

# REPRESENTATIONS OF PIETY AND DYNASTY: LATE-MEDIEVAL STAINED GLASS AND SEPULCHRAL MONUMENTS AT NORBURY, DERBYSHIRE<sup>1</sup>

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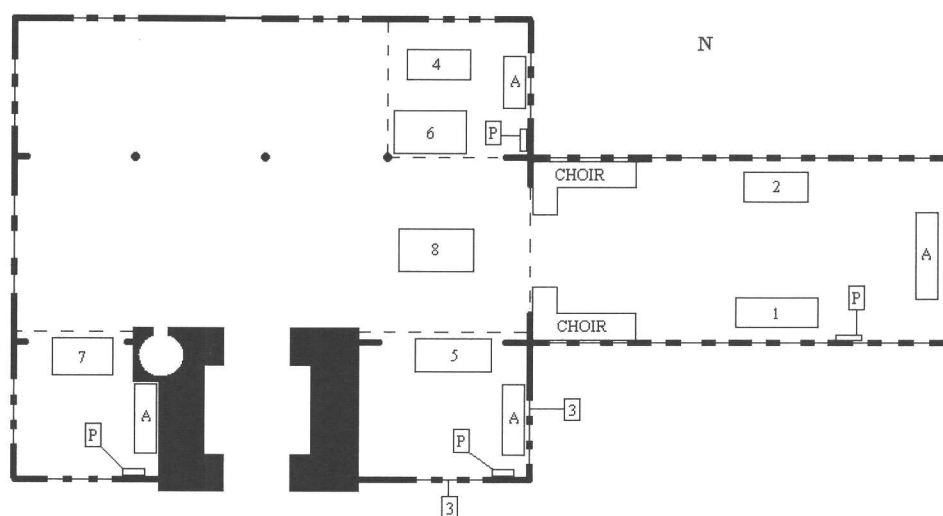
Parish churches were the focal point of the religious life of local communities. They were also probably the grandest buildings that most villagers ever entered, and they housed the only collections of fine vestments, gilded vessels, ornate sculpture, and jewel-coloured glass of which common layfolk had regular visual experience. Few vestments and vessels were kept in the completely accessible congregational spaces of porches and naves, but stained glass and sculpture did occupy these spaces. Furthermore, the screens which separated richly furnished liturgical spaces such as chancels and semi-private chantry chapels were normally parclose screens, solid only to waist-height, so that objects installed in these spaces remained effectively within the public sphere.<sup>2</sup> The elite men and women who bequeathed luxurious fittings to parish churches were well-aware of the semi-public nature of their patronage. It is not by accident that inscriptions in glass and on stone record the rebuilding of churches by particular families or asserted lordship over estates or profitable dynastic connections; these proclamations were intended to be seen by parishioners and followed prescribed formulae which common men and women were frequently able to interpret.<sup>3</sup> Benefactors expected that their patronage might encourage intercessory prayers, crucial to the process of progressing towards heaven. They also sought opportunities to bolster their own and their successors' social and economic position within a locality.

The church of St Mary and St Barlok at Norbury retains an unusually large amount of its medieval decoration, including stained glass, a section of choir stalls, and a large amount of sculpted and incised stonework, much of which reflects the interests of the Fitzherberts, the lords of Norbury throughout the late-medieval period.<sup>4</sup> This article focuses on the monuments and stained glass commissioned by three consecutive generations of Fitzherbert men — Nicholas (d. 1473), his son Ralph (d. 1483), and Ralph's eldest son, John (d. 1531). These fittings are considered alongside the men's wills, and the will of Ralph's wife, Elizabeth (d. 1491), to give an account of the way the family used the public sphere of the parish church to advertise themselves to the locality. The fabric of the church and some of its decoration have been previously described by the historian J.C. Cox and by the Rev. L.J. Bowyer, a former rector of Norbury church.<sup>5</sup> However, neither author examined the glass or monuments relating to the Fitzherberts in an attempt to characterise the patterns of patronage practised by the family. Moreover, the Rev. Bowyer incorrectly attributed one of the incised alabaster slabs at Norbury, an attribution which is not only popularly accepted at Norbury but which has been propagated by subsequent academic readings of the space.<sup>6</sup> An appendix to this article seeks to correct this misattribution.

The most ancient elements of decoration surviving in Norbury church are a font dating from before the mid-thirteenth century and an early fourteenth-century freestone effigy of a knight in chain mail commemorating Sir Henry Fitzherbert (d. aft. 1310), which currently rests under the arch separating the southeast chapel from the nave.<sup>7</sup> Both objects are much older than the space they occupy; the Yorkist partisans Nicholas, Ralph, and John built or

substantially renovated the present nave and chapels between the mid fifteenth and the early sixteenth centuries: Nicholas rebuilt the nave and added the southeast chapel; he or his son Ralph built the north aisle; and John constructed the southwest chapel (Fig. 1).<sup>8</sup> These late-medieval patrons and some of their wives are commemorated by surviving sepulchral monuments and glass portraits (Fig. 2).<sup>9</sup> The earliest of these, an incised alabaster slab to Alice Bothe, first wife of Nicholas, lies in the chancel. This monument, dating from 1460s, was installed during Nicholas's rebuilding campaign, perhaps accounting for its placement in the fourteenth-century chancel.<sup>10</sup> A beautiful late fifteenth-century alabaster tomb featuring an effigy of Nicholas and another of the same date including effigies of his son Ralph and daughter-in-law Elizabeth were originally located under the arches separating the nave from the southeast chapel (Nicholas) and the north aisle (Ralph and Elizabeth) before being moved to the chancel in the mid-nineteenth century (Fig. 3).<sup>11</sup> An unusual incised slab also dedicated to Elizabeth was likewise moved from the north aisle to the chancel at this same time or during a subsequent renovation, when the unadorned alabaster tomb chest topped with a plain marble slab featuring a brass inscription plate to John was moved from the middle of the southwest chapel to its present position under the arch separating this chapel from the nave.

The Fitzherberts' commemorative pattern is unusual. Monuments to each generation of the family appear to have originally occupied different chapels, rather than the more common pattern of forming a cohesive dynastic mausoleum by burying multiple members of the family within a confined visual space.<sup>12</sup> At Norbury, burial location seems to have been determined by earlier patronage by those commemorated, with individuals interred inside spaces or



A. Altar

P. Piscina

1. Effigy to Sir Henry

2. Incised slab to Alice (Bothe)

3. Windows installed by Nicholas

4. Incised slab to Elizabeth (Marshall)

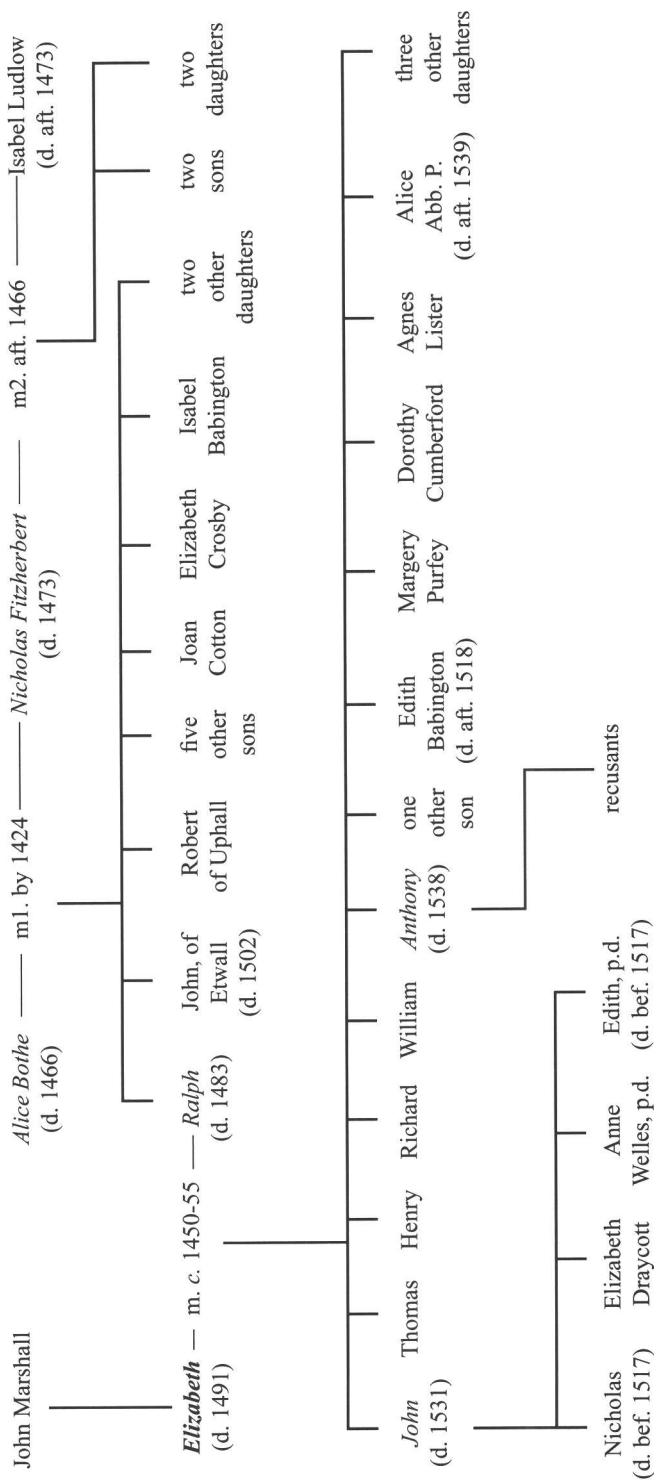
5. Alabaster effigy to Nicholas

6. Alabaster effigy to Ralph and Elizabeth

7. Alabaster tomb chest to John

8. Brass effigies of Sir Anthony and Maud

Fig. 1: Reconstruction of possible layout of Norbury church, c. 1540 (not to scale)



Key: *italics* indicate commemoration on a sepulchral monument at Norbury church; **bold italics** indicate commemoration on two sepulchral monuments at Norbury; m = married; Abb. P= Abbess of Polesworth; p.d. = paternity denied by John Fitzherbert

Fig. 2: Pedigree of Fitzherbert of Norbury<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Possible birth order of children (grouped by gender) taken from Fitzherbert wills. Additional information from Cox, *Churches of Derbyshire*, III, pp. 229-47; Burton, *Description of Leicester Shire*, p. 258.



Fig. 3: Alabaster effigies of Nicholas (d. 1473), background, and Ralph (d. 1483) and Elizabeth Fitzherbert, foreground. Chancel, St Mary and St Barlok, Norbury. *Photo author's own.*

adjacent to features they commissioned or built themselves. Nicholas was buried in the southeast chapel, which he constructed sometime in the third quarter of the fifteenth century. He probably also established the chapel's altar — whose presence is attested by the surviving piscina in the south wall — with the expectation that masses would be said at it for the benefit of his soul. Two surviving windows depict Nicholas, his wives, and children, although the Latin inscriptions which probably recorded his patronage are nearly completely effaced. In the east window, Nicholas and his first wife Alice Bothe appear with their eight sons and five daughters, kneeling on either side of an impaled heraldic shield bearing the arms of Fitzherbert and Bothe. Above these groups are three panels depicting female saints set into architecturally framed niches: Winefride, Anne and the Virgin, and a fourth figure who holds a book and a large bunch of keys (Fig. 4).<sup>13</sup> The south window follows the same format, showing Nicholas, his second wife Isabel Ludlow, and their two sons and two daughters kneeling on either side of the Fitzherbert arms, now impaling a blank shield. Above the kneeling Fitzherberts three male saints — John the Baptist, Barlok, and Anthony the Great — occupy similar niches to their female counterparts (Fig. 5). Windows of this type were expensive features, and their installation at Norbury was undoubtedly designed to commemorate Nicholas's rebuilding works.<sup>14</sup> An elaborate decorative programme in this chapel, therefore, already celebrated Nicholas's patronage during his own life. This programme was further enhanced in the last decade of the fifteenth century, when Nicholas's grandson John installed the alabaster effigy and tomb chest commemorating Nicholas beneath the arch separating the chapel from the nave, close to the position currently occupied by the effigy of Sir Henry Fitzherbert.<sup>15</sup>



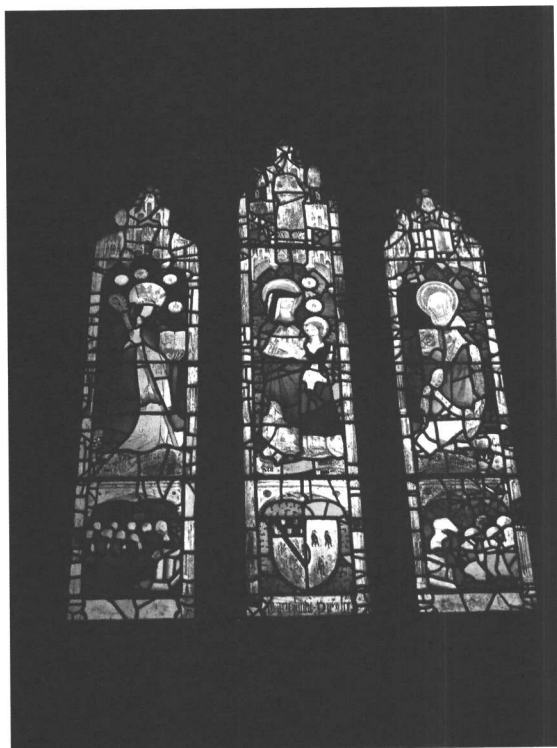


Fig. 4: East window of southeast chapel,  
third quarter of fifteenth century,  
St Mary and St Barlok, Norbury.  
*Photo author's own.*

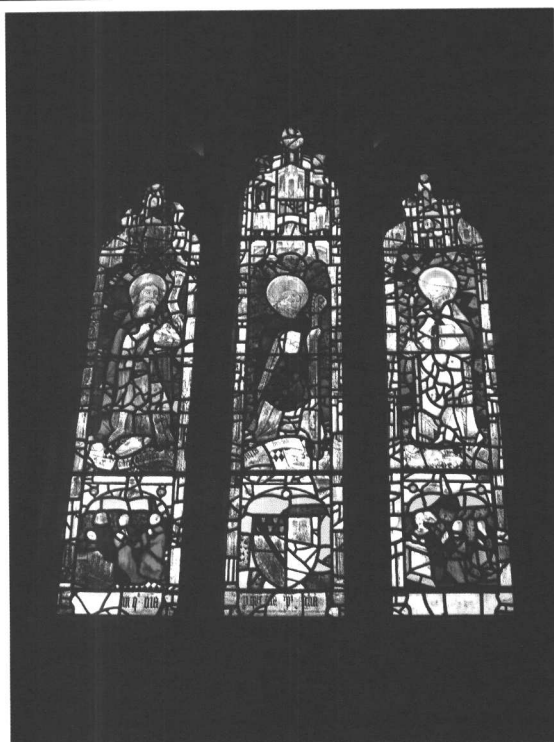


Fig. 5: South window of southeast chapel,  
third quarter of fifteenth century,  
St Mary and St Barlok, Norbury.  
*Photo author's own.*

A similar scheme including glass donor portraits and sepulchral monuments may have commemorated Nicholas's son, Ralph, and his wife Elizabeth in the north aisle. No windows survive intact in the aisle, but the inscription surrounding an incised alabaster slab to Elizabeth which was formerly located in the north aisle included the phrase 'Loke as the scrippture abov maketh mencion / about the tow [?] Founder this ston... / The same Elys—th...'.<sup>16</sup> Glazed donor portraits like those in the southeast chapel frequently included inscriptions recording patronage, and the 'scripture' alluded to on Elizabeth's monument may have been part of a glazing programme in the east or easternmost north windows of the north aisle (i.e., 'above' the incised slab dedicated to her).<sup>17</sup> This window may have mirrored those in the southeast chapel exactly: viewed from outside the church, the windows conform to the shape and size of their counterparts in the southeast chapel. Elizabeth's will of 1490, which requests her burial 'before the image of St Nicholas beside the body of Ralph Fitzherbert, late my husband', may even give a clue to the saint shown in the window's central panel.<sup>18</sup> The organ which currently occupies nearly the whole east end of the north aisle precludes a detailed examination of the interior fabric of this part of the church, but a piscina remains visible at the extreme south end of the aisle's east wall, confirming the presence of an altar alongside that wall. Elizabeth left £10 (over twice the amount she bequeathed to all other religious foundations) along with rents from the village of Calton, some five miles distant, 'to the finding of a priest to pray for the soul of Ralph Fitzherbert, late my husband, and for my soul', and she probably had in mind a priest performing masses for her and her husband's souls at the altar in the north aisle.<sup>19</sup> By locating their burial and commemorative programme in the north aisle, Elizabeth and Ralph established a second sphere in which their own patronage was visually expressed, although the small size of the southeast chapel where Nicholas was interred may have precluded additional burials and forced the burials of Ralph and Elizabeth elsewhere in the church. This second space appears designed to echo the southeast chapel, a point not lost on Ralph and Elizabeth's eldest son John, who commissioned the twin alabaster tombs to his parents and grandfather and placed these opposite one another, under the arches separating the nave from their respective burial chapels.<sup>20</sup>

Whether Ralph and Elizabeth were prompted to establish a personalised, rather than the more common dynastic, commemorative space by constraints of space in the southeast chapel or by another motive, their son John appears to have recognised benefits in this arrangement because he followed the example of his parents in creating his own chapel immediately to the west of the tower. This space was completed before 1517 when John's will requested burial under the arch separating it from the church's nave, imitating the burial arrangements in both earlier chapels.<sup>21</sup> The south wall of John's chapel features a slightly elongated version of the now-familiar three-light window present in the other chapels, and an identical window was removed from the west wall in the nineteenth century, so that the original arrangement of the space was almost a mirror-image of the southeast chapel built by his grandfather Nicholas.<sup>22</sup> Both windows may originally have included donor portraits as well as depictions of saints, perhaps including some of the figures currently preserved in the chancel's east window.<sup>23</sup> Walled off and used as a vestry since the nineteenth century, the decorative programme of the chapel is now obscured. However, a plan drawn by the Rev. Bowyer, who had full access to the vestry, shows a piscina near the southeast corner of the chapel, indicating the presence of the altar 'beneath the steeple', for which John requested his executors purchase a reredos in a codicil of his will.<sup>24</sup> Between writing his will in 1517 and his death, John installed a plain alabaster tomb chest topped by a marble slab with a small Coventry 3 style non-effigial

brass plate with a standard Latin inscription in three lines.<sup>25</sup> The inscription describes John as 'sometime lord of this manor' and gives the date of his death (completed later in a slightly different hand) before requesting God's mercy on his soul.

The tomb chest currently rests under the arch dividing the chapel from the nave — the location in which John requested burial — but it was moved to this position in the nineteenth century. Before this, the tomb was located in the centre of the chapel.<sup>26</sup> John may have changed his mind about his burial place between 1517 and his death, opting for burial and commemoration in the centre of the chapel rather than at its periphery. Equally, however, it is possible that the monument was originally located under the arch in order to allow space for masses to be said at the altar in the (unusually small) chapel, and only moved to the centre following the removal of the altar at the Reformation. Not counting the niche at the east end of the space, which would have been occupied by the altar, the chapel only measures approximately eleven feet by ten feet, an area which the nearly six foot by four foot tomb chest would have seriously encumbered. The original plan to place the monument under the arch separating the chapel from the nave would also have appealed to John because this arrangement more exactly replicated his own placement of monuments in the chapels dedicated to his parents and grandfather, a desire which his creation of the mirror-image chapel clearly indicates. While considerations of size may have initiated the individualised nature of Norbury commemoration — the unusually small scale of the southeast chapel accounting for Ralph and Elizabeth's need to seek out a new commemorative space from their predecessors — John appears to have been driven by a separate motive since the large north aisle would have afforded ample space for the installation of additional monuments alongside those to his parents. The monuments themselves provide additional evidence which can be used to understand John's concerns and intent.

The two alabaster incised effigial slabs to Alice Bothe and Elizabeth Marshall are earlier and much less-costly memorials than the tombs commemorating their respective husbands Nicholas and Ralph.<sup>27</sup> That commemorating Alice (d. 1466) is worn and cracked, but shows the figure of a woman in a beaded or jewelled horned headdress, wearing a houppelande with hanging sleeves reaching almost to the floor, its neckline open at the front to reveal a necklace of beads or pearls (Fig. 6). Her head rests on diagonally placed pillows and she is shown in an attitude of prayer. Surrounding the figure is an extremely fragmentary English inscription describing Alice as the daughter of Henry Bothe and the fruitful wife of Nicholas Fitzherbert 'lord and patrone of y<sup>s</sup> place'.<sup>28</sup> The monument to Alice is a standard effigial composition, without any unusual features or special emphasis, placing it in stark contrast to that which commemorated her daughter-in-law. This lady, Elizabeth (d. 1491) is commemorated twice at Norbury. The first monument is a striking incised slab depicting her figure completely enveloped in a shroud with four coats-of-arms at the corners and a rhyming English inscription surrounding the central figure (Fig. 7).<sup>29</sup> Much has been written about the development of shroud and cadaver effigies in later medieval England, especially with regard to the genre as an expression of piety.<sup>30</sup> Most scholars agree that memorials of this type particularly sought the intercessory prayers of laypersons by evoking pity as well as reiterating the transitory nature of all the viewer's own life. The direct nature of the appeal to parishioners and other layfolk is emphasized by the choice of English for the inscription.<sup>31</sup> Pamela King has written about a possible connection between individuals commemorated by shroud and cadaver effigies and support for the Lancastrian cause in the Wars of the Roses, suggesting a political, rather than spiritual, motive in their commissioning.<sup>32</sup> The Norbury slab, which commemorates a member



Fig. 6: Incised alabaster slab of Alice Fitzherbert (d. 1466). Chancel, St Mary and St Barlok, Norbury.  
*Photo author's own.*

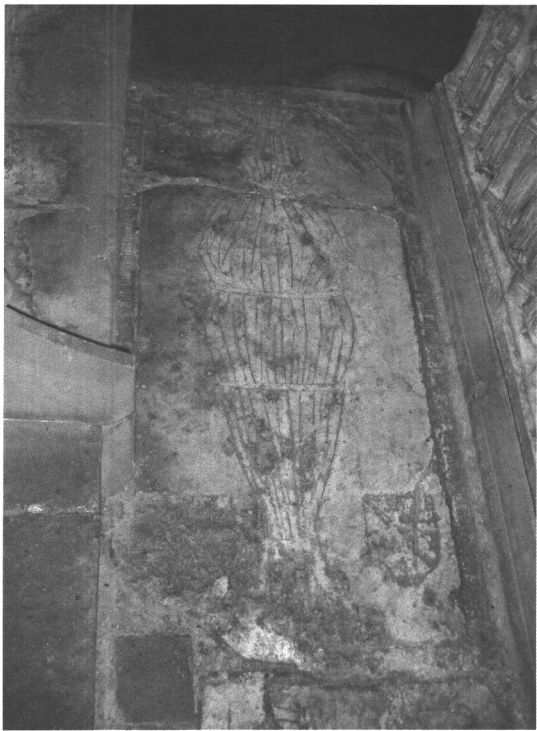


Fig. 7: Incised alabaster slab of Elizabeth Fitzherbert (d. 1491). Chancel, St Mary and St Barlok, Norbury.  
*Photo author's own.*

of a staunchly Yorkist family, may raise doubts about this thesis — as, indeed, does the brass including a cadaver to Sir Marmaduke Constable (d. 1518), an important member of Richard III's affinity, at Flamborough.<sup>33</sup> However, the presence of heraldic shields surrounding the figure confirms that social considerations could and did affect the final decorative programme of shroud memorials. This monument is concerned not only with the piety and spiritual well-being of the woman it commemorates, but also with perpetuating the memory of the dynastic connection made through her marriage; in other words, despite the special piety associated with shroud memorials, the slab nevertheless remains conventional in its blend of religious and social iconography.<sup>34</sup>

Nor should this surprise us, since the person who commissioned this monument is likely to have been Elizabeth's son and heir, John, who acted as one of her executors alongside his brother Thomas, brother-in-law Thomas Babington, and Robert Jakes, a major landholder in Sibson, Leics., and probably a relative of Elizabeth.<sup>35</sup> He also probably commissioned the second monument to his mother: the sculpted alabaster tomb on which she is shown elaborately costumed alongside her husband Ralph. However, the latter monument and its twin commemorating Nicholas nevertheless include many representations of religious sentiment alongside more prosaic dynastic imagery. The rhyming English inscriptions which formerly accompanied both sculpted alabaster tombs were explicit in recording the church patronage of Nicholas and Ralph; the phrasing of Nicholas's inscription — 'This church he made of his own expence / In the joy of Heaven be his recompence' — unambiguously connected patronage to intercession and the attainment of heaven. The monument to Ralph included an allusion to the *memento mori* imagery popular in the fifteenth century:

The dart of death that no man may flee  
Nay the common lawe of mortallitie  
Hath demaunded to be buried here  
The body of Rafe Fitzherbert, Squiere...<sup>36</sup>

Many of these features were undoubtedly chosen to appeal to the parishioners who were their principal audience; the original position of the monuments ensured that layfolk were able to approach closely. John probably hoped that Norbury parishioners might offer intercessory prayers on behalf of the souls of his parents and grandparents; he may also have recognised benefits in recording the tradition of his family's patronage in such a permanent and public manner.<sup>37</sup> A similar mixture of motivation is apparent on the sculpted figures themselves. Elizabeth's sculpted effigy wears an elaborate collar from which dangles a medallion showing the Blessed Virgin crowned and holding the Christ Child, but this jewel does not appear in her will and probably does not represent a real piece of jewellery;<sup>38</sup> instead, the 'pendant' cleverly demonstrates Elizabeth's devotion to the Virgin while simultaneously enhancing the prestige associated with her effigy's costume (Fig. 8). The diminutive figures surrounding the tomb chests also play a double roll: acting as small-scale memorials for the Fitzherbert wives and children they represent (including those children who died in infancy and are not commemorated by any other monument to prompt intercessory prayers), while also celebrating the fecundity of the Fitzherbert unions, who produced a total of thirty-one children in two generations (Figs 9 and 10).<sup>39</sup> Several of the small figures even support a shield which was formerly painted with his or her arms, so that the memory of important marital connections could be preserved. Successful careers are also recorded, as the children are depicted in costumes appropriate to their occupation — priests, lawyers, and merchants (some wearing royal livery) stand alongside armoured sons, while daughters appear as maidens, matrons, or nuns.



Fig. 8: Detail of alabaster effigies of Ralph (d. 1483) and Elizabeth Fitzherbert (d. 1491). Chancel, St Mary and St Barlok, Norbury. *Photo author's own.*



Fig. 9: Alabaster tomb chest of Nicholas Fitzherbert (d. 1473). Chancel, St Mary and St Barlok, Norbury. *Photo author's own.*



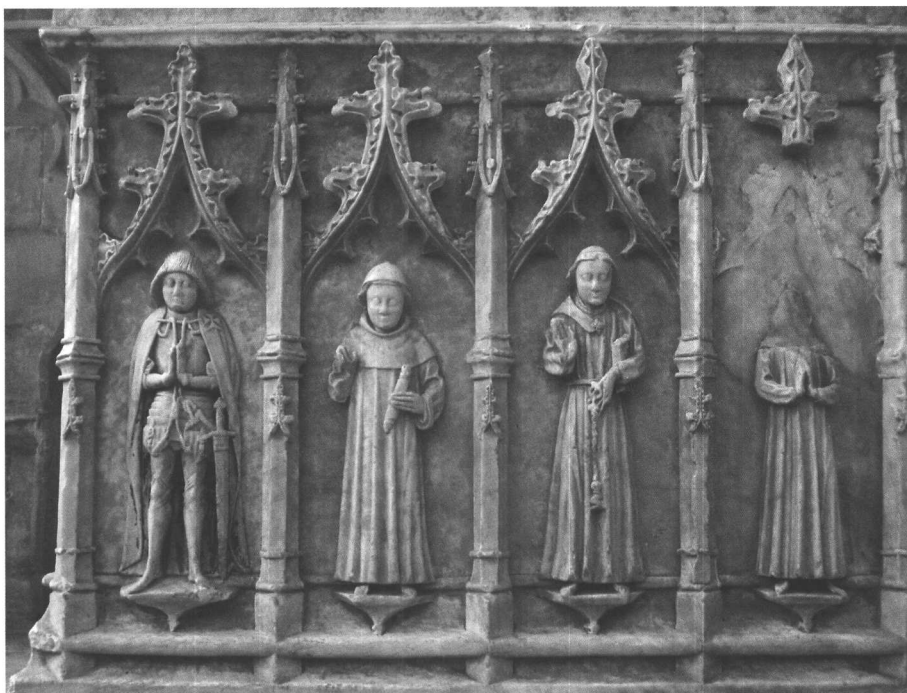


Fig. 10: Detail of alabaster tomb chest of Nicholas Fitzherbert (d. 1473). Chancel, St Mary and St Barlok, Norbury. *Photo author's own.*

Relatively few features on the tombs are unambiguously religious or secular. The tiny figure of an angel at the feet of Nicholas and those of two bedesmen at the feet of Ralph appear to be wholly devotional, as are the angels which hold the pillow upon which Elizabeth's head rests.<sup>40</sup> The intricately wrought suits of fluted armour worn by the effigies of both Nicholas and Ralph and the heraldically charged helms beneath each man's head may be considered wholly secular in nature, intended to instantly convey the men's armigerous status, as is the ceremonial robe with a sideless supertunic and mantle shown on Elizabeth's effigy. More subtly, the collars of Suns and Roses worn by Nicholas and Ralph affirm the Fitzherberts' connection with the House of York, and pendants serve to identify the specific Yorkist king whom each man served: Nicholas's collar features a lion pendant for Edward IV, while the boar of Richard III dangles from Ralph's collar (Fig. 8). The inclusion of Yorkist livery following the Battle of Bosworth and the inception of the Tudor dynasty appears incongruous and may have been designed to add authenticity to these retrospective monuments, although Suns and Roses collars on the alabaster tomb of Sir Henry Pierrepont (d. 1499) at Holme Pierrepont, Notts., and on an early Tudor effigy of a lady at Wethersfield, Essex, show that Yorkist livery could appear in the 1490s even where monuments were not retrospective.<sup>41</sup>

Finally, the grand nature of the tombs themselves must have impressed common and elite laypersons alike, and should likewise be considered an integral part of the monuments' display of status. No documentation survives related to the Norbury tombs — documentation related to medieval monuments is extremely rare — but a contract dating from 1510 for a very similar alabaster tomb chest at Chesterfield, Derbys., was recorded by John Gough Nichols in the nineteenth century.<sup>42</sup> The contract was drawn up between Benedicta, widow

of Henry Foljambe, esq. (d. 1503), and Henry Harpur and William Moorecock, alabastermen of Burton-on-Trent, Staffs., to provide a chest with figural representations of Henry and Benedicta's fourteen children plus four angels, the tomb to be as 'good as is the tomb of Sir Nicholas Montgomery at Colley [Great Cubley, less than four miles southeast of Norbury], with 18 images under the table, and the arms upon them'. A sum of ten pounds was agreed upon, which is probably very near that which John Fitzherbert paid for each of the tomb chests at Norbury. Each sculpted effigy would have cost another five to ten pounds, suggesting an estimated overall cost of thirty to forty pounds for the pair of monuments, an enormous sum equal to the minimum required yearly income for a knight.<sup>43</sup> John clearly intended these monuments to be more than a visual reminder for priests, a point emphasised by the presence of Elizabeth's effigy on the grand tomb, despite the fact that she already had a simple monument to act as a mnemonic prompt. The tomb chests' ultimate success can be gauged in the reactions of those who had seen the monuments. At least one member of the tombs' 'audience' thought they were worth their great expense: John's sister, Edith Babington, who, along with her husband Thomas (d. 1518), commissioned a nearly identical monument, which survives at Ashover, Derbs., from the same Burton workshop from which Benedicta Foljambe ordered the Chesterfield chest.<sup>44</sup>

This begs the question of why John's own monument with its brass inscription on a plain tomb chest, which he commissioned between 1517 and his death in 1531, is so different from those he commissioned decades before for his parents and grandfather. Did he consider the elaborate tombs less successful additions to the larger commemorative programme at Norbury than his sister did? John's own building works at the church and the provisions he laid out in his will of 1517 suggest that he was not economically constrained during this period, nor does the three-dimensionality of John's tomb imply that cost was a primary factor. The most readily apparent distinction between John's monument and the earlier tombs to his predecessors is a lack of figural decoration. Both the primary effigy and the smaller depictions of children are missing; these are elements which were normally present on other contemporary Coventry 3 style brasses, like that to Francis Cokayne (d. 1538) at Ashbourne.<sup>45</sup> This strikingly bare monumental design may be related to John's failure to maintain the fecundity of previous generations of the Fitzherberts.

John had an unhappy relationship with his wife, Benedicta Bradbourne, which culminated in his repudiation of her at some point before 1517. During their marriage, Benedicta had four children, and John denied the paternity of two of them (both daughters). In his will, he accuses his wife of a 'lewd and vile disposition', saying she 'could not be content with me but [forsook] my household and company and lived in other places where it pleased her and yet does to my great rebuke and hers both'.<sup>46</sup> By 1517, John's only son, Nicholas, who had married the daughter of Sir Ralph Longford, had died childless, and John was clearly very concerned to ensure that his estate would not be split among the heirs of the surviving daughter he claimed, Elizabeth, and those of Benedicta's other surviving daughter, Anne, whom he did not claim.<sup>47</sup> As John 'would not that wrongful begotten heirs nor those that be not of my blood should inherit my manors nor any parcel thereof', and because he wished the manor of Norbury to continue as it 'had continued in [his] name these CCCC years and more', John granted the bulk of the estate to his brother Sir Anthony and his heirs, with the remainder to his other brother Henry, then to his cousin Humfrey Fitzherbert of Uphall, Herts., and finally to the male heirs of his daughter Elizabeth.<sup>48</sup> Most of John's long will is concerned with detailing the finer points of this unpleasant business, which goes some way



towards accounting for the differences apparent on his own sepulchral monument. The earlier monuments celebrated dynastic success, and when John commissioned them, he had every reason to believe he and his wife would continue this pattern; by the time he commissioned his own monument, however, John had failed to continue the Fitzherbert dynasty. Clearly, he would not have wished his disgraced wife to be commemorated on his monument, and the two children he claimed would have made solitary figures on the sides of a tomb chest; moreover, his only son was already dead.

A similar comment can be made about John's choice of the simple three-line Latin inscription, rather than the lengthy, rhyming English epitaphs which accompanied the other monuments. As we have seen, the incised slab to Elizabeth which was the first monument John commissioned was not the first of the Fitzherbert memorials to employ an English inscription. Nicholas included such an epitaph on the incised slab he commissioned for his first wife, and a rhyming English verse also accompanied the lost monument which Elizabeth commissioned for her relative John Marschall (d. 1432) at Sibson, Leics.<sup>49</sup> Both of these inscriptions as well as those which appeared on the alabaster tombs at Norbury feature dynastic information, with an emphasis on children.<sup>50</sup> John lacked the impressive record of fertility which his ancestors proclaimed on the monuments to Alice and John Marschall, and which he himself added to the tombs of his parents and grandfather. Therefore, he had no need for an English inscription; his only need was for a Latin inscription directed at the clerics who administered the sacraments at Norbury. Further support for this theory can be found on the monument to John's younger brother and successor, Sir Anthony (d. 1538), justice of the Common Pleas. This well-known palimpsest brass, apparently completed to Sir Anthony's design, features a lengthy central inscription in the *memento mori* tradition written in Latin, but also employs a separate border inscription giving the parentage of his two wives and recording that he was father to five sons and five daughters.<sup>51</sup> Significantly, especially since the brass was formerly located in the nave, where it would have been accessible to Norbury parishioners, this second inscription is in English.<sup>52</sup>

The establishment of multiple commemorative spaces associated with the Fitzherbert family in Norbury church is unusual: most parish churches did not feature three separate spaces devoted to the commemoration of individual members of the local lordly family. However, by considering the family's late-medieval church building works, the glass they installed to record this patronage, and their retrospective commissioning of sepulchral monuments alongside their surviving wills, we can see how the Fitzherberts used the public setting of the parish church to communicate specific narratives to the men and women within their locality. When we have done so, it becomes apparent that the commemorative programme at Norbury was sensitively designed to adapt conventional methods to the particular space of the church and circumstances of the Fitzherbert family. The portrayal of piety and recording of pious deeds were important to achieving the intercessory prayers necessary to attain heaven. For this reason, every object or image the family installed in Norbury church included decorative and verbal cues designed for this task. Figures are shown in glass and stone in an attitude of prayer and inscriptions recall church patronage and virtuous living in countless other churches throughout the country. With increasing frequency, inscriptions expected to appeal to parishioners in particular were given in English, as at Norbury and at Wanlip, Leics., where the brass to Sir Thomas Walsh (d. 1393) and his wife records that they 'made the kirke [church]'.<sup>53</sup> Some features, like the shrouded effigy of Elizabeth and the bedesmen at Ralph's feet, are unusually vivid representations of piety. Nevertheless, they continue to

operate within a recognisable discourse.

Equally pervasive are the family's attempts to enhance their reputation within the locality by presenting themselves and each other in glass donor portraits and on monuments as fertile and well-connected. This concern, so apparent in the sculpted alabaster tombs John commissioned, is among the most easily recognizable aspects of late-medieval sepulchral commemoration and can be demonstrated in a variety of increasingly common decorative features: the employment of heraldry, the depiction of small figures of children below their parents, effigies, and double effigy tombs to married couples. Stained glass panels featuring heraldry and donor portraits were commonly installed by members of the gentry to record building or rebuilding works in parish churches, as shown by the Norbury windows and by the glass which the herald William Burton recorded at Appleby, Leics., which documented patronage by members of the Appleby family during the early sixteenth century.<sup>54</sup>

Modern observers are sometimes struck by a seeming incongruity between those elements which confer or record social prestige and those which function as prompts for intercessory prayer. However, our notion of a strong separation between the secular and religious spheres should not be anachronistically applied to the late-medieval church. Medieval parishioners who viewed the glass and the monuments from a standpoint in the nave of Norbury church would have absorbed the messages of piety and charitable patronage alongside those of wealth, influence, and longevity, without perceiving a conflict of interest.<sup>55</sup> Indeed, many of the decorative features we have examined at Norbury straddle this divide, functioning both as social markers and as religious prompts. Similarly, we must guard against placing too great an emphasis on the public-private dichotomy of family chapels inside parish churches. As the Fitzherbert monuments and glass at Norbury demonstrate, common layfolk not only could, but were expected to, form part of the audience for commemorative objects. The elite commissioners of these objects designed them with public expression in mind.

## APPENDIX

An incised alabaster slab depicting a figure completely enveloped in a shroud was removed from the east end of the north aisle of Norbury church to the chancel sometime in the nineteenth century (Fig. 7). At each corner of the slab is a coat-of-arms, one of which is entirely effaced. Those three coats which can still be deciphered appear to represent Marshall in the upper left corner and Fitzherbert in the upper and lower right corners. The monument's rhyming English inscription is now worn and fragmentary, most completely so in the lower left corner of the monument (in the area around the unidentifiable shield). It was, however, recorded in a more complete state by the antiquary Samuel Lysons in the early nineteenth century:

**Loke as the scripture abov maketh mencion**

**About the tow—** Founder this stone

The same Elys—th ...

The which decessed the yere that is **goone**

**A thousand [four] hundred neynty and oone**

**The xiiij** Kalend...

...out of this lyf ... past

**To the joy and blysse that ever shall last. Amen.**<sup>56</sup>

This monument was consistently attributed to Elizabeth Marshall (d. 1491), widow of Ralph Fitzherbert (d. 1483), until the publication of the Rev. Bowyer's *The Ancient Parish of Norbury* in 1953.<sup>57</sup> Bowyer instead attributed the monument to Benedicta Bradbourne (d.

1531), wife of Elizabeth's eldest son, John, who repudiated her by 1517, when he created a will disinheriting her and their children in favour of his younger brother, Sir Anthony.<sup>58</sup> His evidence for this reinterpretation is based upon his reading of the monument's inscription and the coat-of-arms in the lower left corner of the slab. In Bowyer's reading, the lower left shield shows the arms of Benedicta's family, Bradbourne, impaling those of Shirley (to whom the Bradbournes were aligned in marriage).<sup>59</sup> I have, however, been unable to find any support for this reading: the shield is currently completely illegible. Dr. Cox found it illegible seventy-five years before the Rev. Bowyer's tenure at Norbury, and Lysons' sketches of four shields on the slab show only the arms to Fitzherbert and Marshall, by themselves, impaled, and quartered.<sup>60</sup> Neither does the Rev. Bowyer's reading of the slab's inscription, which at times employed somewhat circular logic, find support on the monument itself. He amends the first lines to: 'Lyke as the scriptture *alsoe* maketh mencion / About the *to(ttering wal)l* this stone / The same *Benedicta...*', and the year as 'A thousand *fyve* hundred *thirty* and oone'.<sup>61</sup> The reference to the 'tottering wall' is taken from Psalm 62, verse 3: 'How long will ye imagine mischief against a man? Ye shall be slain all of you: as a bowing wall shall ye be, and as a tottering fence'. Bowyer suggests the allusion was meant as 'a further condemnation of the unhappy woman', who was reputed as an adulterer by her husband, seemingly without realising that he inserted it himself.<sup>62</sup> The only two words remaining visible which differ in the accounts of Cox and Bowyer occur in the date of death. Unfortunately, neither word is clear, and both 'four' and 'fyve' share six vertical strokes. However, 'thirty' and 'neynty' have eight and ten vertical strokes respectively, and by examining the inscription we see that the word has ten vertical strokes (Fig. 11). Unmistakably, this word cannot read 'thirty'.



Fig. 11: Detail of inscription on incised alabaster slab of Elizabeth Fitzherbert (d. 1491), showing the ten vertical strokes of the word 'neynty'. Chancel, St Mary and St Barlok, Norbury. *Photo author's own.*

The Rev. Bowyer's reason for rejecting the monument's traditional attribution seems to stem from the fact that its inscription is in English, which he considered more fitting to a sixteenth-century monument, and the fact that another monument commemorates Elizabeth in the same church. Both of these points are, however, easily answered. English inscriptions are hardly uncommon on late fifteenth-century monuments; indeed, the use of English on fifteenth-century monuments can be demonstrated by two memorials within Elizabeth's immediate family. The incised slab to Elizabeth's mother-in-law, Alice Bothe, dating from the 1460s, which rests in the chancel at Norbury, and the lost monument to John Marschall (d. 1432), which Elizabeth and Ralph installed at Sibson, Leics., before Ralph's death, both included English inscriptions, the latter of the same rhyming nature as those at Norbury.<sup>63</sup> The doubts regarding the likelihood that two monuments might commemorate a woman twice in the same church can also be assuaged, again with reference to close associates of the Fitzherberts, the Bothe family of Sawley, Derbys.<sup>64</sup> When Roger Bothe's wife, Katherine Hatton, died in 1466, she was initially commemorated by herself on a (lost) brass in the chancel of Sawley church.<sup>65</sup> This monument must have been completed shortly after Katherine's death, as after Roger's death in the next year (1467) an elaborate double effigy brass including four coats-of-arms and figural depictions of their nineteen children was also installed in the chancel. The second monument — almost certainly commissioned by their eldest son, Roger II (d. 1478), whose own monument closely mirrors that of his parents — was clearly intended not only to commemorate Roger I, but also to record the dynastic prowess of the family. The inscription on the monument to Elizabeth Fitzherbert says that she died in 'the year that is gone', indicating the incised slab was complete by 1492. The retrospective alabaster tomb chest with the effigies of Ralph and Elizabeth surrounded by figural depictions of their own twelve children, must have been conceived after the incised slab was installed, almost certainly to celebrate the same lineal fortitude as the Sawley double effigy brasses. The Rev. Bowyer's reasons for rejecting the traditional attribution of the incised slab to Elizabeth can be discounted alongside his reading of the monument's inscription. For this reason, and because the monument was originally located in the space where Elizabeth Fitzherbert is known to have been buried, I see no reason to discount the attribution made by earlier authors who were undoubtedly able to see the monument in a more complete state.

## ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> I would like to thank Professor Nigel Saul for commenting upon a draft of this article.
- <sup>2</sup> Simon Roffey, *The Medieval Chantry Chapel: An Archaeology* (Woodbridge, 2007), pp. 55–56.
- <sup>3</sup> Nigel Saul, *English Church Monuments in the Middle Ages: History and Representation* (Oxford, 2009), p. 143.
- <sup>4</sup> The destruction of medieval furnishings at churches throughout the country during the Reformation and Civil War periods is well-known. See Julie Spraggon, *Puritan Iconoclasm during the English Civil War* (Woodbridge, 2003); Phillip Lindley, *Tomb Destruction and Scholarship: Medieval Monuments in Early Modern England* (Donington, 2007). Further features were lost during nineteenth-century attempts at restoration: see below.
- <sup>5</sup> J.C. Cox, *Notes on the Churches of Derbyshire*, 4 vols (Chesterfield and London, 1875–79), III (1877), pp. 229–47; L.J. Bowyer, *The Ancient Parish of Norbury* (Ashbourne, 1953).
- <sup>6</sup> The alabaster slab, currently placed against the south wall of the chancel but formerly located in the north aisle has traditionally been attributed to Elizabeth Fitzherbert (d. 1491). Rev. Bowyer suggested instead that it commemorated her daughter-in-law Benedicta (d. aft. 1531). An unpublished paper by Philip Morgan given at the Monumental Brass Society's annual conference in 1999 appears to have accepted Bowyer's attribution: Nigel Saul, *Death, Art, and Memory in Medieval England: The Cobham Family and their Monuments, 1300–1500* (Oxford, 2001), pp. 232–33.
- <sup>7</sup> Sir Henry last appears in records in 1310, and probably died soon after this, as his effigy dates from before

- 1320: J.C. Cox, 'The Church of Norbury', *Journal of the Derbyshire Archaeological and Natural History Society* (afterwards, *DAJ*), 25 (1903), 73-96 (p. 86); H. Lawrance and T.E. Routh, 'Mediaeval Military Effigies in Derbyshire', *DAJ*, N.S. 1 (1924-25), 92-107; 137-151 (p. 101).
- <sup>8</sup> There is some disagreement in attributing individual elements of the building work to different members of the Fitzherbert family. See Cox, *Churches of Derbyshire*, III, pp. 233-239; N. Pevsner, *Derbyshire*, 2nd edn, rev. by Elizabeth Williamson, Buildings of England (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2002), p. 289. Cf. Bowyer, *Parish of Norbury*, pp. 36-41. The effigy of Sir Henry was located in the chancel until c. 1900: Ibid, p. 70.
- <sup>9</sup> Despite some early sources attributing knighthoods to Nicholas and Ralph, none of these men attained knighthood: the inscriptions on their monuments record their status as 'esquire' (in Latin, 'armiger').
- <sup>10</sup> F.A. Greenhill, *Incised Effigial Slabs: A Study of Engraved Stone Memorials in Latin Christendom, c. 1100 – c. 1700*, 2 vols (London, 1976), II, p. 23. For dates associated with the chancel, see Bowyer, *Parish of Norbury*, pp. 36-39. Cf. Cox, 'The Church of Norbury', pp. 80-81.
- <sup>11</sup> Bowyer, *Parish of Norbury*, pp. 42-44, 83-84, 86.
- <sup>12</sup> For example, all seven monuments to members of the Cokayne family at nearby Ashbourne, Derbys., were originally located in the chapel at the east end of the north transept, while those monuments to the other local family of Bradbourne were all located in the church's south transept chapel. See, for other examples, the Foljambe monuments in the Lady Chapel at Chesterfield, Derbys., the Clifton monuments in the north transept chapel at Clifton, Notts., and the Cobham brasses in the chancel at Cobham, Kent.
- <sup>13</sup> The damaged inscription remaining beneath this figure appears to read 'Sca otha', which has been interpreted by Rev. Bowyer as pertaining to St Edith, the foundress of Polesworth Abbey, to which the Fitzherberts were closely connected in the late-fifteenth and early-sixteenth centuries, *Parish of Norbury*, p. 71. Other possible attributions include St Martha and St Zita (known as Sitha in England), both associated with keys: "Martha" *The Oxford Dictionary of Saints*. David Hugh Farmer. Oxford University Press 2003. *Oxford Reference Online*. Oxford University Press. University of Cambridge. 4 March 2010 <<http://www.oxfordreference.com/views/ENTRY.html?subview=Main&entry=t100.e1092>>; "Zita" *The Oxford Dictionary of Saints*. David Hugh Farmer. Oxford University Press 2003. *Oxford Reference Online*. Oxford University Press. University of Cambridge. 4 March 2010 <http://www.oxfordreference.com/views/ENTRY.html?subview=Main&entry=t100.e1693>.
- <sup>14</sup> Richard Marks, *Stained Glass in England during the Middle Ages*, (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 6.
- <sup>15</sup> Though Nicholas died in 1473 and Ralph in 1483, and although an effort has been made to depict the effigies in armour appropriate to the men's dates of death, both monuments date stylistically from c. 1495. See, for comparison, the alabaster monuments to Sir Henry Pierrepont (d. 1499) at Holme Pierrepont, Notts., and to Sir Richard Redman (d. 1476) but dating from c. 1495 at Harewood, Yorks.: Arthur Gardner, *Alabaster Tombs of the Pre-Reformation Period in England* (Cambridge, 1940), esp. pls 53-54, 87, 107, 246, 257. See also, Bowyer, who gives the monuments a date of c. 1500: *Parish of Norbury*, p. 83.
- <sup>16</sup> Cox, *Churches of Derbyshire*, III, p. 238.
- <sup>17</sup> *Oxford English Dictionary*, 'scripture', noun, sense 3: 'An inscription or superscription; a motto, legend, or posy. Also in generalized use, inscribed words', common from the late-fourteenth to sixteenth centuries.
- <sup>18</sup> Staffordshire Record Office (afterwards, SRO) D641/5/T(S)/4/2. I have modernised the spelling of the English will.
- <sup>19</sup> No records survive confirming the presence of a Fitzherbert chantry at Norbury.
- <sup>20</sup> The c. 1495 date of the alabaster monuments coupled with their substantial cost means these monuments could only have been commissioned by the current head of the Fitzherbert family — John (d. 1531). For the cost of the tombs, see below.
- <sup>21</sup> John's will is given in J.C. Cox, 'Norbury Manor House and the Troubles of the Fitzherberts', *DAJ*, 7 (1885), 221-49 (pp. 226-35).
- <sup>22</sup> Bowyer, *Parish of Norbury*, pp. 43-44.
- <sup>23</sup> The appearance of the initials N., A., and J.F. in small lozenge-shaped panels of glass may suggest their installation by Nicholas, Alice (Bothe), and John Fitzherbert: Cox, 'The Church of Norbury', p. 93. For a description of the east window, see Bowyer, *Parish of Norbury*, pp. 75-77.
- <sup>24</sup> Bowyer, *Parish of Norbury*, church plan, inside back cover; Cox, 'Norbury Manor House', p. 235. I have modernised the spelling of the English will.
- <sup>25</sup> John's will makes no mention of the monument, suggesting it was installed after this date. On the brass, see W. Lack, H.M. Stuchfield, and P. Whittemore, *The Monumental Brasses of Derbyshire* (London, 1999), p. 160.
- <sup>26</sup> Bowyer, *Parish of Norbury*, p. 44.
- <sup>27</sup> A will dated 1516 suggests that the normal price of a single-figure incised alabaster slab at this date was around 30 s.: Greenhill, *Incised Effigial Slabs*, I, p. 18.

- <sup>28</sup> Cox, *Churches of Derbyshire*, p. 235.
- <sup>29</sup> On the 1492 date of this monument, see the Appendix.
- <sup>30</sup> See, for example, Saul, *Church Monuments*, pp. 311-34; Lawrence Stone, *Sculpture in Britain: The Middle Ages*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972), p. 214; Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England c. 1400-c. 1580* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1992), pp. 306-08.
- <sup>31</sup> M.T. Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record: England 1066-1307* (London, 1979), pp. 236-38.
- <sup>32</sup> Pamela King, 'The Cadaver Tomb in the Late Fifteenth Century: Some Indications of a Lancastrian Connection', in *Dies Illa, Death in the Middle Ages*, ed. by Jane H. M. Taylor (Liverpool, 1984).
- <sup>33</sup> Jonathan Hughes, *The Religious Life of Richard III: Piety and Prayer in the North of England* (Strough, 1997), pp. 117-18.
- <sup>34</sup> See also, Saul, *Church Monuments*, pp. 333-34.
- <sup>35</sup> Elizabeth's relation to Jakes may have been through his wife, to whom she bequeathed 'a round gown purfeld [trimmed] with damask': SRO D641/5/T(S)/4/2; William Burton, *The Description of Leicester Shire, Containing Matters of Antiquitye, Historye, Armorye, and Genealogy* (London, 1622), p. 258.
- <sup>36</sup> Cox, *Churches of Derbyshire*, III, p. 237.
- <sup>37</sup> The dual function of monuments — to solicit intercessory prayers and as advertisements of social status and dynastic strength — is well-attested. See, for example, Saul, *Church Monuments*, pp. 120-42; Sally Badham, 'Status and Salvation: The Design of Medieval English Brasses and Incised Slabs', *Transactions of the Monumental Brass Society*, 15 (1996), 413-65.
- <sup>38</sup> Elizabeth did own other jewels which may have featured devotional figures, including 'a ring of gold with Images', which she left to her daughter Edith: SRO D641/5/T(S)/4/2.
- <sup>39</sup> Although neither of Nicholas's two wives is depicted as a full-size effigy, they do appear as small figures on the west front of the tomb chest.
- <sup>40</sup> Only one bedesman survives intact, resting atop the lion at Ralph's feet, but the lower half of another, who appears to be prostrating himself on the ground, can be seen to the right of the lion's hind quarters.
- <sup>41</sup> Gardner, *Alabaster Tombs*, p. 31.
- <sup>42</sup> The chest, topped with a restored monumental brass, survives in the Lady Chapel at Chesterfield: Frederic Madden, Bulkeley Bandinel, and John Gough Nichols, eds, *Collectanea Topographica et Genealogica*, 8 vols (London, 1834-43), I (1834), pp. 354-55; Lack, et al., *Monumental Brasses of Derbyshire*, pp. 49-50.
- <sup>43</sup> See Greenhill, *Incised Effigial Slabs*, I, p. 18.
- <sup>44</sup> The couple appear to have commissioned the monument during their lives: although Thomas predeceased his wife, Edith is not depicted as a widow on the monument. For the Ashover monument's connection with Harpur and Moorecock, see Gardner, *Alabaster Tombs*, p. 10.
- <sup>45</sup> The brass to Cokayne, the only other nearby Coventry 3 style monument, is much more elaborate, featuring effigies of Francis (in heraldic dress) and his wife, miniature figures representing their children, and four coats-of-arms in the slab's corners: Lack, et al., *Monumental Brasses of Derbyshire*, p. 6.
- <sup>46</sup> Cox, 'Norbury Manor House', p. 232.
- <sup>47</sup> Cox, *Churches of Derbyshire*, III, p. 239; Cox, 'Norbury Manor House', pp. 227-234.
- <sup>48</sup> Cox, 'Norbury Manor House', pp. 228-29. John's other brothers may already have been dead by this date, but their exclusion is readily explained by the fact that none were married: Thomas and William were priests, while Richard was a Knight Hospitaller: Cox, *Churches of Derbyshire*, III, p. 237.
- <sup>49</sup> Burton, *Description of Leicester Shire*, p. 258.
- <sup>50</sup> The monument at Sibson referred to Ralph and Elizabeth's seven sons and eight daughters: Ibid.
- <sup>51</sup> See Cox, *Churches of Derbyshire*, III, pp. 240-41; Lack, et al., *Monumental Brasses of Derbyshire*, pp. 160-63.
- <sup>52</sup> The monument 'used to be in the gangway of the nave': Cox, *Churches of Derbyshire*, III, p. 239.
- <sup>53</sup> Burton, *Description of Leicester Shire*, pp. 279-80.
- <sup>54</sup> British Library MS Egerton 3510, fol. 23v.
- <sup>55</sup> Saul, *Church Monuments*, p. 136.
- <sup>56</sup> British Library Add. MS 9463, f. 49. The words in bold can be deciphered on the slab today. Cox's correction of part of the date is shown in brackets: Lysons' notebook records the date as 'A thousand thrice hundred'. Cox, *Churches of Derbyshire*, III, p. 238.
- <sup>57</sup> Bowyer, *Parish of Norbury*. For attributions to Elizabeth, see, in addition to Lysons and Cox, Greenhill, *Incised Effigial Slabs*, I, p. 287, II, p. 26; Pevsner, *Derbyshire*, p. 290.
- <sup>58</sup> Bowyer, *Parish of Norbury*, pp. 86-88.
- <sup>59</sup> Ibid, p. 87.
- <sup>60</sup> Cox, *Churches of Derbyshire*, III, p. 238; Add. MS 9463, f. 49.
- <sup>61</sup> Bowyer, *Parish of Norbury*, p. 88. I have italicised the words which differ from those given by Lysons and Cox.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid, p. 86.

<sup>63</sup> The inscription includes the phrase 'Elizabeth [John Marschall's] heyresse was, / That Rafe Fitzherbert, of Norbury, to wife now has.', demonstrating that it was completed during Ralph's lifetime (i.e., before 1483): Burton, *Description of Leicester Shire*, p. 258.

<sup>64</sup> Roger Bothe was another prominent Yorkist, whose sepulchral effigy, like that of his brother-in-law Nicholas Fitzherbert, is depicted wearing the collar of Suns and Roses: Cox, 'The Church of Norbury', p. 86.

<sup>65</sup> For the Sawley brasses, see Lack, et al., *Monumental Brasses of Derbyshire*, pp. 179-83.