

The Deputy Heralds of Chester

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THERE were but few years from the beginning of the reign of Elizabeth I until the beginning of that of George III when a Deputy Herald could not be found living and practising his profession in Chester. Four of them, all named Randle Holme, are well known for their large and valuable collections of heraldic and genealogical manuscripts now preserved in the British Museum, but the nature and extent of the professional activities carried on by them and their predecessors and successors have attracted very little attention and even less understanding.

In order to appreciate what these Deputy Heralds were and what they did, it is necessary to set them in their historical context. During the Middle Ages coats of arms were borne by comparatively few people. There are only 172 Cheshire lords and knights mentioned in a roll of English arms known as the County Roll, drawn up during the reign of Richard II.¹ Very few difficulties arose, and those were settled by the Court of Chivalry, as in the celebrated case of *Scrope v. Grosvenor*, well known by name at least to all interested in Cheshire family history.

This simple state of affairs did not survive the Middle Ages. In the Tudor period a coat of arms, instead of being a practical necessity for the military leader, became a status symbol for the civilian. In saying this I am not unmindful of the non-military uses of armorial bearings in the Middle Ages, e.g. on seals and in architectural embellishments and by women and ecclesiastics. Nevertheless, it all rested on a military basis. After the Wars of the Roses the military basis of heraldry ceased to exist. The numbers of persons using coats-of-arms greatly increased, and arms, like the titles of 'esquire' and 'gentleman', came to be assumed by many whose rights were by no means equal to their pretensions. Furthermore, the growing fashion for elaborate schemes of quarterings increased the risks of incorrect shields being concocted by ignorant or venal craftsmen.

For reasons which cannot now be discussed, the Court of Chivalry had entered into one of its long periods of dormancy.² The Earl Marshal, who, under the Crown, is the supreme authority in heraldic matters, continued to exercise some sort of corrective jurisdiction over the use of arms, but this was only suitable for dealing with *bona fide* disputes between members of the armigerous class concerning their rights to particular coats of arms. Police action was needed to deal with the wholly illegal display of arms and crests by non-

¹ A. R. Wagner, *Catalogue of English Mediaeval Rolls of Arms*, Harleian Soc. c, 1950, p. 68.

² See G. D. Squibb, *The High Court of Chivalry*, Oxford, 1959, ch. II.

armigerous persons which became increasingly prevalent as the Tudor period went on and, if not checked, would have debased the value of armorial bearings generally.

Before explaining what steps were taken to meet these changed circumstances it will be well to say something about the Officers of Arms, who served and still serve the Crown in England under the Earl Marshal. These Officers, although they may appear alike to the uninitiated observer when in full dress and are often colloquially referred to collectively as 'the Heralds', are in fact not all of a kind. For the purposes of this lecture it is only necessary to refer to the Officers of Arms in Ordinary. At all times material for our present purpose there have been thirteen of them. They were incorporated by a Royal Charter of Philip and Mary in 1555 to form the College of Arms, which now occupies the attractive late seventeenth-century building in Queen Victoria Street in the City of London. The thirteen Officers in Ordinary consist of Garter King of Arms, who is their principal, two other Kings of Arms, six Heralds, and four Pursuivants, the Pursuivants being the latest recruits, who are under instruction from their seniors. One of the six Heralds is named Chester, but his name is taken from the Prince of Wales's Earldom of Chester, and he has no special functions in connection with the City or County of Chester. I mention this because the Deputy Heralds of Chester with whom we are concerned this afternoon were not Deputy Chester Heralds, although sometimes erroneously so called.

Having said what they were not, let us turn to what they were. The task of coping with the unauthorised use of arms, which was becoming far too common by the reign of Henry VIII, was imposed upon the Kings of Arms. They had authority from the Crown to 'reforme all false armorye & Armes devysed without auctoritie'. The Kings of Arms could not do this unaided, so writs were directed to all mayors, sheriffs and bailiffs commanding them to give the Kings of Arms aid and assistance.³

Later the police powers of the Kings of Arms were extended to cover the manner in which the funerals of the nobility and gentry were conducted, and there was also a preventive requirement that engravers and painters should not produce any armorial work without the knowledge and consent of the King of Arms of the province.⁴ Here I should explain that England was, and indeed still is, divided for heraldic purposes into two provinces by the River Trent, the King of Arms of the northern province, which includes Cheshire, having the title of Norroy, which simply means the 'Northern King'.

Obviously one man, whose headquarters were in London, could not exercise these powers single-handed. The Kings of Arms were therefore authorised to appoint deputies to assist them in their provinces. Lawrence Dalton, Norroy King of Arms, was so authorised by letters patent under the Great Seal dated

³ A. R. Wagner, *Heralds and Heraldry in the Middle Ages*, 2nd edn., Oxford, 1956, p. 9.

⁴ *Visitations of the North*, Surtees Soc. cxxii, 1912, i. 199.

27 June 1561. Since this was the first authority for the appointment of a deputy in Cheshire, it is worth quoting the relevant clause in full.

‘And farther, by these Presentes we do auctorise our said Servante’, that is to say Norroy, ‘to nominate and appoint under the Seal of his said Office, so many Deputies or Attorneys as shall be thought by him expedient for the better execution of all and singular the Premises’.⁵

Dalton died less than six months after this patent was issued and it is not known whether he exercised his power to appoint deputies. His successor in the office of Norroy King of Arms, William Flower, received on 10 July 1564 a similar patent authorising him to appoint deputies.⁶ Four months later, on 8 November, we have the first record of the appointment of a Deputy Herald. This was Thomas Grexon, who was appointed to be Flower’s deputy in Nottinghamshire, Derbyshire, the East Riding of Yorkshire and part of Staffordshire.⁷

Whether Flower appointed a Deputy for Cheshire at this time we do not know, but we get onto firm ground on 21 June 1578, when Peter Proby of Chester was appointed by Flower to be his Deputy in Cheshire. The original appointment is preserved among the Ashmolean MSS. in the Bodleian Library.⁸

Proby was a painter who specialised in heraldry. His appointment provided that he was to ‘exercise and use his art of painting of arms for funerals, with banners, standards, helms and other funeral furniture’, and, what was really important, he was to collect the funeral fees due to Norroy.

Proby’s appointment was announced to the public in a printed broadsheet, of which one copy has been preserved among the Ashmolean MSS.⁹ This broadsheet contains the full text of the appointment and forbids other craftsmen to execute armorial work without Proby’s licence upon pain of forfeiting to Norroy the sum of 5 marks, just over £3, quite a large amount in those days. The final paragraph of the broadsheet reads like an advertisement. It announces that Proby will be resident in Chester and will be ready to ‘work, set forth and solemnize’ the funerals of ‘honourable or worshipfull personages’. Proby’s broadsheet seems to be unique in its survival, but no doubt other Deputy Heralds announced their appointments in this manner.

In the year after his appointment Proby met with some unexpected competition. Norroy’s province was invaded by a usurper, one William Dakins, who described himself as Norroy King of Arms and set about exercising the privileges of that office by granting and confirming arms and crests, certifying pedigrees, and conducting funerals. Dakins achieved some temporary success.

⁵ T. Rymer, *Foedera* 1713 edn., xv. 616.

⁶ *Visitations of the North*, i. 206.

⁷ College of Arms MS. SML 49, f. 93/2.

⁸ Bodl. MS. Ashm. 845, f. 158.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 840, f. 627.

Somehow he managed to obtain a tabard of the Queen's arms and set out on circuit wearing it.¹⁰ Copying the lawful Norroy in all things, Dakins proceeded to appoint Deputies. One of them was Henry Overton, a painter of Dunham (whether Massey or on-the-Hill is not clear), who was appointed on 2 November 1579 to be Dakins's Deputy in Cheshire and Lancashire.¹¹ Dakins also had another Cheshire Deputy, named Randulph Massey.¹²

However, Proby did not have to suffer this competition for long. In the following February, Dakins was brought before the Court of Star Chamber, where he confessed his offence. His sentence, though savage, was in some respects fitted to his crime. The Court ordered that he should be set on the pillory in the Palace of Westminster and there lose one of his ears. After being taken down and whipped, he was to be taken to stand on the pillory in Chester at assize time, with the tabard on his back and the letters of deputation to Massey about his neck, and there to have his other ear cut off.¹³ There is no record of Massey and Overton's being punished, but the downfall of Dakins necessarily meant the end of their brief careers as Deputy Heralds.

Peter Proby was the first of a long line of Deputy Heralds resident in Chester. The next of whom there is any record was Thomas Chaloner, who also was an arms painter. According to the inscription on his monument in St. Michael's Church, Chaloner was not appointed a Deputy Herald until the day of his death in 1598, but he had been assisting the College of Arms as early as 1591, when he made a visitation of the City of Chester. Unfortunately, only a fragment of this visitation has survived.¹⁴ We could wish that we had more of it, for Chaloner did not confine himself, as was usual in such records, to setting down the bare facts regarding pedigrees and arms, but permitted himself to comment on the living members of the families which he entered. Having told us that Alderman Thomas Greene had no issue, Chaloner went on to add, 'The moore piettye, a verrey Comlye Cittizen: Courteous: a wise gentleman; and a good member of ye Cittye'. We are also told that Alderman William Jewett had been 'reputed for an excellent synging man in his youth, a martchant of great adventures and a lover of gentlemanye disportes and exercises'.

After Chaloner's death there were for a time two Deputy Heralds in Chester. It will be convenient first to mention William Grafton. Unlike Proby and Chaloner, Grafton does not seem to have practised as a painter, for he is described in documents relating to him simply as 'gentleman'. There seems to be no record of his appointment, but he was described as Deputy for Norroy in 1601 and 1602. Grafton's tenure of office was short. There is no mention of him after 1602, but during his short term he was an active Deputy, for there are records of a number of funeral certificates taken by him.¹⁵

¹⁰ Coll. Arm. MS. Heralds VIII, f. 139.

¹¹ Bodl. MS. Ashm. 845, f. 157.

¹² Coll. Arm. MS. Heralds III, f. 1122.

¹³ *Ibid.*, Heralds VIII, f. 136.

¹⁴ *Vis. Cheshire 1580*, Harl. Soc., xviii, 1882, pp. 261-272.

¹⁵ *Cheshire and Lancashire Funeral Certificates*, L.C.R.S., vi, 1882, pp. 39, 95, 120, 146, 175, 191.

Contemporary with Grafton was Randle Holme I. There are full biographical particulars of him and of his three successors of the same name in a paper by the late J. P. Earwaker.¹⁶ I propose therefore to confine my remarks to their activities as Deputy Heralds, the material being mostly drawn from records in the College of Arms, which were not used by Earwaker. I am grateful to Sir Anthony Wagner, Garter King of Arms, for drawing my attention to these records, and to the Chapter of the College for access to them.

Randle Holme I had been apprenticed to Thomas Chaloner. Shortly after Chaloner's death Holme married his former master's widow, and with the widow he acquired the business. Holme was appointed Deputy Herald for Cheshire, Lancashire and North Wales by William Segar, Norroy King of Arms, on 1 March 1600.¹⁷ He was reappointed in 1603 and 1606.¹⁸ The original appointment of 1606 is preserved in the College of Arms. It is beautifully illuminated with the arms of Richard St. George, then Norroy, and with the Royal arms, crests and badges. By it Holme was required to look into abuses and errors by gentlemen assuming arms to which they had no right, and also by painters, glaziers and others usurping the names and authorities of heralds, who served funerals with false arms.

The formal document of appointment was supplemented by detailed written instructions from Norroy. Holme was not to suffer funeral work with arms to be painted by anyone not duly licensed by Norroy. He was to make sure that the arms of the deceased were properly differenced and the quarterings rightly marshalled. He was not to suffer a close hearse with tops to be set up for a gentleman, esquire or knight. A hearse in this context was not the vehicle for conveying the corpse, but a wooden erection decorated with arms set up in the church. He was not to allow a greater proportion of work than was suitable for the rank of the deceased. He was to demand and receive for Norroy the funeral fees set out in a schedule and to send in an account of the profits and fees each Easter and Michaelmas. Most important of all for posterity, he was to make certificates of the funerals and send them to be registered in the College of Arms.¹⁹

Despite the appointment of Randle Holme and other Deputy Heralds in various parts of the country, the abuses continued, so James I ordered the Commissioners for executing the office of Earl Marshal to look into:

'many great abuses offered to the nobility and gentry by persons trading in armory, who presume without authority to intermeddle with the marshalling of arms, the erecting of monuments wherein arms are to be fixed, coats quartered, and due differences to be observed, by reason whereof many great errors are daily committed.'

¹⁶ J. P. Earwaker, 'The Four Randle Homes', in *C.A.S.* iv, 1892, p. 115.

¹⁷ *Cheshire and Lancashire Funeral Certificates*, p. vi.

¹⁸ Coll. Arm. MSS. Heralds II, f. 760; Box XXV, no. 27.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, Heralds II, f. 758.

On 10 November 1618 the Commissioners made an Order for settling the fees at funerals not attended by Officers of Arms and prohibiting painters and other tradesmen from working arms and crests without the allowance of the Kings and other Officers of Arms. The Order required to be sent to the College of Arms certificates of all funerals of noblemen, baronets, knights, esquires, and gentlemen buried without the attendance of an Officer of Arms. The fees varied from 40s. for a gentleman buried without funeral escutcheons and £3 6s. 8d. for a gentleman buried with escutcheons to £45 for a duke or duchess or an archbishop.

The Commissioners then proceeded, 'for remedy of the former Gross Abuses, which are daily committed by Painters that keep open Shops of Armory and do Devise and set forth Armes at their pleasure, assuming the names of Herald-Painters for their more Countenance therein', to order that such tradesmen should not paint arms on coaches or elsewhere or funeral work or make or paint any descents or pedigrees or give any tricks of arms out of their books and shops without the allowance and approbation of the Kings of Arms. Masons were not to engrave, paint, or set up arms, genealogies, epitaphs, or inscriptions, or to make monuments without the allowance of the Kings and Officers of Arms. Glaziers, goldsmiths, cutters, gravers, carvers, and other artificers were not to paint, engrave, or carve arms before draughts had been seen and allowed by the Kings and Officers of Arms, except those of the nobility, 'whose coats and quarterings [were] eminent and well-known', or such of the ancient gentry as had been formerly viewed, approved, and allowed by the provincial Kings of Arms at their visitations.²⁰ We could wish that some such order was in force to-day. It would save the perpetration of some appalling heraldic horrors in churches and other public places.

The Commissioners' Order was reflected in the form of the deputations of the Deputy Heralds. Hitherto they had been granted by each provincial King of Arms by virtue of the commission issued to him by the Crown. After the Order of 1618 the deputations were granted by all the Officers of Arms acting together under the authority of the Order.

Although the existing deputations were not mentioned in the Commissioners' Order, they seem to have been regarded as abrogated by it. The deputation to Randle Holme was not due to expire until 1622, but on 30 November 1619 we find him writing to Norroy referring to the making of the Order and to Norroy's promise to endeavour to get him a new deputation.²¹ When Holme's new deputation was granted on 11 December 1619 it was only for Cheshire, Denbighshire and Flintshire, the deputation for Lancashire being granted to one Leonard Smetheley of Manchester.²²

²⁰ *Ibid.*, Heralds VII, f. 217.

²¹ 'Letters on the Claims of the College of Arms in Lancashire', in *Chetham Miscellanies*, Chetham Soc. xcvi, 1885, v. 35. The year is omitted from the date of the letter, but the reference to 'May last at which tyme Baronett fitton dyed' shows that it must be 1619.

²² Coll. Arm. MS. Box XXV, no. 36; *Lancashire Funeral Certificates*, Chetham Soc. lxxv, 1879, p. 46.

Holme displayed great energy in acting upon his instructions relating to funerals. There are copies surviving of 121 funeral certificates taken by him during the next twenty years, but there may well have been more. He often had difficulty in collecting the fees from unwilling executors. Sometimes it took him years to collect a fee. The funeral certificate for Sir Thomas Ireland, who died in 1625, was not signed until 1637,²³ and there are other cases where many years elapsed between the funeral and the certificate. In one case, that of Ralph Willbraham of Dorfold, who died in 1628, Holme had to pursue his quarry to London in order to get the money.²⁴

Randle Holme I was 84 when he died in 1656. His son, Randle Holme II, survived him for only three and a half years. Most of Randle Holme II's adult life seems to have been spent working for his father. However, he became a Deputy Herald in his own right, when he was appointed Deputy for Lancashire in 1627.²⁵

Randle Holme II was not only over-shadowed by his father, but also by his son, Randle Holme III. Randle Holme III is perhaps the best known of his line, for he was the author of *The Academy of Armory*, printed and published in Chester in 1688. No record of his appointment as a Deputy Herald has been found, but it must have been after 1668, for in that year he was in trouble with the great William Dugdale, then Norroy King of Arms, for doing funeral work without Dugdale's authority. On 12 March 1667/8 Dugdale was awarded £20 damages against Holme in an action at Stafford Assizes, and the day after this triumph Dugdale recorded in his diary that he went from Stafford to Cheshire and on the 14th he pulled down achievements hung up by Holme in the churches of Nether Peover and Budworth. In the following August Dugdale came to Chester and pulled down the achievements which Holme had set up for Alderman Walley in St. John's church.²⁶ However, Holme had made his peace with Dugdale by 1675, when we find him taking funeral certificates in Lancashire and Flintshire.²⁷

Holme's career as a Deputy Herald seems to have had some vicissitudes. On 16 May 1678 we find him described as 'Deputy to the Office of Arms', but by 10 February 1679/80 he was described as 'sometyme Deputy to Garter principal King of Arms' and on 2 December 1682 he was described as 'sometyme Deputy to the office of Arms'.²⁸ However, whatever fresh trouble there may have been, peace prevailed again by the time that Holme published his *Academy of Armory* in 1688, for the first chapter of the first book is dedicated:

²³ *Lancashire Funeral Certificates*, p. 49.

²⁴ *Cheshire and Lancashire Funeral Certificates*, p. 189.

²⁵ Coll. Arm. MS. Box XXV, no 36.

²⁶ W. Hamper, *Life . . . of Sir William Dugdale*, 1827, pp. 128-9.

²⁷ *Lancashire Funeral Certificates*, p. 82; *Cheshire Sheaf*, iii. 336.

²⁸ *Cheshire and Lancashire Funeral Certificates*, p. 26; Brasenose College Muniments 57 a. 12; 57 a. 14.

'To the Honourable the Kings at Arms with the Worshipful the Colledge of Heralds: R.H. Your Deputy for the County Palatine of Chester and Lancaster, with North Wales; Wisheth Prosperity and increase of Happiness.'

Yet on the title page he is still described as 'sometimes Deputy for the Kings of Arms'. Perhaps the reconciliation occurred while the book was in the press.

It is to be observed that Holme sometimes described himself as 'Deputy to the Office of Arms', but this seems to have been a careless reversion to an earlier and by then obsolete style, for all the surviving deputations of the time of Charles II, instead of being granted by the College of Arms as a whole under the Commissioners' Order of 1618, were granted by single Kings of Arms, Garter beginning to grant deputations for the first time. No text of a deputation to Randle Holme III seems to have survived, but he seems to have continued to be a Deputy Herald until his death in 1699. He is described on his monument in St. Mary's church as 'Deputy to the kings at arms', but in the entry of his burial in the parish register he is up-graded as 'Herrald of Armes'. This no doubt reflects the position which he held in the eyes of his fellow-citizens, for in the heading of three sets of commendatory verses prefixed to his *Academy of Armory* he is described as 'Herald in Chester', but in fairness to Holme it should be said that he was always careful to describe himself as a Deputy.

The last of his line to be a Deputy Herald was Randle Holme IV, who is described on his monument in St. Mary's church as 'Deputy to Norroy K:att Armes', though, like his father, he was up-graded to 'Harreld of Armes' in the parish register. We have no copy of his deputation, but it probably took the form of a written agreement between Norroy and Holme. This procedure was adopted after the accession of William and Mary, because the practice of holding visitations had ceased, so that there were then no longer any visitation commissions on which the deputations could be made to depend for their validity.

Randle Holme IV died in 1707. By his will he left 'all my Books and Collections of Heraldry' to be equally divided between his brothers George and John,²⁹ but neither of them followed the long family tradition, and the 'books and collections' were purchased by Robert Harley, Earl of Oxford, from whose library they passed to the British Museum in 1753.

The next Deputy Herald in Chester was Francis Bassano. The Bassano family was descended from a Venetian, who came to England in 1538 as a court musician to Henry VIII. The immigrant's son and grandson and other members of the family were also court musicians to succeeding sovereigns until 1641, but by the beginning of the eighteenth century the Bassanos had, like the Holmes, become a family of Deputy Heralds.³⁰ Francis Bassano's father, Richard, was a painter in Lichfield and held the appointment of Deputy Herald for Derbyshire

²⁹ Proved 22 Sep. 1707, Cheshire County Record Office.

³⁰ S. Glover, *History of the County of Derby*, 1829, ii. 575.

and Staffordshire.³¹ Richard Bassano had another son, Christopher, who lived in Derby and succeeded his father as Deputy Herald for Derbyshire.³²

Francis Bassano became the Deputy for Cheshire and North Wales to Norroy le Neve (1704–1729). It is not certain when Bassano obtained this appointment, but he had come to Chester by 1712, when he was admitted a freeman of the City.³³ One of his contemporaries in Chester was a painter named Charles Orme and Orme's son, Edward, became Bassano's godson. On 15 September 1733 Bassano and Edward Orme were appointed joint Deputies by Norroy Leake.³⁴ If the age at death stated on his monument in Chester Cathedral is correct, Orme was only about 17 at the time of this appointment.

Bassano died on 17 April 1746. By his will he left to Edward Orme and his brother Ambrose 'all my books marked EAO . . . and all materials and other goods and instruments belonging to the painting business now in my workhouse in the said City and also all my prick of patterns for Escutcheons and all my paper pedigrees'.³⁵ Some of Bassano's manuscripts are now in the British Museum.³⁶

Edward Orme was a musician. He was appointed organist of the Cathedral in 1765.³⁷ After his godfather's death he continued to carry on on his own account the business in which he had been assisting all his adult life.³⁸ He was admitted a freeman of the City as a painter in 1747.³⁹ In the same year we find him described as Deputy to Norroy Cheale, though there seems to be no record of his appointment.⁴⁰ No doubt he continued to act as Deputy to Cheale and his successors Townley and Oldys until he was reappointed Deputy Herald for Cheshire and North Wales by Norroy Oldys on 24 January 1761.⁴¹ This appointment was of very short duration, for Oldys died within a few months.⁴² Orme was not re-appointed by the next Norroy, but as late as 1772 we find him describing himself as 'Deputy to William Oldys, late Norroy'.⁴³ Orme was the last Deputy Herald in Chester. He was also the last to be appointed anywhere, and, when he died of gout at the age of 61 in 1777, he had outlived all the other Deputy Heralds.

By then the need for Deputy Heralds had ceased. Elaborate heraldic funerals

³¹ Brit. Mus. MS. Add. 47, 979, no. 42.

³² *Ibid.*, no. 41

³³ *Rolls of the Freemen of the City of Chester*, L.C.R.S. lv 1908, p. 230.

³⁴ Sir Anthony Wagner, *Heralds of England*, 1967, p. 372.

³⁵ Proved 16 Sep. 1747, Cheshire County Record Office.

³⁶ Brit. Mus. MSS. Add. 6032; Stowe 540. There are also two of Bassano's manuscripts in the College of Arms (D. & S. Lysons, *Magna Britannia*, ii pt. II. 355n.

³⁷ J. C. Bridge, 'The Organists of Chester Cathedral', in *C.A.S.* xix, 1913, 109, where Orme is wrongly styled 'Deputy Chester Herald'.

³⁸ For painting work by Orme for the Dean and Chapter, see R. V. H. Burne, *Chester Cathedral*, 1958, pp. 201, 203.

³⁹ *Rolls of the Freemen*, ii. 330. Ambrose Orme was admitted on the same day.

⁴⁰ Brasenose College Muniments, 57 a. 32.

⁴¹ Coll. Arm. MS. CGY (II).

⁴² *College of Arms*, 1953, p. 115.

⁴³ Brasenose College Muniments, 57 a. 29.

had gone out of fashion and so there were no longer any fees to be collected for the Officers of Arms in London. Nevertheless, some heraldic work continued to be done in Chester. There was one George Wilkinson, who is described as 'Herald' in a Chester directory of 1782.⁴⁴ Herald he certainly was not, but presumably he was a herald painter. Arms painting continued in Chester well into the nineteenth century. There was Edward Tollit, herald painter, of whom nothing is known except that he had a son baptised at Holy Trinity Church in 1827. The last of his line was Samuel Brown, who described himself as an 'heraldic artist' and was operating at 17 Bold Square as late as 1860.⁴⁵ I suspect that these later practitioners were primarily coach panel painters.

Although Deputy Heralds were appointed to safeguard the interests of the Officers of Arms, such an appointment opened up considerable opportunities for gainful employment to a man able to take advantage of them. It was for this reason that the appointments were attractive to herald painters. A Deputy Herald who could restrain other painters from doing heraldic work could secure a monopoly of such work for himself. In this field there was a steady demand for heraldic painting for the funerals of the nobility and gentry. The amount of heraldic display depended upon the rank of the deceased, but even a non-armigerous merchant would have the arms of his City Company displayed at his funeral, though for a fee which was but half that payable in respect of a gentleman of coat armour.

From providing the heraldic trappings for funerals, it was but a step for the Deputy Herald to supply the other necessities, the mourning gowns and gloves, the hearse, and the coffin, and to superintend the funeral ceremony. In short, the Deputy Herald undertook the whole work of arranging the funeral. He became, in the literal sense of the word, an undertaker.

The work and the expense involved in these heraldic funerals would make the modern mortician's mouth water. Before the funeral itself came the lying-in-state. Some idea of what that involved was given by a witness in a case in the Court of Chivalry in 1691. He said that he saw:

' a piece of Black Base hanging over the door of the . . . house with three paper Escutcheons thereon bearing the Armes of [the deceased person] and a roome or parlor in the . . . house hung round with black base and Escutcheons and the roome wherein the Corps . . . lay covered with black base on Cieling and floor and the sides hung round with the same and Escutcheons upon it and silver sconces with lights, and in the middle of the Roome the Corps lay covered with a black velvet pall and Escutcheons upon it and four men standing by the same with their Hats on, Mutes, and stands with Candlesticks and Candles standing by the said Corps'.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ I am indebted to Mr. Robert Sutton, A.R.C.M., A.R.C.O. for this reference.

⁴⁵ *History, Gazeteer and Directory of Chester*, Sheffield, 1860, p. 133.

⁴⁶ *Oldys v. Domville*, cited in Squibb, *op. cit.*, p. 95.

The funeral procession, or, as it was often called, the funeral pomp, varied in magnificence with the rank of the deceased. It would be tedious to recite all the elements in even a simple funeral procession from the poor men in gowns going two by two, carrying little flags of the arms of the deceased person, at the head to the miscellaneous friends and well wishers at the rear, with the body surrounded by gentlemen bearing banners displaying the arms of the deceased and his ancestors and relations.⁴⁷ Sometimes it was not the actual body, but a wax or wooden figure representing it, the burial having previously taken place privately. Such a funeral was really what we should now call a memorial service.

It fell to the lot of the Deputy Herald to marshal the funeral pomp. A witness in the case in 1691 defined the marshalling of funeral pomp as the calling of persons attending the funeral out of the house, putting them in the order in which they are to march, and bidding them march or halt.⁴⁸ This putting of the company into order must have been a delicate task in an age in which people felt so strongly about precedence that the wife of a doctor of divinity could sue the wife of a justice of the peace in the Court of King's Bench because the justice's wife had forcibly insisted upon the precedence at a funeral which she claimed to be her due.⁴⁹

The Deputy Heralds also developed a useful follow-through of their funereal activities in the provision of painted heraldic memorials to be placed in the parish churches of the deceased. There are numerous examples of these armorial monuments painted on wooden panels in the churches in and around Chester, particularly in St. John's church, Chester, and in the churches at Stoak, Backford and Thornton-le-Moors. Although these wooden monuments are not signed, there can be little doubt that they are the work of the Deputy Heralds in business at the times when they were painted. One of them is to be seen as far afield as Salisbury Cathedral, where in the north choir aisle there is a stone monument to Mary Barnston of the Cheshire family, who died in 1625, and hung on the wall above it is a framed painting of the Barnston arms in the distinctive style to be found in Cheshire churches.

The Deputy Heralds also practised as genealogists. They provided their clients with long vellum pedigree rolls, illuminated with shields of arms, similar to the splendid Eyton pedigree displayed in the Grosvenor Museum. The chief function of such a pedigree was, no doubt, to gratify the vanity of the client, but some of the Deputy Heralds' genealogical work had a more practical purpose.

There were at Brasenose College, Oxford, two fellowships, founded in 1522, in the elections to which preference had to be given to candidates, born in Cheshire, of the cousinage or lineage of John Williamson, Rector of St. George's,

⁴⁷ For details of some heraldic funeral processions, see *Cheshire and Lancashire Funeral Certificates*, pp. vii-xii.

⁴⁸ *Oldys v. Domville*, cited in Squibb, *op. cit.*, p. 93.

⁴⁹ *Ashton v. Jennings* (1675), 2 Levinz 133.

Canterbury, or of the name, cousinage or lineage of John Port, Serjeant-at-law, or of his heirs. John Williamson was born at Weaverham and had a brother who lived in Chester, and Serjeant Port was a native of Chester, where his father was Mayor in 1486.

In order to prove that he fell within the extremely wide terms of this genealogical qualification, a young man had to arm himself with a pedigree. Often this pedigree was drawn up by the Deputy Herald in practice in Chester at the time. Many of these pedigrees are preserved in the Brasenose College muniment room. Most of them are signed by one or other of the Randle Holmes, but there are four late ones signed by Edward Orme.⁵⁰ There is also one of Orme's Brasenose pedigrees among the records of the diocese of Lincoln, having been submitted to the Bishop as Visitor of the College on the hearing of an appeal.⁵¹

These pedigrees seem to be the only identifiable surviving work of Orme. By this time drawing up such pedigrees must have been almost the only activity left for a Deputy Herald, apart from painting arms on carriages and church monuments. After Orme's death these Chester-made pedigrees were replaced by pedigrees under the seal of the College of Arms until the preference for founders' kin was abolished in 1858.⁵²

Having endeavoured to get the Deputy Heralds of Chester in their historical context, it would be well to say a few words about their geographical context. Deputations were granted on a county basis, and although a man might hold deputations for more than one county, the total area covered by his deputations would not be more than he could easily visit from his base. The Deputy Herald in Chester who had the widest area was Randle Holme I, whose deputations covered Cheshire, Lancashire and the six counties of North Wales. Although it was an essential qualification for a Deputy Herald that he should be a local man, the whole country was not neatly parcelled out among Deputy Heralds at any one time. The granting of deputations was dependent upon a suitable man being available. Chester was unusual in having a succession of Deputy Heralds throughout almost the whole of the period during which there was work for Deputy Heralds to do, though York ran Chester fairly close with an almost unbroken succession between 1600 and the early years of the eighteenth century. Some counties were never the subject of more than one deputation, but the geographical distribution of the deputations shows that the Kings of Arms endeavoured to have Deputies in Cambridge, Derby, Exeter, Gloucester, Hereford, Norwich, Nottingham, Oxford, Shrewsbury,

⁵⁰ Brasenose College Muniments, 37 a. 42 and 57 A. 28 (Nathaniel Bostock, 1620); 57 a. 2 (Ralph Eaton, 1655); 57 a. 15 (Peter Gerrard, 1661); 57 A. 6 and 57 a. 7 (Thomas Lowe, 1662); 57 a. 5 and 57 a. 16 (Thomas Hynde, 1663); 1663); 57 a. 4 (John Leigh, 1667); 37 a. 8 (Thomas Tench, 1679); 57 a. 12 (Francis Acton, 1679); 37 a. 3 (Thomas Tench, 1680); 57 a. 14 (Richard Dale, 1682); 57 a. 30 (Hugh Ball, 1698); 57 a. 32 (Charles Everard, 1747); 57 a. 31 (Alan Harrison Eccles, 1764); 37 A. 27 (Richard Sandbach, 1765); 57 a. 29 (George Heron, 1772).

⁵¹ Lincoln Diocesan Records, V/V/6 (Richard Heyes, 1757).

⁵² The last man to hold one of these fellowships was John Arderne Ormerod, the third son of George Ormerod, the historian of Cheshire (Brasenose College Muniments, unnumbered pedigree).

Stafford, Taunton, Warwick, and Worcester, as well as in Chester and York, whenever they could find a suitable man.

This leads to the last matter on which I wish to touch. What kind of men were these Deputy Heralds? Although they are often described in records as 'painters', the word 'painter' was used with the meaning of 'one who paints pictures' and not with the meaning of a 'workman who applies paint to wood or ironwork'. Their surviving work indicates a high level of artistic achievement in both oils and water-colour. In addition to manual dexterity, they had an extensive knowledge of heraldry, and some of them, especially Randle Holme I and Randle Holme III, were highly competent genealogists. They had to be men of integrity, for they collected substantial sums of money, for which they had to account to the Kings of Arms. Finally, they had to be keen and energetic, for upon their keenness and energy depended the number of fees they were able to collect.

Socially, most of them belonged to families of minor gentry. Peter Proby came of a family which in later generations held the earldom of Carysfort. A younger branch of the Probys still flourishes at Elton Hall, near Peterborough. Thomas Chaloner was armigerous, his arms being displayed on his monument in St. Michael's church, and William Grafton was always described as 'gentleman' in documents relating to him. The four Randle Holmes were descended from a family which had owned a moiety of the manor of Tranmere in Wirral since the end of the fourteenth century. Randle Holme I was granted a crest and an augmentation of his arms in 1613.⁵³ Francis Bassano's grandfather had his pedigree and arms entered at the visitation of London in 1633.⁵⁴

In Chester the Deputy Heralds were leading citizens. Three of the four Randle Holmes were Sheriffs, and Randle Holme I was Mayor in 1633, his son being one of the Sheriffs in that year. Francis Bassano was Sheriff in 1734 and Edward Orme in 1773.

Although their activities were mainly in the area covered by their deputations, Randle Holme I and Randle Holme III held office at Court. Randle Holme I was in the service of Henry, Prince of Wales, though in what capacity is uncertain.⁵⁵ His office was probably an honorary one conferred as a mark of favour, as was that of Randle Holme III, who was Gentleman Sewer Extraordinary to Charles II.⁵⁶ This seems to have been a very suitable appointment for him. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines a 'sewer' as an attendant at a meal who superintended the arrangement of the table, the seating of the guests, and the tasting and serving of the dishes. To marshal the guests at a royal banquet cannot have seemed very different in principle from marshalling the mourners at a funeral, and required the same degree of knowledge and tact, if everything was to proceed smoothly.

⁵³ Brit. Mus. MS. Harl. 2161, f. 117.

⁵⁴ *Visitation of London . . . 1633*, Harl. Soc. xv, 1880, i. 54.

⁵⁵ Earwaker, *op. cit.*, p. 117.

⁵⁶ Brit. Mus. MS. Harl. 2022, f. 183b.

So we come to the end of our exploration of a by-way of history. Although the circumstances which made Deputy Heralds necessary have long since passed away, we still have reason to be grateful to them. I have already mentioned some of the tangible remains of their professional work, the paintings and the pedigrees, the funeral certificates and Chaloner's visitation. Some of these tell of matters of which other records are not now to be found. Then, as a by-product of their professional activities, we have the extensive historical collections made by the four Randle Holmes, and in a more modest way by Francis Bassano. Great though the debt which we owe to these men for their tangible remains may be, the intangible results of their work are much greater. Had not the Kings of Arms been able to obtain such competent assistance, not only in Chester, but throughout the country, the whole of English heraldry might have been reduced to chaos. As it is, we can rely upon most heraldry of the sixteenth, seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries as being reasonably accurate and good evidence of family relationships. It is not until the reign of George III that we have to start viewing heraldic display with suspicion. It was then the purveyor of arms based on nothing more than surname and county of birth, who is unhappily still with us, began to come into his own. The present Kings of Arms no doubt wish that there were still a place for Deputy Heralds at the present time. Historians and antiquaries can be thankful that Deputy Heralds flourished in the past.