wider than the chancel, the two sections separated by a chancel arch still bearing a considerable amount of painted decoration (figs. 14 and 15). Sir Richard Conyers' arms, impaled with those of his first wife Alice Wycliffe, appear twice on the exterior of the building. One shield has been inserted above the western window of the bell tower (fig. 14). The other has been placed in a roundel above the porch door, which was probably an entirely new addition (fig. 16). The positioning of this second shield is deliberately striking, placed where it could not be missed by anyone entering the church and demanding 'Orate pro Anima Ricardi Conyers et Alicie uxoris suae'. The Conyers arms also appeared at least once in the windows. A fragment of glass, now situated in the east window, features an image of the Virgin and the arms of the Conyers of Hornby, *Azure a maunche or* (fig. 17).<sup>444</sup> It was almost certainly put in place by Sir Richard, the only member of the Conyers family ever to hold the manor.

Further evidence of Sir Richard's presence here is given by the remnant of his tomb. St Mary's church contains three alabaster effigies in the form of a knight and two ladies. The tomb chests on which these stood have long since disappeared and all three now lie in the east end of the chancel, the knight against the south wall and the ladies, stacked one on top of the other, against the north wall. In 1823 these

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*Medieval Houses of England and Wales 1300-1500. Volume I Northern England* (Cambridge, 1996), p. 398; CFR Hen VII, vol. XVIII p. 333.

<sup>444</sup> 'Parishes: Gilling', *A History of the County of York North Riding: Volume 1* (1914)

**Figure 14 St Marys church, South Cowton, exterior. The main part of the structure appears to date from the 13<sup>th</sup> century, with some 15<sup>th</sup> century alterations.**



**Figure 15 The chancel arch, St Marys church, South Cowton.**

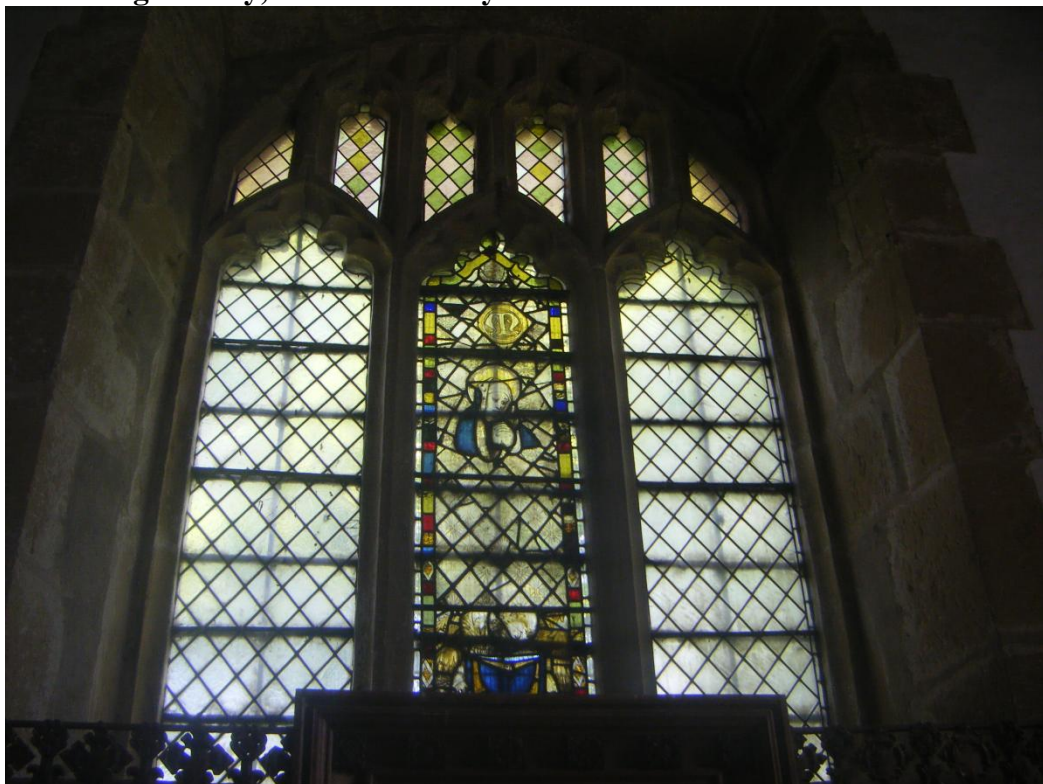




**Figure 16** The arms of Sir Richard Conyers and Alice Wycliffe, situated above the porch door and inserted c. 1480-95.



**Figure 17** The east window. Note the Conyers' arms alongside a representation of the Virgin Mary, late 15<sup>th</sup> century.



figures were situated in the south-east corner of the nave, although this too was probably not their original location.<sup>445</sup> It seems most likely that the complete tombs were originally placed within the chancel to the west of the altar, where there is a conveniently large space and where they would have been most conspicuous. Situated within the chancel, the tombs served as a powerful reminder to the resident clergy to pray for those depicted. In a position between the nave and the altar, they could not be missed by a congregation witnessing mass. As Pamela Graves suggests, tombs thus placed may even have served to distract the congregation from it.<sup>446</sup> Such positioning undoubtedly served a powerful intercessory motive, reminding people to pray for the deceased.<sup>447</sup> It would also have served to highlight the significance of those represented.<sup>448</sup> In most likely placing the tombs so conspicuously within the church, Sir Richard was effectively appropriating the entire building as a kind of private family chantry. Such actions are analogous with the practices of a large number of the Yorkshire gentry. Harewood, for example, is dominated by the tombs of the Redmans in the north aisle and the Gascoignes in the south. The Cresacres similarly dominated the church at Barnburgh and the Burghs the church at Brough.

In terms of the type of memorial used, tomb chests were a conspicuously expensive choice, intended to emphasise the high status of those who commissioned them.<sup>449</sup> The male figure at South Cowton is depicted in full plate armour of an elaborately decorated design, with an early Tudor livery collar comprising single

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<sup>445</sup> Crease, *Incomparable Sepulchres*, p. 287.

<sup>446</sup> Graves, 'Social Space', p. 317.

<sup>447</sup> Roffey, *Medieval Chantry*, pp. 56-7.

<sup>448</sup> Binski, *Medieval Death*, p. 74.

<sup>449</sup> Saul, *English Church Monuments*, p. 58.



roses interspersed with the Lancastrian Ss (fig. 18).<sup>450</sup> He has long hair, curled back from his face, and his feet rest on what appears to be a mutilated lion with one paw on the end of his sword, all of which is reminiscent of the somewhat finer tomb of Sir Richard Redman at Harewood (fig. 19). The South Cowton figure is notable for one unusual feature; between his hands he holds an elaborately carved heart.<sup>451</sup> The two ladies at South Cowton both appear very similar in style and are almost certainly the work of the same period and even the same workshop (figs. 20 and 21).<sup>452</sup> The facial features of all three effigies are strikingly similar and there are numerous points of similarity between the two females such as the angels supporting their pillows, the position of their hands, and the arrangement of the mantle cords across their chests. Like the knight, both hold identical carved hearts. One wears a truncated headdress, the other's head is bare except for a circlet. Both are fashionably and expensively attired as befitting women of high status and wear a considerable amount of jewellery in the form of mantle brooches and rings.<sup>453</sup> The bareheaded woman also wears an elaborate necklace. All three figures have traces of polychrome decoration, in particular that of the second woman, which retains a large amount of brown pigment on her uncovered hair (fig. 21).<sup>454</sup>

The date of these figures can be set with reasonable accuracy. All three have heavy-lidded eyes and high, flat cheekbones, features consistent with a late fifteenth-century date and which can be clearly seen in the effigies of Sir Richard Redman

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<sup>450</sup> Gardner, *Alabaster Tombs*, pp. 65-6.

<sup>451</sup> Crease, *Incomparable Sepulchres*, p. 287.

<sup>452</sup> Gardner, *Alabaster Tombs*, p. 63; Crease, *Incomparable Sepulchres*, p. 287.

<sup>453</sup> Scott, *Medieval Dress*, p. 153.

<sup>454</sup> Crease, *Incomparable Sepulchres*, p. 287.

**Figure 18 Effigy attributed to Sir Richard Conyers, c. 1490-1500.**



**Figure 19 Effigy of Sir Richard Redman at Harewood, c. 1495. The similarity in style with that of Sir Richard Conyers suggests that the two were created around the same time.**



**Figure 20 Female effigy, probably representing Sir Richard Conyers' first wife, c. 1490-1500.**



**Figure 21 Female effigy, almost certainly commissioned with the effigies of Sir Richard and his wife but whose identity is uncertain, c. 1490-1500.**



(fig. 19) and Sir William Mirfield at Batley, both of which date from the 1490s. The hair of the male figure, curled away from the face and falling onto the shoulders, is a style that can only be found in tomb sculpture after 1470.<sup>455</sup> His armour is consistent with a date between 1460 and 1490.<sup>456</sup> The presence of a Tudor livery collar means this effigy must have been created after 1485. Henry VII was quick to adopt the Lancastrian emblem of Ss after his success at Bosworth Field, and the use of the single red rose, as opposed to the more familiar double Tudor rose, suggests a date fairly early in the reign.<sup>457</sup> Since Sir Richard Conyers received an annuity of £8 from the new king in 1486, his connection with the new regime was of an early date.<sup>458</sup> Taking all of this into account, it is possible to say that this effigy was probably created in the decade after 1485, perhaps in the first half. The female effigies, which share so many stylistic details with that of the male, are consistent with a similar date of creation. Their style of dress, with low wide necklines and tightly fitted bodices with flared skirts and wide, hanging sleeves, indicates a date in the late fifteenth century.<sup>459</sup> The truncated headdress of the first lady (fig 20), with its flap folded back and extending down over the shoulders, suggests a date more specifically between 1475 and 1490.<sup>460</sup>

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<sup>455</sup> Gardner, *Alabaster Tombs*, p. 65.

<sup>456</sup> Gardner, *Alabaster Tombs*, p. 63; Francis M Kelly, *A Short History of Costume and Armour, Chiefly in England. Vol. I. 1066-1485* (London, 1931), p. 33; Mark Downing, 'Medieval Military Effigies up to 1500 Remaining in Worcestershire', *Transactions of the Worcestershire Archaeological Society*, 3rd Series, 18 (2002), p. 206; Saul, *English Church Monuments*, p. 209.

<sup>457</sup> Doris Fletcher, 'The Lancastrian Collar of Esses: Its Origins and Transformations Down the Centuries' in James L. Gillespie (ed.) *The Age of Richard II* (Stroud, 1997), pp. 197-8.

<sup>458</sup> CPR Hen VII, vol. I, p.92.

<sup>459</sup> Scott, *Medieval Dress*, p. 153.

<sup>460</sup> Gardner, *Alabaster Tombs*, p. 63.

This dating evidence is highly suggestive of the identity of those represented. Sir Richard Conyers is the most likely candidate for the male effigy – he possessed the manor at the right time, remodelled the church around himself as lord, and was in service to the Tudor regime. His will, made some years before his death, requested burial at St Mary’s, South Cowton and the amount of time, money and care spent focusing the church on himself as lord suggests that from the first he was creating a fitting burial site.<sup>461</sup> Bulmer’s *History of the North Riding* argues against this identification, asserting that it cannot be Sir Richard because the porch inscription mentions only one wife and therefore he was married only once.<sup>462</sup> This, however, is specious reasoning. It is clear from sixteenth-century pedigrees that Conyers did indeed have two wives; the porch inscription merely indicates that this part of the church was completed before Conyers married Katherine Bowes.<sup>463</sup> An alternative identification is made by Pevsner, who suggests that the effigies represent Christopher Boynton and his two wives.<sup>464</sup> This seems a plausible suggestion; there is an inscription to the memory of one Sir Christopher Boynton in the chancel and he held significant land in the North Riding, possibly including South Cowton. This identification falls down, however, when we look at dates. The most likely Boynton candidate died in 1451, much earlier than the style of the effigy indicates.<sup>465</sup> A later style could be accounted for if he had been commemorated long after his death, but

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<sup>461</sup> Extracts of this will are given by the editor of the *Testimenta Eboracensa*. I have been unable to trace the original. TE III, p. 291; Crease, *Incomparable Sepulchres*, p. 286.

<sup>462</sup> T. Bulmer, *History & Directory of North Yorkshire* (Preston, 1901), p. 410.

<sup>463</sup> Dendy (ed.) ‘Dalton’s Visitation’, p. 131.

<sup>464</sup> Bulmer, *North Yorkshire*, p. 410; Nikolaus Pevsner, *The Buildings of England and Yorkshire: The North Riding* (Hammondsworth, 1966), p. 350.

<sup>465</sup> CFR Hen VI, vol. XXX, p. 231; Foster (ed.) *Visitations of Yorkshire*, p. 4; Page (ed.) *VCH North Riding, I*, p. 79.

this is unlikely as there were no Boyntons at South Cowton at so late a date. Prior to Conyers' arrival the manor was part of a twenty-year lease to Richard Pigot, who was unlikely to have set up an elaborate memorial for someone unrelated to him.<sup>466</sup> Furthermore, there is no reason why Boynton would be wearing the Tudor livery collar.

If Sir Richard Conyers is represented here, then the woman in the truncated headdress is probably his first wife, Alice Wycliffe (fig. 20). Husband and wife may have occupied a joint tomb. The identity of the other woman is more difficult to decipher (fig. 21). Generally referred to as the second of two wives, her unbound hair raises some questions as to whether this identification is correct.<sup>467</sup> Unbound hair is generally indicative of a maiden. There is some precedent for married women in this period to be represented with their hair loose, indeed this seems to be the case with the wife of Sir John Saville at Thornhill (fig. 11), but it was unusual and largely restricted to women of the higher nobility.<sup>468</sup> It may be that this second female does represent Sir Richard's second wife, Katherine Bowes, in which case she may have occupied the same tomb. It is equally possible, however, that this effigy represents a close female relative of Sir Richard's, perhaps a daughter. Only three are recorded, all of whom married, but there could have been another who died young.<sup>469</sup> A female who died without issue and without forming an alliance with a notable family would

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<sup>466</sup> Pollard, *North-Eastern England*, p. 63.

<sup>467</sup> Bulmer, *North Yorkshire*, p. 410; Pevsner, *Buildings of England: North Riding*, p. 350; Emery, *Greater Medieval Houses*, p. 398; Crease, *Incomparable Sepulchres*, p. 287.

<sup>468</sup> Gardner sights a few examples, most of whom belonged to the higher levels of the nobility. Of the gentry examples he gives, both are in Yorkshire, at Butron Agnes and Thornhill, and it is perhaps notable that he does not sight South Cowton as an example. Gardner, *Alabaster Tombs*, p. 72.

<sup>469</sup> They were Margery Bowes, Eleanor Lascelles and Margaret Danby. TE III, p. 291.



not necessarily have been of interest to the heralds. If she was never married it would have been Sir Richard's responsibility to see that she was commemorated. As Virginia Bainbridge has argued, social obligations did not cease just because the person in question had died.<sup>470</sup> Sir Richard had a duty of care to provide for such a daughter even after death.

Concern for the souls of those represented was probably not Sir Richard's only consideration in choosing to commemorate them in this way. Sir Richard needed to establish his position as lord of the manor. The placement of tombs within the parish church was one way of doing this. South Cowton's church could be transformed into what was effectively a family mausoleum, serving as a demonstration of ancestry and local importance, helping to create and maintain family identity.<sup>471</sup> Funerary monuments often functioned as part of a larger scheme of patronage, which according to Pamela Graves acted as a means of "presencing" a lord's authority.<sup>472</sup> Sir Richard's sense of place in the region, as a Conyers of Hornby, was probably quite assured, but his position as lord of South Cowton was by no means as certain. He was the first Conyers to hold the manor and, since he had no son to succeed him, would almost certainly be the last. His response to this crisis of lineage was to create the impression that no such crisis existed, by suggesting that he and his family had long occupied this piece of land. A similar reaction to family crisis among the Cobhams in Kent has been highlighted by Saul, where memorials were created for several generations by a single individual in an effort to reaffirm the

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<sup>470</sup> Virginia Bainbridge, 'The Medieval Way of Death: Commemoration and the Afterlife in Pre-Reformation Cambridgeshire' in Michael Wilks (ed.) *Prophecy and Eschatology. Studies in Church History*, 10 (Oxford, 1994), p. 184.

<sup>471</sup> Bainbridge, 'Medieval Way of Death', pp. 184-5.

<sup>472</sup> Graves, 'Social Space', p. 311.

family's place as local lords.<sup>473</sup> In placing memorials to his family, possibly more than one generation, in the centre of communal worship, Sir Richard created an impression of solid, long-term lordship that was not actually the case. The ability to make such a claim, however artificial, was clearly important.

There is much evidence to suggest that Sir Richard Conyers was eager to make his mark at South Cowton. He placed his arms in highly visible locations, twice on the exterior and at least once in the glass of the windows. His tomb, most likely situated in the middle of the chancel, would have been an unavoidable reminder of his importance, and he may have made further alterations. According to Pevsner the windows, the roof of the nave and the large stone font all date from the fifteenth century.<sup>474</sup> The bell tower also shows signs of alteration. The style of the southern door and the western window, which appear to date from an earlier period, suggests that the bottom section probably pre-dates Sir Richard's occupation of South Cowton.<sup>475</sup> The masonry of the tower is not continuous, however, indicating that it may have been built in stages (fig. 14). The upper levels, with Perpendicular bell openings, may date from the late fifteenth century. The effect of so many changes would have been impressive, but it was also largely superficial. Sir Richard did not stretch to complete rebuilding, only the appearance of it.<sup>476</sup> The work he did was enough to create the impression that this was a new building. More importantly, it was enough to create the impression that it was Sir Richard Conyers' new

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<sup>473</sup> Saul, *English Church Monuments*, p. 132.

<sup>474</sup> Pevsner, *Buildings of England: North Riding*, p. 349.

<sup>475</sup> Pevsner, *Buildings of England: North Riding*, p. 349.

<sup>476</sup> Crease, *Incomparable Sepulchres*, p. 286.



building. Every addition or alteration Sir Richard made served to emphasise his place at the head of the community.

The desire to create a visible presence within the local parish church was apparently shared by a large number of gentlemen in this period.<sup>477</sup> The fifteenth century saw a considerable amount of refurbishment, renovation and rebuilding in churches great and small all across England.<sup>478</sup> In Yorkshire almost every church provides evidence of some alteration, ranging from the minor to the substantial, from new furnishings to the complete rebuilding of a structure. A new south aisle was added by the Conyers at Hornby, whilst the Burghs' almost completely rebuilt the small church of St Oswald at Askrigg, as did the Tempest family for the church at Giggleswick. Almost uniformly, the fifteenth-century gentry favoured the church closest to their main seat of power in directing such patronage, for it was here that their position of importance in the locality could be best emphasised. Gratitude was expected and donors made sure that it was properly directed, appropriating church space in a way that proclaimed both their own and, perhaps more importantly, their family's importance and identity as lords.<sup>479</sup>

This does not mean that the appearance of their heraldry in windows and on walls, tombs and vestments was necessarily cynical, although it has sometimes been

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<sup>477</sup> Jonathan Hughes, *Pastors and Visionaries. Religion and Secular Life in Late Medieval Yorkshire* (Woodbridge, 1988), p. 52.

<sup>478</sup> Christopher Wilson, '“Excellent, New and Uniforme”: Perpendicular Architecture c. 1400-1547' in Richard Marks and Paul Williamson (eds.) *Gothic Art for England. 1400-1547* (London, 2003), p. 113.

<sup>479</sup> Marks, *Stained Glass*, p. 8; Bruce Gordon and Peter Marshall, 'Introduction: Placing the Dead in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe' in Bruce Gordon and Peter Marshall (eds.) *The Place of the Dead. Death and Remembrance in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge, 2000), p. 5.

regarded as such.<sup>480</sup> Purgatory was a very real and pressing concern for late medieval Christians, who sought to do all they could to shorten its pains for themselves and their loved ones. It was this above all else which concerned them when it came to demonstrations of devotion.<sup>481</sup> Benefaction towards upkeep and repair, rebuilding, furnishing, the provision of masses and the salaries for extra priests were works of Christian charity, benefitting the community and assisting in communal salvation.<sup>482</sup> We cannot overlook the possibility that Conyers' actions were prompted first and foremost by the desire for salvation. The conspicuous nature of his renovations combined with his tomb and his chantry, the core of the whole scheme, reminded churchgoers to pray for him.<sup>483</sup> The extent, not to mention the expense, to which Conyers was willing to go demonstrates the seriousness with which the quest for salvation was regarded by gentry males.

By contributing significantly towards their local church, the gentry not only demonstrated their piety, they also impressed their contemporaries with their wealth and influence.<sup>484</sup> In placing himself so prominently and repeatedly within the context of parish worship, a lord like Sir Richard not only emphasised his ties with the

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<sup>480</sup> P. W. Fleming, 'Charity, Faith and the Gentry of Kent 1422-1529' in Tony Pollard (ed.) *Property and Politics. Essays in Later Medieval English History* (Gloucester, 1984), pp 40, 52; Colin Richmond, 'The English Gentry and Religion, c. 1500' in Christopher Harper-Bill (ed.) *Religious Belief and Ecclesiastical Careers in Medieval England* (Woodbridge, 1991), p. 147; Margaret Aston, *Faith and Fire. Popular and Unpopular Religion 1350-1600* (London, 1993), p. 24; R.N. Swanson, *Religion and Devotion in Europe, c. 1215-1515* (Cambridge, 1995), p. 232; Hughes, *Pastors and Visionaries*, p. 37.

<sup>481</sup> Swanson, *Religion and Devotion*, p. 38; Saul, *English Church Monuments*, p. 163.

<sup>482</sup> Hughes, *Pastors and Visionaries*, pp. 39, 45-6; Colin Platt, *The Architecture of Medieval Britain. A Social History* (London and New Haven, 1990), p. 238; Roffey, *Medieval Chantry*, pp. 6, 41, 87.

<sup>483</sup> Page (ed.) *Certificates of Chantries. Vol. I*, p. 145.

<sup>484</sup> Marks, *Image and Devotion*, p. 176.

community, he asserted his rights over it.<sup>485</sup> Though on a considerably smaller scale, the work he did at South Cowton served a similar purpose to the construction of Henry VII's Lady Chapel at Westminster Abbey. Just as Christopher Wilson has described the latter as 'nothing less than a legitimization of Henry VII's rule in the eyes of God and posterity', so South Cowton church served to legitimise Sir Richard Conyers' position as lord of the manor.<sup>486</sup> His alterations, like those made to any church, were a testament to his worldly success, his wealth and his power.<sup>487</sup> Even stepping out of the building the congregation were reminded of his presence; Cowton Castle stood just a short distance to the south (fig. 22).

That the desire to establish his position as lord was paramount for Sir Richard is apparent when the church is considered in conjunction with his new home. Cowton Castle takes the form of a rectangular tower house with turrets on the north-east and north-west corners (fig. 23), a form that mirrors the church tower. A relatively small but nonetheless still impressive battlemented structure of squared rubblestone, it is situated on the end of a ridge half a mile from the church, overlooking the former village site. In terms of local dwellings the house was almost certainly the largest, though it is smaller than some other North Riding tower houses, with a floor plan measuring 60 by 25 feet.<sup>488</sup> Until the 1950s there was a walled courtyard, part of which wall can still be seen and which may have resembled that at

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<sup>485</sup> Swanson, *Religion and Devotion*, p. 123.

<sup>486</sup> Wilson, '“Excellent, New and Uniforme”', p. 110.

<sup>487</sup> Marks, 'Age of Consumption', p. 21.

<sup>488</sup> Hellifield Peel, for example, was considerably larger. Emery, *Greater Medieval Houses*, pp. 346-7; Page (ed.) VCH, North Riding, Vol I, p. 72.

**Figure 22** The view of Cowton Castle from the chancel door, built late 15<sup>th</sup> century.



**Figure 23** Cowton Castle looking from the north-west, late 15<sup>th</sup> century.



Mortham's Tower, also in the North Riding (fig. 24).<sup>489</sup> There was also a gateway, battlemented like the wall, which was still standing in the nineteenth century. It is quite likely that timber service buildings occupied at least some of this enclosed space, for this was a standard feature of such houses.<sup>490</sup> According to Whitaker there was also a fishpond, presumably in the depression to the east that now serves as a wildlife reservoir.<sup>491</sup>

Cowton Castle represents a considerable expense on Sir Richard's part. Limestone was readily available in the area, but it was still an expensive material.<sup>492</sup> The cost of such a structure may have been an attraction in itself, as it effectively demonstrated the owner's wealth. In choosing to situate his new home on top of a slight hill overlooking the village and the church, Conyers made sure that this would be noticed. The ability to locate his house here, in a highly prominent position, further demonstrated that he was the most important person around, for no lord would have allowed such a display on his lands. The addition of a fishpond served a similar purpose, emphasising Sir Richard's wealth and status. Freshwater fish were a luxury available only to the very rich, something that even fairly well-off gentry could only afford on special occasions.<sup>493</sup> Private possession of his own pond implied that Conyers was a particularly important individual. This point would have been further emphasised when Sir Richard decided to empark 120 acres, a move that

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<sup>489</sup> Emery, *Greater Medieval Houses*, pp. 278-9.

<sup>490</sup> Hugh Braun, *An Introduction to English Medieval Architecture* (London, 1951), pp. 240-1.

<sup>491</sup> Whitaker, *History of Richmondshire*, p. 78.

<sup>492</sup> Alec Clifton-Taylor, *The Pattern of English Building* (London, 1962), p. 29; Alec Clifton-Taylor and A.S. Ireson, *English Stone Building* (London, 1983), pp. 100-3.

<sup>493</sup> C.M. Woolgar, *The Great Household in Late Medieval Britain* (New Haven and London, 1999), p. 120.

**Figure 24 Remains of the courtyard wall, Cowton Castle, late 15<sup>th</sup> century.**



necessitated the removal of the village.<sup>494</sup> Parks were an important mark of aristocratic status, the acquisition of which further served to demonstrate Conyers' status and importance as lord of South Cowton.<sup>495</sup>

The outward appearance of Cowton Castle remains relatively untouched. The majority of the structure is original, although the roof and part of the battlements were replaced after a collapse in the 1970s. The window with three cinquefoil-headed lights on the western side dates from the fifteenth century, although those on

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<sup>494</sup> Beresford, 'Lost Villages', 134; Pollard suggests this was for conversion to arable pasture. Pollard, *North-Eastern England*, p. 58.

<sup>495</sup> Nicholas Orme, *From Childhood to Chivalry* (London and New York, 1984), p. 191.



the eastern side may well be Victorian insertions.<sup>496</sup> The main entrance was through the eastern turret, but was closed-off during the nineteenth century. Its replacement, on the eastern wall of the main block, opening into what would have been a hall, may be an original door, although the masonry appears to have been renewed. The arms of Conyers impaled with Wycliffe, like those which appear on the church, are present above both openings (fig. 25). The decision to build a tower house, as opposed to any other type, is of particular significance. This was not the only style of gentry house in Yorkshire, and alternatives can be found at Slingsby and Scargill, both courtyard houses, and Walburn Hall, home of the Siggiswick family, which takes the form of a central hall with service wings.<sup>497</sup> Tower houses seem to have been the most popular type of construction in the North Riding, however. Emery calculates that there were at least ten in the county, eight of which were in north Yorkshire.<sup>498</sup> By choosing to have his home constructed in the same style as neighbouring gentry houses, Sir Richard affirmed his place as a member of the north Yorkshire elite. He also made use of the tower house's traditional associations. In the north of England, occasional raids from Scotland had encouraged the building of defensible stone houses, a tradition that long out-lived its necessity in terms of defence.<sup>499</sup> This type of structure harked back to the traditional role of the lord as protector. It underscored Sir Richard's position by making reference to the traditional responsibilities of lord, at the same time suggesting, by its old-fashioned

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<sup>496</sup> Peter Ryder, *Medieval Buildings of Yorkshire* (Ashbourne, 1982), p. 112; Emery, *Greater Medieval Houses*, p. 398.

<sup>497</sup> Emery, *Greater Medieval Houses*, pp. 405-7.

<sup>498</sup> These eight are South Cowton, Sedbury, Whorlton, Harlsey, Brough, Gilling, Ayton, and Hipswell Hall, all dating from the fourteenth or fifteenth centuries. Emery, *Greater Medieval Houses*, p. 284.

<sup>499</sup> Wood, *English Medieval House*, p. 166; Lyndon F. Cave, *The Smaller English House* (London, 1981), p. 182; Pollard, *North-Eastern England*, p. 14; Emery, *Greater Medieval Houses*, p. 278.

**Figure 25** The Conyers-Wycliffe heraldry inserted above a door on the east side of the house, no longer used but which once would have led directly into the lower hall late 15<sup>th</sup> century.



appearance, that this was a position his ancestors had long occupied, thereby further legitimating his lordship. That it is unlikely ever to have served as a haven for the local community against Scottish raids does not really matter; it looked as though it could, indeed as though it might have already done so.

Tower houses had particular significance in the region, but any type of fortification carried a specific message about its owner. The architecture of war denoted status.<sup>500</sup> As Charles Coulson has argued, fortification was, like the right to

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<sup>500</sup> Goodall, 'Architecture of War', p. 187.



bear arms, an appurtenance of rank.<sup>501</sup> Sir Richard's house at South Cowton was not necessary for military purposes, but as a fortified structure it signified status, power and masculinity.<sup>502</sup> Like his armoured effigy in St Mary's church and his heraldry emblazoned on the walls, the fortified house employed what Dressler describes as 'the ethos of chivalry' to articulate aristocratic status.<sup>503</sup> Fighting might be less universal among gentry males than it was in earlier centuries, but the evidence for Yorkshire supports the conclusion that, in Christine Carpenter's words, it 'remained the spiritual *raison d'être* of the landed class for many centuries to come'.<sup>504</sup> A tower house like Cowton Castle, complete with battlements, curtain wall and gatehouse, presented a conspicuously martial, and by extension a conspicuously aristocratic, image.

Stressing the military aspect of gentility, which carried strong associations with ideas of masculinity, may have been particularly important to Sir Richard because he seems to have had little or no experience of warfare. He was only called once to act as commissioner for array and there is no record of his ever fighting in battle.<sup>505</sup> A Richard Conyers was knighted during the 1482 Scottish campaign, but this was probably a different man.<sup>506</sup> There were plenty of other Richard Conyers in Yorkshire and the Richard of South Cowton must have been at least fifty years old at

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<sup>501</sup> Coulson, *Castles*, pp. 72, 100.

<sup>502</sup> Platt, *Architecture of Medieval Britain*, p. 185.

<sup>503</sup> Dressler, 'Steel Corpse', p. 144.

<sup>504</sup> Carpenter, *Locality and Polity*, p. 49.

<sup>505</sup> CPR Ed IV, Ed V, Ric III, p. 401.

<sup>506</sup> William Arthur Shaw, *The Knights of England* (London, 1906), p. 20; Crease, 'Incomparable Sepulchres', p. 288.

the time. The little that is known of his service to the lords of Middleham suggests that he took an administrative role, acting as reeve and farmer of Moulton and quite likely fulfilling similar duties for other properties.<sup>507</sup> Sir Richard stood in high favour with Richard III, being made an esquire of the royal household and receiving an annuity in 1484.<sup>508</sup> He received a further annuity from Henry VII in 1486, in a successful transition from one regime to the next that was partly due to his family connections.<sup>509</sup> It was important for Henry VII to have the support of the Conyers; the gentry of Richmondshire had an influence that far outweighed their numbers and the Conyers of Hornby were the most important gentle family in the region.<sup>510</sup> If they chose to join a rebellion, as they had that of Robin of Redesdale in 1469, the consequences for the monarch could be dire.<sup>511</sup> Richard's own abilities as a trusted servant of the lords of Middleham, however, probably contributed in encouraging the new king's generosity.

The exterior appearance of Cowton Castle served to emphasise Sir Richard's role as lord. The interior, though much altered, speaks of a similar concern to affirm his position. There were originally ten rooms; two large chambers being set one on top of the other at the south end of the house and eight smaller rooms, similarly stacked, in the turret end (figs. 26 and 27).<sup>512</sup> Whilst the purpose of the large upper

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<sup>507</sup> Pollard, *North- Eastern England*, p. 63.

<sup>508</sup> CPR Ed IV, Ed V, Rich III, p. 439.

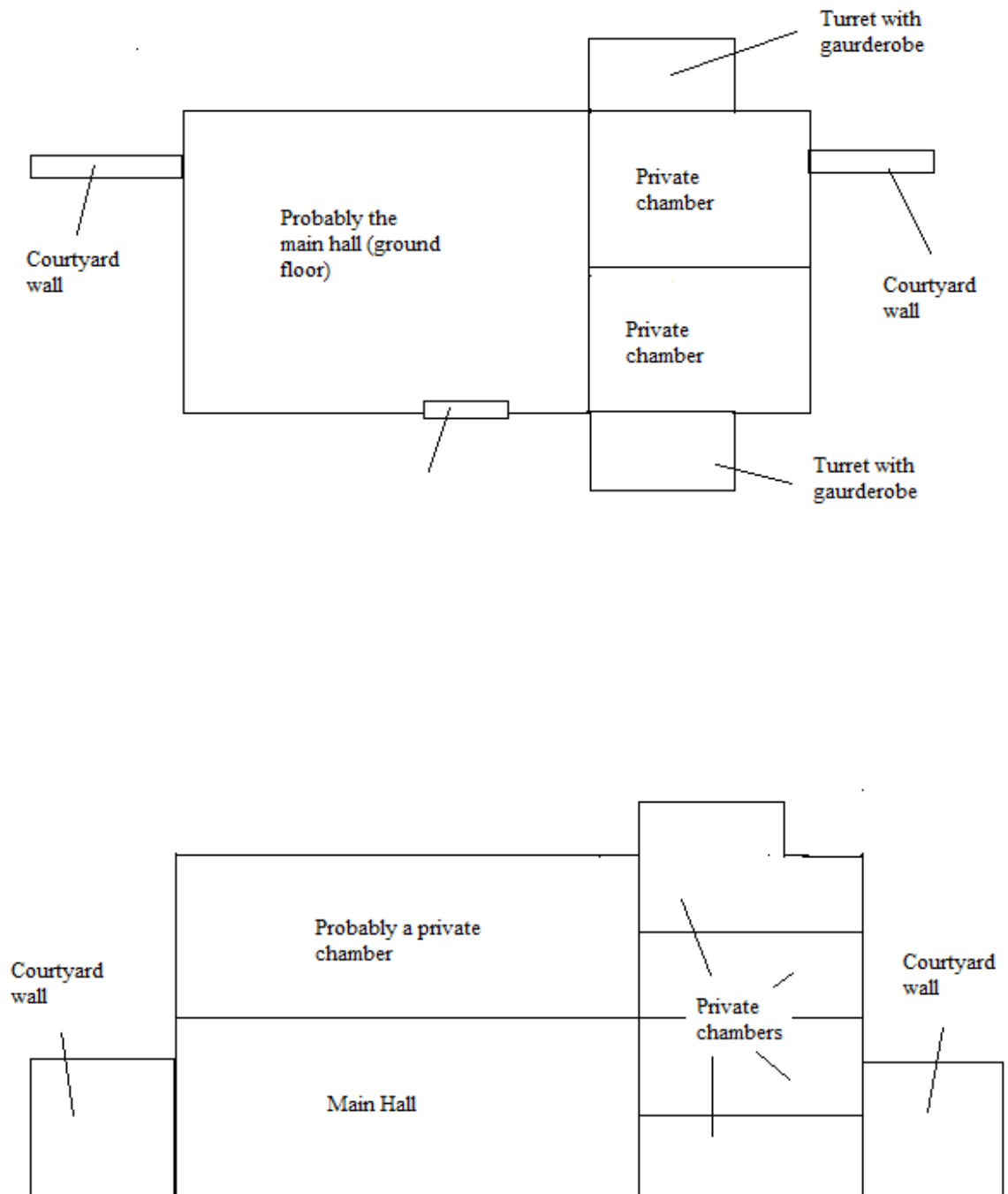
<sup>509</sup> CPR Hen VII, p. 92.

<sup>510</sup> Lander, *Conflict and Stability*, p. 99; Pollard, 'Richmondshire Community', pp. 37-8.

<sup>511</sup> Robin of Redesdale was probably Sir John Conyers, Sir Richard Conyers' brother. Under his leadership the royal forces were defeated and Edward IV spent several weeks as a prisoner of the earl of Warwick,

<sup>512</sup> Emery, *Greater Medieval Houses*, p. 398.

**Figure 26 Proposed plan of Cowton Castle from above and a cross section from the east. Extensive alterations to the interior layout in the nineteenth century render this largely speculative, although the placement of windows and doors serves as an indication.**



**Figure 27 The eastern turret, Cowton Castle. Stairs, accommodation and privies were located within the two turrets, late 15<sup>th</sup> century.**



chamber is not clear, the room beneath it probably served as a hall. The latter was accessed directly from the courtyard through a substantial doorway with Conyers' arms emblazoned above it, suggesting that it was a public room of some importance. The function of halls in late medieval England was largely symbolic, implying a traditional feudal role for the lord of the manor.<sup>513</sup> It could provide a venue for the manorial court, although we do not know that Cowton Castle was ever used for this purpose, and a forum where a lord's hospitality and largesse could be demonstrated.

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<sup>513</sup> Anthony Quiney, 'Hall or Chamber? That is the Question. The Use of Rooms in Post Conquest Houses', *Architectural History*, 42 (1999), p. 42.

As Woolgar has pointed out, a meal given in the great hall underlined the status of those involved more than any other event.<sup>514</sup> Sir Richard, newly arrived at South Cowton, may have felt more need to emphasise his position in this way than someone whose place was more assured. The inclusion of small private chambers, in this case served by garderobes in the turrets, represents a trend for private chambers in late medieval high-status houses.<sup>515</sup> These provided added comfort, convenience and privacy, but they were probably also intended to underline Sir Richard's wealth and importance.<sup>516</sup> Although these were internal arrangements, as such inaccessible to the majority, it is important to remember that they were visible from the outside. The arrangement of small windows indicated the presence of small chambers, whilst large windows indicated the presence of a hall.<sup>517</sup> In this way the owner's standing was announced to the community, even those not allowed inside.<sup>518</sup>

In the interior as well as the exterior design, Sir Richard's main concern seems to have been the emphasis of status. The combination of house and church served to present Conyers as a man of wealth and importance, worthy of respect. Sir Richard's newness to the lordship led him to emphasise solidarity, tradition and longevity, precisely because these things were lacking in reality. His lack of a male heir may have made his need all the more pressing, since there was no guarantee that the Conyers of South Cowton would continue. His first wife was too old to bear more children, and his second marriage, to a much younger woman, probably did not

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<sup>514</sup> Woolgar, *Great Household*, p. 111.

<sup>515</sup> Emery, 'Late Medieval Houses', p. 147.

<sup>516</sup> Woolgar, *Great Household*, p. 50.

<sup>517</sup> Wood, *English Medieval House*, 358.

<sup>518</sup> Cooper, 'Gentry House', p. 116.

take place until after his building work was complete.<sup>519</sup> If the Conyers were to have a significant presence here, Sir Richard had to make their mark himself. Anyone who followed him would perpetuate their own name, not his, even if his successors, the Bowes, may have chosen to stress the Conyers connection as a result of gaining the manor through marriage to his daughter.<sup>520</sup> His lack of a male heir made his situation more immediate, but the overall themes could be seen through any number of Yorkshire gentry examples. Appropriation of the parish church, however piously intentioned, allowed gentry males to place themselves and their families at the centre of the community. When the manor house was situated in such close proximity as that at South Cowton the association was strengthened. Lordship was in a sense legitimised through the presence of the lord in the context of worship. Public devotional habits could evidently play a significant role in the construction of a gentleman's identity.

Evidence of what were ostensibly more private devotional practices, but which may be equally indicative of the way in which the identity of gentlemen was formed, can be found in the Redman of Kearby hours.<sup>521</sup> This book contains most of the aspects usually found in *horae*. There is no calendar, but not all books of hours contained them.<sup>522</sup> In size it measures approximately 125mm x 80mm and does not appear to have been significantly cut down, although it has been rebound during the nineteenth century. Two types of illuminated letters appear throughout, both quite

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<sup>519</sup> There is no evidence of any sons who died, although details are sketchy. TE III, p. 291; Dendy (ed.) 'Dalton's Visitation', p. 130; H.B. McCall, *Richmondshire Churches* (London, 1910), p. 71.

<sup>520</sup> Page (ed.) *VCH, North Riding, I*, p. 73; Crease, *Incomparable Sepulchres*, p. 287.

<sup>521</sup> York Minster Library Add. 67 Horae.

<sup>522</sup> For full list of contents see Appendix.

**Figure 28 The Office of the Dead in the Redman of Kearby Book of Hours, YML Add. 67 Horae, f.50. Faces in profile appear as part of the stave decoration. Created between 1405-1425.**



simple in design. There is very little in the way of border decoration and only four colours are used throughout, red, blue, yellow and, sparingly, gold. One unusual feature appears within the Office of the Dead, where faces in profile appear as part of the stave decoration (fig. 28).

There are certain points that need to be considered when using this type of source for a study of gentlemen. Books of hours were owned by a wide range of people, not just the gentry.<sup>523</sup> They were an integral part of devotional culture for Christians throughout Europe and inexpensive, mass-produced versions were readily

<sup>523</sup> Roger S. Wieck, 'Introduction' in Roger S. Wieck (ed.) *The Book of Hours in Medieval Art and Life* (London, 1988), p. 27.

available. The main difference between these and more expensive examples was quality, not content.<sup>524</sup> Some elements were generic – the Hours of the Virgin, the Office of the Dead, the Penitential Psalms, and so on – and do not necessarily tell us anything specific about a particular group or individual. In order to uncover specific information it is necessary to look beyond the standard devotions and towards the non-standard, personalised elements, the decoration and the inclusion of particular prayers.<sup>525</sup> A book of hours, as Kathryn Smith has put it, could be both ‘exemplary of the trends of late medieval lay piety and a singular devotional artefact’.<sup>526</sup>

In order to examine the identity of its owners, much of this study will be devoted to the distinctive features in the Redman Hours, specifically the prayers from that dedicated to Richard Scrope. The significance of the personalised features of *horae* does not mean that the standard elements are unimportant. Standardisation may be highly significant, as Eamon Duffy has pointed out. The lack of textual difference between the books of hours used by gentlemen and non-gentlemen, males and females, clergy and layfolk, points to a conventionality of belief in late medieval England, at least among the wealthier classes.<sup>527</sup> Gentry males owned books of hours that were strikingly similar to those owned by anybody else, something that supports Mary Erler’s belief that late medieval emphasis on spirituality transcended class,

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<sup>524</sup> Elisabeth Salter, ‘“The Dayes Moralised”: Reconstructing Devotional Reading, c. 1450-1560’ in Robert Lutton and Elisabeth Salter (eds.) *Pieties in Transition. Religious Practices and Experiences, c. 1400-1640* (Aldershot, 2007), p. 145.

<sup>525</sup> Kathleen Kamerick, *Popular Piety and Art in the Late Middle Ages. Image Worship and Identity in England 1350-1500* (New York, 2002), p. 157.

<sup>526</sup> Kathryn A. Smith, ‘The Neville of Hornby Hours and the Design of Literate Devotion’, *The Art Bulletin*, 81, 1 (1999), p. 72.

<sup>527</sup> Duffy, *Marking the Hours*, pp. 59-60.



gender, and status.<sup>528</sup> For example, where the sex of owners can be determined there is no overwhelming difference between male and female owned books. Had there been it would not have been possible to pass them from one gender to the other, yet this occurred for example between Roger and Hawisa Aske, Jane Stapleton and John Ward.<sup>529</sup> Men and women of gentle status show similar devotional interests in the objects they owned. Elizabeth Sewerby and Thomas Babthorpe both possessed devotional works written in English.<sup>530</sup> Alison Sothill owned a ring inscribed ‘Jhesus’ and Margaret Vavasour bequeathed a sword belt with the words ‘Jhsus est amor meus’, an item that presumably originally belonged to a male.<sup>531</sup> Among Brian Stapleton’s intimate possessions was ‘a crosse of golde with a crucifix of the one side, and the five woundes of the oder side, with a small cheyn of gold belonging to ytt’.<sup>532</sup> References to such items are harder to find in male wills, but what seems a greater interest on the part of gentry females may in reality be a reflection of their more limited possessions. Men had more to give and so seldom went into the kind of detail that allowed for the listing of small, personal items. Unspecific instructions like those of Robert Gascoigne, whose daughters were each to receive ‘certan plate’, or of Miles Metcalfe, whose son and daughter were to have ‘of my parte as myn executors semeth the best’, are common.<sup>533</sup> What we have here may be less of a

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<sup>528</sup> Mary C. Erler, *Women, Reading and Piety in Late Medieval England* (Cambridge, 2002), p. 117.

<sup>529</sup> In the will of Hawisa Aske a primer went from husband to wife, whilst Jane Stapleton’s book was left to her son. TE II, pp. 141-6; TE IV, pp. 273-4.

<sup>530</sup> Sarah Rees Jones and Felicity Riddy, ‘The Bolton Hours of York: Female Domestic Piety and the Public Sphere’ in Anneke B. Mulder-Bakker and Jocelyn Wogan-Browne (eds.) *Women and Christianities in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages* (Turnhout, Belgium, 2005), p. 237; Thomas Burton, *The History and Antiquities of the Parish of Hemingbrough* (Leeds, 1888), p. 180.

<sup>531</sup> TE IV, pp. 6-7; TE IV, pp. 362-4.

<sup>532</sup> TE IV, p. 94.

<sup>533</sup> TE III, pp. 9, 16.

question of different attitudes than of different resources. The Yorkshire evidence supports Christine Peters' argument that overall, 'gender boundaries...did not clearly demarcate religious experience and preference'.<sup>534</sup>

Ownership of the Redman of Kearby Hours can be inferred from the appearance of three names within this book of hours, those of Thomas, John and Richard Redman (fig. 29), all of whom appear to have written their names themselves.<sup>535</sup> Richard, who wrote on the last folio that he 'aw this Booke if any man fynde it', has been identified by Ker and Piper as living during the early part of the sixteenth century.<sup>536</sup> He died in the mid-1520s and was apparently buried at Kirkby Overblow, although no trace remains of his tomb.<sup>537</sup> This manuscript would appear to have been out of use a decade later, as the name of the Pope and the memorial to Thomas Becket are untouched, deletions that were required by edicts of 1535 and 1538 respectively (fig. 30). As Duffy argues, the absence of such deletions from any book of hours is 'a reasonably safe indication' that the book was not in use during this period.<sup>538</sup> It is therefore possible, even probable, that the other two owners, Thomas and John Redman, preceded Richard. The identity of Thomas remains elusive, but 'John Redman of Keyrbey', who wrote his name in an apparently late fifteenth-century hand, seems more promising.<sup>539</sup> He may well be the 'Johanni

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<sup>534</sup> Christine Peters, *Patterns of Piety. Women, Gender and Religion in Late Medieval and Reformation England* (Cambridge, 2003), p. 60.

<sup>535</sup> YML Add. 67 Horae. John's signature appears on ff. 64-5, 73, 108-9, Thomas' signature on f. 120 and Richard's on f. 125.

<sup>536</sup> YML Add. 67 Horae, f. 125; N.R. Ker and A.J. Piper, *Medieval Manuscripts in the British Libraries. IV. Paisley to York* (Oxford, 1992), p. 813.

<sup>537</sup> 'Wills in the York Registry 1519 to 1553', *YAA. RS. Vol. XI* (1891), p. 143.

<sup>538</sup> Duffy, *Marking the Hours*, pp. 151-2.

<sup>539</sup> Add. 67 Horae, ff. 64-65, 73, 108-109.

Figure 29 Signature of Richard Redman, the Redman of Kearby Hours, YML Add. 67 Horae, f. 125. This signature can be dated to the early 16<sup>th</sup> century.

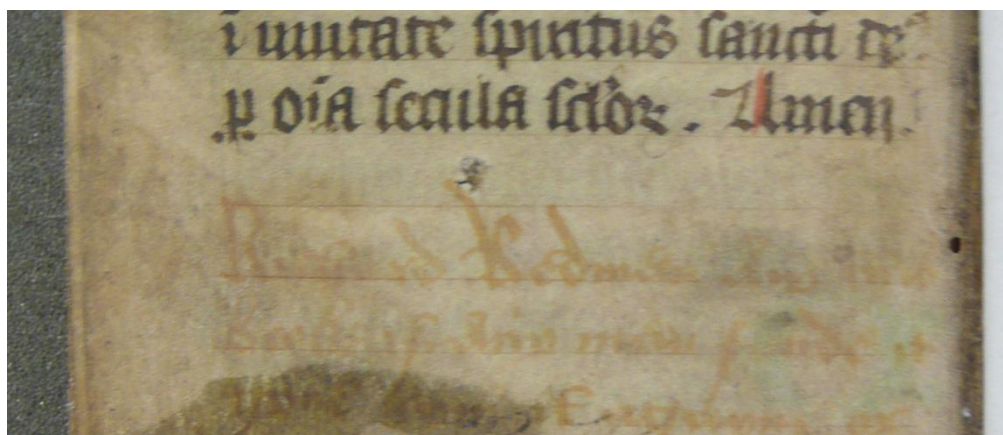
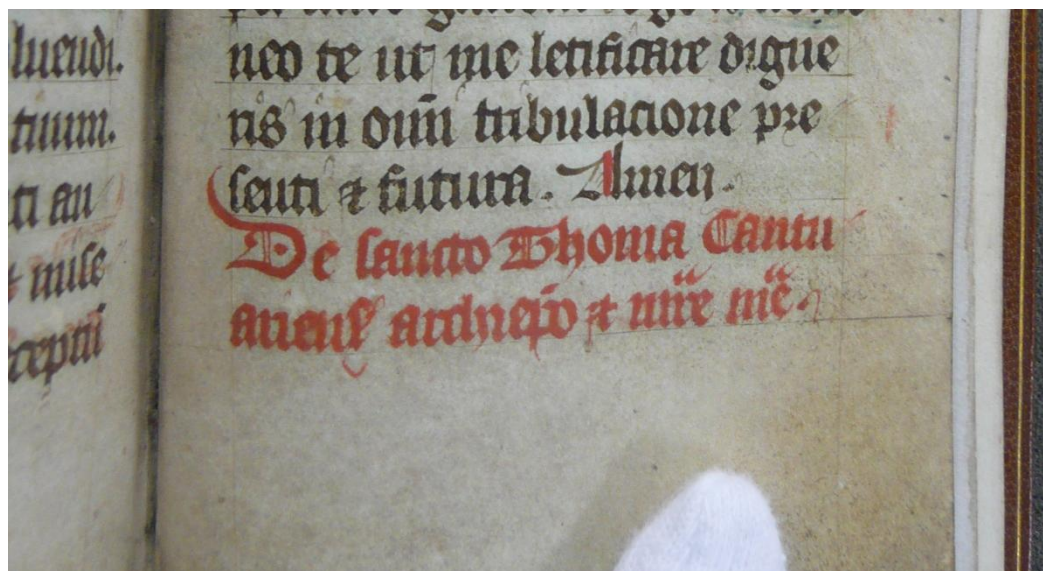


Figure 30 The prayer to Thomas Becket, Redman of Kearby Hours, YML Add. 67 Horae, f.123. No effort has been made to efface the text in accordance with the edict of 1538.



Redeman, *servienti suo*’, who received four marks in Sir William Redman’s will in 1482 and an annuity of £10 from Middleham in 1485.<sup>540</sup> Both point to John as a loyal servant, whilst his previous appointment in 1476 as bailiff of Bishop Auckland indicates that his experience was indeed administrative.<sup>541</sup> It was for this same ability that Sir Edward Redman called him down into the unsettled south-west of the country in the early 1480s.<sup>542</sup> In all John Redman seems to have been something of a career administrator.

A minor cadet branch of the Redmans of Harewood, the precise relationship of the Kearby Redmans to the main line is not clear, but their presence at Kearby, an appurtenance of Harewood, from the middle of the fifteenth century suggests that they sprang from a younger son at around this time.<sup>543</sup> Sir Edward Redman’s failure to mention them specifically in his will of 1510, when he was casting around for prospective heirs to carry on the Redman name should his surviving male heirs die without issue, implies that they were at most cousins at this stage.<sup>544</sup> Although Sir Edward was interested in continuing the family name, this was not at the expense of his closest relatives. His first choice after his son was his daughter, then his granddaughter, provided the former married one of the Redmans of Twiselton and the latter ‘any that hight Redeman’. His preference for a nephew, Thomas Preston, in the event of further failure, over Redmans as closely situated as those at Kearby

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<sup>540</sup> TE III, pp. 280; CPR Ed IV, Ed V, Rich III, p. 497.

<sup>541</sup> Horrox, *Richard III*, p. 53.

<sup>542</sup> TNA KB 9/369/22, 9/1060/33. See also Horrox, *Richard III*, p. 196.

<sup>543</sup> The Redman pedigree before the 1480s is extremely sketchy. Foster (ed.) *Visitations of Yorkshire*, p. 285; ‘Flower’s Visitation of Yorkshire’, p. 342; H. Speight, *Kirkby Overblow and District* (London, 1903), p. 127.

<sup>544</sup> TE V, p. 23.

implies that they were more distantly related than this.<sup>545</sup> Informed speculation suggests that they may have been second cousins at this point (see Pedigree G). Regardless of their precise relationship, close ties between the various branches of the family appear to have been maintained. In 1482 Sir William Redman of Harewood was employing at least two relatives, John and George Redman, who were not part of his immediate family, one of whom was acting as his bailiff.<sup>546</sup> Either or both might have come from Kearby, where they were ideally placed to provide service to their wealthy relations. In all likelihood this would have been administrative in nature, for there is nothing to support the idea that they were soldiers, lawyers or priests.<sup>547</sup> At least three of the Redmans could write with apparent proficiency, an ability demonstrated by the insertion of their signatures in this book of hours. Whilst the ability to sign is not necessarily proof of extensive literacy, it is suggestive, particularly when done well.<sup>548</sup> It is not unreasonable to suggest that the Redman of Kearby males acquired their proficiency in this area with the specific idea of administrative service in mind.

The ability to identify the potential owners of the Redman Hours does not help us to determine who actually commissioned it, except to say that it was almost certainly not John or Richard. Both of these lived long after the manuscript appears

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<sup>545</sup> Kearby was situated approximately three miles from Harewood.

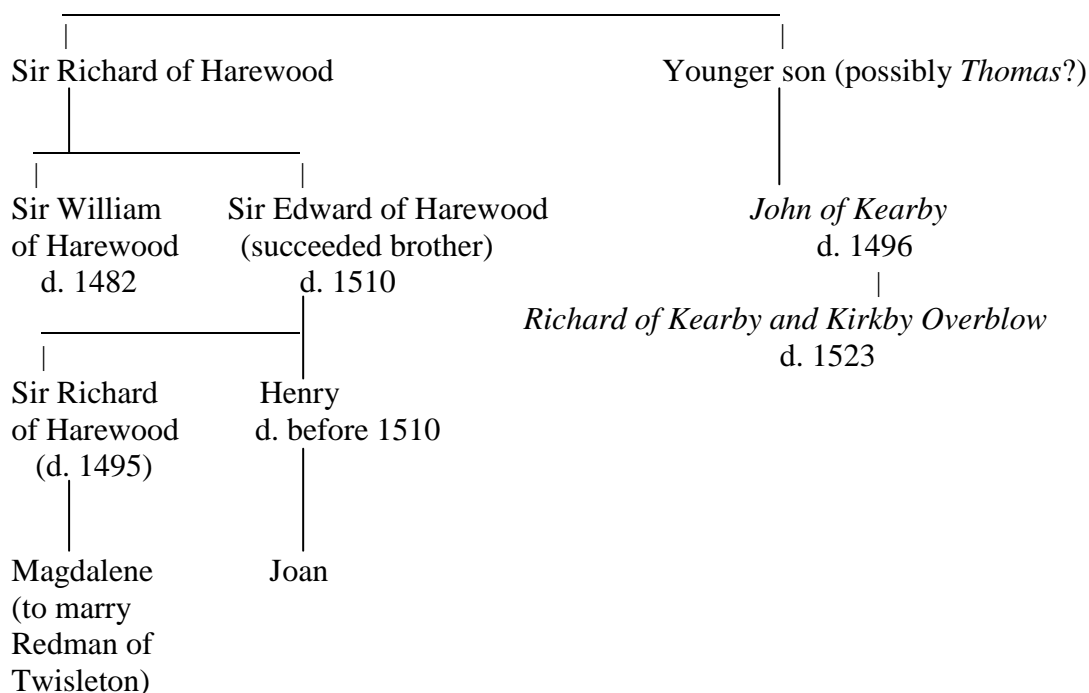
<sup>546</sup> TE III, pp. 280-1.

<sup>547</sup> Extensive searches have turned up no reference to membership of the religious orders, legal training or the presence of Kearby Redmans on the battlefield.

<sup>548</sup> David Cressy, *Literacy and the Social Order. Reading and Writing in Tudor and Stuart England* (Cambridge, 1980), pp. 42-57.

### Pedigree G Redman<sup>549</sup>

Names in italics represent those who wrote their names in the Redman of Kearby Book of Hours



Pedigree compiled from:

Joseph Foster (ed.) *Visitations of Yorkshire* (London, 1875), p. 285  
Dendy (ed.) 'Flower's Visitation', p. 342.

A. Gooder, *Parliamentary Representation of the County of York 1258-1882. Volume I* (1935), pp. 8, 14 165-9.

'Sir Richard Redman' in W.M. Ormrod, *Lord Lieutenants and High Sheriffs of Yorkshire 1066-2000* (Barnsley, 2002), p. 79

H. Speight, *Kirkby Overblow and District* (London, 1903), p. 127.

Will of Sir William Redman, TE III, pp. 280

Will of Sir Edward Redman, TE V, p. 23.

Writ diem clausum extremum for John Redman, 16<sup>th</sup> November 1496. CFR Henry VII, Vol. XXII, p. 241.

<sup>549</sup> The position of the Redmans of Kearby in this pedigree is largely speculative, whilst other minor branches of the Redman family are left out entirely. It has been compiled from a variety of sources including Foster (ed.) *Visitations*; 'Flower's Visitation'; Will of Sir William Redman of Harewood, 1482, TE III, pp. 280-1; Will of Sir Edward Redman of Harewood, 1510, TE V, p. 23; *Wills in the York Registry 1514 to 1553*, YAA. RS, Vol. XI (1891).

to have been created.<sup>550</sup> In the absence of any record of when it was produced the Redman Hours must be dated by its stylistic and liturgical content. James Farquhar has indicated seven common features of *horae* that may be of use when attempting to do this— the use of marks, coats of arms, liturgical evidence, the style of miniatures, the form of rulings, penwork and border design.<sup>551</sup> Not all of these are applicable to the Redman manuscript; there are no marks, coats of arms or miniatures. The remaining stylistic evidence is suggestive, however.<sup>552</sup> The professional Anglicana script used could date from any part of the fifteenth century, but the decoration points to an earlier rather than a later date (figs. 31 and 32). The elaborate, curling pattern of red lines where the illuminated letters have extended into the borders, combined with the appearance of faces in profile on the side of the musical staves in the Office of the Dead (fig. 28), are both reminiscent of fourteenth-century decoration.<sup>553</sup> The limited use of colour – there is, for example, no green – is also suggestive, although this could represent the limitations of the specific workshop. In terms of style, therefore, this manuscript could date from the late fourteenth or early fifteenth centuries. Liturgical evidence indicates that it must be the latter of these options, with the inclusion of a prayer to Archbishop Richard Scrope.<sup>554</sup> The Redman Hours must have been produced after 1405, when the Archbishop was executed. The presence of his prayer does not allow us to be more specific, because

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<sup>550</sup> John died in 1491, CFR Hen VII, p. 241. Richard died in 1524.

<sup>551</sup> James Douglas Farquhar, 'Manuscript Production and Evidence for Localizing and Dating Fifteenth-Century Books of Hours', *Journal of the Walters Art Gallery*, 45 (1987), pp. 44-52.

<sup>552</sup> I am indebted to Linne Mooney for her advice on the stylistic dating of this manuscript.

<sup>553</sup> Myra D. Orth, 'What Goes Around: Borders and Frames in French Manuscripts', *Journal of the Walters Art Gallery*, 54 (1996), p. 192.

<sup>554</sup> YML Add. 67 Horae, f. 102.

Figure 31 Writing style indicates a date in the first quarter of the fifteenth century, YML Add. 67 Horae, f.85.

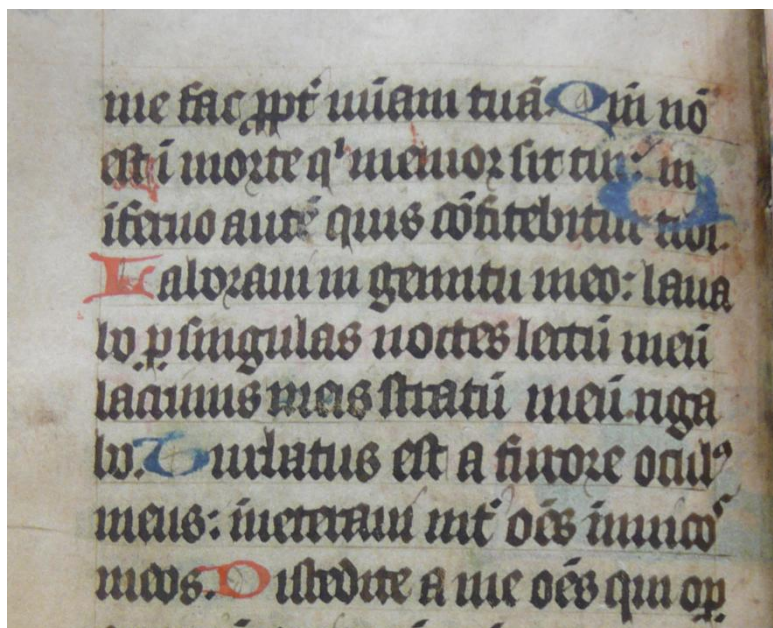
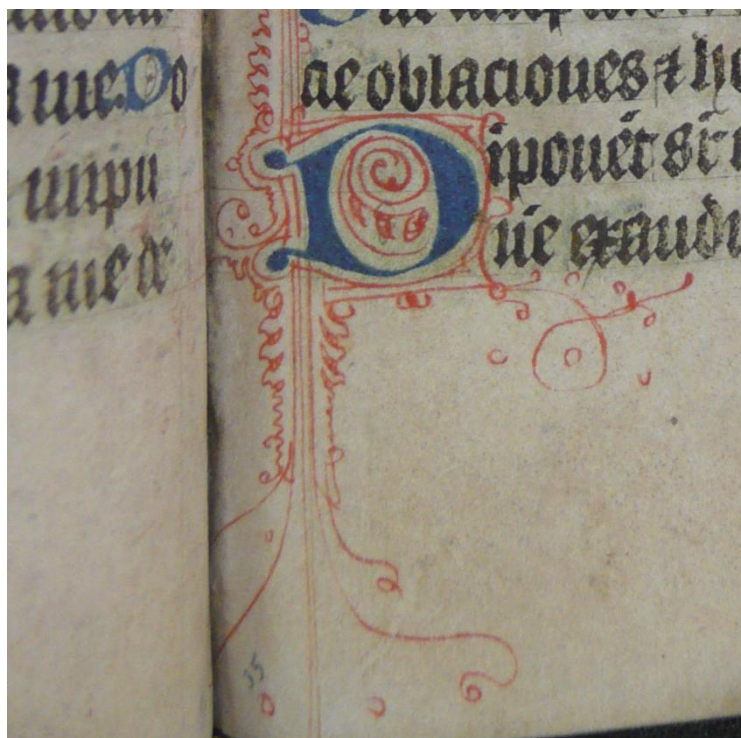


Figure 32 Details of the border decoration in the Redman of Kearby Hours, YML Add. 67 Horae, f.96.





Scrope's cult had an immediate and lasting following in Yorkshire.<sup>555</sup> Never canonised, he was nonetheless unofficially recognised as a saint by at least 1413 and by York Minster by the 1430s, when his image appeared in a window complete with nimbus.<sup>556</sup> The appearance of other saints within the litany does little to contribute to a more precise date. The inclusion of a prayer to John of Beverley may indicate that this manuscript was produced after the victory at Agincourt on his feast day, but he had long enjoyed a local cult.<sup>557</sup> The cult of St Ninian was not heavily promoted in Yorkshire until the middle of the century, when he was a favourite of Richard, duke of Gloucester, but he was traditionally venerated in the North-Western marches, an area where the Redman family had long held property, so this too is inconclusive.<sup>558</sup>

We are left with a book that dates definitely after 1405 and possibly after 1415, that was written for York use and probably produced in York. Certain elements suggest that it may have been commissioned by a priest, although not conclusively so. There is a distinct leaning towards ecclesiastical saints - Stephen and Lawrence were deacons, Richard Scrope, William of York, Thomas Becket, Blaise, Ninian and John of Beverley were all bishops and Peter was the first Pope – but this does not mean that the owner was in holy orders. We might just as easily point to a preference for martyrs, citing five of the above, Stephen, Laurence, Blaise, Scrope and Becket. The combination of priest and martyr may well have been selected because it was particularly powerful, rather than any affinity with clerics on

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<sup>555</sup> J.W. McKenna, 'Popular Canonization as Political Propaganda: The Cult of Archbishop Scrope', *Speculum*, 45, 4 (1970), p. 618; Swanson, *Religion and Devotion*, p. 153.

<sup>556</sup> Bystanders appealed to St Richard Scrope to save a burning church, Hughes, *Pastors and Visionaries*, p. 323; F. Harrison, *The Painted Glass of York* (London, 1927), p. 98.

<sup>557</sup> Hughes, *Pastors and Visionaries*, p. 304.

<sup>558</sup> Alexander Grant, 'Richard III and Scotland' in A.J. Pollard (ed.) *The North of England in the Age of Richard III* (Stroud and New York, 1996), p. 125.

the owner's part. *Horae* owned by members of the clergy were sometimes passed to the laity, as between Christopher Conyers, rector of Rudby, and his brother Robert.<sup>559</sup> There was no great distinction between the books owned by either group. The original owner of the Redman of Kearby manuscript could have been a priest but from his book it is impossible to tell. That there are no apparent candidates belonging to the clergy, however, makes this rather less likely.<sup>560</sup>

Whoever the original owner, the choices he or she made were apparently sufficient to meet the needs of several generations of gentlemen. The Redman Hours must have remained fit for the purpose it was intended to serve, because later users did not feel the need to upgrade their book in terms of content or decoration, even though alterations in *horae* are common. Brian Roucliffe added several English prayers to his book, whilst a manuscript associated with the Pulleyn family of York features images sewn in on separate leaves.<sup>561</sup> It would have made little sense to discard it, for the Redman Hours, though towards the bottom of the scale in terms of quality, still represents a considerable expense. All books were luxury items available only to the relatively rich and even a simple example was a useful tool for demonstrating affluence.<sup>562</sup> *Horae*, intended for use in public as well as in private, were items of conspicuous consumption. The distinction of wealth and importance

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<sup>559</sup> TE III, pp. 287-93.

<sup>560</sup> There are no Redmans at all recorded in John Le Neve, *Fasti Ecclesiae Anglicanae 1300-1541. VI Northern Province*, compiled by B. Jones (London, 1963).

<sup>561</sup> Amelia Grounds, 'The Evolution of a Manuscript: The Pavement Hours' in Margaret Connolly and Linne Mooney (eds.) *Design and Distribution of Late Medieval Manuscripts in England* (Woodbridge, 2008), p. 118; Duffy, *Marking the Hours*, pp. 46-7.

<sup>562</sup> Lesley Lawton, 'The Illustration of Late Medieval Secular Texts, with Special Reference to Lydgate's Troy Book' in Derek Pearsall (ed.) *Manuscripts and Readers in Fifteenth-Century England. The Literary Implications of Manuscript Study* (Woodbridge, 1983), p. 42; Duffy, *Marking the Hours*, p. 4.

implied by ownership would have been emphasised by the fact that the Redmans of Kearby were probably the only parishioners of Kirkby Overblow who possessed such a book.<sup>563</sup> Possession alone would have singled them out as particularly significant individuals. It would not have mattered how simple the internal decoration was, firstly because most people would never have seen the inside of the book and secondly, because even if they had they would have nothing to compare it to.

For the purposes of social differentiation, internal decoration was thus of limited significance. Ownership was enough to demonstrate status. Decoration was, however, desirable. *Horae* from the top end of the scale were colourful, with elaborate borders, historiated initials and full page illuminations of the highest quality.<sup>564</sup> The Redman Hours is not a particularly decorative example, but an effort was made to make it visually attractive. Considerable use was made of its limited palette. Out of one hundred and twenty-five folios there is seldom a page without at least one illuminated letter of some kind and all have small letters of red or blue within the text itself. New sections are indicated by a line of red text and the litany is decorated with alternating Ss of red and blue to indicate each saint (fig. 33).<sup>565</sup> Not only does this create a more attractive effect, it served a vital if more utilitarian purpose. Marking out divisions in the text with colour made it easier for users of *horae* to find particular passages.<sup>566</sup>

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<sup>563</sup> Virginia Reinbury, 'Prayer and Books of Hours' in Roger S. Wieck (ed.) *The Book of Hours in Medieval Art and Life* (London, 1988), p. 39.

<sup>564</sup> Wieck, 'Introduction', p. 28.

<sup>565</sup> YML Add. 67 *Horae*, ff. 39-43.

<sup>566</sup> Grounds, 'Evolution of a Manuscript', p. 121; Kamerick, *Popular Piety*, p. 161.

Figure 33 The Litany of Saints from the Redman of Kearby Hours. Alternating colours have been used to pick out the Ss in order to provide a more attractive effect, ff. 39-43



Figure 34 The most elaborate form of capital found within the Redman of Kearby Hours, used at the beginning of prayers. YML Add 67 Horae, f.91.



**Figure 35** The second, slightly less elaborate form of capital, used more regularly in the Redman of Kearsby Hours. YML Add. 67 Horae, f.22.



There are two types of illuminated letter within this manuscript, neither of which is particularly complicated or accomplished in its execution. The more elaborate type is generally reserved for the start of each section and only the Hours of the Virgin has them within the text, one starting each of the eight offices (fig. 34). These letters are all three or four lines high and take the form of a gold capital outlined in black. This sits on a quartered background coloured alternately blue and yellow, contained within an irregular four-sided border also outlined in black. In all, the book contains thirteen of these letters. Less elaborate and more common are the letters used to indicate new sections within the prayers themselves (fig. 35). These are all two lines high, blue capitals surrounded by a square formed by a thin red line. The space inside this border is filled with further red lines that follow the shape of

the letter, with simple foliate sprays sometimes extending into the margins. There are one-hundred and thirty-four of these, sometimes more than one to a page. Combined, there is a total of almost one-hundred and fifty illuminated letters on one-hundred and twenty-five folios.

The colourful aspect of the Redman Hours probably appealed to the individual who bought it. This is not to denigrate its importance as a devotional object. Indeed, as Kate Challis has argued, works of artistic beauty could be highly valued as being to the greater glory of God.<sup>567</sup> The primary purpose of a book of hours was to aid prayer through the observation of the Hours of the Virgin. With the addition of further prayers to particular saints these books could be tailored to the purchaser's own devotional interests.<sup>568</sup> It is through such personalisation that the most may be learned about an individual's beliefs and attitudes. The Redman of Kearby Hours begins, much like any other book of hours, with the Hours of the Virgin. It includes the Litany of the Saints, the Office of the Dead, prompts for the Seven Penitential Psalms and various prayers to Christ, none of which is particularly unusual. Signs of individual preference are apparent, however, from the prayer to Richard Scrope, followed by an indulgence, the Fifteen Oes, special prayers to the Virgin and St Anne and memorials to particular saints. Not all of the personal choice elements are especially significant in attempting to determine something about the identity of gentlemen or their culture. There is nothing particularly notable about the indulgence promising three hundred days remission for those who contritely confess

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<sup>567</sup> Kate Challis, 'Marginalized Jewels: The Depiction of Jewellery in the Borders of Flemish Devotional Manuscripts' in Margaret M. Manion and Bernard J. Muir (eds.) *The Art of the Book. Its Place in Medieval Worship* (Exeter, 1998), p. 268.

<sup>568</sup> Reinbury, 'Prayer in Book of Hours', p. 40.

their sins or listen to the story of Christ's Passion, for example.<sup>569</sup> Shortening the pains of purgatory was a common concern for which indulgences were readily available.<sup>570</sup> The decision to include the Fifteen Oes indicates an interest in affective piety, but once again this is hardly unique.<sup>571</sup> These immensely popular prayers to Christ appeared across Europe and are regularly found in books of York use.<sup>572</sup> Devotions to the Virgin and St Anne were likewise common in the fifteenth century. Indeed, none of the elements, considered separately, carry any unavoidable significance for the identity of the individual who selected them. Only when considered together do patterns begin to appear.

Such patterns may be found in the selection of saints in the special prayers, the possible combinations of which were practically endless, as were the reasons why an individual might choose them.<sup>573</sup> In some cases it may have been prompted by a shared name; Sir Thomas Tempest, for example, was particularly generous to the altar of St Thomas in Bracewell church.<sup>574</sup> In other cases the particular attribute of a saint might be sought; St Apollonia, for example, was felt to be particularly efficacious against toothache, whilst St Katherine was a special patron of learning. Gender may also have had an influence, although as Christine Peters argues, this was not decisive. Female saints did not just appeal to women, or male saints to men, any

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<sup>569</sup> YML Add. 67 Horae, ff. 102-104.

<sup>570</sup> R. W. Southern, *Western Society and the Church in the Middle Ages* (London, 1970), pp. 139-142.

<sup>571</sup> YML Add. 67 Horae, ff. 108-118.

<sup>572</sup> Charity Meier-Ewert, 'A Middle English Translation of the Fifteen Oes'. *Modern Philology*, 68, 4 (1971), p. 355.

<sup>573</sup> Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars. Traditional Religion in England c. 1400-1580* (New Haven and London, 1992), pp. 164-5.

<sup>574</sup> TE IV, pp. 249-52.

more than virgin martyrs spoke only to virgins.<sup>575</sup> Some of the most popular saints were female and there is evidence that they were sometimes favoured by Yorkshire gentlemen – William Fitzwilliam’s devotion to Mary Magdalen caused him to commend his soul to her specifically, alongside God, the Virgin, Peter and Paul, St Leonard and all the saints.<sup>576</sup> It is worth noting, however, that no female saints other than St Anne and the Virgin, who by virtue of their close relationship to God exist on rather a different plane, are individually venerated in the Redman manuscript.<sup>577</sup> Female saints may not have been deliberately excluded from the Redman hours because of their gender, but the fact remains that none were chosen.

The selection of saints made in the special prayers by whoever commissioned the Redman of Kearby Hours is an extremely interesting one. The most obvious preference is one of locality. Four were specifically northern, three of these specifically Yorkshire, saints. The cult of Richard Scrope, who received special prayers, had followers throughout the country, but York was its base.<sup>578</sup> The veneration of William of York and John of Beverley was almost entirely restricted to Yorkshire.<sup>579</sup> Ninian was Scottish in origin but had a considerable following in northern England. It may well have been felt that he could provide some protection against his own people, for Sir Hugh Hastings, about to go on campaign in Scotland,

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<sup>575</sup> Peters, *Patterns of Piety*, p. 97.

<sup>576</sup> TE III, pp. 211-3. Other popular females in Yorkshire were Katherine, Agnes, Barbara, Sitha.

<sup>577</sup> Bernard J. Muir, ‘The Early Insular Prayer Book Tradition and the Development of the Book of Hours’ in Margaret M. Manion and Bernard J. Muir (eds.) *The Art of the Book. Its Place in Medieval Worship* (Exeter, 1998), p. 11.

<sup>578</sup> Danna Piroyansky, ‘Martyrio pulchro finites: Acbishops Scrope’s Martyrdom and the Creation of a Cult’ in P.J.P Goldberg (ed.) *Richard Scrope. Archbishop, Rebel, Martyr* (Donnington, 2007), p.111.

<sup>579</sup> R.W. Pfaff, *New Liturgical Feasts in Later Medieval England* (Oxford, 1970), p. 5.



expressed particular devotion to Ninian in his will of 1482.<sup>580</sup> In less immediate danger, Margaret Aske wanted someone to undertake a pilgrimage to the Scottish saint's shrine.<sup>581</sup> The Salvins of Duffield even possessed one of his bones as a relic, bequeathed in 1496 to the Grey Friars of York.<sup>582</sup> Other saints singled out for veneration in the Redman Hours, though not limited to the region, had ties there. Blaise was one of York's civic saints; St Peter, to whom York Minster was dedicated, had obvious local significance; and Stephen and Laurence had chapels in the cathedral. The cult of the Holy Name was fostered in the fourteenth century by Yorkshire mystic Richard Rolle, whilst the Fifteen Oes, wrongly attributed to St Bridget, may even have been composed by Rolle or one of his followers.<sup>583</sup>

The northern bias of the Redman of Kearby Hours is inescapable, supporting Jonathan Hughes' argument that devotional trends in Yorkshire were indeed 'unique to the region'.<sup>584</sup> The users of this particular book of hours would appear to have felt a measure of affinity with religious figures from their own region. Although the choice of saints was not restricted to those of local origin, their appearance beside widely popular and highly venerated individuals like St Anne and Thomas Becket indicates the esteem in which they were held.<sup>585</sup> This preference for local figures is

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<sup>580</sup> TE II, pp. 275-7.

<sup>581</sup> TE III, pp. 273-8.

<sup>582</sup> TE IV, pp. 116-7.

<sup>583</sup> Hughes, *Pastors and Visionaries*, p. 259; Pfaff, *New Liturgical Feasts*, pp. 68-74; Rebecca Krug, 'The Fifteen Oes' in Anne Clark Bertlett and Thomas H. Bestul (eds.) *Cultures of Piety. Medieval English Devotional Literature in Translation* (Ithaca and London, 1999), p. 107.

<sup>584</sup> Hughes, *Pastors and Visionaries*, p. 347.

<sup>585</sup> England may even have had an international reputation for its devotion to St Anne. Wendy Scase, 'St Anne and the Education of the Virgin: Literacy and Artistic Traditions and the Implications' in Nicholas Rogers (ed.) *England in the Fourteenth Century* (Stamford, 1993), p. 83.

not unusual among the Yorkshire gentry. Thomas Markenfield left money to the house of Robert of Knaresborough and named his son and heir Ninian, whilst Ranulph Pigot demonstrated a particular interest in the cult of John of Bridlington.<sup>586</sup> The Yorkshire gentry, both male and female, appear to have readily identified themselves with local saints, though not always to the same extent as the Redmans of Kearby.

Identification with a particular locality and its traditions was, according to Rosenthal, a common feature of high-status devotional practices.<sup>587</sup> But locality, whilst important, does not appear to be the only factor that influenced the selection of saints in the Redman of Kearby Hours. Repeated connections can be found in the Redman Hours with Archbishop Scrope and his family, suggesting that politics may also have had an influence on whoever commissioned this book. Not only is the archbishop the only saint outside of the Holy Family to receive special prayers, his prayer was the first ‘personalised’ item to be included, coming before prayers to the Virgin Mary and to St Anne.<sup>588</sup> The chapel at Castle Bolton, home to the Scropes of Bolton, was dedicated to St Anne, the only female saint besides the Virgin Mary to be represented here, whilst St Stephen’s Chapel in York Minster became the main burial site for members of the Scrope family after 1406.<sup>589</sup> Devotion to St Bridget, supposed author of the Fifteen Oes, was fostered by Henry, Lord FitzHugh, the Archbishop’s nephew, whilst the Holy Name was encouraged by the Archbishop

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<sup>586</sup> TE IV, pp. 124-6, 213-5.

<sup>587</sup> Rosenthal, *Purchase of Paradise*, p. 124.

<sup>588</sup> YML Add 67 Horae, f. 102.

<sup>589</sup> Christopher Norton, ‘Richard Scrope and York Minster’ in Goldberg (ed.) in P.J.P. Goldberg (ed.) *Richard Scrope. Archbishop, Rebel, Martyr* (Donington, 2007), pp. 156-66.

himself.<sup>590</sup> All this is suggestive of a connection between the Redmans and the Scopes, although if such a connection existed I have been unable to find it. There is no evidence of any Redmans as part of the Archbishop's household, indeed they do not appear to have been connected with the Scopes at all, through marriage or service.<sup>591</sup> Nor would it appear that they took part in the rebellion of 1405.<sup>592</sup> Sir Richard Redman of Harewood made regular appearances in royal service throughout this period, something that he is unlikely to have done if he or his family were suspected traitors.<sup>593</sup>

The politicised aspect of Scrope's cult would have been very hard to avoid.<sup>594</sup> He was, after all, executed for treason in a rebellion supported by 'knights, esquires and the commons from the city [of York] and the countryside' as well as a considerable number of priests.<sup>595</sup> Yet adherence to Scrope need not represent strong political allegiances, as Sarah Rees Jones has pointed out regarding the Bolton

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<sup>590</sup> Patricia Cullum and Jerem Goldberg, 'How Margaret Blackburn Taught her Daughters: Reading Devotional Instruction in a Book of Hours' in Jocelyn Wogan Browne, Rosalyn Voaden, Arlyn Diamond, Ann Hutchinson, Carol M. Meale and Lesley Johnson (eds.) *Medieval Women: Texts and Contexts in Late Medieval Britain* (Turnhout, Belgium, 2000), pp. 234-5.

<sup>591</sup> I have found no evidence of any connection with the Scopes, although the Redmans were one of Yorkshire's wealthiest and most important gentle families and could have associated with minor nobility. Gooder, *Parliamentary Representatives*, pp. 8, 165-9; TE III, pp. 280-1; TE V, p. 23; William Brown (ed.) *Yorkshire Deeds. Vol. II*, Yorkshire Archaeological Society, Record Series, 50 (1914); M. J Stanley Price (ed.) *Yorkshire Deeds, Vol. 10*, Yorkshire Archaeological Society, Record Series (1955); Foster (ed.) *Visitations of Yorkshire*, p. 285; Le Neve, *Fasti Ecclesiae*.

<sup>592</sup> Neither chronicles nor parliament rolls name many gentry specifically. For example, see David Perry (ed.) *Chronica Maiora of Thomas Walsingham 1376-1422* (Woodbridge, 2005), pp. 336-8; William Marx (ed.) *An English Chronicle 1377-1461* (Woodbridge, 2003); RP iii, 604-6. The Redmans were not connected to the earls of Northumberland, unlike the gentlemen known to have taken part. Simon Walker, 'The Yorkshire Risings of 1405: Texts and Contexts' in Gwilym Dodd and Douglas Biggs (eds.) *Henry IV: The Establishment of the Regime, 1399-1406* (Woodbridge, 2003), p. 180

<sup>593</sup> CPR Hen IV, vol. III, pp. 42, 53, 54, 149, 274, 351, 359, 405.

<sup>594</sup> Duffy, *Stripping of the Altars*, p. 164.

<sup>595</sup> Perry (ed.) *Chronica Maiora*, p. 337; Frank Scott Hayden (ed.) *Eulogium Historiarum, Vol. III*, Rolls Series (London, 1863), p. 406.

Hours, a York produced manuscript with a marked interest in the martyred archbishop.<sup>596</sup> Whilst the nature of his death, as a judicial execution, meant that this was always a cult with political overtones, this does not preclude genuine devotional meaning.<sup>597</sup> As Archbishop, Scrope might, like William of York or John of Beverley, have been attributed saintly qualities without a violent death, even though Swanson argues that it was hardly inevitable.<sup>598</sup> His followers were not necessarily expressing anti-Lancastrian sentiments, indeed there is evidence that some who donated gifts may have been royal servants.<sup>599</sup> Personal resentment was felt towards Henry IV and general resentment against the Crown by various groups – the Church who opposed secular authority riding roughshod over ecclesiastical liberties, lawyers who objected to the lack of due legal process, the city of York who felt its rights had been infringed – but not necessarily against the dynasty as a whole or in particular.<sup>600</sup> Almost certainly, for some Scrope's appeal was based on his position as a powerful and recent local figure. Political allegiance need not necessarily have been particularly important to the Redmans of Kearby, or to any gentlemen when making devotional choices.

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<sup>596</sup> Sarah Rees Jones, 'Richard Scrope, the Bolton Hours and the Church of St Martin in Micklegate: Reconstructing a Holy Neighbourhood in Later Medieval York' in Goldberg (ed.) *Richard Scrope*, p. 217.

<sup>597</sup> Donna Piroyansky, *Martyrs in the Making. Political Martyrdom in Late Medieval England* (Basingstoke, 2008), p. 83.

<sup>598</sup> R.N. Swanson, 'Bureaucrat, Prelate, Traitor, Martyr: Sketching Scrope' in Goldberg (ed.) *Richard Scrope*, p. 18.

<sup>599</sup> McKenna points to a Lancastrian collar of Ss donated to his tomb. McKenna, 'Popular Canonization', p. 622.

<sup>600</sup> T.W. French, 'The Tomb of Archbishop Scrope in York Minster', *Yorkshire Archaeological Journal*, 61 (1989), p. 97; Hughes, *Pastors and Visionaries*, pp. 310-3.

One further influence is suggested by the particular selection of saints within the Redman of Kearby Hours, connected to the owners' lifestyle. It has already been noted that there is a distinct preference for clerics within this manuscript. The possibility that this might indicate the original owner was a member of the clergy has been discussed above. But the saints represented here were not just members of the Church, they were all educated men. The presence of St Anne, famed for teaching the Virgin to read, may also be significant. The Redmans of Kearby would have had to be reasonably well-educated in order to act as administrators for their wealthier relatives. It is a reasonable supposition that saints who were also noted for their education may have had a particular appeal for them. Muir has argued that lifestyle and career were certainly influential factors when it came to choosing special protectors.<sup>601</sup> The evidence of the Redman Hours appears to confirm this conclusion.

An examination of this book of hours thus presents us with an image of men who were consciously northern, high status, educated and male. This is not significantly different from the manner in which Sir Richard Conyers chose to identify himself through his manor of South Cowton. He too chose to represent himself as northern, as high status and as male. The similarities in outlook this betrays should perhaps not be surprising. In respect of their administrative careers, Sir Richard Conyers and the Redmans of Kearby were quite similar. Conyers moved in higher circles, serving a nobleman rather than gentlemen, was considerably richer and left rather more evidence behind, but all were administrators, men of local and, compared to some of their relatives, relatively minor importance. When it came to representing themselves, both Conyers and the Redmans put an emphasis on place,

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<sup>601</sup> Muir, 'Early Insular Prayer Book', p. 12.

in social and geographical terms. The building of a new manor house and patronage of the local church carried definite high-status connotations. Ownership of *horae*, though not limited to the aristocracy, was restricted to the relatively wealthy, as was the ability to read them. Sir Richard's house was conspicuously typical of North Riding gentry houses and the Redmans demonstrated a distinct preference for local saints. Locality was thus a contributory feature to how the identity of these men was constructed. For all of them, place, be it manorial, regional, or both, was important.

The differences apparent in Conyers' and the Redmans' sense of themselves as men, on the one hand emphasising a martial identity, on the other an educated, administrative role, requires further scrutiny. Sir Richard Conyers placed his emphasis on the traditional, martial role of the gentry male. He built himself a fortified tower and his tomb represented him lying resplendent in armour he would probably never have worn. At no point did he refer to his role as a bureaucrat, choosing to represent himself as the wielder of sword rather than pen. The Redmans of Kearby made no apparent effort to identify themselves with the gentry's 'traditional' martial ethos, at least not in their book of hours. They wrote their names in their book but did not have it inscribed with the Redman heraldry. They chose saints who were educated men, clerics who, with the possible exception of Scrope, were without military associations. Perhaps this difference may be accounted for by the relative difference in status. Both were gentlemen, but the Conyers were a top-ranking family, the Redmans of Kearby a very minor branch of another. Expectations may have been different, a matter that will be investigated further in the next chapter.

## Chapter 5

### The Relevance of the Fighting Knight: The Babthorpes, the Gascoignes and the Nortons

In the fifteenth century, the bearing of arms was fundamental to aristocratic identity. The heroes of fiction were always fighting men, whilst works of moral instruction continued to laud the knight who used his sword in service of his lord, of the king, and in the maintenance of law and order. The *Book of the Ordre of Chyvalry*, a popular work in the fifteenth century in spite of having been written some centuries earlier, urged the knight to act against wrongdoers like an axe that ‘is made to hewe and destroye the euylle trees’.<sup>602</sup> Men of the gentry depicted themselves in armour on tombs and donor windows, built castles in miniature and placed their heraldry on almost every imaginable surface. There is no escaping the conclusion that, for the fifteenth-century gentleman, martial symbolism was an important indicator of status.<sup>603</sup> It was also, according to many scholars, closely bound up with high-status masculinity.<sup>604</sup> Ruth Karras, for example, sees physical aggression as a key feature of what it meant to be a man of the knightly class, arguing that violence, sanctioned or unsanctioned, ‘was the fundamental measure of a man’ for this social group.<sup>605</sup> Christopher Fletcher, whilst he does not suggest that violence was imperative, argues for ‘the centrality of physical energy, strength and constancy’ in medieval concepts

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<sup>602</sup> Alfred T. Byles (ed.) *The Book of the Ordre of Chyvalry*. EETS. OS. 168 (London, 1926), p. 42.

<sup>603</sup> Carpenter, *Locality and Polity*, pp. 46, 48-9; Coulson, *Castles*, pp. 100, 162.

<sup>604</sup> For example see Bennett, ‘Military Masculinity’, pp. 71-88; Ailes, ‘The Medieval Male Couple’, pp. 214-37; Taylor, ‘Chivalric Conversation and the Denial of Male Fear’, pp. 169-88.

<sup>605</sup> Karras, *Boys to Men*, p. 21.

of ‘manhood’, ideas that are all closely tied to the ideal of the fighting man.<sup>606</sup> The willingness and ability to fight have thus been accorded some prominence in assessments of what it meant to be an aristocratic man in later medieval England. At the same time, however, it is apparent that not all gentlemen could be considered predominantly fighting men. A large number probably did not fight at all. Yet the alternatives do not seem to have been rated very highly. A legal career, for example, was rarely portrayed as an ideal pursuit for gentry males, even though the cost apparently excluded most of those of a lesser status from training.<sup>607</sup> Rather than the courage required by war, law was thought, as Powell puts it, to encourage ‘weakness and venality’, both of which were perceived as negative masculine traits.<sup>608</sup> One of the few works to speak positively and at length about the legal profession was that written by Sir John Fortescue, himself a lawyer. His constant need to argue the qualities of lawyers, particularly favouring justices, who he says have the ‘benediction of God’, suggests that he had to work hard to make his case.<sup>609</sup> Contemporary bias has led Susan Wright to argue that men who acquired gentle status through membership of the legal profession were ‘objects of ridicule’.<sup>610</sup> Yet as Simon Payling has argued, it was probably the principal means of social advancement available in the fifteenth century.<sup>611</sup> Through examination of three Yorkshire families – the Babthorpes, the Gascoignes and the Nortons – this chapter will investigate just how important the martial ethos was in the construction of

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<sup>606</sup> Fletcher, ‘Manhood and Politics’, p. 21.

<sup>607</sup> S.B. Chrimes (ed.) *Sir John Fortescue. De Laudibus Legum Angliae* (Cambridge, 1949), p. 119.

<sup>608</sup> Powell, *Kingship, Law and Society*, p. 40.

<sup>609</sup> Chrimes (ed.) *Sir John Fortescue*, pp. 3, 129.

<sup>610</sup> Wright, *Derbyshire Gentry*, p. 1.

<sup>611</sup> Payling, *Political Society*, p. 41.



gentlemanly identity in this period. If gentlemen needed to be seen as fighting men, to what extent did this coincide with reality?

At the end of the fourteenth century, the Babthorpes were gentry of long-established but relatively minor standing. For at least a hundred years they had been men of purely local importance, acting as stewards of Hemingbrough for the Prior of Durham.<sup>612</sup> Their first appearance in the Bishop of Durham's register was in 1313 and records their involvement in a dispute over the responsibility for repairing a watercourse.<sup>613</sup> Appearances in a wider political context are scant; throughout the entire fourteenth century the Babthorpes were named on only one royal commission.<sup>614</sup> This relative obscurity changed with Sir Robert Babthorpe I (see Pedigree H), whose rise began with Henry IV's seizure of the crown in 1399 and was accelerated by his loyalty during the rebellions of 1403 and 1405. After the first uprising Robert I was made constable of Wressle for life, when the castle came into the king's hands after the execution of the rebellious earl of Worcester, Thomas Percy.<sup>615</sup> After the second, he was also given the task of arresting suspected rebels and seizing their goods.<sup>616</sup> His loyalty was rewarded on both occasions by the gift of horses taken from those judged guilty of treason.<sup>617</sup> A few years later, in 1408,

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<sup>612</sup> R. B. Dobson, *Durham Priory. 1400-1450* (Cambridge, 1973), p. 133.

<sup>613</sup> Hardy (ed.) *Register of Richard de Kellowe*, pp. 1189-90.

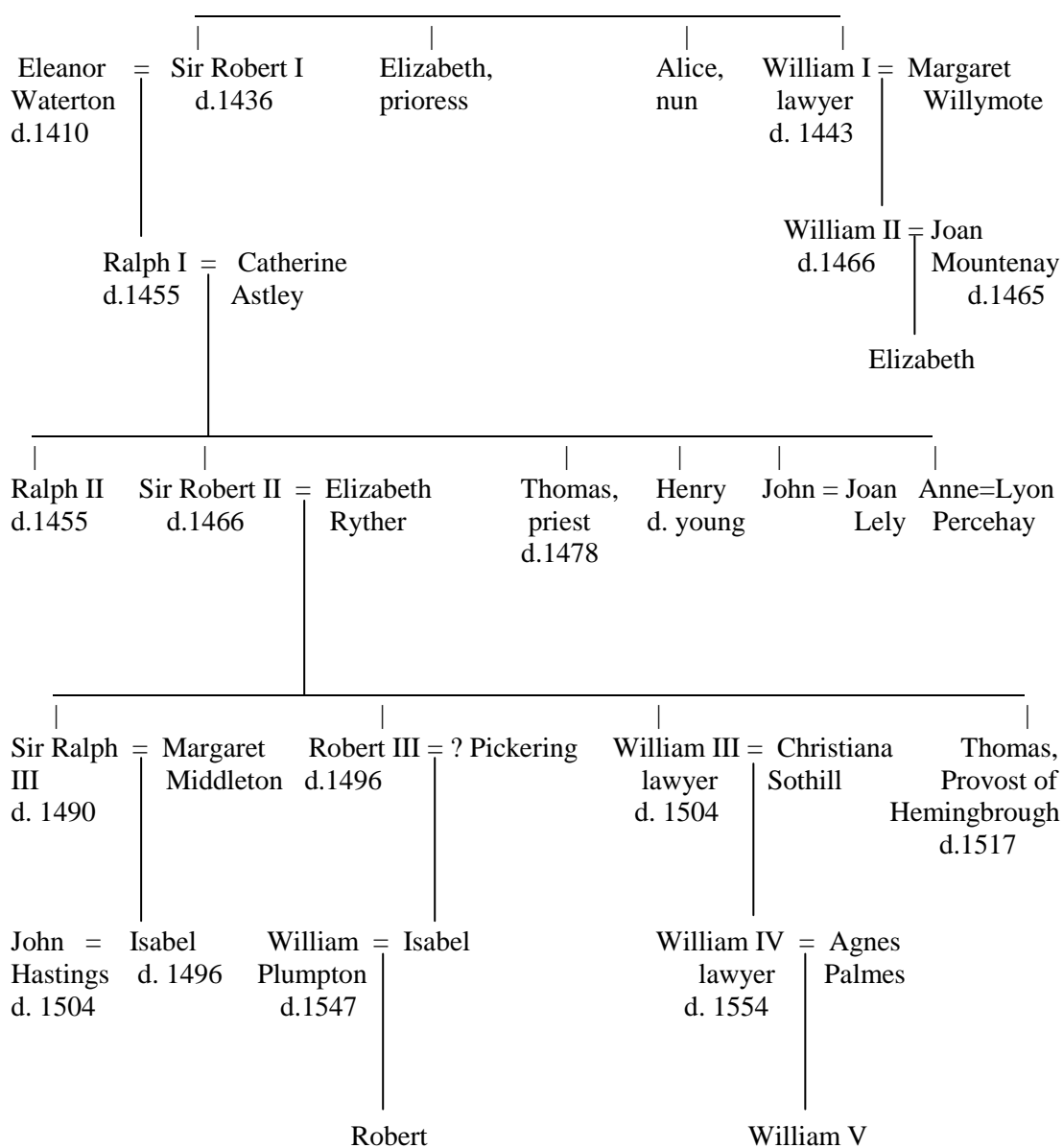
<sup>614</sup> This was a commission of *wallis et fossatis*, September 15 1324. CPR Ed II, p. 70.

<sup>615</sup> CPR Hen IV, vol. II, p. 247.

<sup>616</sup> May 22 1405, CPR Hen IV, vol.III, p. 67; CPR Hen IV, vol. III, p. 304.

<sup>617</sup> He received 4 'Stodmares' January 21 1404, 1404, CPR Hen IV, vol. II, p. 350; 2 'coursers' October 8 1405, CPR Hen IV, vol. III, p. 182.

### Pedigree H - The Babthorpes of Babthorpe



Pedigree compiled from:

Thomas Burton, *The History of Hemingbrough* (York, 1888), p. 173.

Robert Collyer and J. Horsfall Turner, *Ilkley Ancient and Modern* (Leeds, 1885), pp. 120-1

Joseph Foster (ed.) *Visitations of Yorkshire* (London, 1975), pp. 589-9

Writ of diem clausum extremum for Robert Babthorpe, 9<sup>th</sup> October 1436, CFR Hen VI, 1430-7 (London, 1936), p.297

Robert I was made under-steward of four Midland counties.<sup>618</sup> By 1409 he had received more than 40 marks per annum in grants from the king and queen and in 1410 was granted, in addition, a tun of Gascon wine.<sup>619</sup> The frequency of his appointment to high office, combined with the royal gratitude it engendered, suggests that Robert Babthorpe was an able administrator. He also appears to have been a capable soldier. He was appointed as king's esquire in 1405 at a time when the royal household still served a strongly military function.<sup>620</sup> He served in the French Wars under Henry V and was present at Agincourt with five men-at-arms and fifteen foot archers, fighting alongside other notable Yorkshire gentlemen including Sir Thomas Rokeby, Sir William Harrington, Sir Richard Hastings, Sir William Eure and John Waterton, esquire.<sup>621</sup> Robert I was knighted there or shortly afterwards and in 1416 was made Controller of the Royal Household.<sup>622</sup> The gift of a house in Caen in 1417 suggests that he was involved in the taking of the town, and his contribution to the capture of Rouen in 1418 is attested by his appearance in the *Brut* and *The Siege of Rouen*.<sup>623</sup>

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<sup>618</sup> The counties were Leicester, Warwickshire, Northamptonshire and Nottinghamshire. CPR Hen IV, vol. IV, p. 35.

<sup>619</sup> CPR Hen IV, vol. IV, pp. 78, 81; 232.

<sup>620</sup> CPR Hen IV, vol.III, p. 182; Given-Wilson, *Royal Household*, p. 63; David Morgan, 'The Household Retinue of Henry V and the Ethos of English Public Life' in Anne Curry and Elizabeth Matthew (eds.) *Concepts and Patterns of Service in the Later Middle Ages* (Woodbridge, 2000), p. 75.

<sup>621</sup> H. Armstrong Hall, 'Some Notes on the Personal and Family History of Robert Waterton, of Methley and Waterton' in *Miscellanea*, Transactions of the Thoresby Society, 4, (Leeds, 1909), p. 88.

<sup>622</sup> By the time he gave his receipts his status had changed to 'knight'. TNA E358/6; CPR Hen IV, vol. II, p. 40.

<sup>623</sup> Donald Seward, *The Hundred Years War. The English in France 1337-1453* (London, 1978), p. 173; Frederick W.D. Brie (ed.) *Brut*, Part II (London, 1908), p. 399; 'The Siege of Rouen' in *Historical Collections of a Citizen of London in the Fifteenth Century*. Camden Society (London, 1876), p. 15.

It is not clear how Robert I first entered royal service. Unlike several of their contemporaries who found success under the Lancastrian kings – the Bucktons, Hastings, Swillingtons, Radcliffs, and Stapletons, to name but a few – the Babthorpes had no history of service to the Duchy of Lancaster.<sup>624</sup> Robert held some significant duchy offices, including that of steward of the honour of Lancaster in 1406, but neither he, nor any other Babthorpe, appears to have been in duchy service before the fifteenth century.<sup>625</sup> He was connected to the Watertons, however, long-time servants of the duchy, by marriage (Pedigree H).<sup>626</sup> Association with this family, particularly his wife's uncle Sir Robert Waterton, a trusted servant of the new king who had been his chamberlain since 1386, almost certainly aided Robert Babthorpe in securing royal favour.<sup>627</sup> The date at which the latter married Eleanor Waterton is not recorded, but their son Ralph's (Pedigree H) first appearance in official record in 1430 means that it must have taken place by 1409.<sup>628</sup> Ralph could not have entered royal service until he was twenty-one, meaning he was born in 1409 at the latest and perhaps some years earlier.

However Robert Babthorpe I gained a position in royal service, his abilities would have been crucial in building upon it. His skill as a soldier would probably have had particular appeal for Henry IV. The instability of the new king's reign, particularly in the north, required men who could fight as well as administrate.

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<sup>624</sup> Christopher Allmand, *Henry V* (New Haven and London, 1992), p. 355.

<sup>625</sup> He was also made steward of duchy lands in Northamptonshire at the same time, 4 Nov 1406, Robert Somerville, *History of the Duchy of Lancaster. Volume One, 1265-1603* (London, 1953), pp. 572, 586.

<sup>626</sup> Hugh, Robert and John Waterton, his wife's uncles, had long been servants of the earl of Lancaster. Somerville, *Duchy of Lancaster*, pp. 67, 416-9.

<sup>627</sup> Somerville, *Duchy of Lancaster*, p. 385.

<sup>628</sup> Eleanor died in 1410. TNA E 101/46/38, 101/70/4/670; Burton, *History and Antiquities*, p. 173.

Robert I's ability and willingness to fight may also have helped him secure a position in service to Henry V. Evidence suggests that a large number of Yorkshire gentlemen were willing and able to fight in this period. Several fought in France, including Thomas Aske in 1417, Sir John Middleton and Robert Tempest in 1420. Not all, however, were willing to make a habit of it. All of the above made only a single appearance in France. This may have been something of a rite of passage, judging by the large number of gentlemen who can be found in the records, but it was not something to which many were prepared to commit themselves on a long-term basis. This general lack of enthusiasm is highlighted by the difficulty that the king's representatives had in rounding up men to go to France in the early decades of the fifteenth century.<sup>629</sup> In contrast, Robert Babthorpe I's involvement in warfare, particularly in Henry V's wars abroad, was much more sustained.

Martial service seems to have been a crucial part of Robert Babthorpe I's rise in status. But he was not quite the 'professional soldier to his very bootstraps' described by Robert Massey.<sup>630</sup> Not only did he occupy a much wider variety of roles than this would suggest, he also appears to have stepped down from an actively military role in the mid-1420s. In the last eleven years before his death, which occurred when he was in his early to mid sixties, he was named in no less than six commissions of *wallis et fossatis*, four seeking funds for the king, one to investigate failures to render dues to St Leonard's hospital, York, and one inquisition into the

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<sup>629</sup> Edward Powell, *Kingship, Law and Society. Criminal Justice in the Reign of Henry V* (Oxford, 1989), p.233.

<sup>630</sup> Robert Massey, 'Lancastrian Rouen: Military Service and Property Holding, 1419-49' in David Bates and Anne Curry (eds.) *England and Normandy in the Middle Ages* (London, 1994), p. 278.

lands of William Fulthorpe.<sup>631</sup> He also served as one of Henry V's executors and in 1429 was named Seneschal of the Prior of Durham's liberty of Hemingbrough.<sup>632</sup> Clearly he was a trusted and busy man with administrative ability, but he was apparently no longer a military one.

The timing of Robert I's decision is particularly significant, coinciding as it did with his son's entry into adulthood. Not long after Robert I made his last appearance in a military capacity, Ralph Babthorpe I entered royal service. Ralph's first recorded appearance occurred in 1430, when he was retained to accompany the eight-year-old Henry VI to France.<sup>633</sup> Henceforth it was he, rather than his father, who represented the Babthorpe family in service to the Crown. Amounting to a handover of responsibility, this implies a deliberate family strategy at work. It suggests that a Babthorpe was needed to represent the family in this capacity, but that one was sufficient. Ralph I would prove as successful as his father, maintaining a similarly close relationship with the new king, Henry VI. King's esquire and sewer for life by 1433 and keeper of Scarborough castle in the same year, Ralph I was made steward and master forester of Galtres from 1437.<sup>634</sup> In 1450 he was high enough in royal favour to be targeted by a petition requesting the removal of Henry's advisors 'by whose improper ways your possessions have been greatly diminished, your laws not executed, and the peace of this your realm not observed nor kept.'<sup>635</sup>

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<sup>631</sup> CPR Hen VI, vol. I, pp. 424, 496; CPR Hen VI, vol. II, pp. 199, 280, 469, 524; CFR vol. XVI, p. 105; CPR Hen VI, vol. II, pp. 50, 126, 139, 354; CPR Hen VI, vol. I, p. 494.

<sup>632</sup> RP iv; Burton, *History and Antiquities*, p. 175.

<sup>633</sup> TNA E 101/46/38, 101/70/4/670

<sup>634</sup> CPR Hen VI, vol. II, p. 251; CPR Hen VI, vol. II, p. 251, vol. III, p. 63.

<sup>635</sup> RP, v. 216.

Whether Ralph was removed from court is another matter; Henry VI managed to agree to the demands with an exemption so vague it could have included everyone on the list, but as Ralph Babthorpe I does not appear for any commissions in Yorkshire for the period 1448-52 he may well have remained at the king's side. The Ralph Babthorpe appointed to collect taxes in the East Riding in August 1450 was probably Ralph Babthorpe II, the eldest son of Ralph Babthorpe I (Pedigree H).<sup>636</sup> In the same period a distinction was made between father and son by the addition of 'the elder' to the name of Ralph I. The entry of 1450 makes no such distinction.<sup>637</sup>

Like Robert Babthorpe I, Ralph I's service to the crown was not solely military. Many of the offices he held were largely administrative. Record of his actual involvement in warfare is limited but significant. In 1455 he fought and died for the king at St Albans. His son Ralph Babthorpe II was also among the fatalities. The double death of father and son was not an unheard of tragedy among the fifteenth-century Yorkshire gentry, indicating the continued commitment of some families to the practice of warfare and the pursuit of a martial lifestyle. In a way the Babthorpes were more fortunate than some of their contemporaries. The Harringtons, who lost father and son at the battle of Wakefield, left as heirs two under-age girls, resulting in the division of the patrimony and the end of the main line.<sup>638</sup> Ralph Babthorpe I had five sons, at least three of whom were still living at the time of his

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<sup>636</sup> CFR Henry VI, vol. XVIII, p. 169.

<sup>637</sup> CFR Henry VI, vol. XIX, pp. 100, 127.

<sup>638</sup> There was an uncle who continued the Harrington name, but he did not inherit. His attempt to seize control of his nieces and their property shortly after the death of his father and brother irritated Edward IV so much he refused to give him custody. The wardship of Anne, the eldest, was granted to Geoffrey Middleton. CPR Ed IV, vol. I, p. 59.

death (Pedigree H). In 1455, Robert Babthorpe II assumed his position as head of the Babthorpe family.

By this time he had already occupied several important administrative roles in the Duchy of Lancaster, at least one of which, the stewardship and constablenesship of Tickhill, was held jointly with his father.<sup>639</sup> There is no record that Robert II ever fought for the Lancastrians, although he did have links with them as late as 1460 when he acknowledged a debt to queen Margaret.<sup>640</sup> But unlike those who preceded him as head of the family, Robert II does not appear to have been a fighting man. Perhaps he had not been equipped to do so. Warfare was an expensive business and not every family could afford to fund more than one soldier in a generation. The first, second and fourth sons of Sir Richard Fairfax of Walton appear to have been fighting men.<sup>641</sup> Two fighting men in the same generation can also be found for the Eures, Hastings, Everingham, Tempests and the Watertons, among others, but these were all notably wealthier families than the Babthorpes. The decision to train one son to fight may well have been a question of expense. It is significant that, in the case of the Babthorpes, it was always the eldest son (Pedigree H). Robert I, Ralph I and Ralph II were all fighting men, as was Robert III.<sup>642</sup> There may be evidence here of a family strategy, something that is further supported if we look at the careers of the Babthorpes' younger sons. In the three generations during the century that produced more than one son, at least two of the younger sons went into the law and

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<sup>639</sup> Somerville, *Duchy of Lancaster*, pp. 528-9.

<sup>640</sup> RP v. 388

<sup>641</sup> Foster (ed.) *Visitations of Yorkshire*, pp. 39, 96-7.

<sup>642</sup> Robert III was actually knighted on the field in Scotland in 1481. Burton, *History and Antiquities*, p. 173.



two into the Church.<sup>643</sup> Both lawyers were called William and both priests were called Thomas, implying that order of birth determined both name and future profession. The Babthorpes were actually much less involved in warfare than some of their contemporaries.

The decision to train the eldest son to fight, who as such would represent the family as a whole, implies that the Babthorpes considered this to be the best career available to them. There is evidence that they actively sought to promote themselves as a family of fighting knights after the deaths of Ralph I and II at the battle of St Albans in 1455. Ralph I's third son Thomas, a priest, was responsible for their memorial. A double tomb, no longer extant, was set up in the abbey church of St Albans. A lengthy inscription celebrated their deaths in loyal service fighting for the king. The first part, recorded by Weever, read

Cum patre Radulpho Babthorp jacet, ecce! Radulphus  
 Filius, hoc duro marmore pressus humo:  
 Henrici Sexti dopifer, pater Armiger ejus,  
 Mors satis id docuit; fidus uterque fuit.<sup>644</sup>

Their position in royal service was a valuable indicator of their importance, worth stressing on its own, and the inscription made sure to emphasise their fidelity. The

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<sup>643</sup> The lawyers were William, younger brother of Robert I and William, younger brother of Ralph III. The priests were Thomas, brother of Ralph II and Robert II and Thomas, brother of Ralph III.

<sup>644</sup> This is recorded in Burton, *History and Antiquities*, p. 178. He also gives Weever's translation, 'Behold where two Ranulph Babthorpes, bothe the sonne & father, lie, Under a stone of marble hard, interr'd in this mould dire: To Henry Sixth the Father Squire, the Sonne he Sewer was, Bothe true to Prince, and for his sake they both their life did passe.'

location of the monument at St Albans rather than in the parish church at Hemingbrough served a dual purpose. Firstly, the monument would be seen by a great many more people at St Albans than if it was hidden away in a small parish church in Yorkshire. This helped to promote the Babthorpes as a family of national importance. That their bodies had probably already been buried at St Albans, following the abbot's pleas to be allowed to honourably inter the fallen, was not really an issue.<sup>645</sup> The location of tomb and body did not have to coincide. Commemorating the deaths of the two Ralph Babthorpes at St Albans also served to emphasise the nature of their service. They were buried where the battle took place, highlighting the fact that they had not just died whilst in faithful service, they had been killed fighting for the king. Thomas' actions may have been at least partly motivated by piety, the 'purgatorial fear' that Saul sees as so crucial to late medieval commemoration.<sup>646</sup> He may also have been motivated by a sense of duty and familial affection, for in his will he requested commemoration for another brother, Henry, who had predeceased him.<sup>647</sup> Promotion of the family, however, was almost certainly a major concern.

The knighting of Ralph Babthorpe III on the battlefield in Scotland in 1482 indicates that, in the next generation, the Babthorpes resumed their pattern of ensuring that the head of the family should be able to fight. It was unfortunate, then, that Ralph III and then his brother Robert III both died without male issue. The Babthorpe inheritance now passed to a third son, William III. This son may have

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<sup>645</sup> Henry Thomas Riley (ed.) *Registrum Abbatiae Johannis Whethamstede, Abbatii Monasterii Sancti Albani*, Vol. I. Rolls Series, 28 (London, 1872), pp. 177-8.

<sup>646</sup> Saul, *English Church Monuments*, p. 122.

<sup>647</sup> Will of Thomas Babthorpe, 1478, reproduced in Burton, *History and Antiquities*, p. 179.

been a lawyer and his own son, William Babthorpe IV, was described as ‘lerner in the law’.<sup>648</sup> Such a profession was far from ideal in terms of representing the Babthorpe martial image, but a son, or grandson, was always better than a daughter. The latter was the Babthorpe’s only other option. Ralph III and Robert III had each produced daughters named Isabel (see Pedigree H). One married Sir John Hastings and died in 1496, the same year that William III inherited. The second married William Plumpton and by 1499 Babthorpe itself was among the manors being claimed on behalf of Isabel Plumpton.<sup>649</sup>

The loss of the manor from which they took their name was not something that the Babthorpes were willing to accept. The legal process to establish ownership was slow and continued after the death of William Babthorpe III, whose son, William IV, inherited as a minor in 1504. At some point in the next few years the Plumptons gained possession of Babthorpe and Isabel Plumpton was actually occupying the manor when the Babthorpes decided to take more direct action. On 29<sup>th</sup> April 1508, Thomas Babthorpe II, William IV’s guardian and his only living uncle, mounted an assault on the manor. According to a complaint made by the Plumptons before the Council of Henry VII, Thomas, accompanied by 140 armed men, arrived at Babthorpe, seized the house and physically ejected Isabel from the premises.<sup>650</sup> If the Plumptons’ version of events can be accepted as truthful, Thomas’ actions on this occasion can be seen as a manifestation of his responsibilities as senior male representative of that family whilst William IV was still a minor. As

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<sup>648</sup> Brown (ed.) *Yorkshire Star Chamber*, p. 109.

<sup>649</sup> For further discussion of this, see Chapter 2. Also Kirby (ed.) *Plumpton Letters*, pp. 236-9; Hawkes, ‘Isabel Plumpton’, p. 91.

<sup>650</sup> C.G. Bayne (ed.) *Select Cases in the Council of Henry VII*, Selden Society, 75 (London, 1958), p. cxxxv.

such, Thomas appears to have felt it incumbent on him to see that the Babthorpes of Babthorpe continued. He gave his support to nephew rather than niece because Isabel no longer bore the Babthorpe name. If allowed to keep the manor of Babthorpe she would be breaking a chain of possession that went back more than two hundred years.<sup>651</sup> Blood, lineage and place were obviously of considerable importance. That Thomas was a priest, Provost of Hemingbrough from 1480, did not stop him from defending the family honour and identity through the threat, if not the actuality, of violence. Thomas' direct approach may have been influenced by the gentry's willingness to fight to protect their rights and their honour, but perhaps also by his family's self-consciously martial identity.

So concerned were the Babthorpes to present themselves as a fighting family that by the early seventeenth century they were laying claim to a family tradition that went back much farther than the fifteenth century. When the Somerset herald compiled his pedigrees of various important Yorkshire families, the Babthorpes recorded among their ancestors one Sir Thomas Babthorpe, knighted before Calais at the capture of the town by Edward III.<sup>652</sup> There is no trace of any such individual in this period and no letters of protection appear to have been issued in his name. A contingent led by the Bishop of Durham was present at the siege of Calais and, given the long-term association of the Babthorpes with the palatinate it is possible that some of them accompanied him, although none are recorded.<sup>653</sup> Sir Thomas may be

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<sup>651</sup> First appearance for Radulfus de Babthorp for the vill of Babthorp and surrounding land in 1284-5, *Feudal Aids. Vol VI. York and Additions 1284-1431* (London, 1920), p. 36.

<sup>652</sup> Foster (ed.) *Visitations of Yorkshire*, pp. 598-9.

<sup>653</sup> Thomas Duffus Hardy (ed.) *Register of Richard de Kellowe, Lord Palatine and Bishop of Durham, 1314-1316*, vol. II (London, 1874), pp. 1189-90; Frederick W. D. Brie (ed.), *Brut*, Part II (London, 1908), p. 539.

a creation of later generations. He at least represents some confusion on the Babthorpes' part; the family claimed that this Sir Thomas had also been Controller of the Royal Household, a post that was held by only one Babthorpe, Sir Robert I. Whilst genuine confusion is a possibility, deliberate fallacy cannot be ruled out. A little creative reckoning in terms of ancestry served to legitimise the status of gentlemen, particularly gentlemen whose claim to aristocratic status was tenuous. In the Babthorpe's case, the invention of Sir Thomas Babthorpe served to underline their credentials as fighting knights.<sup>654</sup> The readiness of the gentry to create their own family past might even be considered a feature of their identity.

If military service was still important to the Babthorpes, this was not the same as violence for its own sake. Until the very end of the fifteenth century there is no record of their involvement in the kind of violent self-help for which the late medieval gentry are notorious. The one example before this refers to the family as victims, not perpetrators, when Robert Babthorpe I's property was invaded at Brackenholve.<sup>655</sup> The violence that ensued over the Babthorpe-Plumpton dispute was not about violence for its own sake. Thomas Babthorpe's assault on the manor of Babthorpe was an act to take rightful possession of property. Not only could it be seen as morally correct, it was also legally acceptable; as guardian of the heir and by extension of the patrimony, he had every right to take hold of it by force. Martial service allowed the Babthorpes to rise in Yorkshire gentle society, and the threat of violence allowed them to protect family honour and family land. They were willing to use violence as a means to an end, but not as an end in itself. This may support

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<sup>654</sup> C.E Moreton, *The Townshends and Their World: Gentry, Law and Land in Norfolk, c. 1450-1551* (Oxford, 1992), p. 5.

<sup>655</sup> Oct 24 1427. CPR Hen VI, vol. I, p. 465.

Neal's argument that uncontrolled impulse of any kind demonstrated an unmanly lack of self-command.<sup>656</sup> The ability to fight was of limited value if a man did not also possess the ability *not* to fight.

In order to assess the place of martial ability for gentry masculinity, I will now move on to another fifteenth-century gentle family, the Gascoignes. Like the Babthorpes, the Gascoignes rose from relative obscurity at the end of the fourteenth century, a rise that was largely due to their success in royal service. The Gascoignes, however, did not rely on martial service. Their rapid advancement came through the practice of law, specifically through the successful career of a single individual. Unlike some who made their fortune in this way, the Gascoignes were already members of the gentry. By the time William Gascoigne II, future Chief Justice of England, was born c.1350 (Pedigree I) there had been Gascoignes at Gawthorpe for several generations. They were not a particularly important family – the manor was small, acquired through an heiress, and conferred at best minor importance on its holders.<sup>657</sup> They might have stayed in this position but for the determination of William Gascoigne I to improve their situation. From the mid-fourteenth century he set about acquiring land, by 1358 gaining more than seventy acres in Harewood from John de Insula.<sup>658</sup> The following year he received further lands in Yorkshire and Northumberland in grants from the king, those in Yorkshire being about sixteen miles north of Harewood.<sup>659</sup> At the same time he also attempted to lay claim to the

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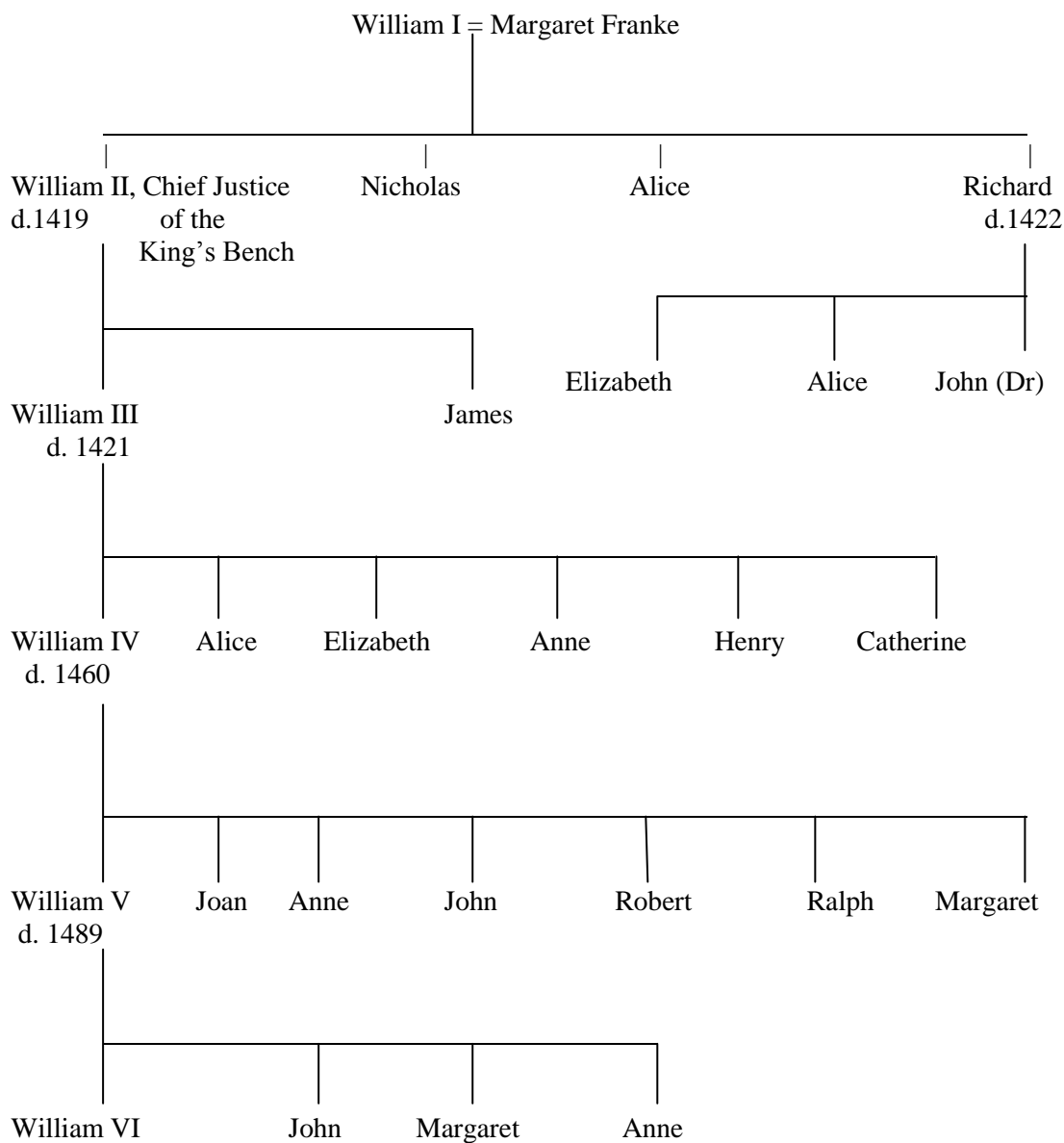
<sup>656</sup> Neal, *Masculine Self*, p. 119.

<sup>657</sup> John Jones, *The History and Antiquities of Harewood* (London, 1869), pp. 52, 54.

<sup>658</sup> CPR Ed III, vol. XI, pp. 111, 132.

<sup>659</sup> These were Dishforth and Bridge Hewick, both close to Ripon. CPR Ed III, vol. XI, p. 203.

### Pedigree I - The Gascoignes of Gawthorpe



Pedigree compiled from:

F.S. Colman, *A History of the Parish of Barwick in Elmet*, Thoresby Society, 17 (Leeds, 1908), pp. 129-143.

Joseph Foster (ed.) *Visitations of Yorkshire* (London, 1875), pp. 238-9, 297, 384-5.

John Jones, *The History and Antiquities of Harewood* (London, 1869), pp. 54-8

Wills of William Gascoigne, Chief Justice of the King's Bench, 1419, Joan Gascoigne, widow of William Gascoigne, 1426, William Gascoigne, 1421, Richard Gascoigne, 1422 all TE I, pp. 390, 402, 403, 410.

Will of Margaret Gascoigne, 1471, TE III, p. 187.

Will of Ralph Gascoigne, 1486, TE IV, p. 15.

manor of Thorpe in Balne, although the matter was judged against him.<sup>660</sup> In 1363 he acquired a further three acres close to Gawthorpe.<sup>661</sup> Whilst any land was useful in consolidating a gentleman's position, William Gascoigne I's interest was focused on lands in the vicinity of his original holding at Gawthorpe. He was determined to extend the family patrimony, a desire that can be seen through the actions of many other gentlemen. A hundred years later Richard Clervaux would attempt to do much the same thing at Croft, a process which is documented in the Clervaux Cartulary.<sup>662</sup> The piecemeal acquisition is similar in both cases, although Clervaux took more than twenty years before he was content, Gascoigne only five.

William I's expansion must have cost him a considerable amount of money, perhaps acquired from royal service, which would account for the grants he received from the king. He was the first Gascoigne in the fourteenth century to appear in the Chancery Rolls, between 1363 and his death in 1378 being called to act on six commissions and supervise a proof of age.<sup>663</sup> This indicates a definite if minor improvement in the family's local standing, but it appears that William's plans did not stop there. With his children he employed a strategy similar to that of the Babthorpes, albeit with a different focus. If the Gascoignes were to improve their position further, they would need money and patronage. The legal profession was recognised by the gentry as a reliable means of getting both.<sup>664</sup> This was almost

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<sup>660</sup> Brown (ed.) *Yorkshire Star Chamber*, p. 10.

<sup>661</sup> CPR Ed III, vol. XII, pp. 325, 409.

<sup>662</sup> Pollard, 'Richard Clervaux', pp. 151-6.

<sup>663</sup> IPM, 36 Ed III, vol. XI, p. 295; CFR Ric II, vol. IX, p. 153; CPR Ric II, vol XIII, pp. 358, 370; vol. XIV, pp. 137, 264; vol. XVI, pp. 40, 126.

<sup>664</sup> Lander, *Conflict and Stability*, pp. 146-7; Pollard, *North-Eastern England*, p. 103.



certainly a factor in William Gascoigne I's decision to put at least two of his sons into the law, one of whom, William II, was his eldest son and heir.<sup>665</sup> The Yorkshire gentry did sometimes train the eldest son in the law, but it was unusual for the heir to embark on a legal career. Sometimes a man with a prominent legal career or from a family with a longstanding legal tradition would put his eldest son into the law, as did Sir Guy Fairfax, Chief Justice of the Duchy of Lancaster and Justice of the Common Pleas, with his eldest son William.<sup>666</sup> It was however a much more usual course for younger sons, even in families as prominently and consistently associated with the law as the Pigots. The commitment of at least two sons to the law thus looks very much like a deliberate strategy.

There can be no doubt that legal training proved to be an excellent starting point for William Gascoigne II. Through it both he and his brother Richard Gascoigne found service with the Duchy of Lancaster, William acting for some years as counsel for Henry as earl of Derby and eventually becoming chief steward of the duchy in 1395.<sup>667</sup> In this position he was responsible for discharging most of the business of the West Riding bench, a responsibility assumed by his brother Richard, in Walker's words, 'more or less single-handed' after William became Chief Justice of King's Bench and Richard became chief steward of the northern parts of the duchy.<sup>668</sup> In the course of his career William undertook a considerable amount of

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<sup>665</sup> William's position as the eldest is confirmed by a charter of 1373 referring to him as the eldest son of William Gascoigne. F.S. Colman, 'A History of the Parish of Barwick-in-Elmet', *Thoresby Society*, XVII (1908), p. 133.

<sup>666</sup> Somerville, *Duchy of Lancaster*, p. 469.

<sup>667</sup> Somerville, *Duchy of Lancaster*, pp. 373, 468.

<sup>668</sup> Simon Walker, 'Yorkshire Justices of the Peace. 1389-1413', *EHR*, 427 (1993), pp. 286, 294-5; TNA DL 25/1197.

work, his name appearing on more than one hundred and fifty commissions, mostly of a judicial nature. To put this in perspective, Chrimes credits Sir John Fortescue, Chief Justice of England from 1442, with receiving somewhere in the area of seventy-five judicial commissions and special inquisitions during his career.<sup>669</sup> James Strangeways, another prominent Yorkshire judge, appeared on slightly fewer than seventy, although he was a regular justice of assize on the midland circuit. As Henry IV's 'dear and faithful' servant, William Gascoigne II's work seems to have been constant until this king's death in 1413, after which he is recorded on only three commissions.<sup>670</sup>

William Gascoigne II's profession made him a powerful man with some powerful friends. His descendants married into some of the most notable families of Yorkshire.<sup>671</sup> According to the pedigree produced by John Jones in 1869, eighteen out of twenty-six females who lived to marriageable age from the beginning of the fifteenth to the middle of the sixteenth centuries married knights. Of the remaining eight two married gentlemen, four married esquires and two married the lords Latimer and Ogle respectively.<sup>672</sup> The males seem to have done similarly well, one Sir William, the Chief Justice's great grandson, acquiring the hand of a niece of the earl of Northumberland. That most of the males were able to make marriages that the heralds thought worth recording is a significant indicator of the family's prosperity. Gascoigne fathers were able to find brides for their sons from families of equal or

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<sup>669</sup> Chrimes (ed.) *Sir John Fortescue*, p. lxxi.

<sup>670</sup> RP iii, 511, Sept 1402; CPR Hen V, vol. I, pp. 65, 348; vol. II, p. 80.

<sup>671</sup> These included the Askes, Constables, Langtons, Pickerings, Pigots, Redmans, Savilles, Stapletons, Tempests and Vavasours.

<sup>672</sup> Jones, *History and Antiquities*, pp. 54-8.

greater standing, something they would not have been able to do without wealth and influence. A certain amount of this wealth was in evidence as early as the 1380s, when William Gascoigne II was in a position to lend significant sums of money to his fellow gentlemen - Ralph Standish owed William II and his associate Robert de Dynley £120 in 1380, whilst in 1389 Robert Ramsey owed William II 26 marks.<sup>673</sup> By the time of his death in 1419 the Chief Justice possessed extensive land, farming equipment and livestock, whilst the amount of gold and silver plate, a form of investment favoured by the gentry, mentioned in his will indicates that he was an extremely wealthy man. This impression is further reinforced by the Gascoignes' ability to found cadet branches at Lasingcroft and Hunslet.<sup>674</sup> Few gentle families could afford to permanently separate land from the patrimony. The ability of Sir William II to do this is an indication of the extent of his wealth.

The law proved an extremely useful tool in improving the standing of William Gascoigne II and his family but as far as can now be ascertained, William II also took his duties very seriously. Several of his fellow gentry trusted him enough to make him an executor in their wills, John Ellis going so far as to specify that his goods should be disposed of 'especialment par l'advise de William Gascoigne.'<sup>675</sup> As a judge he seems to have been tough, although there is nothing to suggest that he was not also fair, indeed he was still remembered more than two hundred years later as a man

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<sup>673</sup> TNA C 241/165/21; TNA C 241/188/38.

<sup>674</sup> Colman, 'Barwick-in-Elmet', p. 133.

<sup>675</sup> John Depeden, knt, John Scot, knt, TE I, pp. 297, 346. John Ellis, knt, TE I, p. 249.

Who by resolute & judicious exertion of Authority,  
 Supported Law and Government in a manner  
 Which has perpetrated his name,  
 And made him an example famous to Posterity.<sup>676</sup>

The number of pardons entered in the Patent Rolls for people William Gascoigne II had condemned suggests he was not inclined to condone criminal behaviour, even among those who could pay to escape the consequences of their actions.<sup>677</sup> Nor was he intimidated into settling a dispute in favour of a fellow judge, even when the latter brought 500 men to an arbitration.<sup>678</sup> The popular story that he sent the future Henry V down for contempt is probably fictitious, although the two men do not appear to have been on good terms.<sup>679</sup> Immediately on his accession, Henry V confirmed the place of every judge on the bench except William Gascoigne. The belief that William II would have defended his judicial dignity against the Prince of Wales, regardless of whether or not it actually happened, speaks for his reputation. So too does the story told by Thomas Gascoigne about William II's refusal to condemn Archbishop Scrope, although this version of events must also be considered slightly suspect.<sup>680</sup> Thomas had a vested interest in praising his relative, and if William did indeed refuse then he did so extremely tactfully, since he was still appointed to take

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<sup>676</sup> Epitaph of king's justice Sir Thomas Denison, which makes reference to several famous justices, quoted in Jones, *History and Antiquities*, pp. 117-8.

<sup>677</sup> For example the 1415 pardon of a man at York found guilty of ambush and mutilation by William Gascoigne and William Waldenby. CPR Hen V, vol. I, pp. 189-90.

<sup>678</sup> RP iii 649.

<sup>679</sup> James Hamilton Wylie, *The Reign of Henry the Fifth*, vol. I (Cambridge, 1914), p. 16; Philip Lindsay, *King Henry V. A Chronicle* (London, 1934), pp. 120-5; Allmand, *Henry V*, p. 58.

<sup>680</sup> Thomas Gascoigne, 'The Martyrdom of Richard Scrope, Archbishop' in James Raine (ed.) *The Historians of the Church of York and its Archbishops*, vol. II, Rolls Series (London, 1886), p. 306.

custody of the archbishop's possessions after his execution.<sup>681</sup> The overall impression that we have of William Gascoigne II is that he was conscientious in his work, a man who personally oversaw important business and even delivered documents with his own hands.<sup>682</sup> His apparent determination to carry out his duties suggests that his profession meant more to him than a source of income. The law was part of his identity and something he took considerable pride in.

This pride is particularly evident in the decision to be represented on his tomb in judicial robes (fig. 36). William Gascoigne II is depicted in the robes of his office, a long loose robe with long sleeves, gathered at the waist by a belt. He also wears a mantle and coif. His effigy was once richly painted and some traces of this decoration still remains in the traces of scarlet pigment on William's robes and green on the lining, as well as gilding on the headdress of his wife.<sup>683</sup> The heraldry on this tomb was also painted and has not survived, but of the five shields held by angels on the north and south sides of the tomb-chest and the two on the east end H.D. Pritchett was able to indentify several families with the aid of antiquarian accounts (fig. 37).<sup>684</sup> On the eastern end of the tomb two angels carry a large shield bearing the royal arms as a demonstration of William Gascoigne II's royal service. This is the only shield to have been carved rather than merely painted, thereby drawing attention to it as a feature of particular importance. The decision to be represented in

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<sup>681</sup> CPR Hen IV, vol III, p. 24.

<sup>682</sup> RP iii 530.

<sup>683</sup> Routh and Knowles, *Medieval Monuments*, p. 66.

<sup>684</sup> These are Gascoigne, Manston, Manston and Neville, and Gascoigne and Neville. H.D. Pritchett, *The Monuments of Harewood Church* (Leeds, 1929), p. 8.

**Figure 36. The effigy of Sir William Gascoigne, Chief Justice, at St Mary's church, Harewood, c. 1419. He is dressed in the robes and coif of office.**



**Figure 37. The north side of the tomb chest of Sir William Gascoigne, Chief Justice, c. 1419.**



the robes of his office was by no means the only choice for a man in his position.<sup>685</sup> Gentlemen generally chose to represent themselves as knights in armour, regardless of military experience and William II, as a knight, could have been depicted in this way. He could even have taken the unusual step of combining armour and the judicial mantle and coif like Sir William Yelverton at Rougham, Norfolk in 1472.<sup>686</sup> No contract survives for William II's tomb, there is no mention of specific details in his will and the likely date, estimated by Routh and Knowles to be 1419, the year of his death, does not confirm who was responsible for it.<sup>687</sup> It is certain that he intended to have a tomb and that he wanted it placed in Harewood church, but not what he intended it to look like.<sup>688</sup> It is entirely possible that he had some input into the design.

It is equally possible that the choice to represent William Gascoigne II in judicial robes was down to his executors. If so, this would indicate a sense of pride in the association with a Chief Justice of the King's Bench. There was no attempt to conceal descent from a man of this eminence in the legal profession, indeed quite the opposite. The Gascoignes chose to advertise the connection by placing their own tombs in close proximity to his. Any tombs placed in Harewood church would promote the Gascoigne family as a whole. The nature of these monuments was of particular significance because the Gascoignes were not the only prominent gentry

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<sup>685</sup> There are a few other examples, such as the brass of Sir John Cassey at Deerhurst, Gloucestershire, c.1400, the elaborate alabaster tomb to Sir Richard Choke at Long Ashton, Somerset, c.1483, and the mural brass of Sir John Cottesmore at Brightwell Baldwin, c.1439. Frederick H. Crossley, *English Church Monuments. AD 1150-1550* (London, 1921), pp. 94, 230; Saul, *English Church Monuments*, p. 153.

<sup>686</sup> Saul, *English Church Monuments*, pp. 271-5.

<sup>687</sup> Pauline Routh and Richard Knowles, *The Medieval Monuments of Harewood* (Wakefield, 1983), p. 12.

<sup>688</sup> TE I, p. 390.

family to be interred here. The previous lords, the Aldburghs, may also have been buried at Harewood. No traces of their monuments remain, but as Philip Lindley suggests, the destruction of medieval tombs was much greater than has previously been thought.<sup>689</sup> The contemporary lords of Harewood, the Redmans, were buried here and there may even have been an element of competition between them and the Gascoignes. Monuments to both families still stand in what appear to be their original locations, the Redmans in the north aisle and the Gascoignes in the south (fig. 38). The Gascoignes chose to argue for their importance with reference to their legal forebear. There was clearly no shame, then, in having a predecessor in the law, at least not so spectacularly successful a predecessor. The position of Chief Justice was considerably more impressive than that of a mere lawyer.

William II brought the family wealth, prosperity and royal favour. His career also brought a certain amount of recognition, something that, according to David Burnley, was of considerable importance to the late medieval aristocracy.<sup>690</sup> But whatever the prestige attached to his position, it does not appear to have been enough to make the Gascoignes continue as a primarily legal family. This does not even seem to have been the intention of the Chief Justice himself. His eldest son, William Gascoigne III, was an active soldier. He fought in France on more than one occasion – he was abroad in 1419 when his father made his will and died there three years later, probably at the siege of Meaux.<sup>691</sup> His relative lack of appearances on

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<sup>689</sup> Philip Lindley, *Tomb Destruction and Scholarship. Medieval Monuments in Early Modern England* (Donnington, 2007), p. 4.

<sup>690</sup> David Burnley, *Courtliness and Literature in Medieval England* (Harlow, 1998), p. 9.

<sup>691</sup> TE I, p. 394; TE I, pp. 402-3.



**Figure 38. Interior of Harewood church, looking to the south-east. The tombs of the Gascoignes are situated on the south side of the church, those of the Redmans on the north side.**



Yorkshire commissions supports the idea that he was seldom at home, for a man of such standing could expect to be drafted into royal service. It was almost certainly William III who was called to array in 1415 and who was chosen as MP for Yorkshire in 1421, but there is no record that he ever served as a justice of the peace.<sup>692</sup> Neither he nor his younger brother James appears to have been trained in the law; the Chief Justice's younger son married a Bedfordshire heiress and went on to be sheriff of Bedfordshire and Buckinghamshire in 1433 (Pedigree I).<sup>693</sup>

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<sup>692</sup> CPR Hen V, vol. I, p. 407; Gooder, *Parliamentary Representation*, p.180.

<sup>693</sup> CFR Hen VI, vol. XVI, p. 176.

Such a change from one generation to the next may have represented a personal enthusiasm for a particular lifestyle. Gentry parents tended to decide the path their children's careers would take before they were old enough to have any say in the matter although, as Nicholas Orme argues, they could be flexible on the subject.<sup>694</sup> The Gascoignes had achieved high status through the law, but this does not mean that they intended to remain associated with it. On the contrary, the evidence indicates that they did not. Other Yorkshire gentlemen who made their fortunes through the law seem to have adopted the same attitude towards the direction of their children's futures. The Tirwhit family, for example, owed their rise to the career of Robert Tirwhit, Justice of the King's Bench and a contemporary of Gascoigne who served on some of the same commissions.<sup>695</sup> His eldest son William Tirwhit pursued a 'traditional' knightly role, acting as lord, as royal servant, as well as fighting in France much like William Gascoigne III.<sup>696</sup> Almost all prominent legal men made similar choices. Only Sir Guy Fairfax put his eldest son to the law, something that may demonstrate a particular pride in the law on his part. Since he was himself a third son, however, it may also reflect the fact that his children would not represent the Fairfax family as a whole. The role they took was less important to familial identity than it would have been if Sir Guy were the eldest son.

None of the succeeding heirs to the Gascoignes of Gawthorpe pursued legal careers. Until the 1460s they did not even appear as justices of the peace, although

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<sup>694</sup> Orme, *Childhood to Chivalry*, pp. 36-8.

<sup>695</sup> These included commissions of the peace in Beverley and Ripon in March 1390 and February 1391. CPR Ric II, vol. II, pp. 140, 439.

<sup>696</sup> A.R. Maddison (ed.) *Lincolnshire Pedigrees*, Harlein Society, LII (1904), pp. 1018-21; Ormrod, *Lord Lieutenants*, p. 85.

before this date three of the heads of the family acted as MPs for Yorkshire and one was also sheriff of the same county.<sup>697</sup> All heads of the family were knighted, some of them quite young – William VI was already a knight when he was granted special livery to succeed his father in 1489, even though he was only eighteen years old.<sup>698</sup> Early knighthoods such as this may be seen as the result of an inclination towards martial service; at least one of these men was knighted on the battlefield.<sup>699</sup> It may also be a reflection of their long-term service to the earls of Northumberland, from whom knighthood might have been obtained in their capacity as understewards of Knaresborough.<sup>700</sup> Service to magnates, or to the king, did not have to be martial. The late medieval nobleman required servants who could do more for him than fight and there was considerable scope for the advancement of those whose talents lay elsewhere. The Gascoignes themselves provided different types of service to their lord. As far as the earl himself was concerned, their administrative ability was probably the most valuable of these. The Gascoignes did not need to offer martial service, yet this was something that they provided on a semi-regular basis. The choice to do so, to equip at least the son and heir to fight in the service of his lord, was not prompted by necessity. It was a matter of choice, and as such indicates the importance of the role of fighting knight in how the Gascoignes saw themselves as a family. Practice of the law brought the family wealth and influence. This was an acceptable profession for a gentleman and when it brought high office and powerful

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<sup>697</sup> These were William (d.1422) MP in 1421, his son William (d.1454) MP in 1430 and 1435 and sheriff of Yorks in 1441, and his grandson William (d.1462) MP 1452. Gooder, *Parliamentary Representation*, pp. 180, 186-8; CFR Hen VI, vol. XVII, p. 205.

<sup>698</sup> CPR Hen VII, vol. I, p. 197.

<sup>699</sup> In this case Towton in 1460. Carol Arnold, 'The Commission of the Peace for the West Riding of Yorkshire, 1437-1509' in Tony Pollard (ed.) *Property and Politics. Essays in Later Medieval English History* (Gloucester, 1984), p. 122.

<sup>700</sup> Somerville, *Duchy of Lancaster*, p. 525; Kirby (ed.) *Plumpton Letters*, pp. 51-3.

connections could be regarded as a matter of considerable pride. Yet the readiness of gentlemen to abandon the law once success had been achieved and a position in gentle society established indicates a hierarchy of worth that put practice of the law beneath more 'traditional' aristocratic roles. The Gascoignes were far from full-time professional soldiers, but they made sure that at least one man in every generation, including the head of the family, could fight. In this way they were able to present themselves as a family of fighting knights, even though it was their role as servants to the earls of Northumberland, in various and often non-martial capacities, that had the biggest influence on their standing in the mid to late fifteenth century.

Like the Babthorpes, the Gascoignes' involvement in warfare was less extensive than it might at first appear. Like the Babthorpes too, for the majority of the fifteenth century the Gascoignes were only interested in sanctioned violence, that is, warfare in the service of king or nobleman. It is only from the late 1470s that they become involved in various disputes over rights and property, some of which are reported to have led to violence. In 1479 Sir William Gascoigne V claimed he had been assaulted by Sir William and Edward Redman and a force of a hundred armed men, a dispute that may have been prompted by his attempts to create a private park around Gawthorpe, bordering as it did on the Redman patrimony at Harewood.<sup>701</sup> In 1499 Sir William Gascoigne VI was accused of sending three hundred men led by his servant George Oglethorp to capture and keep the manor of Thorpe in Balne.<sup>702</sup> This same manor had been claimed by William Gascoigne I over a hundred years before and William VI apparently felt he had a hereditary right to the property.

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<sup>701</sup> Hayes, 'Ancient Indictments', pp. 32-3; CPR Ed IV, Ed V, Ric III, pp. 203-4.

<sup>702</sup> Brown (ed.) *Yorkshire Star Chamber*, pp. 9-11.

Another complaint of 1499, made by Miles Willestrop, who seems to have been a prosperous peasant, accused Sir William Gascoigne VI of being one of the main instigators of a criminal conspiracy with his neighbours ‘that yche of thame shuld aide mayntene and assist oder.’<sup>703</sup> In this case again the issue seems to be land ownership – judging from the number of times Willestrop’s fences were torn down we may assume that someone objected to their location.

It appears that the Gascoignes were prepared to use violence as a means of protecting land they saw as their own. Sir William Gascoigne VI was just as ready to use violence in defence of his honour. During the 1520s he had a priest physically ejected from his church at Ripley because he had not been consulted in his nomination.<sup>704</sup> At about the same time he sent twenty-nine yeomen, labourers, and even two chaplains from Gawthorpe for an armed assault on a chantry priest at Harewood, to whom ‘great enormytees then and ther hym did, to the great hurt and damage of your said orator’, in response to an injury to his dignity.<sup>705</sup> When John Fletcher, one of the king’s officials, failed to consult him before sending an individual with whom he was connected to prison, Sir William VI allegedly held him prisoner for the better part of a week.<sup>706</sup> Fletcher had interfered with his ability to intervene on the part of his dependant and in doing so undermined his position as a gentleman. These last incidents suggest that William VI was highly, although probably not unusually, sensitive about his honour. Failure to treat a gentleman with respect could result in violence, even in death. Sir Ralph Eure, with which this thesis

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<sup>703</sup> Brown (ed.) *Yorkshire Star Chamber*, pp. 15-9.

<sup>704</sup> Brown (ed.) *Yorkshire Star Chamber*, pp. 77.

<sup>705</sup> Brown (ed.) *Yorkshire Star Chamber*, pp.73-5.

<sup>706</sup> Brown (ed.) *Yorkshire Star Chamber*, pp. 121-7.

began, was prompted to strike out in response to discourtesy; Thomas Ward, one of the Wards of Givendale, was even moved to murder, although his actions were eventually judged self-defence.<sup>707</sup> It is clear that these gentlemen all deemed violence to be an appropriate, perhaps even a necessary response when their position was challenged. It was a means to an end, not an end in itself. Excessive violence, particularly where no 'just' cause could be given, was not a feature of gentlemanly identity. Indeed, it may well have been detrimental to it, something that is indicated by the relative rarity of personal involvement by gentlemen in acts of violence. Sir William Gascoigne VI is seldom recorded to have taken part in assaults and he was a great deal more than just a violent thug.

At the same time as he was accused of terrorising his neighbours, William Gascoigne VI carried out considerable duties for the Crown. He was appointed to numerous royal commissions before and after the end of the fifteenth century, as well as being made sheriff of Yorkshire in 1495.<sup>708</sup> In 1498 he rallied to resist the Scots in person and also seems to have intended personally to lead his own men against the Pilgrimage of Grace in 1536, when he must have been close to seventy years old.<sup>709</sup> It seems that he was a loyal and trusted servant, managing to acquire no less than three wardships in 1505 and 1506, a sure sign that he was high in royal favour.<sup>710</sup> When he felt he had claims to a particular piece of land he could be ruthless, for example the confiscation of a widow's cattle until she paid rent to him and not his rival, but he was not necessarily breaking, or intending to break, the

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<sup>707</sup> CPR Hen IV, vol. III, p. 261.

<sup>708</sup> CPR Hen VII, vol. XXII, p. 226.

<sup>709</sup> Gooder, *Parliamentary Representation*, pp. 217-8.

<sup>710</sup> CPR Hen VII, vol. II, pp. 430, 464, 516.

law.<sup>711</sup> He evidently saw nothing wrong with the use of violence in the defence of right and honour, an attitude that Richard Kaeuper sees as common to the late medieval aristocracy in general.<sup>712</sup> Gascoigne's faith in the justification of his actions is further demonstrated by an incident occurring whilst he was sitting on the West Riding bench. When a plaintiff, in fear of his life, asked that Sir William Gascoigne be bound to the peace, Sir William declared that no one there had the power to do so, for he was the 'oldest and best' justice present.<sup>713</sup> He obviously did not feel that his behaviour was in contradiction to his role as a Justice of the Peace or to his position as a gentleman. His use of violence served a purpose which, in his eyes, rendered that violence entirely justifiable. That it could be justified was, however, crucial. Violence in response to slight might be the act of a man, but it was not automatically the act of a gentleman.

In the Gascoignes we have an example of a family who owed their wealth and importance to a career in the law, much like their better known contemporaries in Norfolk, the Pastons. Like that family the Gascoignes soon moved away from legal careers. Not every gentle family who practised the law abandoned it so quickly, however. The Nortons of Norton Conyers were associated with the law through several generations. Examination of their circumstances and motivations may provide a different perspective on the desirability of the traditional martial role for gentry males. It may help to clarify whether martial experience was a desirable, even perhaps a necessary accomplishment for a man to be considered a gentleman.

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<sup>711</sup> H.B McCall (ed.) *Yorkshire Star Chamber Proceedings*, Vol. II, Yorkshire Archaeological Society. Records Series 43 (1911), pp. 54-6.

<sup>712</sup> Kaeuper, *Chivalry and Violence*, p. 9.

<sup>713</sup> Gooder, *Parliamentary Representation*, p.218.

There had been Nortons in the North Riding since at least the thirteenth century.<sup>714</sup> In all likelihood they took their name from the vill of Norton, although it is not clear at what point they gained possession of the manor. In 1314 a John Norton, a clerk in the service of the Bishop of Durham, was pardoned for acquiring land in Norton for himself and his heirs without the bishop's permission.<sup>715</sup> This may have been the manor itself, for Norton was in the family's possession by the mid-fourteenth century, when it passed to Margaret, the sole child of Richard Norton of Norton.<sup>716</sup> She married Roger Conyers, one of the Conyers of Sockburn and produced at least one son, Adam, who assumed the name of Norton (see Pedigree J). It was probably at this point that Norton became Norton Conyers, the addition a compromise for the loss of the paternal name.<sup>717</sup> Possession of the manor had evidently been lost by the end of the century, for Sir Richard Norton is recorded as purchasing it from Sir Richard le Scrope in 1398.<sup>718</sup> Precisely how it came to be in Scrope's hands is unclear, but Norton's action was in a sense a reclamation of familial identity. Throughout all this the Nortons maintained a position among the lower levels of the gentry. Such prosperity and prominence as they possessed was largely owing to their long-term service with the bishop of Durham through his

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<sup>714</sup> *Book of Fees, Yorkshire*, p. 1102; *Yorkshire Deeds*, Vol. V, p. 110.

<sup>715</sup> Thomas Duffus Hardy (ed.), *Register of the Bishop of Durham*, Rolls Series, vol. II (London, 1873), pp. 1252-3.

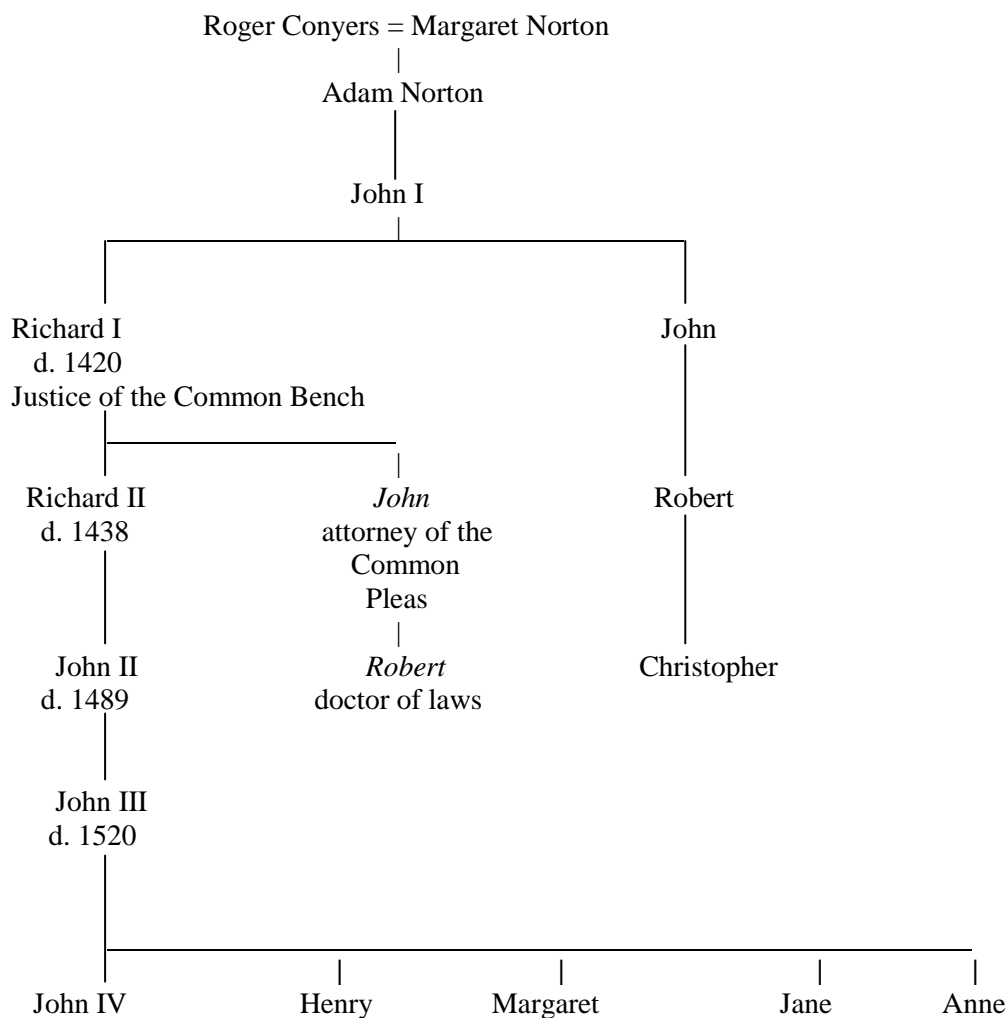
<sup>716</sup> Whitaker, *History of Richmondshire*, vol. II, pp. 182-3; Foster (ed.), *Visitations of the North*, vol. II, pp. 200-1; J.W. Clay, *Dugdale's Visitation of Yorkshire with Additions* (Exeter, 1894), pp. 71-77.

<sup>717</sup> It was listed as Norton in the Domesday book, J. Horsfall Turner, *Yorkshire Place Names in the Yorkshire Domesday Book, 1086* (Bingley, 1901), p. 43. As late as 1315 it was still being referred to as Norton, not Norton Conyers, Thomas Duffus Hardy (ed.), *The Register of the Bishop of Durham*, Rolls Series, Vol.III (London, 1875), p. 101; Foster (ed.), *Visitations of Yorkshire*, pp. 244-5; Clay (ed.), *Dugdale's Visitation of Yorkshire with Additions*, pp. 71-7; Dendy (ed.) 'Flower's Visitation', pp. 21, 200-1.

<sup>718</sup> Page (ed.) *VCH, North Riding*, vol.I, p 393.



### Pedigree J - The Nortons of Norton Conyers



Names in *italics* refer to those whose relationship to the Nortons of Norton Conyers is uncertain. Their positioning within the pedigree is speculative.

Pedigree compiled from:

J. W. Clay (ed.) *Dugdale's Visitations of Yorkshire with Additions* (Exeter, 1894), pp. 71-7  
 'Flower's Visitation' in *Visitations of the North*, Surtees Society, vol II (1920), p. 21  
 Joseph Foster (ed.) *Visitations of Yorkshire* (London, 1875), pp. 244-5  
 'Harvey's Visitation' in *Visitations of the North*, Surtees Society, vol I (Durham, 1911) pp. 64-5.

'Sir John Norton' in W.M. Ormrod, *Lord Lieutenants and High Sheriffs of Yorkshire 1066-2002* (Barnsley, 2002), p. 103.

liberty of Allertonshire. Several Nortons of Norton can be found in service to the Bishop, most, including John, a clerk, and Robert, a notary public undertaking some kind of legal role.<sup>719</sup> This suggests that there may have been a legal tradition within the family, although this profession does not appear to have been uniformly pursued. There is no evidence, for example, that Richard Norton I's father, John I, was a lawyer. No profession was mentioned when the latter acted as mainperneur for Robert Godeale in 1379 or when he appeared twice as commissioner of the peace in the North Riding in 1380 and 1383.<sup>720</sup> A John Norton was an advocate of the Court of York in the second half of the fourteenth century, being remembered as such in the wills of several individuals between 1361 and 1381.<sup>721</sup> But as this was an ecclesiastical court this was possibly not John Norton I, who married and produced at least two sons (see Pedigree J). Men in minor orders could marry, but did not generally do so.

It is possible, then, that the decision to put Richard Norton I into the law was within a Norton family tradition. Richard's career bears some similarity to that of William Gascoigne II. Both were eldest sons and they were near contemporaries, for whilst the date of Richard Norton's birth is uncertain, we can make an educated guess. By the early 1380s he was making regular appearances on commissions, at which time he was probably in his early twenties.<sup>722</sup> At the most he cannot have been more than ten years William Gascoigne's junior. Just as Gascoigne benefitted from

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<sup>719</sup> Thomas Duffus Hardy (ed.), *The Register of the Bishop of Durham*, Vol I (London, 1873), pp. 170, 359, 474, 622, 634, 765; vol. III (London, 1875), p. 101.

<sup>720</sup> CPR Ric II, vol. I, pp. 338, 571, vol. II, p. 255.

<sup>721</sup> These individuals were Thomas de Hoton, rector, Henry de Ingelby, canon of York, Humphrey de Cherleton and William de Feriby. TE I, pp. 63, 95, 97, 105.

<sup>722</sup> CPR Ric II, vol. III, pp. 260, 354, 387.

an early connection with the Duchy of Lancaster, Norton was apparently able to make use of his family's long-term connections with the Palatinate of Durham. The bishop was among his important clientele, as were the Scropes of Bolton and Masham and the earls of Northumberland.<sup>723</sup> Richard Norton I was also retained by Lord FitzHugh, along with other prominent Yorkshire lawyers including John Conyers, James Strangeways, William Lodington and William Waldenby.<sup>724</sup>

Whilst some of Richard Norton I's time would have been spent in Westminster, the first twenty years of his career were focused in his home region.<sup>725</sup> Between 1383 and 1405 he was named on more than thirty royal commissions of a legal nature, most often in the North Riding.<sup>726</sup> Clearly the Crown regarded him as a useful servant, something that was further recognised with his dramatic rise to prominence after 1405. In 1406 he was raised to the position of serjeant-at-law, making his first recorded appearance as such in June 1407.<sup>727</sup> In 1407 he was also made justice of assize on the East Anglian circuit and Chief Justice at Durham for Bishop Langley.<sup>728</sup> Two years later Richard Norton I was retained by the Duchy of Lancaster as a serjeant-at-law.<sup>729</sup> In 1413 he was made a justice of the Common Bench and a year later was appointed Chief Justice following the resignation of

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<sup>723</sup> C. Liddy, *The Bishopric of Durham in the Later Middle Ages* (Woodbridge, 2008), p. 99.

<sup>724</sup> Walker, 'Yorkshire Justices of the Peace', p. 287.

<sup>725</sup> Walker, 'Yorkshire Justices of the Peace', p. 293.

<sup>726</sup> CPR Ric II, Henry IV, Henry V.

<sup>727</sup> CPR Hen IV, vol.III, p. 339.

<sup>728</sup> Walker, 'Yorkshire Justices of the Peace', p. 294. R.L. Storey, *Thomas Langley and the Bishopric of Durham 1406-1437* (London, 1961), p. 63.

<sup>729</sup> Somerville, *Duchy of Lancaster*, pp. 450, 468.

William Thirning.<sup>730</sup> It was usual to spend such a long period as an apprentice, followed by a subsequent rise to the bench, but the speed at which Norton advanced from serjeant to judge is worth noting.<sup>731</sup> His rapid rise must almost certainly be credited to Bishop Langley who as Chancellor was in a position to give considerable assistance, particularly his appointment as Chief Justice when he was the most recent addition to the bench. Although the legal profession was to a certain extent a meritocracy, patronage was still important.<sup>732</sup> It is unlikely that Richard Norton, or indeed any lawyer, would have reached so high a position without the support of important patrons.

As with William Gascoigne II, who achieved a similar position, there are signs that Richard Norton I took pride in his profession. Like William Gascoigne II, he chose to be represented on his monumental brass in his judicial robes, a testament to the importance of his profession, and specifically his high rank within that profession, to his identity.<sup>733</sup> This brass, though much worn, is still situated in St Marys church, Wath, parish church for Norton Conyers. It has been identified by Sally Badham as York series Ic.<sup>734</sup> If the depiction of Richard Norton I in his robes of office did not make matters clear enough for observers, an inscription at the

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<sup>730</sup> CPR Hen V, vol. I, pp. 3, 40; Wylie, *Reign of Henry the Fifth*, p. 19; RP iv 35, 63, 95, 116, 123; iv 71.

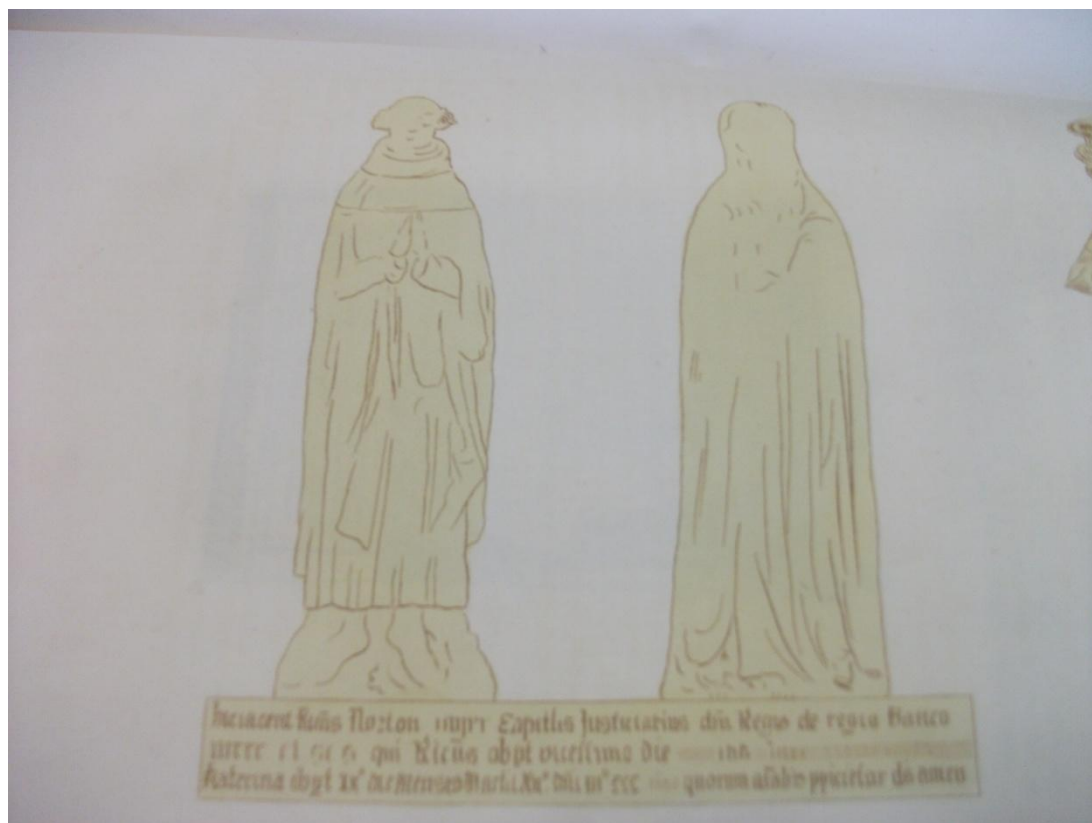
<sup>731</sup> Harding, *Law Courts*, p. 112.

<sup>732</sup> Anthony Musson and W.M. Ormrod, *The Evolution of English Justice. Law, Politics and Society in the Fourteenth Century* (Basingstoke, 1999), p. 32.

<sup>733</sup> Saul, *English Church Monuments*, p. 58.

<sup>734</sup> Sally Badham, 'Monumental Brasses: The Development of the York Workshops in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries' in Christopher Given-Wilson (ed.) *Medieval Art and Architecture in the East Riding of Yorkshire* (Leeds, 1989), p. 181.

**Figure 39. The brass of Richard Norton, Chief Justice of the Common Pleas, in St Mary's church, Wath, c. 1420.**



bottom of the brass also describes him as ‘Capitalis Justiciarius domini Regis de Communi Banco’ (fig. 39).<sup>735</sup> Richard Norton I’s success, like that of William Gascoigne II, was conspicuous. This may explain his decision to advertise his status as a justice on his monumental brass. The majority of gentry lawyers have since faded into obscurity, something that Musson and Ormrod attribute to their own deliberate attempts to conceal their origins.<sup>736</sup> Identifying lawyers is often extremely difficult. Walter Eure, predominantly called to act on legal commissions at the beginning of the century, may have been a lawyer.<sup>737</sup> The same applies to John

<sup>735</sup> Clay (ed.) *Dodsworth’s Yorkshire Church Notes*, p. 222; McCall, *Richmondshire Churches*, p. 145.

<sup>736</sup> Musson and Ormrod, *Evolution of English Justice*, p. 69.

<sup>737</sup> CPR Hen IV, vol. I, pp. 74, 245, 293.

Hastings and William Hopton in the 1470s and to George Ward in the 1480s. All of these were younger sons who appear to have dealt largely with legal matters, but only Ward is specifically identified as a lawyer.<sup>738</sup> Gentlemen in the fifteenth century increasingly possessed some legal training, meaning that even non-professionals could have had a reasonable knowledge of the law.<sup>739</sup> Very few chose to depict themselves as lawyers. In Yorkshire it is difficult to find memorials of any kind where gentlemen are not depicted in armour. Rather than a deliberate deception, however, this could represent the character of the legal profession as a means to an end. Knowledge of the law was a useful thing to have and it could be instrumental in climbing the ranks of gentle society. It was not that the law needed to be concealed, rather that it was not important enough to advertise unless there was conspicuous success. It was compatible with gentility, but not in itself indicative of it.

The problems involved in identifying lawyers, combined with the fact that Norton was a very common name in late medieval England, make it difficult to identify the professions of Richard Norton's family. Several references to a John Norton active within the region in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries suggest the possibility that Richard Norton I's younger brother may also have practiced the law (Pedigree J).<sup>740</sup> A John Norton witnessed charters for Henry Fitzhugh of Ravensworth in 1387 and 1389, whilst a man of the same name acquired a licence with Thomas Percy to grant land to Jervaulx Abbey in 1405 and witnessed

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<sup>738</sup> George Ward was described as a bachelor in law when he was appointed as one of the commissioners in office of the constableness of England. CPR Ed IV, Ed V, Ric III, p. 317.

<sup>739</sup> Orme, *Childhood to Chivalry*, p. 77.

<sup>740</sup> Dendy (ed.) 'Flower's Visitation', pp. 200-1.

a charter in Melmerby, the neighbouring township to Norton Conyers, in 1410.<sup>741</sup> It was quite possibly the same man, under Richard Norton I's influence, who acquired a position as an attorney of the Common Bench in 1409 and 1410.<sup>742</sup> The appearance of another John Norton, doctor of law, in 1423 when he was hearing appeals in the court of admiralty, and in 1425 a man of the same name was called to rule on a decision made by the warden of the east march in 1425, suggests the possibility of a second generation of lawyers from this same family.<sup>743</sup> In the absence of fuller and more detailed records, however, it is impossible to do more than speculate if, and in what way, these men were related (Pedigree J).

If the John Norton, doctor of laws, who was active in the 1420s was a son of Richard Norton I then he was a younger son. Richard Norton I's son and heir was Richard Norton II, about whose career very little is ascertainable. He married the heiress Isabel Tempest and was buried at Wath beside his father.<sup>744</sup> I have been unable to find his name in surviving deeds and charters and he does not seem to have been called to act on any royal commissions. Exemption could be purchased, but this was probably not the case here.<sup>745</sup> Local office, however irksome, was considered a necessary recognition of importance by many gentlemen.<sup>746</sup> It is possible that Richard Norton II was simply not important enough to warrant inclusion. When he

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<sup>741</sup> IPM Vol. XXII, p. 392; TNA C 143/436/13; Clay (ed.) *Yorkshire Deeds*, V p. 101.

<sup>742</sup> CPR Hen IV, vol. IV, pp. 123, 136. Richard Norton I did have some connection with the Court of Admiralty, recorded as hearing appeals in this court, for example in 1404, CPR Hen IV, vol. II, p. 366.

<sup>743</sup> CPR Hen VI, vol. I, p. 160; CPR Hen VI, vol. I, p. 317.

<sup>744</sup> Foster (ed.) *Visitations of Yorkshire*, pp. 244-5; Page (ed.) *VCH North Riding*, vol. I, pp. 79, 230; Clay (ed.) *Dodsworth's Yorkshire Church Notes*, p. 222.

<sup>745</sup> Examples of those who did include Ralph de Eure in 1415, CPR Hen V, vol. I, p. 321.

<sup>746</sup> Payling, *Political Society*, p. 110; Moreton, *Townshersds*, p. 63.

was recorded as holding land in Norton Conyers in the Feudal Aids he was given no title, nor do various sixteenth-century pedigrees record him as being a knight or even an esquire.<sup>747</sup> He may have been a member of the parish gentry, but there is nothing to deny or confirm this.

The relative obscurity of Richard Norton II may help to explain a change of plans in the next generation. Richard II's own eldest son, John II, was educated in the law, eventually rising to the rank of Justice of the Common Bench.<sup>748</sup> John's appearances as a commissioner for the Crown were fairly limited, acting as a JP in 1470 and 1489, the year of his death, and in 1488 being named on a commission to assess subsidies in the North Riding.<sup>749</sup> He might have appeared more frequently in the Chancery rolls if he had been more willing to undertake such duties; Anthony Pollard suggests it was a lack of enthusiasm that meant he never sat on the North Riding bench before 1485 and seldom appeared at shire elections.<sup>750</sup>

John Norton II fathered two sons, John Norton III and Henry Norton. The younger of these, according to Flower's visitation, died without issue.<sup>751</sup> To judge by the type of commission that the eldest son, John III, appeared on, he was almost certainly a lawyer like his father. He acted as a Justice of the Peace for the North Riding on almost every commission from 1496 to the end of Henry VII's reign and

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<sup>747</sup> *Feudal Aids*, vol. VI, pp. 290, 299; *Visitations of the North*, vol. I, pp. 64-5, vol. II p. 21; Foster (ed.) *Visitations of Yorkshire*, pp. 244-5.

<sup>748</sup> Ormrod, *Lord Lieutenants*, p. 103.

<sup>749</sup> CPR Hen VII, vol. I, pp. 242, 507; CFR vol. XXII, p. 117.

<sup>750</sup> Pollard, *North-Eastern England*, pp. 157, 166.

<sup>751</sup> Dendy (ed.) 'Flower's Visitation', p. 21.



more than once was specifically singled out by the king to give judgement in some difficult local disputes.<sup>752</sup> The fact that, for the entirety of a career spanning more than thirty years, John Norton III was named on only one commission of a military nature is also suggestive.<sup>753</sup> William Gascoigne II had a similarly limited appearance on military commissions, being required to array only once, in 1403.<sup>754</sup> Most of the prominent Yorkshire judges were never called upon to serve in a military capacity, including Guy Fairfax, Justice of the Common Pleas, James Strangeways, Justice of the King's Bench, Thomas Fulthorpe, a Justice of Assize on the Northern circuit, and Robert Danby, Chief Justice of the Common Pleas. The same can be said about serjeants-at-law including Miles Metcalfe, Richard and Thomas Pigot and John Vavasour. Whilst being a lawyer did not necessarily mean that a man could not fight, it is clear that the talents of legal men were felt to be better utilised in another capacity. It was almost certainly John Norton III's service as a lawyer that caused him to be made a Knight of the Bath in 1501.<sup>755</sup> This was probably also the reason that he was pricked as Sheriff of Yorkshire twice, in 1506 and 1514.<sup>756</sup>

The heads of the family of Norton of Norton Conyers thus appear to have maintained a connection, with a brief hiatus under Richard Norton II, with the law throughout the fifteenth century. There is no evidence to demonstrate that any of their number actually fought in battle, quite possibly because they were not equipped to do so. Perhaps they could not afford it. In spite of Richard Norton I's success,

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<sup>752</sup> CPR Hen VII, vol. II, pp. 667, 669; Brown (ed.) *Yorkshire Star Chamber*, p. 67; LI, p. 185.

<sup>753</sup> CPR Hen VII, vol. II, p. 52.

<sup>754</sup> CPR Hen IV, vol. II, p. 294.

<sup>755</sup> Ormrod, *Lord Lieutenants*, p. 103

<sup>756</sup> CFR Henry VII, Vol. XXII, p. 388.

reaching the exalted position of Chief Justice of the Common Bench in 1414, it was not until the first half of the sixteenth century that the family managed to get higher than the lower to middling ranks of the gentry. Their income was modest, their manor small, and they have left precious little evidence of their existence.<sup>757</sup> Apart from an advantageous marriage with the Tempest heiress in the first decade of the fifteenth century, they married into other middling families like the Nunwicks, Manningshams, Wards and Mallorys. Practice of the law provided them with a certain amount of status, but they were only ever notably successful when it also brought the patronage of a powerful man. Richard Norton I prospered with assistance of Bishop Langley and John Norton III managed to acquire the support of Henry VII. For the Nortons, like the Babthorpes and the Gascoignes, service to the right man was all important, the nature of that service secondary.

The law nonetheless proved an extremely useful tool for gentlemen who knew how to use it. There is evidence that the Nortons, particularly in the later part of the fifteenth century, made the most of the advantages their extensive knowledge offered. The late medieval gentry were concerned, perhaps more than anything, with the protection and acquisition of land. There were any number of extra-legal methods of hastening disputes, but more often than not it seems that the law was the first rather than the last resort.<sup>758</sup> John Norton II and III were particularly active in disputing with their neighbours and they appear to have been guilty of some rather sharp practice. In the late 1480s both were sued for detention of deeds relating to

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<sup>757</sup> For example, Richard Norton I earned only £10 per annum as Chief Justice of Durham, and £93 6s 8d as Chief Justice of the Common Pleas. Storey, *Thomas Langley*, p. 63; CPR Hen V, vol. I, p. 16.

<sup>758</sup> Smith, 'Litigation and Politics', p. 71; Carpenter, *Wars of the Roses*, p. 53.

various manors in Craven.<sup>759</sup> One or the other of these John Nortons himself sued Christopher Clapham over a bond given by his father William Clapham and subsequently lost.<sup>760</sup> Since John Norton was also suing Thomas Medhop over a bond similarly lost, the existence of these documents begins to look rather suspect.<sup>761</sup> It was only after the Nortons ceased to be closely associated with the law in the sixteenth century that their methods of dealing with difficulties stepped outside of the courts. John Norton III came to blows with the representatives of the abbot of Fountains over the occupation of a piece of land.<sup>762</sup> His dispute with the Earl of Cumberland over the rights to hold a manor court at Kirkby Malzeard was similarly violent.<sup>763</sup> So strong was his resentment over the latter incident that he apparently became ‘the bitterest of Cumberland’s enemies,’ going so far as to supervise the besieging of the earl in Skipton castle during the Pilgrimage of Grace.<sup>764</sup> The change in tactic could represent a disadvantage on the part of the fifteenth-century Nortons, who as professional lawyers may not have been particularly well equipped to use force. The threat of violence, coming from these men, may have been less effective than when it was used by a man trained to fight. Alternatively, the extensive knowledge of the law possessed by Richard Norton I, John Norton II and John Norton III can be seen as an advantage. It provided them with an alternative, and

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<sup>759</sup> TNA C 1/107/12.

<sup>760</sup> TNA C1/151/57.

<sup>761</sup> TNA C1/151/58.

<sup>762</sup> TNA STAC 2/27/173

<sup>763</sup> R.W. Hoyle, *The Pilgrimage of Grace and the Politics of the 1530s* (Oxford, 2001), p. 39.

<sup>764</sup> Mervyn James, *Society, Politics and Culture. Studies in Early Modern England* (Cambridge, 1986), p. 162.

more effective, manner of dealing with quarrels. In this respect legal knowledge was an extremely useful thing for a gentleman to have.

Ultimately, the Babthorpes, the Gascoignes and the Nortons owed their position among the ranks of the gentry to service. The Babthorpes rose to prominence through service to the Crown, the Gascoignes to the earls of Northumberland and the Nortons to the bishops of Durham. It does not appear to have mattered, at least in terms of their success, whether this was primarily military, legal or administrative service. It appears that, as Pollard has argued, one type was as good as another.<sup>765</sup> The law could provide a steady income and access to political power as the agent of a nobleman or a servant of the crown. It was also a useful tool for the acquisition and protection of rights and property.<sup>766</sup> As gentry of lesser, or at best middling, status the Nortons relied on the law for the means to live like gentlemen. Practice of the law was a perfectly respectable manner for a gentleman to support himself and in the right circumstances could confer considerable prestige. The choice to represent high ranking-justices William Gascoigne II and Richard Norton I in judicial robes on their tombs indicates a considerable pride in their success. Practice of the law was thus entirely compatible with gentility. A man did not have to be a soldier in order to be considered a gentleman.

At the same time, it is quite clear that the image of the fighting man retained considerable importance in terms of both status and masculinity. The choices of these three families, as soon as they were able, to project themselves as families of fighting men indicates that the ideal gentleman was still, apparently, a military man.

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<sup>765</sup> A.J. Pollard, *Late Medieval England* (Harlow, 2000), pp. 185, 188.

<sup>766</sup> Moreton, *Townshends*, pp. 13-4.

The Babthorpes embraced the ideal with the most enthusiasm, the Nortons with the least interest, but all, to some extent, sought to promote the martial image. The Babthorpes constructed a family identity based on martial service. The Gascoignes, once they were established, abandoned legal careers for a more 'traditional' role and this included martial service. Only the Nortons, whose success never quite matched that of the other two families examined here, maintained connections with the law over the century as a whole. It seems to have been standard practice among the Yorkshire gentry that families who made their fortune through the law, even those who, like the Pigots, owed their very position as gentry to it, abandoned the profession almost as soon as they were established. Younger sons were still put into the Church and the law, but the eldest was usually presented as a fighting man, ready and able to provide martial service should the need arise. But military experience, or its lack, did not ultimately determine an individual's status as a gentry male. It was the constructed image that was important, rather than the reality.

## Conclusion

This thesis began by asking whether it was possible to ‘knowe a gentilman’ in fifteenth-century Yorkshire. Membership of the gentry was not clearly delineated and unlike the nobility there were no set and definite requirements. Yet, as this study has shown, there was evidently a distinction, at least in the minds of those who called themselves gentlemen, between those who could lay claim to this status and those who could not. Sir Ralph Eure’s aggressive response on the road to Brompton, with which this thesis began, was prompted by the failure of men of lesser status to treat him with the respect he felt that he deserved.<sup>767</sup> He took this failure as a grave insult because he believed that they should know the difference. The question, then, is how were they, or anyone else, supposed to know who was a gentleman and who was not? This thesis has endeavoured to answer this question through a study of gentry culture, undertaken through a selection of case studies, relating to Sir Ralph Eure, the Constables and the Hiltons, the Plumptions, the Savilles, the Conyers and the Redmans, the Babthorpes, Gascoignes and Nortons. The evidence has presented several themes integral to gaining a better understanding of gentry culture and through it a greater understanding of how the identity of gentry males was constructed and projected. The purpose of this conclusion is to disentangle these themes, explaining how and why they were significant. I will begin by discussing what would appear to have been the most important, the possession of land, and progress through a consideration of the importance of lordship, lineage, marriage and fatherhood, the martial role and the significance of service. I shall then highlight

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<sup>767</sup> Turton (ed.) *Honor and Forest of Pickering*, pp. 176-7.

some areas where there is a potential for productive further study, before concluding whether it was indeed possible to know a gentleman in fifteenth-century Yorkshire.

Almost certainly, the most important qualification for gentility was the possession of property, more specifically, the possession of a manor. As my evidence shows, and as Christine Carpenter has agreed, land was ultimately what counted.<sup>768</sup> This is indicated by the determination of those who aspired to enter the gentry from below to acquire this type of property. The Coppendaes, a family of Beverley mercantile origin, made their transition into the gentry at the beginning of the fifteenth century through the purchase of land.<sup>769</sup> The Otes, a similar family from Wakefield, used the same method at the beginning of the sixteenth.<sup>770</sup> The younger sons of established gentry families were just as eager as their lower-status counterparts to possess land of their own. The sons of Sir Christopher Conyers and Chief Justice Gascoigne were fortunate in having fathers who could afford to provide them with manors.<sup>771</sup> Although the Conyers' lands seem only to have been granted for a life term, Gascoigne's grants were hereditary, establishing the Gascoignes of Lasingcroft and Hunslet.<sup>772</sup> The majority of gentlemen were less fortunate, being forced to provide for themselves if they could. Some, like Richard Pigot, succeeded. One of his first actions on making enough money through the practice of law was to

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<sup>768</sup> Carpenter, *Locality and Polity*, p. 3.

<sup>769</sup> George Sheeran, *Medieval Yorkshire Towns* (Edinburgh, 1998), p. 13.

<sup>770</sup> Louis Ambler, *The Old Halls and Manor Houses of Yorkshire* (London, 1913), pp. 48-9.

<sup>771</sup> See Chapter 4, p.162 and Chapter 5, pp. 234-5.

<sup>772</sup> TE I, p. 390.

purchase the manor of Little Burton.<sup>773</sup> Every family examined within these case studies has shown a significant interest in land, the Gascoignes, Plumptons, Nortons, Savilles and Sir Richard Conyers to acquire it, the Hiltons, Constables, Redmans and Babthorpes to protect it. The same could probably be said of every gentle family in Yorkshire. Those who lacked land wanted it, those who had it sought to protect and expand what they had. Ownership of a manor was not the only thing needed in order for a man to be counted as a gentleman, but he could not really be considered a gentleman without it.

As examination of the Yorkshire gentry has shown, the possession of a manor was significant in several ways. Firstly, any land served as a source of income, theoretically as a gentleman's main source of income. Landed wealth ideally provided the means to finance an aristocratic lifestyle. As the case studies of the Savilles and Sir Richard Conyers demonstrate, this included an appropriate house and household.<sup>774</sup> As is suggested by the evidence of the Plumpton letters and examination of the Redman of Kearby book of hours, it could also mean fine clothes and furnishings, food, horses and the leisure to enjoy all these things.<sup>775</sup> A gentleman was not expected to work for a living, even if in reality he had to work very hard indeed. Equally importantly, a manor provided the venue for a high-status lifestyle. It provided a man with somewhere to live as a gentleman, and to be seen to live as a gentleman. The manor was the primary focus of display. Almost all of Yorkshire's surviving gentry manor houses show signs of alteration or complete rebuilding in the

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<sup>773</sup> Richard purchased Little Burton in 1460, seven years before he was made one of the king's sergeants-at-law. NYCRO ZFW MIC 1160; CPR Ed IV and Hen VI, p. 38.

<sup>774</sup> See Chapter 3, pp. 134-6 and Chapter 4, pp. 181-90.

<sup>775</sup> See Chapter 2, pp. 102-6, 116-8 and Chapter 4, pp. 202-3.



fifteenth century, something that Le Patourel regards as being a feature of the period.<sup>776</sup> Sir Richard Conyers' house at South Cowton was an entirely new construction, the Saville's house at Thornhill quite probably a significant alteration of an existing building, although little of the latter remains.<sup>777</sup> Significant alteration or refurbishment can also be seen in many of the parish churches close to manor houses. Not all were as comprehensive as the works completed by Sir Richard Conyers, whereby he appropriated the entire church as a kind of private chapel, but a large number of gentlemen engaged in similar if more modest programs.<sup>778</sup> Yorkshire churches saw a considerable number of re-glazed windows, the addition of aisles and towers and constructing chapels, the last including the Saville chapel at Thornhill, a construction that was expanded and glorified by successive generations of the family.<sup>779</sup> At St Anne's, Catterick, there is even evidence of similar multi-generational interest in expansion of the church. Rebuilding was begun by John Burgh, continued by his widow and completed by their son William in the 1420s.<sup>780</sup> The desire for the latest comforts and conveniences might have prompted the refurbishment of a gentleman's home. A concern for salvation was assuredly a feature in the patronage of churches.<sup>781</sup> But these were not their only functions. The building and refurbishing of manor houses, churches, the construction of parks and roadways, the last a popular focus of bequests, all acted as demonstrations of wealth

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<sup>776</sup> Le Patourel, *Moated Sites*, p. 31.

<sup>777</sup> See Chapter 3, pp. 134-6.

<sup>778</sup> See Chapter 4, pp. 165-77.

<sup>779</sup> See Chapter 3, pp. 123-6.

<sup>780</sup> The contract between William Burgh and the mason is printed in McCall, *Richmondshire Churches*, p. 18.

<sup>781</sup> Kreider, *English Chantries*, p. 91; Roffey, *Medieval Chantry*, p. 19; Saul, *English Church Monuments*, p. 163.

and status.<sup>782</sup> They were, like the possession of fine clothes, jewellery and books, status markers, signs that the man who owned them was a gentleman. It was through such conspicuous consumption that a man could demonstrate that he was a gentleman.

Whilst the opportunities a manor provided for display were significant, it also provided something that scattered lands and other sources of wealth did not: lordship. This was important. It was concern to protect their rights as lord that prompted much of the aggressive behaviour of Sir Roger Hastings and Sir William Gascoigne VI.<sup>783</sup> Sir Godfrey Hilton's accusation against the Constables and their associates indicate annoyance that they were interfering with his lordship – frightening his tenants as well as stealing his produce.<sup>784</sup> As can be most clearly seen within the Plumpton letters, lordship gave a man authority over others – his household and any tenants that might be associated with the manor – and with it came responsibility. There are examples within this collection of lords exerting authority over tenants; unfortunately for those at Idle two different lords issuing two sets of instructions in the case of a disputed property.<sup>785</sup> The responsibility to provide 'good lordship' is explicit here in the tenants' appeal to Sir William Plumpton II to intervene. This same responsibility is also manifest in numerous other letters, the majority of which, like most surviving letters of this period, are essentially

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<sup>782</sup> Stephen Ellis left 8 marcs for the upkeep of the bridge at Bolton and Marmaduke Constable left money in his will to repair 'all the evill peces of ways in the towne of North Clif'. TE V, pp. 57-8, 166-9.

<sup>783</sup> See Introduction, p. 10 and Chapter 5, pp. 244-6.

<sup>784</sup> See Chapter 1, pp. 41-2.

<sup>785</sup> Kirby (ed.) *Plumpton Letters*, No. 32, p.55.

petitions.<sup>786</sup> The writers request aid, whether monetary, the use of influence or actual physical protection.<sup>787</sup>

The actions associated with the position of lord mattered as much as the position itself when it came to demonstrating gentility. The reaction of gentlemen when they were, for whatever reason, unable to perform in this respect indicates that the responsibility was a serious one. This was most marked in the case of servants. Sir John Mauleverer's outburst at the courts of Westminster, taken from this same collection of letters, was prompted by his desire to protect the welfare of a servant.<sup>788</sup> Similarly, outside of the Plumpton correspondence, Sir William Gascoigne VI, infuriated by the arrest of one of his servants, kidnapped the official responsible and held him captive for the better part of a week, during which he berated the unfortunate individual for failing to consult him first.<sup>789</sup> Sir Roger Hastings was even accused of having broken one his servants out of prison, before thinking better of this rash act and returning him the next morning.<sup>790</sup> In all these cases the gentlemen involved had been thwarted in their attempts to provide good lordship. Their resultant anger indicates that success or failure was a direct reflection on them as gentlemen.

For the purposes of demonstrating wealth or lordship, the gentlemen within these case studies show a clear preference for inherited land, like those further up the

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<sup>786</sup> Richardson, 'Fading Influence', p. 230; Williams, 'English Vernacular Letters', p. 27.

<sup>787</sup> See Chapter 2, pp. 90-2.

<sup>788</sup> Kirby (ed.) *Plumpton Letters*, No. 18, pp. 32-4.

<sup>789</sup> Brown (ed.) *Yorkshire Star Chamber*, pp. 121-7.

<sup>790</sup> Turton (ed.) *Honor and Forest of Pickering*, p. 189.

social scale. Gentle families cultivated an association with particular locations – they were the Hastings of Fenwick, the Thwaites of Lund, the Wycliffes of Wycliffe and so on. This last was the ideal, for place and person could be seen as indivisible. Connections were cultivated by establishing a physical presence, something that could be achieved through the building of manor houses. It could also be done through patronage of the local church, by glorifying God's house through the expansion and decoration of the building, and through the establishment of chantries. These actions all served to highlight the connection of a gentleman and his manor, thereby emphasising his position as lord. Though usually focused on the founder and his family, these were seen to be beneficial to the congregation in general.<sup>791</sup> Sir Thomas Saville, for example, requested prayers for his own soul and some specific relatives, but the masses said in his honour could still be heard by and would benefit the congregation at Thornhill.<sup>792</sup> This connection could also be demonstrated through largesse, given in the form of food or money to those in need. In the absence of detailed household records it is difficult to ascertain how charitable gentlemen were to their local community in life, but the evidence of wills shows that they could be generous in death.<sup>793</sup>

The connection between a gentle family and a manor, where it already existed, was to be protected and maintained. The Plumptons spent more than twenty years attempting to defend Plumpton from rival claimants the Roucliffes and the

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<sup>791</sup> Roffey, *Medieval Chantry*, p. 4.

<sup>792</sup> Clay (ed.) *Halifax Wills*, pp. 9-10. Chapter 3, p. 126.

<sup>793</sup> For example, Sir John Constable of Halsham's will included gifts to his servants and a remission of rents to his tenants in nine manors. TE II, pp. 158 -9

Sotehills, with endless reference to legal proceedings being made in their letters.<sup>794</sup> The Babthorpes took a more direct approach alongside their own legal wrangling to regain control of Babthorpe, descending on the manor with a hundred armed men and ejecting the occupants.<sup>795</sup> Sir Godfrey Hilton's dispute with the Constables came about because he wished to keep the Hiltons' long-term seat at Swine within the Hilton family, in spite of its inheritance by his niece, Elizabeth Melton.<sup>796</sup> When the connection between a family and particular manor was tenuous, as when property was acquired through an heiress or via indirect succession, gentlemen went to some trouble to enhance it. The Savilles had a hereditary claim to the manor of Thornhill through an heiress, as did the Hiltons of Swine, and both families emphasised their claims by stressing this connection. In the case of the Hiltons there was an attempt to appropriate this ancestry for themselves, with the adoption of the arms of the Lascelles', the former lords of Swine. When the connection was non-existent gentlemen had to work even harder to establish themselves. Sir Richard Conyers was a new arrival at the manor of South Cowton. The Conyers had never been lords there and, due to Sir Richard's failure to produce a son, their line would never become established. Yet it would be difficult to determine this by examining house or church: all of Sir Richard's work here was geared towards creating an impression of tradition, security and longevity of lordship that was essentially fictive.<sup>797</sup> This case study in particular demonstrates the capacity of the gentry to invent their status. The nature of the gentry, composed in many cases of men whose ancestry was relatively

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<sup>794</sup> See Chapter 2, pp. 88-9.

<sup>795</sup> See Chapter 5, pp. 227-8 and Brown (ed.) *Select Cases in the Council of Henry VIII*, p. cxxxv.

<sup>796</sup> See Chapter 1, pp. 48, 58-60.

<sup>797</sup> See Chapter 4, pp. 175-6, 183-4.

humble, meant that such creativity was fairly commonplace. Creativity and adaptability might even be considered features of gentry identity.

Long-term occupation of place depended on the existence of a long-established lineage. It was only through a clear line of succession that property could be kept within the same family for several generations. The Savilles, for all their tendency to change the family seat, were a notable success. The family can be traced in an unbroken line of male succession from the thirteenth to the twentieth century.<sup>798</sup> The Conyers on the other hand only managed a single generation at South Cowton because Sir Richard Conyers failed to produce a son.<sup>799</sup> As these case studies have shown, lineage was in itself a hugely significant aspect of gentle identity. The Hiltons, Constables, Savilles, Conyers, Gascoignes and Nortons all left evidence calculated to demonstrate that they possessed aristocratic blood, and the others were almost certainly conscious of their own claims in this respect. Descent from a gentleman, ideally from a long line of gentlemen, was an important sign of a man's own gentility. For this reason, gentlemen, or would-be gentlemen, were determined to demonstrate that aristocratic blood was something they possessed. Whilst written pedigrees, such as that commissioned by Sir Ralph Eure at the end of the century, were rare, the representation of visual pedigrees was much more common.<sup>800</sup> Many such representations are still readily apparent and almost all of the families examined within this thesis leave some evidence of this nature behind. Heraldry, the purpose of which, according to Binski, was to indicate 'selfhood and,

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<sup>798</sup> Clay (ed.) 'Saville Family', pp. 1-47.

<sup>799</sup> See Chapter 4, pp. 175-6.

<sup>800</sup> Tscherpel, 'Political Function of History', p. 94.

more importantly, the bonds of blood and family allegiance', can be found in almost every conceivable medium and often in a public setting.<sup>801</sup> Shields were placed above the entrances to gentry residences, as at South Cowton, Tanfield and Thornhill. They adorned silverware and jewellery, such as the silver bowl 'cum armis' bequeathed by Sir William Stapleton and the ring belonging to Sir Randulph Hastings 'cum mauches & cum coloribus armorum meorum'.<sup>802</sup> They were carved into the stonework of churches, inserted into the glass of the windows, and, if the wishes of men like John Stapleton and Thomas Hopton were observed, embroidered onto vestments.<sup>803</sup> The creation of a family mausoleum in the local parish church, as at Swine, Thornhill, South Cowton, Harewood and Wath, to name only a few examples discussed here, served to further illustrate lineage in a highly visible, even obtrusive, manner.

Aristocratic descent was so vital a requirement of gentility that those who lacked the appropriate credentials were compelled to create them. The Hiltons of Swine and the Bowes of South Cowton both made use of maternal ancestry, in the absence of paternal predecessors, in order to validate their positions.<sup>804</sup> The Hiltons are particularly striking in that they attempted to conceal the point of change by adopting the arms, and the ancestry, of their predecessors at Swine. The Babthorpes of Babthorpe, apparently feeling that their martial heritage should go back further than the beginning of the fifteenth century, invented, or elaborated upon, an ancestor

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<sup>801</sup> Binski, *Medieval Death*, p. 105.

<sup>802</sup> TE IV, pp. 221-2; TE I, p. 218.

<sup>803</sup> TE III, p. 181; IV, p. 5.

<sup>804</sup> See Chapter 1, pp. 51-5 and Chapter 4, p. 190.

supposed to have fought with Edward III at Crécy.<sup>805</sup> The Saville's claims that they were descended from the Sabelli, a patrician family of ancient Rome, seem to have been based on no more than the similarity in their names and a considerable amount of wishful thinking.<sup>806</sup> The importance that gentlemen attributed to ancestry, and the willingness of those who lacked a suitable pedigree to invent one, is indicative of just how important lineage was to them. This is illustrated most effectively with reference to Norfolk-based contemporaries the Pastons.<sup>807</sup> The contemporary accusation that they were descended, in the not too distant past, from peasants, was accurate. It was also deeply insulting and led to an aggressive denial, complete with all manner of fabricated proofs of their aristocratic lineage. Aristocratic descent was something a gentleman could simply not do without, even if he had to create it for himself.

Lineage was also something to which a gentleman had particular responsibilities. It was his job, as a gentry male, to promote and enhance the status of his lineage. The reliance of the Plumptons on men who were closely related, in particular Robinet and Edward Plumpton, indicates that this responsibility was expected to be felt by all male family members, whatever their position within the lineage; the former was an illegitimate son, the latter a nephew of the head of the family.<sup>808</sup> It was a younger son who commemorated the death of his father and elder brother, the two Sir Ralph Babthorpes, at St Albans, in an act that was intended to

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<sup>805</sup> See Chapter 5, pp. 228-9. This ancestor, Sir Thomas Babthorpe, supposedly Controller of the Royal Household, bears a strong resemblance to Sir Robert Babthorpe I.

<sup>806</sup> Clay, 'Savile Family', p. 4.

<sup>807</sup> Norman Davis (ed.) *Paston Letters and Papers of the Fifteenth Century*. Part I. EETS, SS. 20 (Oxford, 2004), pp. 23-7.

<sup>808</sup> See Chapter 2, pp. 98-9.



glorify the Babthorpes as a whole.<sup>809</sup> The decision of the Constables, in forming an alliance against Sir Godfrey Hilton, to turn to relatives by blood and marriage suggests that responsibility to aid the lineage might stretch to those who were connected to but not members of it.<sup>810</sup> There appears to have been an expectation that help would be forthcoming because of shared interests and a sense of familial belonging.

The head or future head of the family had an additional, indeed a crucial, responsibility. It was incumbent on him to see that the lineage continued. This was most effectively done via the production of a legitimate male heir. Here the necessity to perform as a gentleman and as a male coincided. It was this concern that prompted Sir William Plumpton II to reveal the existence of a son born supposedly as the result of a clandestine marriage, both his unquestionably legitimate sons having died prior to producing male heirs of their own.<sup>811</sup> The absence of sons put the lineage, and the transition of its property, in jeopardy. Sir William's actions were unusual, but Sir William was a man who regularly failed to conform to social expectations. In other cases, the desire for security in these circumstances resulted in some elaborate contingency plans. Sir Thomas Colville, who had no children when he went to fight in France in 1418, made assumption of the Colville name a requirement of his cousin's inheritance.<sup>812</sup> Sir Edward Redman, having already lost one son, was not content to leave matters to fate. In case his surviving son, Sir Richard, died without male issue, his granddaughter and next heir was to marry one of two specified

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<sup>809</sup> See Chapter 5, pp. 225-6.

<sup>810</sup> See Chapter 1, pp. 68-9.

<sup>811</sup> See Chapter 2, pp. 85-8.

<sup>812</sup> Brown, *Ingleby Arnecliffe*, pp. 46-8.

cousins or, should that fail, ‘any that hight Redman’.<sup>813</sup> By this he ensured that, by reason of continuity of the family name, his lineage would appear to continue.

The existence of an heiress could pose just as great a difficulty as if there were no heir at all. The disputes between the Constables and Sir Godfrey Hilton, the Plumptons and the Roucliffes and Sotehills, and between the Babthorpes and the Plumptons, all resulted from the existence of heiresses.<sup>814</sup> Swine ceased to belong to the Hiltons after the death of Sir Robert, it was inherited by his daughter Elizabeth and was henceforth associated with the Meltons, formerly of Kilham.<sup>815</sup> Babthorpe, long-term seat of the Babthorpes, was saved by the family’s forethought to entail this manor on the male heir, bypassing two heiresses before it got to a third son.<sup>816</sup> A gentleman who, as head of the family, failed to produce sons had effectively failed in his most important duty to his lineage. As Joel Rosenthal has put it, ‘he had failed himself, and he had failed his own father. In addition, he had failed those more distant progenitors who had begotten him’.<sup>817</sup> His own claim to gentility might be affected by this failure, since he had failed to uphold the responsibilities of his aristocratic blood. In addition, perceptions of his masculinity almost certainly would have been affected. Fathering children, as Bullough has argued, was one of the most

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<sup>813</sup> TE V, p. 23.

<sup>814</sup> These disputes were over the rights of heiresses Elizabeth and Isobel Hilton, Elizabeth and Margaret Plumpton and Isobel Babthorpe. See Chapter 1, p. 54, Chapter 2, pp. 86-7 and Chapter 5, pp. 227-8.

<sup>815</sup> See Chapter 1.

<sup>816</sup> Without a tail male Babthorpe would have passed to the Hastings and then to the Plumptons. The latter’s attempts to claim the manor in spite of this are well documented and have been discussed in Chapter 5.

<sup>817</sup> Rosenthal, *Patriarchy*, p. 41.

obvious and undisputable proofs of manliness.<sup>818</sup> A man incapable of fathering children was perceived as essentially deficient.

The importance of producing heirs suggests that marriage may have been more significant for the head or future head of the family than for younger sons. The latter, provided the eldest son lived long enough to produce an heir, were not responsible for the continuation of the lineage in the same way. Yet marriage still seems to have been important for these men. There are no comprehensive or official records of marriage in this period, even for the aristocracy, and reliance on sixteenth-century pedigrees may well lead to a serious underestimation of numbers. These tend to record marriage for the eldest and the second sons, without reference to others, but this does not necessarily mean that younger sons were not married, only that their marriages were not thought worth recording. Alternative evidence, gathered from wills, tombs and letters, indicates that the proportion of gentlemen who married was considerably higher than pedigrees indicate. It is rare to find reference to a man of gentle status, outside of the Church, who had never been married. Furthermore, incidental evidence indicates that gentlemen were expected to want to marry. The Plumpton letters reveal three apparently ardent would-be bridegrooms in the persons of Edward Plumpton, Randall Manwering and an unnamed London mercer seeking to marry Godfrey Greene's sister. The Saville-Harrington matrimonial dispute presents another in the form of Sir Thomas Saville. All of these men are portrayed as eager, although Edward Plumpton is the only man to speak for himself. Their apparent ardour may be no more than a convention, but this in any case is significant. Whether or not these men were really enthusiastic about marriage, it was

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<sup>818</sup> Bullough, 'On Being Male', p. 41.

expected that they would be. All this suggests that marriage was not just about continuing the lineage. Its appeal to gentlemen in general, not just to those who needed legitimate heirs, indicates that it had a greater significance in the construction of identity for gentry males.

In one respect marriage strengthened and advertised a man's gentility. Marriage, for the late medieval aristocracy, Susan Wright has argued, was primarily about the connections that could be forged.<sup>819</sup> These case studies indicate that this was certainly an important aspect. The failed marriage between Christina Harrington and Sir Thomas Saville, for example, was prompted largely by the desire of both families to form a connection, something that was more successfully achieved by two marriages between different parties at a later date.<sup>820</sup> A man's worth and worship, and by extension that of his family, was signalled by the families who were willing to associate themselves with him. Like ancestors, living relations could serve to enhance a gentleman's prestige.<sup>821</sup> Horizontal ties were advertised in much the same way as vertical connections, through the display of heraldry in public settings, on manor houses and churches, on tombs and in windows. The tombs of the Hiltons at Swine, the Savilles at Thornhill and the Gascoignes at Gawthorpe all still feature the arms of families they were connected to by marriage, although these cannot all now be identified.<sup>822</sup> The tomb of Thomas Langdon, intended to feature 'all my doghtirs in armes with thair husbandis on my right syde, and with all my sones and

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<sup>819</sup> Wright, *Derbyshire Gentry*, p. 54.

<sup>820</sup> See Chapter 3, pp. 150-1.

<sup>821</sup> Tscherpel, 'Political Function of History', pp. 88-9.

<sup>822</sup> Those on the tomb of one of the Hilton knights appear to have been rearranged, the placement is different in BL Lansdowne 894.

their wives in armes upon my left side', was essentially an advertisement of his own importance.<sup>823</sup> Joint tombs of husband and wife, like those at Harewood, Swine and Thornhill, served a similar purpose. Good matches reflected well on the gentleman who arranged them. Impressive in-laws were an indication of a man's own status, defined in this case by his wealth and influence, since it was only through these things that advantageous marriages could be made. Only a man with the extensive resources of Sir Guy Fairfax, for example, could afford to have his two sons marry the sisters and potential heiresses of George, lord Roos of Hamlake.<sup>824</sup> Sir Guy, a younger son who had built his own fortune through a career practicing law, had something to prove. High-status relations were particularly useful in such circumstances. For the Otes, a prosperous merchant family from Halifax, marriage with one of the Savilles of Copley appears to have been part of a scheme to establish themselves as members of the gentry.<sup>825</sup> A family like the Savilles, of unquestionably aristocratic status, conferred a measure of status on their in-laws simply by association.

Marriage for gentlemen also allowed for a demonstration of masculinity. Generally coinciding with a man's first independent establishment, it brought with it a measure of independence and responsibility that was an indication of adulthood. This was a vital requirement of a society which distinguished men not just from women, but also from boys.<sup>826</sup> Child marriages do not appear to have been common for gentry males, and when they do occur appear only in special circumstances. John

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<sup>823</sup> TE II, p. 278.

<sup>824</sup> Foster (ed.) *Visitations*, pp. 96-7.

<sup>825</sup> Ambler, *Old Halls and Manor Houses*, pp. 48-9.

<sup>826</sup> Fletcher, 'Manhood and Politics', p. 25.

Roucliffe can only have been in his mid-teens when he married Sir William Plumpton II's granddaughter, who was several years younger. The age of the couple reflects the fact that she was an heiress, as well as Sir William's typical disregard for what was common practice.<sup>827</sup> The reason for the early marriage of Sir Thomas Boynton's two daughters is not clear, although he may have been concerned to secure their futures before he died. It is however apparent that the grooms were close to or as young as their wives. Boynton left £20 for one son-in-law, in the event that his daughter 'lif to he come to age xxi yeres, and that thei lye togedder'.<sup>828</sup> Though not explicitly stated, it is unlikely that these young couples occupied independent establishments. It is certain that John Roucliffe and his Plumpton wife did not; the marriage contract stipulated that the couple would live with the groom's family and John Roucliffe indicates in his letter that that this was the current situation.<sup>829</sup> Such youthful marriages were the exception to the rule. Most gentlemen did not marry until they could be considered adults. Marriage could thus be considered a sign of maturity and by extension of manhood.

A man could be a gentleman without having a wife. It was vital, however, that a gentleman who married should be able to carry out his responsibilities in that role, to protect and provide for his wife and children. This encompassed both protection from physical harm and the protection of more nebulous interests. It included the provision of basic necessities such as food and shelter, and not so basic necessities like fine clothes, horses and other luxury items. In this sense the role of

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<sup>827</sup> See Chapter 2, pp.104-5.

<sup>828</sup> TE V, pp. 110-2.

<sup>829</sup> Kirby (ed.) *Plumpton Letters*, No. 11, p. 35, Appendix, pp. 236-9.

husband and father was not unlike that of lord. The seriousness of the responsibilities is reflected in the lengths gentlemen went to provide for their children. Daughters were to be found husbands, sons to be provided with livelihoods. The ultimate aim in all cases was summed up by Robert Strangeways when he left his son and heir ‘ducentas marcas sterlingorum ad sui status sustentacionem et relevamen’.<sup>830</sup> A gentle father was expected to see that his children could continue to live in the style that befitted their status. This might be simple enough in the case of the eldest son, who could expect to inherit his father’s lands, but few gentlemen had the means to provide for all their sons in this manner. The Conyers of Hornby, the Burghs of Brough and the Vavasours of Haslewood, all of whom succeeded in doing so, were in the minority.<sup>831</sup> Unwilling to divide the patrimony, which would limit the resources of the main branch and thus lessen its standing, the majority of gentlemen left younger sons sums of money. John Constable of Halsham left his son Thomas £6 13s 4d, whilst Sir John Saville of Thornhill left his three younger sons 40s each.<sup>832</sup> Bequests could be token gestures if landless sons had already been provided for in another way. For the gentry, this usually meant training in the law or preparation for entry into the Church. To this end Ralph Gascoigne directed that his younger son was to be sent to school, quite probably in preparation for a legal career, as Ralph himself was a lawyer.<sup>833</sup> The Babthorpes went a step further, having an established system whereby a son’s future career was allocated at birth, along with his name. The first son, who would inherit as head of the family, was called Ralph or Robert,

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<sup>830</sup> TE II, pp. 108-9.

<sup>831</sup> See Chapter 3 on the Conyers; NYCRO ZRL 1/40, 42,43,45; TE IV, pp. 8-9.

<sup>832</sup> TE I, pp. 350-1; TE IV, pp. 270-1.

<sup>833</sup> TE III, pp. 15-6.

the next called William and put into the law, and the next called Thomas and put into the Church.<sup>834</sup>

As the Plumpton letters make explicit, the failure to provide for dependants was a serious fault, something that might render an individual less of a man, as well as less than a gentleman.<sup>835</sup> Katherine Chadderton was not at all impressed by the brother-in-law who failed to provide adequately for his family. As she wrote in a letter to her brother, his fair speech was all very well, but whilst he failed to fulfil his responsibilities as husband and father it was of little worth.<sup>836</sup> The implication of Katherine's condemnation was that the gentleman who failed to provide for his family was not a proper gentleman at all. The determination of most gentlemen to provide, in most cases to the full extent of their ability, indicates that she was not alone in this opinion. The slight hint of smugness suggested in Robert Eyre's statement that he had 'martyred another of my daughters', is indicative of his pride in the ability to do so.<sup>837</sup> The responsibility to protect and provide for dependants can thus be seen as a characteristic of identity for gentry males. A man's ability to provide proved that he was a man of means, and so indicated his worldly success. His readiness to act indicated that he understood his responsibilities as a gentleman. Wealth and influence were of limited value if a man did not use them as he was expected to.

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<sup>834</sup> See Chapter 5, pp. 224-5.

<sup>835</sup> See Chapter 2, pp. 102-7, 115-8.

<sup>836</sup> Kirby (ed.) *Plumpton Letters*, No. 2, p. 25.

<sup>837</sup> Kirby (ed.) *Plumpton Letters*, No. 143, p. 136.



Among the qualities of a gentleman, then, a man had to be a landholder, lord, husband and father and in all of these roles he had to conduct himself in the expected manner. The extensive use of martial imagery made by the gentry in this period indicates the possibility that, like men of higher social status, he aspired also to be seen as a soldier. Gentlemen identified themselves through crests and heraldry. The majority, to judge by extant examples, commissioned tombs on which they were represented as knights in armour. They were similarly depicted in glass; the Saville chapel at Thornhill features representations of the heads of the family in both mediums. They built their houses in a martial style, represented by towers, battlements, and courtyards enclosed by retaining walls. South Cowton had all of these features, as did most tower houses in the North-Riding, including Ayton Castle, Nappa Hall and Mortham's Tower. The Savilles' house at Thornhill, the Watertons' at Methley, the Bosvilles' house at Darfield and many others had all of the above features with the addition of a moat. There can be little doubt that these trappings retained considerable significance when it came to indentifying a gentleman.

For some, this meaning was literal. Sir Thomas Buckleton, for example, fought in France, Scotland and Lithuania, and supported Henry Bolingbroke on his landing at Ravenspur. Sir Robert Babthorpe I was a regular combatant in Henry V's French Wars, whilst the Gascoignes, as staunch supporters of the earls of Northumberland, made appearances in several battles of the Wars of the Roses, including the decisive fight against Richard III at Bosworth. Sir John Hotham took part in both battles of St Albans, the battle of Wakefield, and of Towton, where he was killed alongside his eldest son. Full-time, professional soldiers may have been,

in Simon Payling's words, 'a minority upon a minority', but there were nonetheless a considerable number of skilled amateurs to be found among the Yorkshire elite.<sup>838</sup> Several may be found among the limited number of gentlemen examined within these case studies; the Constables, Babthorpes and Gascoignes are particularly notable for their production of fighting men. This allows for the fact that the extent of a gentleman's martial experience was dependent upon circumstances, not only his own but those of the period in which he lived. In the first half of the century particularly between 1415 and Henry V's death, there was great opportunity and some incentive to fight in France. From 1455 until 1485 the Wars of the Roses provided intermittent opportunities to fight and Yorkshire gentlemen, being so closely associated with the major players – the earls of Lancaster, the dukes of York, the earls of Warwick and Northumberland – would have found it hard to avoid getting involved.

At the same time, however, it is possible to find gentlemen who demonstrate little or no martial experience. There is no evidence, for example, that Sir Richard Conyers served in a military capacity, or John Norton II. Yet both of these men chose to depict themselves through martial imagery. Both were represented in armour on their tombs and Sir Richard Conyers' house was clearly martial in style. The decision to use martial imagery appears to have had little connection with real experience. This would appear to confirm the findings of Rachael Dressler, Nigel Saul and Charles Coulson, who have all argued that military imagery was intended

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<sup>838</sup> Simon Payling, 'War and Peace: Military and Administrative Service amongst the English Gentry in the Reign of Henry VI' in Coss and Tyerman (eds.) *Soldiers, Nobles and Gentlemen*, p. 241.

to convey status, rather than experience.<sup>839</sup> When Yorkshire gentlemen used martial imagery they identified themselves as members of the aristocracy.

As an indicator of gentility, martial imagery was not specific to males. Gentlewomen, like gentlemen, could be identified through the use of heraldry, as well as through the fortified style of their houses. This is not to say, however, that the use of martial imagery is irrelevant when it came to demonstrating masculinity within this social group. Gentlemen were not all accomplished soldiers. Some, like the Redmans of Kearby, quite possibly had no knowledge of warfare, and others, like Sir Robert Babthorpe II, only a basic understanding.<sup>840</sup> But as Nicholas Orme has argued, the sons of the nobility, regardless of their intended future careers, were all educated in much the same way, including a basic training in warfare.<sup>841</sup> The same may have applied to the sons of gentlemen. Thomas Babthorpe's comfort in leading an armed assault on the Plumpton occupants of the manor of Babthorpe supports this possibility. He would not have acquired familiarity with the tactics of war in his role as Prior of Hemingbrough.<sup>842</sup> Such skills as he possessed were acquired as a Babthorpe male, that is to say as a gentleman, rather than as a priest. The ability to fight may thus have had some relevance in a man's recognition as a gentleman.

This is not to say that the use of violence was itself a requirement of gentility. Violence as such seems to have played a much smaller part in the identity of

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<sup>839</sup> Dressler, 'Steel Corpse', pp. 135, 148; Saul, *English Church Monuments*, p. 235; Coulson, *Castles*, pp. 72, 100.

<sup>840</sup> See Chapter 4, pp. 194-6 and Chapter 5, pp. 224-5.

<sup>841</sup> Orme, *Childhood to Chivalry*, pp. 39-40.

<sup>842</sup> See Chapter 5, pp. 227-8.

gentlemen than scholars like Craig Taylor have suggested.<sup>843</sup> Gentlemen did sometimes make use of violence, often as an adjunct to the law, as did Thomas Babthorpe, the Plumptons, and the Gascoignes, but the threat of violence was much more common than its actual use. Edward Powell sees this as a countrywide phenomenon, and there is no reason to think that the Yorkshire gentry were an exception to the rule.<sup>844</sup> Actual violence in response to a personal challenge seems to have been more common. Sir Ralph Eure's aggressive response when an inferior failed to show him due respect, striking out with an angry declaration that he would 'lerne you curtesy and to knowe a gentilman', was the direct result of this challenge to his position.<sup>845</sup> The servants of Sir Ralph Bigod who 'strake, bette, sore wounded & maymed' yeoman Robert Wilson did so on Sir Ralph's instructions in an attack that seems to have been prompted by an insult to the gentleman's dignity. Wilson's assertion that it was without 'eny cause or occasion by hyme geven' tends to support rather than deny the likelihood that this was the case.<sup>846</sup> In an even more extreme case, John Hesilhand, an obscure individual, was killed in an argument over his insulting behaviour towards Thomas Ward, a member of the Ward family of Clifton.<sup>847</sup> Thomas Ward's willing admission of the cause of the quarrel, whilst continuing to assert that he was in the right, indicates that he considered his actions to have been warranted. A willingness to use violence in these cases may be seen as

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<sup>843</sup> Craig Taylor, 'English Writings on Chivalry and Warfare During the Hundred Years War' in Coss and Tyerman (eds.) *Soldiers, Nobles and Gentlemen*, p. 68.

<sup>844</sup> Carpenter, *Locality and Polity*, pp. 47-8; Edward Powell, 'Law and Justice' in Rosemary Horrox (ed.) *Fifteenth-Century Attitudes*, pp. 40-1.

<sup>845</sup> Turton (ed.) *Honor and Forest of Pickering*, pp. 176-7.

<sup>846</sup> Brown (ed.), *Yorkshire Star Chamber*, pp. 13-5.

<sup>847</sup> CPR Hen IV vol.III, p. 261.

representative of the desire of gentlemen to project an image of masculinity. Failure to respond to such personal slights could be seen as unmanly.

In this respect, the desire to appear masculine seems to have come into conflict with the accepted social and cultural norms of the gentry. The use of force was deemed acceptable, even encouragable, behaviour for gentlemen, but only in a particular cause, most specifically warfare in service to a lord. Here, the use of violence may be seen as the ultimate expression of discipline and self control, since it was only through extensive training and the ability to maintain control of his emotions that a man was able to survive on the battlefield. Violence of the unofficial, disorganised and impulsive kind was a different matter. Yorkshire evidence indicates that contemporaries recognised a distinction between licit and illicit violence.<sup>848</sup> Thuggish behaviour represented a lack of self control that was considered ungentlemanly. It also demonstrated a deficiency of education in acceptable social behaviour. The negative impact of unrestrained violence on an individual's status as a gentleman is indicated by one of the many charges levelled against Sir Roger Hastings by Sir Ralph Eure and Sir Richard Cholmley. Accompanied by an excessive numbers of servants, 'more like men of war then men of peas', Sir Roger was accused of riding about the countryside, setting an 'ill example to other'.<sup>849</sup> By implication the gentry were expected to set a good example, which included curbing their more aggressive tendencies. Threats and bullying tactics might be manly, indeed no one suggested that Sir Roger's behaviour was inappropriate for him as a man, but they were clearly not considered to be appropriate behaviour for a

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<sup>848</sup> See Chapter 5, pp. 229-30, 244-7.

<sup>849</sup> Turton (ed.) *Honor and Forest of Pickering*, I, p. 188.

gentleman. Violence may, as Ruth Karras has argued, have played an important part in the construction of masculinity for the aristocracy.<sup>850</sup> But it was not automatically a feature of gentry identity, indeed its misuse could even undermine a man's claims to gentility.

In times of war the ability to fight was a valuable asset for a man seeking service with a great magnate. In times of peace there were other more valuable talents that a gentleman could demonstrate. There can be little doubt that gentlemen were eager to enter into service. As these case studies have demonstrated, they actively sought it; the Plumptons and the Gascoignes with the earls of Northumberland, the Conyers with the earls of Warwick and the Duke of Gloucester, the Babthorpes with the earls of Lancaster, the Nortons the bishops of Durham. Lesser gentlemen sought correspondingly lesser lords, with men like Godfrey Greene quite happy to serve the Plumptons. A relationship of service with a great, or at least a more powerful, man can be considered a feature of gentry identity.<sup>851</sup> This was something that would-be gentlemen both actively sought and were eager to demonstrate.

There were obvious practical advantages to service with the right lord. Several of the families studied within this thesis – the Conyers, the Babthorpes, the Gascoignes, the Nortons – made their fortune through it.<sup>852</sup> Service provided them with wealth, land and, perhaps most importantly, with powerful connections. But

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<sup>850</sup> Karras, *Boys to Men*, p. 21.

<sup>851</sup> See Chapter 2, pp. 96-7.

<sup>852</sup> See Chapter 4, p. 162 and Chapter 5, pp. 217-22, 233-4, 248-50. 260.

perhaps the greatest significance of service was its use in highlighting a gentleman's own status. Service, as a relationship between unequal parties, always meant that one man would need to acknowledge the superiority of another. The general willingness of Yorkshire gentlemen to defer to their superiors, demonstrated in the majority of the Plumpton letters, and implied in any successful relationship formed between gentlemen and noblemen, indicates that this was not a problem.<sup>853</sup> It was not detrimental to an individual's gentility, or apparently to his masculinity, to accept the superiority of a man who was supposed to be superior. By doing so a man demonstrated that he understood the hierarchy and his place in it. He highlighted the fact that whilst, as a gentleman, he occupied a position below some, he was above others. Service to a powerful individual effectively demonstrated that the servant was himself a man of worth. It was in his interests to retain a position of service and to show that he occupied this position of favour. In this, the Yorkshire gentry were characterised by complicit masculinity. It was not vital to be superior to everyone, quite probably because gentlemen, situated high in the hierarchy but not at the top, would always be subject to someone else's authority, be it other more powerful gentlemen, noblemen or the king. What was important was that a man knew how to behave appropriately to his status and the status of those around him. For a gentleman this meant behaving with authority towards inferiors, respect towards men of similar status, and treating those of higher status with a certain level of deference. Sir William Plumpton's failure to recognise the superiority, by acknowledging the decisions, of the earl of Northumberland occasioned shock among his contemporaries. His failure to treat a superior with due respect rendered him less of a

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<sup>853</sup> See Chapter 2, pp. 91-2, 94-6.

gentleman.<sup>854</sup> For many gentlemen, such behaviour was simply unconscionable. In this case the requirements of gentility and masculinity coincided, both requiring the proper recognition of place.

Recognition was important because gentility, and masculinity, was built largely on appearances. In order to be recognised a gentleman had to demonstrate the required characteristics. He had to show that he belonged to a particular place as lord, and demonstrate that he was man of importance in that locality. He had to protect, promote and perpetuate the lineage, thereby strengthening his claims to gentility through aristocratic blood. He should also protect and provide for his dependants, both related and unrelated, but with a clear emphasis on the former and, of these, a distinct preference for the immediate nuclear family, particularly wives and children. He had to present himself as part of the class of ‘men who fought’, even if his own experience of fighting was limited. He had to be prepared to defend his honour and his possessions. Finally, he had to show that he understood and recognised a hierarchy that placed him near, but not at, the top. Status and masculinity for gentlemen were thus essentially performative in nature. A gentleman was considered a gentleman because he behaved like one. He knew what was expected of him and he did it. More importantly, he was *seen* to do it.

This study has focused on the knightly class rather than the lower ranks of gentle society; the Constables, Savilles, Conyers and Gascoignes were close to magnates in terms of wealth and influence and one, the Conyers, would even be elevated into the peerage at the beginning of the next century. Within this sub-group,

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<sup>854</sup> See Chapter 2, pp. 97-8.



heads of the family are far better represented than others. This leaves some obvious avenues for future study. We might ask, for example, whether those who were not members of the upper gentry shared the same ideas of what made a man a gentleman. Equally, we might ask the same questions about men who were not the heads of families. The county-specific focus of this study suggests further avenues for enquiry. As has become apparent from the case studies presented here, Yorkshire gentlemen were conscious of themselves as belonging to the north, if not to Yorkshire specifically, and this may have shaped their concept of what it meant to be a man. Sir Richard Conyers built a house that, by its style, declared his membership of the North Riding elite, the Redmans of Kearby favoured northern saints, with several that were specific to Yorkshire.<sup>855</sup> Almost all of those examined within these case studies operated within networks that were particular to their own region, something that is particularly evident for the Constables and their social network that was almost exclusive to Holderness.<sup>856</sup> Heavily involved in the Wars of the Roses and under constant fear, if not actual danger, of invasion from Scotland, the martial ability may have acquired more significance to Yorkshire gentry identity than it did in counties that saw few battles and faced little threat of invasion. The gentlemen of midland counties like Leicestershire, Nottinghamshire and Northamptonshire may well have accorded less importance to the fighting aspect of gentry identity because of their location. Further differences might be found in the importance of locality to devotional interests, or the approach towards visual culture. England, as Derek Keene has pointed out, was a country of regional identities.<sup>857</sup> According to Keith

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<sup>855</sup> See Chapter 4, pp. 183-5, 208-10.

<sup>856</sup> See Chapter 1, pp. 69-71.

<sup>857</sup> Keene, 'National and Regional Identities', p. 50.

Dockray, gentlemen of the north had more in common with each other than with men of the south, but the accuracy of such claims remains to be tested.<sup>858</sup> Only individual examination of other regions will show whether the Yorkshire gentry's understanding of what it meant to be a gentleman was the same as that of gentlemen elsewhere in the country.

This thesis began by asking if it was possible to know a gentleman in fifteenth-century Yorkshire. The evidence suggests that it was. The experiences of gentlemen might be disparate, dependant on factors of relative wealth, influence, position within the family and so on, but those studied here all appear to have shared common cultural values. The knights, esquires and gentlemen within these case studies shared an understanding of what was expected of them in terms of the behaviour, attitudes and accomplishments without which they would not qualify as 'proper' gentlemen. Their identity was largely performative in nature. A gentleman had to be able to demonstrate a wide variety of characteristics, but all he had to do was demonstrate them. It did not really matter if they had been recently or entirely fabricated as long as they could be produced. Appearances were what mattered and if something was missing from the 'ideal' package – military prowess, lineage, a long-established seat – it could be created. Perhaps the most striking feature of gentry identity is its adaptability. Scholars working in fields as diverse as social history, art and architecture, have noted this point; aristocratic identity was a public construction and as such it needed to be seen.<sup>859</sup> The same, it seems, was true of gentry identity. All a man needed to do in order to be accounted a gentleman was to be recognised as

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<sup>858</sup> Dockray, 'Richard III and the Yorkshire Gentry', p. 48.

<sup>859</sup> Kaminsky, 'Estate, Nobility and the Exhibition of Estate', pp. 698, 703; Marks, *Image and Devotion*, p. 1; Cooper, 'Gentry House', p. 120.

such. For this same reason, however, recognition was crucial. If people failed to acknowledge the privileged position of gentry males their privilege and their position disappeared. It was this concern which lay behind the anger of Sir Ralph Eure, whose outburst began this thesis. Not only was it possible to know a gentleman in fifteenth-century Yorkshire, but it was imperative for that gentleman that he should be known.

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