

## THE RELIGIOUS GILDS OF WYMONDHAM, c. 1470-1550

by Ken Farnhill

### SUMMARY

*This article will discuss the evidence for the gilds in Wymondham, aside from the five gild account books. It will examine the value of the testamentary sources, and will also reveal the extent of landholding by the gilds, in addition to the halls which many gilds possessed. Finally, it will consider the relationship between the gilds and the parish as revealed by the parish bede roll of 1524.*

Religious gilds have been keenly studied in recent years as an aspect of voluntary religious activity by the laity. Most of this work has focused on account books, and returns to the 1389 survey of religious gilds<sup>1</sup>. Three studies of the gilds in Wymondham were undertaken at the turn of the last century, by Mr G. A. Carthew in 1884, and Miss Catherine Firth and the Reverend Mr S. Martin Jones in 1914, but these studies, on the whole, also restricted themselves to the account books of the four gilds and one brotherhood, which remain in the parish muniments room at Wymondham<sup>2</sup>. Few attempts have been made to study some of the more intractable problems concerning the gilds in the late medieval period, such as their number, the length of their existence and their relationship with the parish. This is partly because answers to these questions are unlikely to be found in the account books of gilds, but are more likely to occur amongst the wills, deeds and manorial records, relatively few of which have survived. Wymondham parish, however, has many such documents and for that reason lends itself to a more broadly based examination of the gilds than is normally possible. In particular, this article will discuss the surviving evidence for the gilds; what wills reveal about the number of gilds existing in Wymondham in the late medieval period, and when they flourished; what properties, including gildhalls, they owned, and what the bede roll reveals about relations between the gilds and the parish church.

### Evidence

Parish records prior to the dissolution of the gilds in 1548, aside from the account books of the gilds and the brotherhood, are scarce. Churchwardens' accounts survive from 1544 to 1546 but contain only routine payments concerning minor repairs to church property. A bede roll, written in 1524, remained unnoticed in the parish chest, until its recent re-discovery, and a number of deeds have survived. Some of these were published by Carthew and, of the many which still remain in the muniments room at Wymondham Abbey, eight explicitly refer to gilds and three others are enfeoffments which seem to detail gild properties<sup>3</sup>. There are over three hundred wills proved in the courts of the archdeaconry of Norfolk, the diocese of Norwich and the province of Canterbury<sup>4</sup>.

Manor records are plentiful, especially for the 13th and early 14th centuries, but there is only one manor court roll covering the early 16th century still extant. Given the fact that the parish covered over twenty manors, this one roll is a disappointingly small survival of what must have been a much larger collection relating to other manors in the parish. There are, however, a number of court rolls, surveys and minute books from the later 15th century which include references to gilds, and the one early 16th-century roll details the activities of the manor courts in parts of Wymondham town itself, and the south-east of the parish<sup>5</sup>.

Thus, the most promising parish sources are the gild books, belonging to the gilds of All Saints, St John the Baptist, Holy Trinity and the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary, and the accounts of the brotherhood of Our Lady's Light<sup>6</sup>. Even here, though, the collection is not as plentiful as it once was. Five gild books remain in the parish church but two more have been lost, one probably within the last two centuries (the five books have been numbered, apparently in a 19th century hand, 1, 2, 3, 4, and 7. The churchwardens' account book from 1546 was numbered 5 but there is no record of the item numbered 6<sup>7</sup>). One of these books probably belonged to the gild of St Thomas the Martyr, an inventory of church possessions of 1552 noted the existence of such a book, containing entries from 1406 to 1538. Another book mentioned in the inventory belonged to the gild of St George, some pages of which were still in the parish chest until late in the last century. However, the inventory of 1552 makes no mention of the books relating to the gild of Holy Trinity and the brotherhood of Our Lady's Light, indicating that these books must have been placed there after 1552, and the seven gild books were not kept together immediately following the dissolution of the gilds in, or before, 1548. Accounts for other gilds in Wymondham have, apparently, never been preserved<sup>8</sup>.

The greatest confusion with these account books concerns the numbers written on their covers. The handwriting cannot be precisely dated but is certainly from the last two hundred years. It is curious, then, that Francis Blomefield made no note of the two account books which are now missing, or indeed the other five remaining books, in his history of Norfolk, first published in the 18th century<sup>9</sup>. However, Blomefield's account of the gilds in Wymondham makes it clear that he did not examine the documents in the parish chest. The evidence he extracted from wills appears to have been his main source and Blomefield did not differentiate between the brotherhood of Our Lady's Light and the gild of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary, a distinction which anyone with access to the books themselves could have made, since separate accounts exist for both.

If Blomefield did not see the seven gild books they could have been dispersed at any time up to 1884. when Carthew removed the surviving five books, in order to transcribe extracts from them. Carthew's two accounts of the gilds make no mention of the missing two account books and although Carthew failed to return a number of documents belonging to the parish, it seems unlikely that he borrowed two entire books and then neglected to mention them. Indeed, he only emphasised the existence of a fifth account book, belonging to the gild of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary, which Blomefield had not identified<sup>10</sup>.

In addition to the account books, Carthew also read other papers relating to the gilds, which he said had become detached from the account books, but these papers, although published in part in *Norfolk Archaeology*, were never returned to the parish. A number of them are deeds relating to gild lands, many of which he transcribed in full, but it is not clear how many such deeds Carthew took, so there may be others which he neither transcribed nor returned. Other documents were transcribed relating to the brotherhood of Our Lady's Light but only one was printed in its entirety. Ten years of accounts for the brotherhood of Our Lady's Light, which must have become detached from the book, were summarised by him and he seems not to have realised from whence they had come. The subsequent numbering of the pages of the account book fails to take account of these missing pages, their absence probably being disguised by the change in language at the head of the accounts: an account in English for 1527 is followed by the Latin account for the regnal year 28 Hen VIII, that is 1536/7<sup>11</sup>.

Along with these accounts, Carthew also kept the rules of the brotherhood, which he printed in full, and a list of members, which he summarised by referring to the priests and a few laymen. He remarked that the list, and (by implication) also the rules, were written on seven pages

of paper, thus the date of the list of members and the rules may be contemporary<sup>12</sup>. The first two names on the list are both priests, the vicar John Drye, and Robert Nelyng. Since Nelyng died in 1523 and Drye did not assume the office of vicar until after 1511 when Robert Irby, the previous vicar, died, the list must come from between these dates<sup>13</sup>. Interestingly, a payment of 5d was made in 1516 to write the register, which may provide a precise date for the membership list, and possibly also the list of rules<sup>14</sup>. The complete list names 124 members but in the absence of the original the total membership at any one time cannot be determined.

Carthew's introduction to the transcripts named ten gilds in addition to the brotherhood, nine of which had been identified by Blomefield and one other which had not<sup>15</sup>. They were the gilds of Holy Trinity, St Peter, St Margaret, St Andrew, St Thomas, Holy Cross, St John the Baptist, St George, All Saints and the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin. However, Blomefield's list contained a mistaken entry, that of the gild of St Andrew. The will which he must have used (the only will to mention a gild of St Andrew amongst the Wymondham wills) actually refers to the gild in Deopham parish, and not Wymondham. There are no other references anywhere to a gild of St Andrew, although a chapel, with its own roodloft, did exist within the church<sup>16</sup>. Both writers also transcribed entries relating to another gild, dedicated to Corpus Christi. This gild was not included in Blomefield's list, although he referred to it later in his account of Wymondham parish as possessing a gildhall and eleven acres of land<sup>17</sup>, and it was mentioned by R.C. Taylor amongst the eleven gilds he listed in his *Index Monasticus*<sup>18</sup>. Carthew also transcribed a number of deeds relating to property formerly held by the gild<sup>19</sup>. An eleventh Wymondham gild which was dedicated to St Laurence, was not identified by Blomefield, despite the presence of bequests to it in the consistory court will registers, which seem to have been his principal testatory source for much of his history of Norfolk<sup>20</sup>. A twelfth gild, dedicated to the Holy Spirit, was recorded in the lay subsidy of 1524 as possessing 20s worth of land and paying 12d in subsidy<sup>21</sup>.

### The wills

Much evidence for gilds in Wymondham is in the form of wills, in both archdeaconry and consistory court registers. The information they provide has to be used cautiously, however. There are not enough wills to be able to chart the rise and fall in popularity of individual gilds. In most cases all we have is a simple bequest and very few wills specify the age of a gild or its gildhall, or give any information about the likelihood of the gild's long term survival (except during the 1540s when they were obviously experiencing difficulties). Wills provide little evidence for the foundation dates of gilds. For example, the gild of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin attracted its first bequest in the surviving wills in 1473, some sixty years after its foundation. Some wills, however, do yield extra information. That of Simon Longrod, written in 1462, mentioned the fact that the Holy Trinity gildhall in Spooner Row had recently been built. His bequest is also the earliest surviving mention of the gild, preceding a reference in a rental of the gild of St Thomas by two years<sup>22</sup>.

According to the wills, six of the twelve Wymondham gilds were meeting prior to 1470, those being St Thomas the Martyr, St Laurence, Holy Trinity, St John the Baptist, St Peter and Holy Cross. To these can be added the gild of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin. Three of the remaining gilds were mentioned in wills between 1476 and 1488. The gilds of Holy Spirit and Corpus Christi were not mentioned in any wills but the latter was established by 1501 and the former by 1524<sup>23</sup>. St Thomas's gild was undoubtedly the longest established of these gilds, it being the only one in Wymondham to respond to the 1389 survey of religious gilds by Richard II and providing a foundation date of 1187<sup>24</sup>.

On the whole, throughout the late 15th and early 16th centuries, the gild of St Thomas attracted more bequests than any other, a total of sixty-two between 1397 and 1538. St Peter's gild received more legacies than St Thomas's in the 1490s, but not at any other time, being mentioned a total of forty-four times. The gild of the Holy Trinity, as one of the longer established of the 15th-century gilds, attracted testators consistently with twenty-six bequests, as did the gild of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin with twenty-eight. Other gilds, such as Holy Cross, All Saints, St Laurence, St Margaret and St George, received fewer than twenty legacies, according to the surviving wills, and there are no recorded bequests to the gilds of the Holy Spirit or Corpus Christi. It is impossible to tell how many informal bequests were made by those who did not leave a will, or how many donations were made by executors of wills without an explicit instruction to do so, but as part of the dispersal of a testator's goods for the benefit of his or her soul.

The amounts paid to each gild varied a great deal, not only amongst the gilds but also over time. There is no real indication that these gifts represented an entrance payment, although the most frequently mentioned sums—6s 8d, 3s 4d, 20d—were common as entrance payments. The standard entrance fee for Wymondham gilds in the 16th century was 12d but most testators paid more than that, although some paid as little as 2d. However, by comparing the list of testators with the membership lists of the gilds, it can be shown that of forty-seven testators, only five gave money to gilds of which they were not members in order to gain membership. The remaining forty-two were all members of the gilds to which they gave their bequests, so their donations cannot be taken as examples of entrance fees for the dead. These figures exclude those whose wills were proved before the accounts of the relevant gild began. It seems clear from this that bequests were much more likely to come from existing gild members than those trying to gain entry to gilds at their deaths.

The cessation of bequests to gilds may not be an accurate way of showing when gilds ceased to function, but they do reveal when they ceased to be attractive to testators, either through their own design, or circumstances beyond their control. In fact, seven of the twelve gilds attracted bequests in 1535 or later. In 1535, William Plomer mentioned the gilds of St Thomas, St Margaret and St George, and Thomas Hobbys left money to the gilds of St Thomas and St John the Baptist<sup>25</sup>. John Drye's will of 1538 named the gilds of St Thomas, St Peter and the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin, and a bequest was made to the gild of the Holy Trinity as late as 1542<sup>26</sup>. Of the other five, the Holy Cross gild received its last testatory gift in 1522, St Laurence in 1516, and All Saints in 1528<sup>27</sup>. In fact, All Saints gild was wound up in 1536, some eight years later, the gild of the Holy Cross was still meeting in 1539<sup>28</sup>, and the gild of St Laurence was mentioned in the 1524 bede roll, although it may not have been functioning by that time<sup>29</sup>. The gild of the Holy Spirit appeared only once on any document, in the lay subsidy of 1524, but the gild of Corpus Christi was still meeting in 1548<sup>30</sup>. Thus, ten of the twelve gilds were still being maintained after 1535.

The impression given by the wills, then, is of a parish which supported an increasing number of gilds over the course of the 15th century, and which kept up that support through into the 1530s. This picture is borne out by the membership lists, which show, amongst other things, that the gild of St John the Baptist welcomed its final new member in 1547<sup>31</sup>, and by the taxation records, which reveal that the gilds of St Peter and Corpus Christi were still meeting in 1548<sup>32</sup>. Clearly, the gilds' attractiveness was not confined to the lights before saints' images, and the largely hostile religious environment created by Henry VIII's government had not dampened the laity's enthusiasm for religious gilds.

### Gild properties

The physical evidence of the gilds in Wymondham is remarkably slim. Gildhalls have only rarely survived and only one can be identified, but the locations of some of the others can be estimated, if not located precisely. Their importance cannot be overestimated: Wymondham parish had at least eight halls in the late medieval period, four of which were in the town itself. Others were located close to where the majority of the gild members resided. Apart from being used to hold the fund-raising gild-ales, where ale was sold at a profit for the stock of the gild, and the annual feast, their function is not clear, but it seems unlikely that they would have remained closed at all other times. Clearly, they were an important presence in the parish community.

The gild of the Holy Trinity built a hall in the early 1460s in Spooner Row, the hamlet in which the gild was based. The will of Stephen Brown in 1536 identifies the gildhall to which he left money for repairs, as standing on the corner of the Spooner Row road which led to Wymondham town<sup>33</sup>. The corner site would appear to be that which is marked off from the rest of the field by a hedge, and presently occupied by a 19th-century Chapel-of-Ease, interestingly dedicated to the Holy Trinity. The gildhall of the Holy Cross has not been located, although it stood within the manor of Norton. It appears once in the manor rolls, when Richard Glover encroached on its land in 1475, and in 1534 it was sold to Thomas Knight by the gild<sup>34</sup>. The gildhall has since disappeared. Norton manor itself covered the area around Damgate Street and Middleton Street, and it was linked with the manors of Wattlefield, Silfield and Sutton, all in the south-east corner of the parish, and all part of the greater manor of Wymondham Grishaugh.

All Saints gildhall, which cost the gild huge sums of money to maintain, was built in Damgate street, just off the market place in the centre of Wymondham town. John Colyour, in his will of 1518, mentions it in the context of leaving his adjoining property to his wife<sup>35</sup>. The account book mentions the rebuilding of the hall, with a chimney and stables, in 1512<sup>36</sup>, and an entry in the manor court roll of Norton, from 1534, describes it as thirty-nine feet high and thirty feet wide, standing on land forty-four feet in depth from the road, opposite some land belonging to the Burton Lazars<sup>37</sup>. It seems extremely likely that this property still stands, as numbers 29 and 31 Damgate Street<sup>38</sup>.

Halls for the gilds of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin and St John the Baptist were built or bought, as the accounts testify, but their exact locations are unclear<sup>39</sup>. The gild of St John the Baptist met in Downham Street, which no longer exists, but which must have connected Wymondham town with Downham manor, due north of the market place<sup>40</sup>. The Nativity gild owned a gildhall but by 1509 had outgrown it and was meeting in St Thomas's gildhall instead<sup>41</sup>. St George's gild was referred to in wills as meeting in Wattlefield but there is no indication of the location of a meeting place, if any existed, for the gild of St Margaret<sup>42</sup>.

The remaining gild properties mentioned in the parish records concern the halls of the gilds of St Thomas, Corpus Christi and St Peter. The deeds relating to them testify to some confusion over which gild owned which property, a problem common to many deeds dated after the dissolution of the gilds. St Thomas's gildhall, called Puleynes, was enfeoffed over a period of at least seventy-five years. Deeds of enfeoffment survive for 1468, 1491 and 1542, but these deeds do not match the two printed by Carthew from 1507 and 1543. Carthew did not, unfortunately, print all the feoffees of the 1507 deed but the priest, John Gurre, who surrendered the property, was not a feoffee, according to the 1491 deed and in the 1543 deed only John Symonds was a feoffee, according to the deed of the previous year. Nor, in either case, does the

link between Puleynes and Boysts, the old gildhall, survive in the other deeds<sup>43</sup>. But, despite these confusions, it is clear that the gild of St Thomas owned two halls, one called Boysts and one called Puleynes.

An undated note, probably from 1580, of lands belonging to the gild of Corpus Christi also names a messuage called Puleynes and eleven acres, standing in Middleton Street<sup>44</sup>. This is probably the property of the gild of St Thomas which was known by the same name, and which may have been sold to the Corpus Christi gild. Blomefield asserted that the gild of St Peter met in Sutton but, given that it owned property in Sutton, Silfield and Wymondham itself, it could have met in any of these places and any of its many properties could have served as a gildhall<sup>45</sup>.

Gildhalls were not, however, the only properties maintained by the gilds. The manor court records, like the account books, frequently mention other properties belonging to the gilds. Eight gilds held land in addition to their gildhalls and some of these gilds, most notably those of St Peter and St Thomas, were important tenants and subletters of land within the parish. Nor was this practice confined to Wymondham gilds: some land in Wymondham was sublet by the gild of St John the Baptist which met in the neighbouring parish of Besthorpe<sup>46</sup>. The gilds had an impact on the parish in purely financial terms, as holders of land, in addition to the contribution they made to church life and, in all cases, the trend was for gilds to acquire an increasing amount of property over the course of the late 15th and early 16th centuries.

St Peter's gild owned numerous properties in Sutton, Silfield and Norton manors. Two properties were owned by it in Silfield in 1463 and in 1476 further land was surrendered to it<sup>47</sup>. Property in Norton and Sutton was referred to in the 1480s and in 1495 five acres were donated to it<sup>48</sup>. An extent of the 16th century identified four properties, totalling eleven acres and three and a half roods, and a rental of the same century noted a payment of 18s 10d by the gild<sup>49</sup>. In 1523, the lord of the manor returned over thirty-five acres to the gild, which it had held illegally<sup>50</sup>. The gild alderman was frequently cited in manor court records for failing to keep up these properties.

The gild of St Thomas owned a large number of properties in 1464, enough to write its own rental, naming thirty-three properties worth £13 18s 0½d per year<sup>51</sup>. In 1482 it was involved in a dispute with Richard and Emma Glover over a cottage in Norton, which was surrendered to the gild a year later<sup>52</sup>, and in 1516 a messuage was surrendered to it by Thomas and Johanna Martyn<sup>53</sup>. In 1518 a cottage was given by William Symond<sup>54</sup>. Some of its property, including its two gildhalls, subsequently formed part of the town lands<sup>55</sup>.

Corpus Christi gild owned a tenement, four roods and one acre of land, in 1501 and a 16th-century rental reveals a payment of 8s 8d for land<sup>56</sup>. In 1544 it paid four marks for an enclosure and three roods in Northfield, bought from Richard Vyntner<sup>57</sup>. Land formerly owned by this gild, and the gild of St Peter, was bought by the churchwardens for £6 13s 4d<sup>58</sup>. An undated note refers to a messuage called Puleynes and eleven acres and three roods belonging to the gild, probably bought from the gild of St Thomas<sup>59</sup>. This was the property mentioned by Blomefield as being purchased from the Crown in 1549, and subsequently enfeoffed for the use of the town<sup>60</sup>.

In 1464, the gild of the Holy Trinity paid 17½d for property rented from the gild of St Thomas, part of this property being a cottage which the gild subsequently bought<sup>61</sup>. In 1491 a further three roods of land were sold to the gild and these properties, in addition to the gildhall, were probably those recorded in the accounts as meadows rented by gild members<sup>62</sup>. However, an undated rental of the 16th century identified six properties worth over 13d owned by the gild

and in 1524 the lay subsidy assessed the gild's properties as worth 20s per year<sup>63</sup>. Thus, the gild of the Holy Trinity built up a substantial stock of land, mostly in Spooner Row, to fund its activities.

In 1448, the gild of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary sold its gildhall to Thomas Payn, provided that he allowed it to use the property for three days between the first day of August and 29 September<sup>64</sup>. In 1500 the gild was granted a property by Robert Chapleyn to maintain a light in the church between 10am and 5pm each day and to help with the maintenance of the chancel<sup>65</sup>. By 1500, there were four properties owned by the gild, as well as the gildhall, which later became too small and it rented a hall belonging to the gild of St Thomas instead<sup>66</sup>. In 1540, two of its properties were sold to assist the parish in purchasing parts of the abbey church for use by the parish<sup>67</sup>.

The gild of St John the Baptist also had four properties worth around 10s in 1500 and rising in value over the following forty years<sup>68</sup>. In 1533 the gild was accused of holding these lands illegally, all the properties in question being returned by the lord of the manor out of generosity to the gild<sup>69</sup>. The gild of the Holy Spirit possessed land worth 20s per year in 1524, a similar amount to that paid by All Saints gild for its two properties, thus it may also have held extra tenements<sup>70</sup>. The gild of the Holy Cross also possessed other properties, alongside the gildhall, which it sold in 1534<sup>71</sup>.

Other properties may have existed, since many deeds from the 15th century refer to enfeoffments without specifying the purpose of the arrangement, and enfeoffments were the most common means by which gilds held land<sup>72</sup>. Also, lands could have been held in other manors in Wymondham for which no records survive from this period. Thus, several gilds were also substantial landholders in the parish. Many properties were sublet to provide an income for the gild and many parishioners in Wymondham would have had dealings with the religious gilds not only in the context of church festivities but also in financial transactions as the subletters of property.

### **The bede roll**

The roll of benefactors to the parish church of 1524 includes both individuals and religious gilds and is thus a good source for examining the interrelationship between the two<sup>73</sup>. It lists, mostly from the early 16th century, those who donated money or furnishings to the church, and these names would be read out at least once a year during mass. It reveals not only much about the 'private' ownership of artefacts in the parish church by gilds but also how gilds compared with richer individual benefactors. The bede roll, in conjunction with wills and some of the gild accounts, also reveals how gilds combined with individuals in the provision, and use, of church ornaments and furniture. However, save for a few 15th-century references, it only includes donations made in the 16th century, indeed some 16th-century bequests are missing. It is not an inventory of church goods and thus cannot be used to reveal church furnishings in their entirety but in specific cases it does show who paid for items related to any particular patron or saint.

Gilds have been frequently described as 'poor men's chantries', providing spiritual benefits for those not wealthy enough to afford them individually<sup>74</sup>. Given this definition, one would expect gilds to act in a similar fashion in benefactions to the church and that they would provide furnishings and ornaments beyond the financial capacity of individual gild members, so rivalling individual gifts made by the wealthy of the parish. Thus, it is a matter of some interest to examine how far the gilds acted as providers for the church on behalf of their memberships and how their gifts compared to those of other individuals. The most relevant benefactions,

given the gilds' tendency to maintain lights and altars dedicated to their patrons, are those gifts relating to these patrons. Bequests relating to four patrons, Our Lady, St John the Baptist, the Holy Trinity and St Thomas, all of which are noted in the bede roll, provide the most promising way to test this theory.

Furnishings related to the Blessed Virgin were extensive, indeed the north aisle of the Abbey church was used as a Lady Chapel by the parish. It housed both an image and an altar dedicated to her. A tabernacle for the image of Our Lady was paid for by Robert and Christian Chapleyn, and a vestment was donated to her altar by Thomas Plomer, a priest. John Dawndy paid for an altar and tabernacle of Our Lady of Pity in the chapel and also provided for the gilding of the image of Our Lady in the choir. The gild, then, played no formal part in the provision of any of these items but all of the individual benefactors were members of the gild of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary<sup>75</sup>.

Although the bede roll has no reference to an image of St John the Baptist, the gild dedicated to him provided a chapel and altar, partly through a levy of members. The chapel probably lay behind a parclose screen within the body of the church, rather than in an extension of the building. Half of the cost of the altar table was paid for by John Boteld, while John Hendry paid for the gilding of the altar table, and although Hendry was a member of the gild of St John the Baptist, John Boteld was not. The only recorded requests that a priest celebrate at the altar of St John the Baptist for the testator's soul are in the wills of John Caly, made in 1524, and Thomas Caly, made in 1542. Both were members of the gild<sup>76</sup>.

An image of the Holy Trinity was established in the choir of the Abbey church. The image itself was provided by Thomas Westgate and a tabernacle bought to house it by William Lombe and Robert Dyn. This tabernacle was then gilded by John Kensey and his two wives, Elizabeth and Agnes, and John Dawndy, who provided £20 for this purpose. Robert Dyn, who provided the tabernacle, was a member of the gild of the Holy Trinity but the others, apparently, were not. However, the account book of the gild only begins in 1517 and there is no membership list. Thus it is possible that more of these benefactors were members of the gild of the Holy Trinity and only Thomas Westgate was not a member of one of the other three gilds with membership lists<sup>77</sup>.

As well as any furnishings related to him in the chapel of St Thomas in the centre of Wymondham town, the Lady chapel housed an image, tabernacle and altar dedicated to St Thomas. The tabernacle was provided for the image by Robert and Christian Chapleyn, the former dying in 1499. Altar cloths were donated by William Knyvet, a Knight, and Geoffrey and Agnes Gay. Although no membership list for the gild of St Thomas survives, Robert Chapleyn left money in his will to the gild of St Thomas, indicating that he was probably a member, and he and his wife were members of the gild of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin. Of the other benefactors, Geoffrey and Agnes Gay were members of the brotherhood of Our Lady's Light<sup>78</sup>.

The provision of the images, tabernacles and altars, then, were more acts of individual piety by richer members of the parish than corporate gifts by gilds. Many of these individual benefactors were members of the appropriate gild and an even greater proportion were members of at least one gild in Wymondham<sup>79</sup>. Of the eighty couples or individuals named on the bede roll of 1524, at least forty were members of gilds in Wymondham. Thus, it is not the case that gilds were eclipsed by more wealthy individual benefactors, since these latter were often gild members themselves, but it is clear that an individual benefaction by a gild member was much more common than a donation made by the gild as a corporate body. This suggests a deliberate poli-



cy by the wealthier gild members to ensure recognition of their deeds not only by the gild which made use of the image or altar but also by the wider parish. The bede roll does not bear out the assertion that gilds were associations of poor men but it does reveal a high level of commitment by gild members to the saints and the holy. In fact, joining a gild was often the only way of establishing a relationship with a saint through the maintenance of a light. The will evidence shows that where a gild existed, there was no separate stock to fund a light before an image: the gilds effectively had a monopoly on the maintenance of lights before images. The only exception to this was the light before the image of Our Lady, which also had a brotherhood attached to it<sup>80</sup>. In their wills, members were most likely to give money to the gilds for the maintenance of lights, as the culmination of this long-term commitment to a patron. Their bequests cannot relate to intercession for the dead, from which they would have benefited anyway. Gilds were, then, strong promoters of relationships with the saints and the holy, which involved the provision of images and altars in the parish church, in the majority of cases paid for by gild members. The principal purpose of the gilds, then, was not to act as 'poor men's chantries' but to secure and maintain a relationship with a patron in life and after death.

### Conclusion

Wymondham parish was a keen supporter of traditional religious practice in the late medieval period, despite its difficulties with the Abbey, itself a poignant symbol of medieval Catholicism. The support offered to the gilds, from rich and poor alike, allowed them to make a considerable impact on the parish, as tenants and subletters of properties, providers of lights, furniture and services in the church and meeting houses in the hamlets surrounding Wymondham town. The harmonious nature of relations between the gilds and the parish – witnessed in part by the presence of so many clergy, and even monks from the Abbey, in the membership lists of gilds – was secured partly through the participation of the wealthier parishioners in the gilds, preventing a divide between the rich and the poor of the parish, and through their private donations to the church which directly benefited the gild. The loss of the gilds in Wymondham was thus felt more acutely, and their contribution to the religious, social and economic life of the parish, fossilized in their records, became another aspect of the past.

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1. E. Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars* (1992), 141-54; J.J. Scarisbrick, *The Reformation and the English People* (1984), 19-39; A.G. Rosser, *Medieval Westminster* (1989), 281-93; B. Hanawalt, 'Keepers of the lights: late medieval English parish gilds', *Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 14 (1984), 26-37; C. Barron, 'The parish fraternities of medieval London', C. Barron and C. Harper-Bill (eds) *The Church in pre-Reformation Society* (1985), 13-37.
2. C. Firth, 'Village gilds of Norfolk in the fifteenth century', *Norfolk Archaeology* 18 (1914), 161-208; S. Martin Jones, *Wymondham and its abbey* (1914); G.A. Carthew 'Extracts from papers in the Church Chest of Wymondham' and 'Wymondham Gilds', *Norfolk Archaeology* 9 (1884), 121-152. 240-274. My University of Cambridge PhD thesis, *Religious gilds and the parish community in late medieval East Anglia, c.1470-1550* will tackle the gild books also, as will the forthcoming book by Dr A.G. Rosser, *English Medieval Guilds 900-1600*.
3. Wymondham Abbey muniments room (hereafter 'W.P.C.'), churchwardens accounts, 1544-6 and 1550-61; deeds 1225-1550; bede roll of 1524. Other deeds were printed in Carthew, 'Extracts', 134-144.
4. Wills in this article are referred to by the testator's name, date of probate, register name and folio, and court at

- which probate was granted, archdeaconry of Norfolk (hereafter 'A.N.F.') or consistory court of Norwich (hereafter 'N.C.C.').
5. Wymondham manor records are, for the best part, preserved in the Norfolk Record Office; see later footnotes for specific references.
  6. The brotherhood was dissimilar to the gilds because it did not hold an annual feast.
  7. H. Harrod, 'Some particulars relating to the history of the abbey church of Wymondham in Norfolk', *Archaeologia* 43 (1872) 270.
  8. W.P.C., accounts of the gilds of All Saints, St John the Baptist, Holy Trinity, and Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary and the brotherhood of Our Lady's Light, and 1552 inventory (ref MJ/27).
  9. F. Blomefield, *An Essay towards a topographical history of Norfolk* Contd by C. Parkin (2nd edition, 1805-10) vol 2, 490-534.
  10. Carthew, 'Wymondham Gilds', 241.
  11. W.P.C., accounts of Our Lady's Light, f.26v-27r; Carthew, 'Extracts', 124-131.
  12. Carthew, 'Extracts', 124-5.
  13. W.P.C., Nelyng's death recorded in accounts of Nativity BVM, 93; death of Robert Irby in same accounts, 90.
  14. W.P.C., accounts of Our Lady's Light, f.21v.
  15. Carthew, 'Extracts', 122-3.
  16. Blomefield, vol 2, 523. N.R.O., will of Richard Umfrey 1488, A. Caston 152-3, N.C.C.; will of William Multon 1495, Multon 1, N.C.C.
  17. Blomefield, vol 2, 534.
  18. R.C. Taylor, *Index Monasticus* (1821), 71-5.
  19. Carthew, 'Extracts', 141-4.
  20. W.P.C., gild of St Laurence in 1524 bede roll, and wills, e.g. N.R.O., Nicholas Dote 1465, Cobald 16, N.C.C. All wills quoted by Blomefield which refer to gilds, save those for St Peter Mancroft in Norwich, came from N.C.C.
  21. Public Record Office, E179/150/267.
  22. N.R.O., will of William Robyns 1473, Paynot 104, N.C.C.; will of Simon Longrod 1465, Cobald 17, N.C.C.; Carthew, 'Extracts', 134-5.
  23. N.R.O., Col. 2/4 T130A. P.R.O., E179/150/267.
  24. W. Rye, 'Some Norfolk Guild Certificates', *Norfolk Archaeology* 11 (1892), 134-6.
  25. N.R.O., will of William Plomer 1535, Gillior 3, A.N.F.; will of Thomas Hobbys 1535, Gillior 11, A.N.F.
  26. N.R.O., will of John Drye 1538, Godsalve 243-44, N.C.C.; will of John Nevell 1543, Whytefoot 16-19, N.C.C.
  27. N.R.O. will of Agnes Davy 1522, Gedney 291, A.N.F.; will of Thomas English 1518, Batman 223, A.N.F.; will of Margaret Levald 1528, Brokhole 168, A.N.F.
  28. W.P.C., accounts of All Saints, f.39r. and deed of 14 December 1539.
  29. W.P.C., 1524 bede roll.
  30. P.R.O., E179/150/267 and E179/151/346.
  31. W.P.C., accounts of St John the Baptist, f.2v-3r.
  32. P.R.O., E179/151/346.
  33. N.R.O., will of Stephen Brown 1536, Godsalve 205-7, N.C.C.
  34. N.R.O., N.R.S.8786, 21 E8, Norton leet court, Monday on feast of St Peter ad Vincula 15 Edw IV (31st July 1475). Carthew, 'Extracts', 143.
  35. N.R.O., will of John Colyour 1519, Batman 304, A.N.F.
  36. W.P.C., accounts of All Saints, f.11v.
  37. N.R.O., N.R.S.10502, 25 B3, Norton manor, Sunday after feast of St Peter ad Vincula 26 Hen VIII (2nd August 1534).
  38. The Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments of England dates this structure to c. 1530, with seventeenth-century alterations.
  39. W.P.C., accounts of St John the Baptist, f.17r-17v; accounts of Nativity BVM, 30-5, 64.
  40. W.P.C., accounts of St John the Baptist, f.5r.
  41. W.P.C., accounts of Nativity BVM, 63.
  42. N.R.O., will of William Plomer 1535, Gillior 3, A.N.F.
  43. W.P.C., deeds of 10 January 1468, 4 February 1491 and 26 February 1542. Others in Carthew, 'Extracts', 135-6.
  44. Carthew, 'Extracts', 144.
  45. Blomefield, vol 2, 523.
  46. N.R.O., N.R.S.8786, 21 E8, Sutton manor, Monday on feast of St Peter ad Vincula 14 Edw IV (1st August 1474).
  47. N.R.O., N.R.S.8786, 21 E8, Silfield manor, 2 Edw IV and N.R.S.11287, 26 B1, Tuesday on feast of St Peter ad Vincula 15 Edw IV (1st August 1475).

48. N.R.O., N.R.S.13890, 28 E7, Norton manor, Thursday after Easter Sunday 22 Edw IV (11th April 1482); N.R.S. 8825, 21 E6, Sutton manor, Friday on feast of St Peter ad Vincula 3 Hen VII (1st August 1488) and Norton manor, Thursday after Easter Sunday 10 Hen VII (23rd April 1495).
49. N.R.O., N.R.S.18554, 33 D6; N.R.S.18535, 33 D5.
50. Carthew, 'Extracts', 136-9.
51. Carthew, 'Extracts', 134-5.
52. N.R.O., N.R.S.11287, 26 B1, Norton manor, Friday after feast of St Peter ad Vincula 21 Edw IV (3rd August 1481); N.R.S.13890, 28 E7, Norton manor, Friday after feast of St Peter ad Vincula 22 Edw IV (2nd August 1482).
53. W.P.C., deed of 12 March 1516.
54. N.R.O., will of William Symond 1519, Batman 379, A.N.F.
55. Blomefield, vol 2, 534.
56. N.R.O., Col 2/4 T130A; N.R.S.18535, 33 D5.
57. W.P.C., deed of 20 July 1544.
58. Carthew, 'Extracts', 142-3.
59. Carthew, 'Extracts', 144.
60. Blomefield, vol 2, 534.
61. Carthew, 'Extracts', 134. N.R.O., N.R.S.18540, 33 D5.
62. W.P.C., accounts of Holy Trinity, *passim*.
63. N.R.O., N.R.S.18540, 33 D5. P.R.O., E179/150/267.
64. W.P.C., deed of 1 October 1448.
65. W.P.C., MJ/16 (Welch 10/9).
66. W.P.C., accounts of Nativity BVM, *passim*, and 63.
67. W.P.C., accounts of Nativity BVM, 130.
68. W.P.C., accounts of St John the Baptist, f. 5r and *passim*.
69. N.R.O., N.R.S.10502, 25 B3, Norton manor, Tuesday after Palm Sunday 23 Hen VIII (26th March 1532).
70. P.R.O., E179/150/267. W.P.C., accounts of All Saints, *passim*.
71. Carthew, 'Extracts', 143; W.P.C., deed 14 December 1539.
72. W.P.C., deeds of 10 July 1471, 15 July 1494 and 10 May 1546 all refer to enfeoffments of the same lands, and probably relate to a gild.
73. W.P.C., bede roll of 1524.
74. Scarisbrick, 20; Barron, 23-4.
75. W.P.C., accounts of the Nativity BVM, 3-4.
76. N.R.O., will of John Hendry 1522, Gedney 289, A.N.F. W.P.C., accounts of St John the Baptist, f.2r-4v. N.R.O., will of John Caly 1524, Brokhole 109, and Thomas Caly 1542, Dowsyng 304, both A.N.F.
77. W.P.C., accounts of Holy Trinity, f.7v; accounts of Nativity BVM, 4, 60, 61.
78. W.P.C., accounts of brotherhood, f.38v; accounts of Nativity BVM, 3. N.R.O., will of Robert Chapleyn 1500, Cage 102-3, N.C.C.
79. It is impossible to tell whether all benefactions were related to membership of the gild with the appropriate patron, since there are no surviving membership lists for eight of the twelve gilds.
80. Bequests were made to the Jesus light, but no gild existed with that patron. Thus, stocks did exist, but not alongside a gild. The images of St Catherine seem not to have interested testators, nor were any gilds in Wymondham dedicated to St Catherine.