

# ◆ The three Gunter family monuments at Racton, West Sussex

By Clive Easter

*Familial groupings of monuments are not uncommon within our parish churches and are but one way of tracing the changing fortunes and tastes of individual families. The group of three monuments to members of the Gunter/Gounter family at Racton, West Sussex, is no exception. As this group has not previously been considered as such, this paper sets out to show the ways in which, especially regarding the earliest (of c. 1546), these monuments represent the social aspirations of a newly established family, as well as the inevitable issues of conspicuous consumption. The paper also makes a case for the last monument, from the mid-1730s, being the product of the Cheere workshop, and for Louis Francois Roubiliac being the sculptor responsible for the portrait bust.*

## INTRODUCTION

The small, aisleless church of St Peter at Racton, West Sussex, dates from the 12th century with a 13th-century chancel. Described by Nairn and Pevsner as ‘humble’, the architectural features of this modest church have, unfortunately, been obscured by over-restoration, mainly in the 19th century.<sup>1</sup> However, the three Gunter family monuments appear, with one exception, to have escaped the attention of iconoclasts and restorers. They are all placed against the north wall of the chancel in what appear to be their original positions. The earliest and largest commemorates John Gunter who died 1557 and is of a type often associated with the Easter Sepulchre. The second is a monument of c. 1630 to Sir George Gunter and his wife, showing two kneeling figures facing each other over a prayer desk. The third, with a portrait bust placed atop a sarcophagus set against an architectural backdrop, commemorates Sir Charles Gounter Nicoll who died in 1733.

In 1775, while collecting materials for his intended history of Sussex, Dr William Burrell visited Racton and examined the parish registers. Doubtless he noticed the Gunter monuments and, once he was employing S. H. Grimm to travel the county to draw its ancient buildings, directed him to include them. Grimm duly came to Racton in 1782, 1789 and 1791. Probably after the 1789 visit he provided Burrell with a finished drawing of each monument (see Figs 3, 5 and 7). Burrell did not complete his history, but on his death in 1796

the drawings passed to the (then) British Museum Library, thus bringing the monuments to the notice of scholarly antiquaries.

Among them was James Dallaway who in 1815 published the first account of the parish and, more importantly for this paper, of the Gunter family.<sup>2</sup> He also provided a useful genealogical chart for the family, as well as detailed descriptions of the monuments, transcripts of the inscriptions and details of some of the associated heraldry.

The *Victoria County History of Sussex* was much fuller in its description of the parish and the church.<sup>3</sup> However, only the two earlier Gunter monuments were described in detail, the 18th-century monument being omitted, perhaps because of overreliance on H. R. Mosse whose survey published in 1933 was of effigies before 1650.<sup>4</sup>

The main line of the Gunter family originated in Gilston, a manor in the parish of Llanvigan in Brecon and with a cadet line resident at Racton by the early 14th century.

This Sussex line became extinct on the death of John Gunter in 1474. The estate then passed to John's brother William who sold it to John Gunter of Chilworth, Surrey. This John Gunter, of the Gilston line of the family, acquired the manor of Chilworth by marriage to Catherine, daughter of William Attworth or Uthworth. John's second wife Margaret, widow of Thomas Troughton, was the daughter of the John Gunter who had died in 1474. Under a settlement of 1503, the estate of Racton would be held by Margaret for the rest of her life. On her death c. 1525, the estate passed to Hugh Gunter, nephew

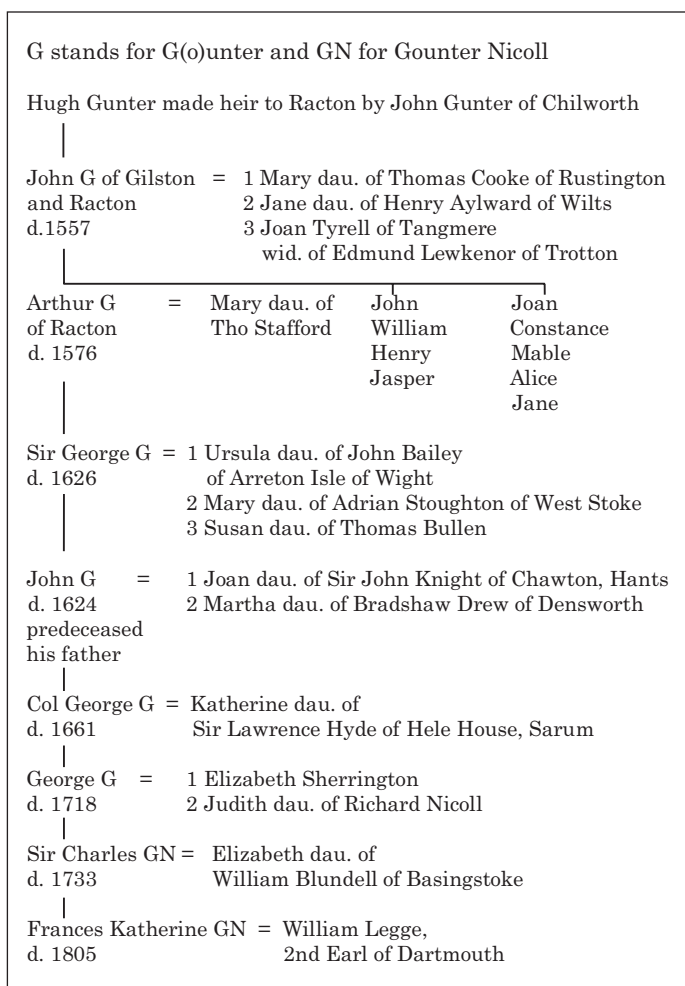


Fig. 1. Genealogy of the Gunter family of Sussex.

of John of Chilworth, thus keeping the estate firmly within the wider Gunter family. John of Chilworth, or his father, appears to have been granted arms or had them confirmed by the College of Arms during the reign of Henry VI as *Sable, three gauntlets argent within a bordure or*. The original Gilston line used *Sable, three gauntlets argent*.

Hugh Gunter's son, John Gunter of Racton, was the subject of the earliest monument. According to Dallaway, this John Gunter married twice, firstly to Jane, daughter of Henry Aylward of Wiltshire and secondly to Joan Tyrell of Tangmere, Sussex, widow of Edmund Lewkenor of Trotton, Sussex. However, recent research has identified a third, earlier, wife, Mary, daughter of Thomas Cooke of

Rustington, Sussex by whom he had one daughter, Joan.<sup>5</sup> The date of the marriage is unknown but it does explain the Cooke arms quartered with others on Gunter's tomb. Mary may have died in childbirth or of postnatal complications.

John Gunter died in 1557, and his eldest son Arthur, who had married Mary Stafford, inherited the estate and manor. Arthur died in 1576. He is known to have retained his Catholic sympathies and may have enjoyed some protection under Henry Fitzalan, 12th Earl of Arundel, with whose household he may have been associated.<sup>6</sup> The retention of Catholic sympathies appears to have been no barrier to social advancement, as the family's fortunes prospered during Elizabeth's reign.<sup>7</sup> Doubtless due to the protection of aristocrats like Fitzalan, Catholics were able to maintain a visible presence within the locality especially after Mary's accession. It appears that recusants like the Gunters and many of a similar social standing could live quite happily in Sussex and elsewhere, providing the authorities were assured of their loyalty and political reliability.<sup>8</sup> Some efforts to maintain Catholic piety were still being made in the late 1560s with resistance to religious innovation

sometimes led by the lord of the manor. This was certainly the case at Racton where Arthur Gunter prevented the election of churchwardens for upwards of ten years. His neighbours the Pole family had, by 1579, not been to church in two years but no recusancy fines were levied because there were no churchwardens.<sup>9</sup>

Arthur's eldest son George (1563–1626), later Sir George, inherited the manor of Racton at age 13. His first wife Ursula was the daughter of John Bailey of Arreton, Isle of Wight: theirs is the second monument discussed below. Sir George and Lady Ursula had four children; their eldest son John – married firstly to Joan Knight of Chawton, Hampshire, and secondly to Martha Drew of

Densworth, Sussex – predeceased his father in 1624. John and Joan's eldest son, Colonel George Gunter (1618/9–61) married Katherine, daughter of Sir Lawrence Hyde of Hele House, Sarum. Col George, who was instrumental in aiding the escape of Charles II after the battle of Worcester in 1651, was buried in the chancel of Racton and Katherine who died in 1684 requested burial in the chancel at Racton next to her husband. George and Katherine had four children, their eldest son George (1646–1718) inheriting the estate in 1661 aged 15. This George married firstly Elizabeth Sherrington (died 1700) and secondly Judith Nicoll (died 1737). By Judith Nicoll, George had five children, the eldest son being (Sir) Charles Gounter Nicoll who died in 1733. Sir Charles was the last of the male line and is commemorated by the third monument in the church. Sir Charles' daughter Frances by his wife Elizabeth Blunden married William Legge 2nd Earl of Dartmouth whose line continues to this day.

THE MONUMENT TRADITIONALLY  
ASCRIBED TO JOHN GUNTER,  
DIED 1557

This monument projects into the chancel and occupies a prominent position on the western end of the north wall (Fig. 2).<sup>10</sup> Built of Caen stone, there is no carved date or inscription evident on the monument but such details could have been painted on and subsequently lost. The monument is ascribed to John Gunter as the stylised initials IG appear within the spandrels of the depressed frontal arch as well as on a roundel on the western end. Nairn and Pevsner consider that it might be ascribed to Hugh Gunter and dateable to c. 1520 but they clearly had not seen the monument properly or the stylised initials had been misinterpreted.<sup>11</sup>

The base of the monument shows three square cusped panels carrying shields of arms separated by two narrow trefoiled panels. Each of the shields of arms display the Gunter arms—*Sable, three gauntlets argent within a bordure or* from John Gunter of Chilworth—impaling quarterly of six 2 & 6 Cooke of Rustington (*Gules, three crescents or, a canton ermine, a martlet sable for difference*), 1 & 5 de Bohun of Midhurst (*Or, a cross azure*) and 3 & 4 Howles of East Standen, Isle of Wight (*Sable, three Talbots heads argent*).<sup>12</sup> The octagonal corner shafts rise from ground level and terminate above the canopy in tapered caps. A similar shaft divides the



Fig. 2. Monument to John Gunter and his second wife Jane erected c. 1546 (photo: author).

entablature, terminating just below the centre of the frontal arch. The main feature of the canopy are two decorative panels: that on the left showing two winged figures supporting a shield bearing the Gunter arms while on the right two swan-like birds support another shield displaying the Gunter arms. Below these panels is a narrow band of fruit and foliage. Completing the canopy is a narrow cresting rail of stylised foliage. The west side of the monument has, at the top, two cherubs supporting a roundel bearing the initials IG, providing further proof of the attribution of the monument to John Gunter, and with a narrow panel of foliage and grapes. A third panel shows two birds (pelicans?) with a chalice between them. This may be a reference to the legend of the Pelican in her Piety. The east side of the monument is completely blank, save for the cresting rail, but has lines marked out for the carving of decoration. The omission of any carving on this side may be due to a lack of funds or because it would not be seen by the congregation, any decoration is superfluous.

The monument, along with the other two in the church, was drawn by S. H. Grimm, probably in 1789 (Fig. 3). The drawing differs somewhat from the actual monument in that the male and female



Fig. 3. Drawing of the monument to John Gunter by S. H. Grimm, ?1789; note that the figures of husband and wife are reversed (reproduced from British Library, Add. MS. 5675 f. 41 [75], by courtesy of the British Library Board).

groupings are reversed and facing away from the central figure. The cresting rail is also different and the side standards and central dividing shaft do not carry through the canopy. Given the accuracy of Grimm's drawings of the other Gunter monuments, these errors are perhaps best explained by the fast pace at which he worked and the making of copies later.

The most prominent feature of the monument is the figure carving in relief on the back wall. This shows, on the spectator's right, a bareheaded man with a tabard worn over his armour and kneeling at a prayer desk. His four sons kneel behind him and all wear civil dress of gowns with false sleeves hanging from the elbows. On the left, is the figure of a woman also kneeling at a prayer desk and wearing a pedimental headdress with the lappets turned up. Her mantle is secured across the chest by a cord and her sleeves terminate in what appears to be fur cuffs. Behind this female figure kneel two daughters who wear similar headdresses but no overmantle. Emanating from the hands of the principal male and female figures are long plain prayer scrolls, which would originally have been painted. Between them stands a bareheaded figure of Christ in Majesty, naked save for a long cloak, who carries a

cross headed staff in his left hand with a banner. The right hand has been lost. There is no evidence of surviving painted decoration on the monument. What is unusual here is the arrangement of the male and female groups. The female group is given prominence by being placed on the true right side of the Christ in Majesty, thus elevating the position of the wife within the overall commemorative scheme and therefore suggesting that it is to her that the monument was erected.

In his will of 1557, John Gunter requested burial in the chancel of Racton church, an entirely proper request given his status as lord of the manor. No monument was specified as it already existed and had been erected to commemorate the death of his second wife Jane who died 1543. She bore Arthur (1536) and three other sons, John, William and Henry, along with two daughters Constance and Mable. These are the figures shown on the monument. John Gunter was married for a third time to Joan, widow of Edmund Lewknor of Tangmere by whom he had one son, Jasper and two daughters Alice(?) and Jane(?), as mentioned in his will. If Jane's date of death is correct then it is argued here that the monument was erected 1546.<sup>13</sup>

The Gunter monument is one of a sizable group of similar monuments erected mostly within West Sussex and into east Hampshire that have Chichester as the centre of production.<sup>14</sup> Other monuments from this workshop include the de la Warr chantry at Boxgrove 1532, the Sackville monument of 1540 at Westhampnett and the Dawtrey monument at Petworth 1535. The Gunter monument is not recessed into the north wall of the chancel as a traditional Easter Sepulchre monument might be. It is a standing structure visible on three sides but given the rich imagery employed and the position it occupies it is likely that Gunter had an Easter Sepulchre in mind when he commissioned the monument.

Gunter would also have known that, by requesting burial in the chancel and in a tomb of his own creation, he was aware of the quality if not the quantity of intercessory prayers that would be offered for his and his wife's souls. Commemoration in such a significant location therefore capitalises on its proximity to the altar and the trappings of the liturgy, as the prayers would have been highly valued as an aid to achieving salvation. It is possible that the monument's size prevented it from being placed nearer the altar, but its visibility to the



congregation would have been a significant factor for Gunter in the expression of his local power and prestige. What we see on the monument is that Christ has already risen from the tomb which can be interpreted here as His triumph over death, an appropriate image for the monument. The reintroduction of Catholic ritual under Queen Mary in 1553 rehabilitated the Easter Sepulchre, but the accession of Elizabeth in 1558 saw Sepulchres finally disappear from the rituals of the Church of England.

Because of the ingrained conservatism amongst both landowners and clergy in West Sussex and the tacit support of the aristocracy in the Earl of Arundel, a commitment to the 'old' liturgy lasted well into the 1570s. During the 16th century a significant number of the (west) Sussex gentry remained committed Catholics. The inclusion on several monuments of this period of panels showing the Resurrection, Christ displaying His wounds and Christ in Majesty are suggestive of strong adherence to the faith. Close-knit ties of kinship amongst the local gentry, their social standing in the community and as holders of local offices enabled them to obstruct religious reform and to prevent actions against recusants. This may also explain the obvious lack of any serious iconoclastic attacks on the monuments: many of the gentry such as Arthur Gunter also adhered to the faith, or certainly tolerated it, and would not be prepared to allow any attempts at the desecration of their family monuments.

#### THE MONUMENT TO SIR GEORGE GOUNTER, DIED 1626, AND HIS FIRST WIFE URSULA BAILEY, DIED 1607

Sir George Gounter was the grandson of John Gunter who died in 1557.<sup>15</sup> His monument is located on the north wall of the sanctuary, immediately to the side of the high altar (Fig. 4). In his will of April 1624, Sir George requested burial in the chancel of Racton church near to the grave of his first wife, but she is not mentioned by name. Constructed largely of limestone with black marble insert panels, it has unfortunately suffered greatly from modern overpainting despite Pevsner regarding it as 'nicely coloured'. The date of the overpainting is unknown but can be assumed to be consistent with the original colour scheme, as the painting of the allegorical figures is as given by Mosse.<sup>16</sup> In this instance, Grimm's drawing is

accurate, especially his recording of the oversized allegorical figures (Fig. 5).

The two figures kneel in an attitude of prayer on tasselled cushions facing each other with a prayer desk between them on which rests two books with page marker scrolls. He, on the left, wears armour with a distinctive scalloped edge to the lining of the tassets, a ruff at the neck, and his head and hands are bare. She is dressed in a long dark mantle with a hood, again with a ruff at the neck and with her hands bare. These figures are placed within an arched recess that has the unusual feature of having the inner surface decorated with plain shields within individual panels. Stylized foliage decorates the canopy spandrels while in the centre of the deep entablature is a black marble panel bearing the Latin inscription

MS

Georgii Govnter militis  
Antiqua, et clariori familia orivndi  
Quam etiam dvcta parili stripe conivge Vrsula  
Bailie Vectensi foeliciter ampliavit perq. Filios 4  
et vnam filiam ex eadem vscepto  
propagatam novis insvper honoratvs adavxit.  
Vitam egit adeo compositam, vt salvis semper  
erga omnes, charitate erga amicos, officio  
erga patriam, pieate erga Devm fide et religion,  
tranquille tandem exieit fataq, et  
Anni et svo evocatvs aetatvs 63.  
Horvm omnivm qvicqvíd hic vides mnemorigi  
affect piessimo Nepos

P.S.F.C.

Avgvstivs vero monvmentvm ipsvm hoc sacellvm  
est qvod fvndatvm extrvct  
redditibvsq cvmvlatvm maiores eivs Dom. Cvltvi  
consecrarvun st svorvm seplvtvae.

Perge Lector et Imitare

Translated into English, the inscription reads:<sup>17</sup>

Sacred to the memory of Sir George Gounter, born of an ancient and very distinguished family which, having taken to wife Ursula Bailie, from an equally distinguished and ancient family from the Isle of Wight, he happily increased by adding 4 sons and a daughter, born from her, and moreover added many new honours to it.

He lived such a well-balanced life, that having shown benevolence to all, affection to his friends, duty to his country, piety, faith and religion to God, he peacefully went away, summoned by death in the 63rd year of his age. In affectionate memory of whom all that you see here his most dutiful grandson commanded to be made at his own expense.

But a more venerable monument is this chapel itself which foundation he increased he extended and restored. These great works were dedicated to God and to the sepultures of his family.

Go, reader, and do thou likewise

The Latin inscription is quoted in full by Mosse but he provides only a general interpretation.<sup>18</sup> It is



Fig. 4. Monument to Sir George Gunter and his first wife Ursula Bailie erected c. 1630 (photo: author).

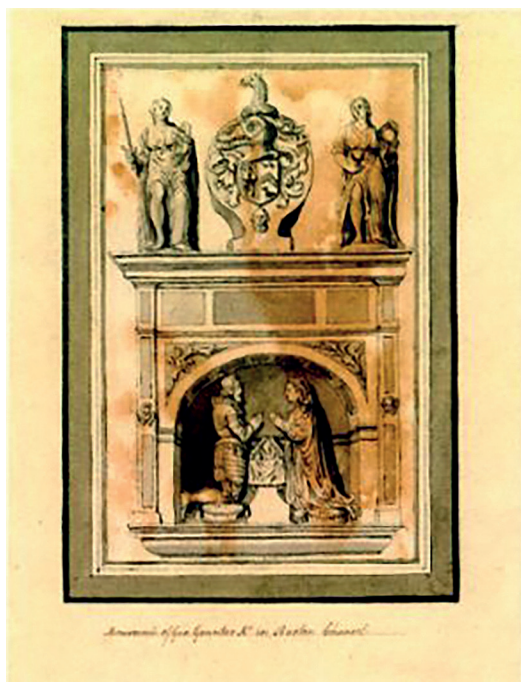


Fig. 5. Drawing of monument to Sir George Gunter by S. H. Grimm, ?1789 (reproduced from British Library, Add. MS. 5675 f. 41 [74], by courtesy of the British Library Board).

notable that no date of death is recorded for either Sir George or Lady Ursula.

It is reasonable to assume that the grandson responsible for erecting the monument was Colonel George Gunter. His father John died in 1624 at the age of 30, just prior to the death of Sir George. This then raises the question of why did Colonel George Gunter erect a monument to his grandfather and not his father. Similarly, why did Sir George's children not erect the monument? These questions cannot easily be addressed, but the answer may lie in the possibility that Colonel George, being only a child when his father died, was raised by his grandparents and it may have been a specific wish to commemorate Lady Ursula as his grandmother, although Colonel George could not have known her. The date of the monument's erection is unknown, but stylistically a date of 1630 is plausible.

Placed on the top of the canopy is an achievement of arms bearing Gunter impaling Argent, a chevron sable, between three moorhens sable, beaked and legged gules for Bailey. Standing either side of the achievement are personifications of Justice

(on the left) and Temperance with their normal attributes of scales and a cup and flagon respectively. These personifications are quite distinctive with their exposed left knees, heavily ruched dresses and slightly overlarge heads. The whole monument lacks sophistication in its overall design and this is particularly evident in the achievement of arms with the crest extending beyond the main body of the piece.

The choice of Temperance and Justice to appear on the monument is interesting, the other two Cardinal Virtues being Fortitude and Prudence. The executor(s) would have wanted to commemorate not only the physical body of the deceased but, by employing specific personifications, they have recorded for posterity those qualities that best exemplified his character. The qualities of Temperance and Justice are implicit within the inscription and reinforced by the canopy figures. Whether the choice of two personifications was limited by costs or space within the design of the monument is unknown, but the exclusion of Fortitude and Prudence as additional or alternative virtues might say something about the personality or disposition of the departed. It has already been noted that Sir George Gunter is known to have retained his Catholic sympathies, but that was not a bar to his social advancement.

A distinctive motif namely the shields in square panels in the soffit of the canopy arch is a feature shared with two other identified monuments: that in Salisbury Cathedral to Sir Richard Mompesson, died 1627, and his wife; and that at Goathurst, Somerset, to Sir Nicholas Halswell, died 1633, and his wife. The idea that the Mompesson and Halswell monuments are related to the Gunter piece by virtue of the soffit panelling is a very realistic possibility. On these monuments, the arrangement of the square or rectangular panels with shields in the canopy arch is identical: the top centre shield has its top edge nearest to the spectator and is flanked by three further shields on either side. The Halswell monument is built against a wall in the north chapel and only one long and one short side was constructed. The arches that form the canopy – two on the long side and one on the short side – have painted shields following precisely that same format as seen on the Mompesson monument. On both the Mompesson and Halswell monuments, the main achievement of arms is cut against a round background. The arrangement of the shield in the

canopy arch of the Gunter monument follows the same pattern as seen on the other two monuments and the overall style of the armour on all three monuments is the same. The monument to Sir Nicholas Hyde, 1631, at Catherington, Hampshire, has, in its personifications of Time and Death standing on the canopy, clear similarities with the personifications of Temperance and Justice as seen on the Gunter monument in that the treatment of the dresses and exposed left knees are identical. Although the sculptor of these monuments is not known with certainty, their similarities are such that a common origin is highly likely and recent research has highlighted the possibility of them being the work of John Fort of Salisbury<sup>19</sup>

#### THE MONUMENT TO SIR CHARLES GOUNTER NICOLL, DIED 1733

This monument is located between the two earlier monuments and placed immediately outside the communion rails on the north side of the chancel (Fig. 6). It consists of a grey-veined marble base with a projecting front panel in an off-white veined marble upon which is carved an inscription in cursive script. Placed on a solid plain grey marble shelf is a deep classical sarcophagus that stands on four moulded feet and surmounted by a large portrait bust. This whole arrangement is set against a moulded blue-grey marble background, framed by darker marble and with a curved canopy complete with urns and a central achievement of arms. Attached to the structural timbers of the roof immediately above the monument are the funeral achievements of the deceased, a helm and crest with a modern twisted torse and two gauntlets<sup>20</sup> Grimm's drawing is again an accurate rendering of the piece, although he minimises the width of the black marble frame and shortens the sarcophagus. However, his drawing of the bust is particularly good (Fig. 7).

The format of the monument closely resembles a design by James Gibbs published as plate CXVII in his *Book of architecture* of 1728, where it is described as a 'monument for a Gentleman in the Country' (Fig. 8).<sup>21</sup> Whether the selection of the design was by the patron or at the suggestion of the workshop must remain speculative, but whoever was responsible was certainly aware of current trends in monument design. Gibbs' design shows the portrait bust facing to the spectators left and flanked by two putti, that on the right holding an





Fig. 6. Monument to Sir Charles Gounter Nicoll died 1733, attributed to Henry Cheere (photo: author).

inverted torch signifying the life extinguished. The omission of these putti is the most significant difference between the original design and the finished monument. On the canopy ends Gibbs has placed two flaming dishes. These have been replaced on the monument by globular urns. The design of the central achievement, changed from the original design, now shows a cartouche with a roundel of arms bearing Gunter quartered with Nicoll of Norbiton for his mother. Lastly, the plain flanking volutes, as drawn by Gibbs, have been replaced by more elaborate volutes complete with extensive foliage running up the side of the monument.

Sir Charles Gounter Nicoll was the last male member of the Gunter/Gounter line. He was baptised on 7 October 1704 and died on 24

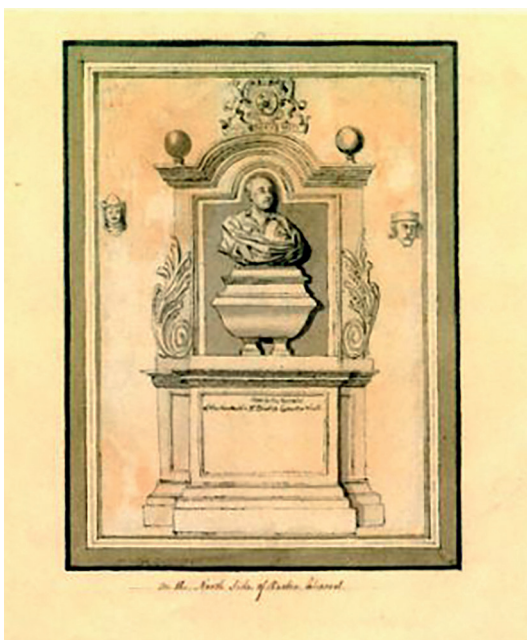


Fig. 7. Drawing of monument to Sir Charles Gounter Nicoll by S. H. Grimm, 1789 (reproduced from British Library, Add. MS. 5675 f. 40 [72], by courtesy of the British Library Board).

November 1733 at the early age of 30. Sir Charles married Elizabeth Blundell, daughter and heiress of William Blundell of Basingstoke. Following Sir Charles's death in 1733, his widow married General Peregrine Bertie, third Duke of Ancaster and Kesteven in 1735. Elizabeth died on 17 December 1743. Sir Charles and Lady Elizabeth had two daughters, Elizabeth and Frances. It was Frances who, on 11 January 1755, married William Legge, 2nd Earl of Dartmouth, and was styled Countess of Dartmouth. She died on 24 July 1805. Sir Charles's widow erected the monument.

The inscription on the Nicoll monument is as follows

Here lie the Remains  
Of the Honourable Sr CHARLES GOUNTER  
NICOLL  
Knight of the most Honourable Order of the Bath  
Descended from a long Train of Ancestors  
Fam'd for their Religion, Loyalty and Virtue

He had all the Qualifications  
Of a compleat and accomplish'd Gentleman  
Amiable in his Person



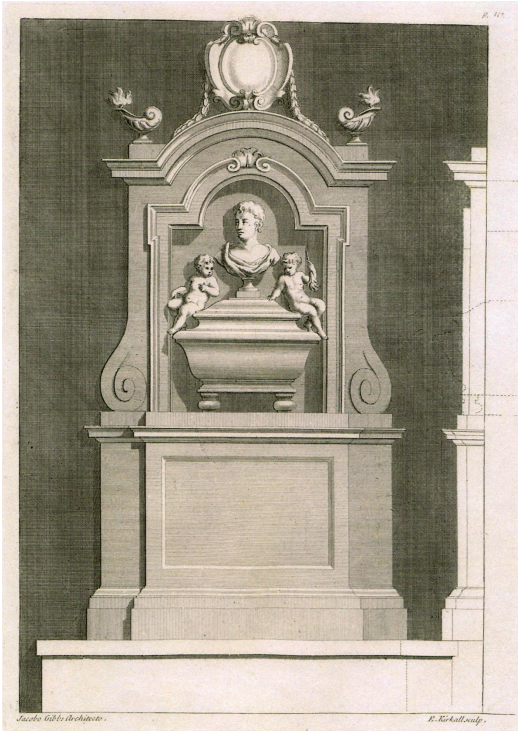


Fig. 8. Plate CXVII in *A book of architecture* by James Gibbs (London: William Bowyer, 1728).

Graceful in his Address  
In Private  
He was easy, affable and condescending  
In Publick  
He was steady, uniform, consistent  
Favoured by his Prince  
And a Friend to his Country

In this distinguished Situation  
Esteem'd, belov'd and honour'd  
He died the 24<sup>th</sup> Day of November 1733  
In the 30<sup>th</sup> Year of his Age

ELIZABETH his belov'd wife  
Daughter and heiress of WILLIAM BLUNDELL Esq  
(by whom he left two daughters  
ELIZABETH and FRANCES-CATHERINE)  
Erected this to his Memory

The authorship of the inscription is unknown but it follows a familiar pattern in acknowledging Nicoll's ancestry, life, virtues and achievements.

The monument is unsigned and essentially unremarkable except for the portrait bust. Given that the design of the monument closely follows an original idea by Gibbs, the most likely maker is Henry Cheere (1703–81), an attribution supported by arguments put forward regarding this monument in an important legal case.<sup>22</sup> Nairn and Pevsner describe the bust as having a panache 'worthy of Rysbrack' and such a comment is entirely understandable given Rysbrack's increasing popularity in the mid-1730s. However it demands closer attention (Fig. 9).

It is a striking piece that shows a bareheaded man wearing a thin, buttoned coat over an open necked shirt with a narrow collar and deep creasing to the fabric. The hair is closely cropped and the



Fig. 9. Bust of Sir Charles Gounter Nicoll, attributed to L. F. Roubiliac (photo: author).

eyes are pupilless. The swirling mass of drapery that encircles the shoulders, clearly not part of his dress, serves not only to separate the bust from its support but also to conceal the abrupt truncation of the body. Despite his youth, Nicoll was a Member of Parliament as well as a prominent Whig and while the drapery employed on his bust may have classical allusions, it is employed to help amplify the visual effect of patrician authority.

Cheere was a major producer of sculpted products, including monuments, and was known to have collaborated early in his career with Henry Scheemakers who doubtless introduced him to continental ideas and methods.<sup>23</sup> During the 1730s, Cheere either directly employed or had other business associations with Louis Francois Roubiliac, whose precise date of arrival in England from France is unknown, but was in all probability around 1730. Initially employed by Thomas Carter, Roubiliac was later introduced by Edward Walpole, son of the Prime Minister, to Cheere who employed him as an assistant. The precise nature of Roubiliac's involvement with Cheere remains open to speculation, but what is known is that Cheere, along with others, collaborated with and subcontracted work to other artists.<sup>24</sup>

A number of portrait busts dating from the 1730s have been attributed to Roubiliac, whether part of a monument or not. The bust to Lord Chief Justice Robert Raymond, died 1732, now in the Victoria and Albert Museum, has been associated with his monument in Abbots Langley, Hertfordshire. The bareheaded figure has pupilless eyes, short hair at the sides of the head and deeply folded drapery encircling the shoulders. The bust is unsigned. The extant monument was commissioned from Cheere and the bust has similarly been associated with him. However, the very sensitive treatment of the face, hair and drapery suggest an attribution to Roubiliac and it may have been his first independent commission.<sup>25</sup> The Nicoll bust has the same sensitive rendering of the facial features and the equally delicate treatment of the hair, but the drapery is much bolder. The attribution of the Raymond bust to Roubiliac is in part due to the treatment of the back of the piece.<sup>26</sup> It has not been possible to see the reverse of the Nicoll bust in order to make a comparison. However, the possibility must exist that the Raymond bust could have been commissioned at the same time as the monument but given as a separate contract to Roubiliac.

Having then successfully proved his ability, he was tasked with the Nicoll bust but was able to provide a bolder style to the drapery. Another bust that is close in date to the Nicoll monument is that at Crofton, Hampshire, to Thomas Missing, 1735. The sculptural elements of the monument are attributed to Cheere but the portrait bust, with its treatment of the drapery and detailed cutting of the shirt collar and coat, again suggests the hand of Roubiliac.<sup>27</sup> Although our knowledge of Roubiliac in the 1730s is incomplete and his involvement with Cheere is similarly unproven, it is reasonable to assume, given the albeit scant available evidence, that the portrait bust on the monument to Sir Charles Gounter Nicoll was carved by L. F. Roubiliac, either in Cheere's workshop or under subcontract to him.<sup>28</sup>

What we see therefore in the Nicoll monument is a very subtle display of conspicuous consumption. Through the employment of such a large and important practice as Cheere's, the executors of the estate were displaying not only their wealth but also their social superiority within the setting of a public environment: the local parish church. In employing Henry Cheere and a design for the monument based on one by Gibbs, the family was making a very deliberate statement. Sir Charles Gounter Nicoll was the last of the male line and the monument, in this context, can be seen as a reminder of the prestige, wealth and power the family once held. Through the medium of the monument, the contemporary spectator would have been reminded of the pre-eminence of the family in local affairs and that such authority had now passed outside of the family.

Each of the three Gunter monuments has been discussed as individual pieces but they need to be seen within a wider context. As individual structures, each monument is important in its own right but collectively they do not represent a continuing commemorative tradition within the family.

Although Hugh Gunter inherited the manor, there is no evidence that he lived there, preferring instead to remain in Wales. This probably explains the lack of a monument to him at Racton, though lack of available funds might be the more likely explanation. Hugh's date of death is unknown but on John's inheritance of the estate, he is elevated to the status of armigerous gentry, albeit of the middling sort. It has been shown that the death of his second wife Jane and, we assume, John Gunter's ensuing grief were the catalyst for making a bold status statement in the form of the extant monument. Prominent on

the front of the piece are the three identical shields of arms, acting as the vehicles to indicate ties of kinship and the associated networks of social relationships. John's attempt at a status symbol is further suggested by the position and size of the monument: it is a little larger than many of the others produced by the same workshop. Its placement does not fully equate with that of the primary position of honour for a gentry monument of this kind: others within its group are much nearer the altar.

The employment of contemporary decorative ideas, especially in the juxtaposition of Renaissance ornament with late gothic architecture, is a feature that not all monuments produced by the workshop can demonstrate, and Gunter may well have been attempting to demonstrate his awareness of current tastes and trends. While Gunter was the newcomer amongst the local gentry, he was signifying his position not only within the parish but further afield amongst more established families through the medium of the monument. Being erected in his lifetime, there can be little doubt that Gunter's social equals were aware of the monument, the significance of its imagery and its status message.

The lack of any monument to Arthur, despite his request to be buried in the chancel, is surprising given the family's increasing prosperity. As a Catholic, or one with Catholic sympathies, it might have been difficult for him to reconcile the status statement of a monument with commemoration in what had become a Protestant church.

The monument to Sir George occupies the prime position of honour in the church, being next to the altar, and makes his status unambiguous. As the erector of the monument Colonel George is asking spectators to recall that status: Sir George was the first within the family to be knighted. Gentlemanly identity involved complex considerations of life style and social image and Sir George's monument enhances his identity via the personifications of Temperance and Justice and the careful wording of the inscription. Other family members were also buried in the chancel and F. H. Arnold recorded

in 1871 the presence of slabs commemorating Elizabeth Sherrington, first wife of George Gunter, died 1700, George Gounter, son of Colonel George Gunter, died 1718, and Judith Nicoll, mother to Sir Charles Gounter Nicoll, died 1737. Arnold also recorded the existence of an almost illegible slab affixed to an outside wall of the church, to George Gunter, the eldest son of Sir George Gounter and Ursula Bailey, who predeceased his father in 1624.<sup>29</sup> This omission of any form of figurative or architectural commemoration is puzzling, but not irrational, as changing tastes and financial concerns may have played a part. Family members may have felt it inappropriate to continue to display their social status through the medium of the commemorative monument. Perhaps because he was the last of the line, the family of Sir Charles Gounter Nicoll sought to erect a monument as much to commemorate the whole family as the individual, and in employing a major metropolitan workshop they attempted to emphasise the status of the extinct family to later spectators. Therefore, while not a continuing series of monuments, the three G(o)unter monuments at Racton show how a family changed its commemorative ideas over time and how each monument is a distinct product of its time. The patronage of a local workshop for John Gunter's monument is easily explained and, if the attribution to John Fort of Salisbury is valid for the monument to Sir George Gunter, we can assume no other local workshop was available and the products of London workshops too expensive. The employment of Henry Cheere for the last monument is not at all surprising given Sir Charles's links to London as an MP. However, Rysbrack and others were operating at that time and perhaps the choice of Cheere was simply a matter of cost. Whatever the reasons for selecting the workshops responsible for the monuments, the choices can be seen as a reflection of changing ideas about conspicuous consumption and the need to remind contemporary spectators of the status of the family.

**Author:** Dr Clive Easter, 55 Bowden Park Road, Crownhill, Plymouth PL6 5NG; clivejester@gmail.com

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> I. Nairn and N. Pevsner, *The buildings of England. Sussex* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1965), 311–12

<sup>2</sup> J. Dallaway, *A history of the western division of the County of Sussex including the Rapes of Chichester, Arundel and*

*Bramber with the City and Diocese of Chichester* 1 (London: T. Bensley, 1815), 153–7

<sup>3</sup> B. Crook, 'Racton', in L. F. Salzman (ed.), *The Victoria County History of the County of Sussex 4 The Rape of Chichester* (London: Oxford Univ. P., 1953) 113–8.



- <sup>4</sup> H. R. Mosse, *The monumental effigies of Sussex (1250 to 1650)*, 2nd edn (Hove: Combridges, 1933), 116–19.
- <sup>5</sup> G. W. Gunter and G. A. Viner, 'Gunter family in Wales and Sussex', *West Sussex History* **32** (1985), 1–5, for a record of this marriage.
- <sup>6</sup> J. E. Mousley, 'Sussex County Gentry in the reign of Elizabeth' (unpub. PhD thesis, Univ. of London, 1955), 218, cites a reference of 1560 to Henry Fizalan as 'my Lord, my master'.
- <sup>7</sup> J. E. Mousley, 'The fortunes of some gentry families of Elizabethan Sussex', *Economic History Review* **2nd ser.**, **11** (1959), 467–83. As evidence of the rise of the Gunter family, Mousley cites the Inquisitions Post Mortem and the Subsidy Rolls to indicate that during Elizabeth's reign they increased the number of manors they held and, in the subsidy years studied, were assessed at rates above average or increasing in relation to it.
- <sup>8</sup> For a detailed discussion of the religious and political make-up of later 16th-century Sussex, see M. Dimmock, A. Hadfield and P. Quinn (eds), *Art, literature and religion in early modern Sussex* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014), 8 and elsewhere. See also M. C. Questier, *Catholicism and community in early modern England: politics, aristocratic patronage and religion c.1550–1640* (Cambridge Univ. P., 2008), 32, 49, for a discussion of the religious conditions existing in the mid-16th century in Sussex.
- <sup>9</sup> See R. B. Manning, *Religion and society in Elizabethan Sussex* (Leicester Univ. P., 1969) 43, 131.
- <sup>10</sup> The monument has often been referred to as an Easter Sepulchre. See the description given by P. Sheingorn, *The Easter Sepulchre in England*, Medieval Institute publications (Kalamzoo: Western Michigan University, 1987), 335.
- <sup>11</sup> Nairn and Pevsner.
- <sup>12</sup> Mosse gives these quarterings. The arms of Cooke would be for his first wife while those of Howles are probably for his mother but the relationship between the Gunter family and the De Bohuns of Midhurst is not currently known.
- <sup>13</sup> N. J. Shilliam, 'Foreign influences on and innovation in English tomb sculpture if the first half of the sixteenth century' (unpub. PhD thesis, Univ. of Warwick, 1986), argues for a date in the 1540s. However, see also D. R. Hutchinson, 'Piety in peril, a religiously conservative sixteenth century school of church monuments in Sussex, Hampshire and the Isle of White' (unpub. DPhil thesis, Univ. of Sussex, 2010), 470, who suggests a date of c. 1538 for the monument. This earlier dating fails to take fully into account all the children shown on the monument and for this reason a date for the erection of the monument in the middle of the 1540s is considered here to be more likely.
- <sup>14</sup> This grouping was originally identified in E. Mercer, *English art 1553–1625* (Oxford: Clarendon P., 1962), 220
- <sup>15</sup> See Gunter and Viner, 16–17. After the death of his first wife Sir George married Mary, daughter of Adrian Stoughton of West Stoke by whom he had one son Arthur and one daughter Mary. On her death he married Susan, daughter of Thomas Bullen by whom he had two sons Thomas and Edward. Sir George died on 22 Aug. 1626
- <sup>16</sup> Mosse, 118.
- <sup>17</sup> I am grateful to Dr Jean Wilson for this translation.
- <sup>18</sup> Mosse, 118.
- <sup>19</sup> See J. Bayliss, 'A discovery at Salisbury Cathedral', *Church Monuments, Journal of the Church Monuments Society* **27** (2012), 90–5. Bayliss argues for monuments related to the Mompesson piece possibly being the work of a Salisbury mason by the name of John Fort who was active at the time these monuments were erected.
- <sup>20</sup> A referee has pointed out that an iron grill to surround the monument was made by Thomas Wragg of London who charged £16 4s. 6d. for it in 1740. No evidence of a surround is now visible and it was not included in Grimm's drawing of the monument (Fig. 7).
- <sup>21</sup> J. Gibbs, *A book of architecture* (London: William Bowyer, 1728), 117.
- <sup>22</sup> The attribution to Cheere was cited in the case of St Peter, Racton, discussed by D. Wilson 'Roubiliac, the Earl of Pembroke and the chancellor's discretion: preservation of the nation's heritage by the Consistory Courts of the Church of England', *Church Monuments, Journal of the Church Monuments Society* **21** (2006), 141–85. The full judgement of St Peter Racton can be found in Chichester Consistory Court (CH 78/99 October 2001). This was an important ecclesiastical law case. The parish, fearing the possible theft of the bust and seeking to sell it, substituted a resin replica and placed the original bust in a bank. The heir at law, the Earl of Dartmouth was happy to remove the bust to his London home and allow access to interested parties. The Church Buildings Council and English Heritage petitioned for the return of the original bust to the church and that it be secured with stainless steel pins. The Chancellor of the diocese subsequently ordered the return of the bust to the church.
- <sup>23</sup> See I. Roscoe, E. Harding, M. G. Sullivan *A biographical dictionary of British sculptors 1660–1851* (London: Yale Univ. P., 2009), 1097, where it is stated that Scheemakers was working with Cheere in 1727.
- <sup>24</sup> For an account of the extent that artists collaborated with one another see M. Baker, *Figured in marble: the making and viewing of 18th-century sculpture* (London: V&A Publications, 2000), chapter 6, where reference is made to Roubiliac's involvement with Cheere.
- <sup>25</sup> See M. Baker 'The making of portrait busts in the mid-eighteenth century: Roubiliac, Scheemakers and Trinity College Dublin', *Burlington magazine* **137** (1995), 821–31 and especially p. 828.
- <sup>26</sup> Baker.
- <sup>27</sup> For a wider discussion of the Missing monument, see M. Craske, *The silent rhetoric of the body* (London: Yale Univ. P., 2007), 360–2 and illustrated, fig. 169. Other busts, notably by J. M. Rysbrack also show similar treatment to the folds and creases of the shirt, especially that to Gibbs of 1726 now in the Victoria and Albert Museum.
- <sup>28</sup> In email correspondence with Malcolm Baker, the author was thought to be correct in the attribution of the bust to Roubiliac although it was acknowledged that firm proof of this attribution would be extremely hard to find.
- <sup>29</sup> F. H. Arnold, 'Racton Monumental Inscriptions', *Sussex Archaeological Collections* **23** (1871), 314–7.