

NEW LIGHT ON WILLIAM PYKENHAM?

by COLIN RICHMOND

I WAS AT Hadleigh recently for the first time in thirty years. On entering the church and seeing the table tomb immediately to the north of the altar (Fig. 112) I exclaimed: it is exactly the same as John Hopton's at Blythburgh (Fig. 113). In fact it is not exactly the same, but it is very similar. It is, for one thing, in the same place, and, for another, it is of the same material: Purbeck marble. The dimensions are different. John Hopton's tomb is 88in long and 39in wide; the tomb at Hadleigh is 60in long and 36in wide; the Hadleigh tomb is 38in from sill to ceiling; Hopton's tomb is fully a foot deeper. The brasses that once were attached to the tombs are also different. At Blythburgh they were on the table itself and the indents show that they were of a man between two women: John Hopton and his two wives. At Hadleigh the brasses were on the sides of the tomb between sill and ceiling. At the east end was an oblong plaque probably with an inscription; at the west end there are four indents: above is another oblong with on either side of it two kneeling figures, while below is another figure with an inscription plate beneath and a swirling label issuing from the figure's mouth. The figure looks as if it was of a cleric. Perhaps the figures above were his parents. If the cleric was William Pykenham, we shall encounter them later.

I cannot find any suggestion that the tomb is that of William Pykenham, rector of Hadleigh for twenty-seven years or more. William was the builder of what Pevsner calls a 'palace' to the west of the church. Only its 'splendid' brick gatehouse survives: it is one of the 15th-century wonders of Suffolk¹ and is a marked contrast to the unpretentious gateway of the house he built as Archdeacon of Suffolk in Northgate Street, Ipswich, which nonetheless is, according to Pevsner, 'remarkable': for a 15th-century provincial town house it most certainly is.

William was also a munificent benefactor of the town of Hadleigh, founding twelve almshouses for twenty-four men and women and possibly doing other good works there: one thinks of bishop Robert Beckington at Wells, or dean James Denton at Lichfield. There is nothing incongruous about mentioning William Pykenham in the same breath as that of a bishop: had Richard III won the battle of Bosworth he would have been one.²

Pevsner does not call the tomb in Hadleigh church a tomb; he calls it an Easter Sepulchre. It was undoubtedly used as such, the brasses being relegated to the end walls in order that the table itself might be left unadorned by worldly imagery. Those very same brasses, nevertheless, indicate that it was also a tomb. We cannot be absolutely certain that it is William Pykenham's tomb, because in his will he does not state his place of burial: the circumstantial evidence, however, undeniably demonstrates that it was. First, William's will of 6 April 1497:³ in it he declares that should he die out of the realm he was to be buried where he died; if he were to die within the realm he should be buried where he died also. He was insistent: his body was not to be moved. The only question, therefore, is where did he die? I think he died at Hadleigh, for the first witness to the will was John Ashwell, parochial chaplain of the parish church of Hadleigh. It is hardly conclusive evidence, yet in conjunction with the circumstantial evidence that links the tomb at Hadleigh with that of John Hopton at Blythburgh it is more than merely suggestive.⁴

What the close similarity of the two tombs indicates is a connection, a close connection, between Hopton and Pykenham. That is what there was. I have set out their relations in *John Hopton* (Richmond 1981). The connection undoubtedly was made through John Hopton's second wife, Thomasine Barrington. The Barringtons were from Rayleigh, Essex. Rayleigh was William's first living. He was rector there from 1462 until 1469 or 1470; he was active on John Hopton's behalf in 1465 or 1466. Thomasine and John had

been married in 1457, while William was still a fellow of All Souls, Oxford. Thomasine and William Pykenham were related, though how closely I have not yet been able to discover. Could Thomasine's mother Eleanor have been the link through the man Thomasine mentions in her will, 'my Graundfader Totham [Tottenham]'?

John Hopton died in 1478; William died in April 1497; Thomasine drew up her will in November 1497, and as it was proved in the following February, she died either at the end of 1497 or the beginning of 1498. There would have been plenty of time for the construction of both tombs in those twenty years, with Thomasine as the mistress-mind behind that construction. That, however, will not do as an explanation, given the indifference of William Pykenham with regard to his place of burial: he would hardly have had built for himself such an unusual tomb when he was so insistent that his body had to be interred where, so to speak, it fell. Unless, that is, the 'tomb' was primarily intended as a combination of memorial and Easter Sepulchre, in which case it did not have to have his

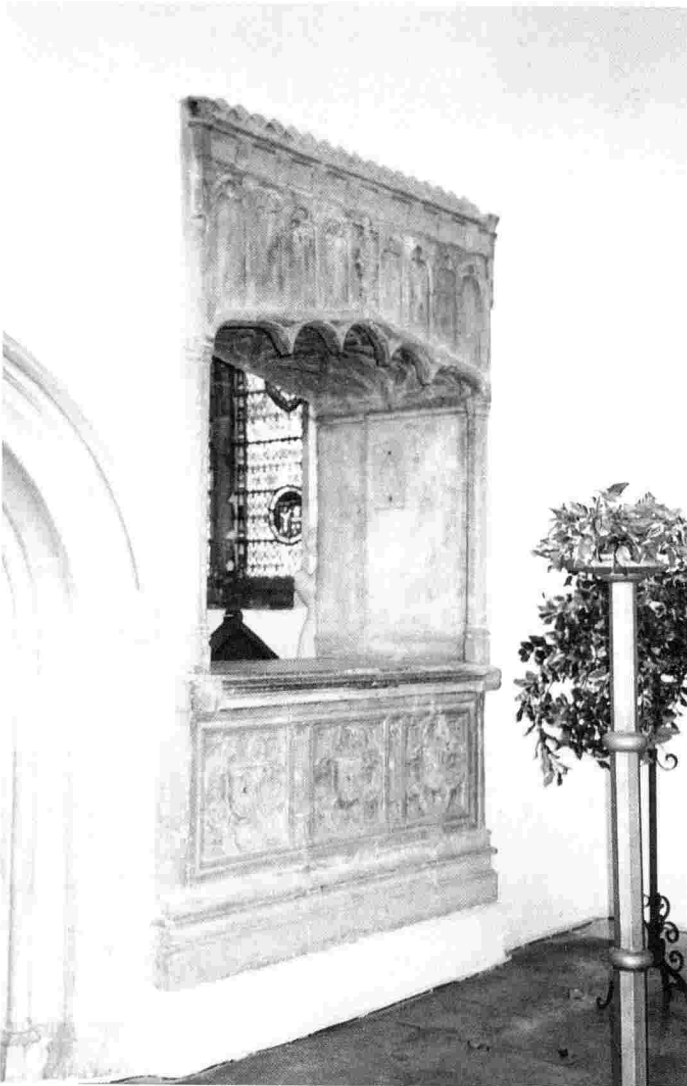


FIG. 112 – The table tomb in Hadleigh church, immediately north of the altar, probably that of William Pykenham (photo: John Blatchly).

body interred in it; that it probably then did, has made me write of it above as a tomb, rather than as a 'tomb'. This hypothesis would also fit with William's desire for what in modern terms would be described as a quiet funeral (he urged that no fuss was to be made), though immediately after his burial a thousand masses were to be said by a thousand priests for his soul and for the souls of his parents.

There is a second hypothesis, which although less satisfying, needs nonetheless to be mentioned. There were seven or eight months between the deaths of William and Thomasine, presumably time enough for her to have had made a tomb, or to have ordered a tomb to be made, for him where he had died, a tomb modelled on that of her former husband at Blythburgh. Whatever the reader decides, the writer is convinced that the prominent position of the tomb, memorial, and Easter Sepulchre at Hadleigh has to be associated with a person of the eminence of Dr William Pykenham.

Who, however, *was* William Pykenham? He was born William Pye at Tottenham,



FIG. 113 – John Hopton's tomb in Blythburgh church.

Middlesex. No doubt at the outset of his dazzling career he felt it better to extend the humble Pye to the more genteel Pykenham. After all, if he could successfully put behind him imprisonment for assault by the Chancellor of Oxford, he was entirely capable of shedding an embarrassing surname. His father was John Pye, a customary tenant of the manor of Tottenham. John, like Clement Paston, had prospered: he was in 1459 among the half-dozen tenants who had the biggest holdings, in his case just less than a hundred acres, and was, therefore, one of those 'protocapitalists' the Black Death had given room and opportunity to in late Medieval England.⁵

One gets from William Pykenham to John Pye in the following fashion. In his will William made a bequest of £10 and two long gowns to Thomasine Risley, his sister, '*sorori mee*'. Thomasine was the wife of Sir John Risley, one of the foremost counsellors and confidants of Henry VII, and a generous benefactor of Jesus College, Cambridge. Sir John Risley died in 1511 or 1512.⁶ Thomasine was the only daughter and sole heir of Richard Turnant of Tottenham, who had inherited Tottenham from his mother, Joan Gedney, widow of John Gedney, the wealthy alderman and draper of London. John Gedney had purchased and consolidated the four manors of Tottenham between 1427 and his death in 1449. The estate he had created at Tottenham was a valuable one; it had been made so by the cattle-grazing its tenant farmers were going in for, that grazing being a profitable business because of the proximity of the London market. Tottenham by the time John Gedney died was a thriving place, with shops, inns, and brothels along its High Street. It was also a famous place, giving its name to a robust anti-chivalrous poem, 'The Turnament of Totenham'. Thomasine Turnant was, therefore, a woman worth marrying: her dowry when she was married to her first husband had been 800 marks in cash alone. That husband had been Richard Charlton, son and heir of a neighbouring landowner, the influential Sir Thomas Charlton of Edmonton. Sir Thomas died in 1465; Richard was killed fighting for Richard III at Bosworth in 1485. By then Thomasine had long been divorced from him, and since 1474 or before had been married to John Risley, who fought at Bosworth for Henry Tudor. Richard Turnant died in 1486, when Thomasine inherited Tottenham: her father left her £200 in cash, items of plate to the value of £80, and £60 of debt owing to him.⁷ She had no children by either husband and died in 1506.

An excursion into Middlesex history has been necessary to show the exceptional context from which an exceptional boy emerged in the late 1440s to go to Cambridge and then in the 1450s to Oxford. When did he cease to be called William Pye? Perhaps it was at the moment he became Dr William Pykenham in the early 1460s?

Richard Turnant had had two wives. The first had been Elizabeth, the daughter of John Stockton, mercer and alderman of London, by whom he had had Thomasine; the second had been Margaret, widow of John Pye, as we have seen, one of his own tenants albeit one of the most substantial among them. It is from Richard's will of 1486 that we learn of Margaret, for in it he calls her his 'congrue' and twice identifies her as the widow of John Pye, as if their marriage was unusual. It almost certainly was. Richard was far above Margaret socially and in terms of wealth, for all John Pye's *nouveau capitalisme*, they were hundreds, probably thousands, of pounds apart. Richard had been the fortunate son of a remarkable mother. Joan Gedney has been the subject of a recent biography (Erler 1994, 171–76). Originally perhaps from Colchester, she had in the course of her dramatic life four husbands, the last two of them mayors of London. It is Joan's second husband who principally concerns us. He was Richard Turnaunt, a wealthy clothier of Winchester, who left her a widow for the second time in 1433. Our Richard Turnant was their only son (Roskill *et al.* 1992, iv, 675–76). Joan subsequently married Robert Large, mercer and mayor of London, and after his death in 1441, despite having entered into a vow to take the veil, she married his friend and colleague John Gedney.⁸ Thus, a Turnant of Winchester became a Turnant of Tottenham.

It may be coincidental, but it is worth noting that Richard Turnant of Tottenham, like William Pykenham, did not desire a particular place of burial: he left it to his daughter Thomasine and her husband Sir John Risley to decide where he was to be buried.

The puzzle of Thomasine Risley, 'sister' of William Pykenham, has been solved. As the son of John and Margaret Pye, William, when his mother married Richard Turnant, became the stepbrother of Richard's daughter Thomasine, who by then had been married for some considerable time to Sir John Risley. And she became his stepsister. Thus they were stepsiblings. It was, if we are right in assuming that the marriage of Richard Turnant and Margaret Pye took place not long before 1486, an adult relationship, not a childhood one. It may have been all the stronger for that. And we may need to add the Risleys to Bourghchiers and Barringtons as William's patrons: he became archdeacon of Suffolk in 1472; Sir John Risley and Thomasine Turnant were married before 1474.

How the Barringtons were related to the Turnants remains to be explored, and the identity of Thomasine Barrington's grandfather Tottenham will also require further detective work. Meanwhile, it would seem that we have found out who William Pykenham was, where the handsome memorial to himself and to his parents is, and how and why it looks like the tomb of John Hopton in Blythburgh church. Had Henry Tudor lost at Bosworth and William Pykenham, a peasant lad from Tottenham, become a bishop his success story might have resonated down the years in Ipswich as that of Richard Whittington's has in London.

NOTES

- 1 For an illustration of the Hadleigh gatehouse, see McCann 2001, 25, Fig. 1.
- 2 I have discussed William Pykenham in Richmond 1981, 214–19.
- 3 P.R.O., Probate 11/11, ff. 73v.–74. It was proved at Lambeth on 8 May 1497.
- 4 Pigot (1860, 87, 274) states that the sources for Pykenham's place of burial conflict, some claiming Hadleigh, others Stoke by Clare. Pykenham was Dean of Stoke College, and if he died while on a visit there, a burial at Stoke would have been in accordance with the terms of his will.
- 5 Moss and Murray 1974, 286. See also the important paper by Douglas Moss (1980).
- 6 His will (P.R.O., P.C.C. Probate 11/17, ff. 60v.–61) is dated 15 Sept. 1511 and was proved on 14 May 1512: see the somewhat underdeveloped essay by Roger Virgoe (1982).
- 7 Richard Turnant's will and testament (P.R.O., P.C.C., Probate 11/7, ff. 193–193v.) are dated respectively 24 and 25 Jul. 1486; they were proved on 4 Aug. 1486; administration was given to Margaret, his widow and principal executor.
- 8 Thrupp 1962, 345, 352; Roskell *et al.* 1992, III, 170–73. I am grateful to Linda Clark at the History of Parliament for sending me a typescript copy of the biography of Robert Large, which will appear in the forthcoming 15th-century volume of the *History*. She has also been (as ever) helpful about Richard Turnant of Winchester and John Gedney of Tottenham. I also owe thanks to Anne Sutton and Jessica Freeman for obligingly answering my ignorant enquiries about London matters. I cannot refrain, however, from mentioning B.L. Add. Ch. 40,564, if only because I looked at it myself. It is John Gedney's delivery of seisin of the four Tottenham manors to Joan Large, widow, and a group of distinguished feoffees; it is dated 10 Dec. 1443 and was a prelude to their marriage in 1444. Joan died in 1462, when Richard Turnant, her son and heir, was said to be aged thirty-four (Lysons 1795, III 525, citing Joan's inquisition post mortem), Richard Turnant's first wife Elizabeth Stockton was buried in Tottenham parish church; her tomb survived in Weever's day; it was dated 1457 (*ibid.*, 535). John Gedney, it might be noted for readers of the *Proceedings*, had been twice married before he married the thrice-married Joan, and his second wife had been Elizabeth, daughter of William Clopton (d. 1446) of Long Melford, Suffolk, and widow of Robert Cavendish (d. 1439), also of Suffolk. Consequently, as one of those who married into the Clopton family, John Gedney featured in the glass of Long Melford parish church; my thanks to Linda Clark for this information.

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Abbreviations

- B.L. British Library.
- C.P.R. *Calendars of Patent Rolls*.
- P.C.C. Prerogative Court of Canterbury.
- P.R.O. Public Record Office.