

John Baret of Bury

MARGARET STATHAM

On 23 September 1391 Abbot William Cratfield appointed Geoffrey, son of Thomas Baret of Cratfield, as the officer in charge of his fishery at Babwell.¹ This is almost certainly the large fishpond created, or upgraded, by Abbot Samson and discovered in the course of excavations at St Saviour's Hospital.² No doubt Geoffrey Baret was a friend, or even a relation, from the abbot's home village. When Geoffrey made his will in 1416 he owned a number of properties in the town and was able to make generous provision for his wife and family. At that time he was living in the part of Abbeygate Street which was then called Spicer Row,³ and he also owned property in Churchgate Street and Punch Lane,⁴ which he left to his wife, and, after her death to son John. He also left land in the fields of Bury to his daughter Alice, who had married William Whitwell: should she die without heirs, this land was to revert to son John. When John became twenty four years old, he was to have the Inn at Hart in the Mustowe, now called Angel Hill, a grange outside the West Gate and other land in the fields of the town, together with an annual quit rent from a tenement, also in the Mustowe. Geoffrey's wife, Joan, was to have custody of John until he became twenty four. She was also required to spend £5 a year for seven years for a chaplain to say mass for Geoffrey's soul. His money bequests included £40 for his wife and John was to have £20 at age twenty four; jointly Alice and John were left £20 to buy sheep if they wished. Geoffrey's daughter, Alice, wife of William Whitwell was to have £2. He also left bequests to his elder son, William Baret of Cratfield, and Alice, his wife, and to their sons, Thomas and Geoffrey, who were already of full age – twenty four – at this date. For six years after his death a priest was to celebrate mass in Cratfield church for his soul, for the souls of his father and mother, for

¹ Geoffrey Baret's appointment is noted in Abbot Cratfield's register, f. 31v; transcription by Charles Battely in Sir James Burrough's *Collectanea Buriensia*, SROB, FL541/13/4, p. 103.

² J. Caruth and S. Anderson, *St Saviour's Hospital, Bury St Edmunds (BSE013): a report on the archaeological excavations 1989–1994*, Suffolk County Council Archaeological Service, Ipswich 1997, pp. 32–36.

³ The part between Whiting Street and Hatter Street. He lived in St Mary's parish, so his house was on the south side of the street, somewhere in the middle of the block. Its position can be determined from the information in the Sacrist's rental, 1433, BL Harl. MS 58, f. 8; photostat copy at SROB, Acc. 1055.

⁴ Now Athenaeum Lane.



1. The side of Baret's tomb showing, in the central panel, a figure wearing the collar of SS and bearing a scroll with the word 'me' from his motto.

his son, who is not named, and for the Lord William, late abbot of Bury.⁵ He left many bequests to monastic houses, including 6s. 8d. to the Prior of St Edmunds and 1s. 8d. to every monk of that house, while bequests to churches included 10 marks for repairing the steeple of Cratfield. He named his executors as his wife, Joan, his brother, William, his brother-in-law, William Whitwell, and Walter Bon, butcher.⁶

Although John Baret was under age when his father died in 1416, he had attained his full age of twenty-four before his mother's death in 1425. He must therefore have been born between 1392 and 1400, probably in Bury. In addition to her son, John, Joan also remembered her son, William Baret, and, Alice, his wife, and their children, Geoffrey, Isabel and Thomas; she also made modest bequests to Alice Whitwell and her children, Joan and John. Her son, John, and Walter Bon were named as executors.⁷ Her last will related to lands at Abbots Thorpe, which were to be disposed after her death for the benefit of her soul, while she left the lands in Bury fields which she had bought during her widowhood to John Baret. Augmented by information from John Baret's own will, a tentative family tree may be compiled (see family tree). For William's family still remaining based at Cratfield in the north east of Suffolk, neither Blythburgh nor Walberswick were much more than twenty miles away; some members of his family may be those who became involved with the Hoptons. A John Baret leased the dove house at Blythburgh in 1484-5; a Geoffrey Baret of Walberswick rented land at Walberswick in 1477-8 and had worked for John Hopton at Blythburgh and Easton Bavents felling timber and plastering walls. Dr Richmond identified three John Baretts in the area, one of whom was bailiff of Blythburgh in various years between 1484 and 1496, probably taking advantage of the minority of Hopton's heir. He also

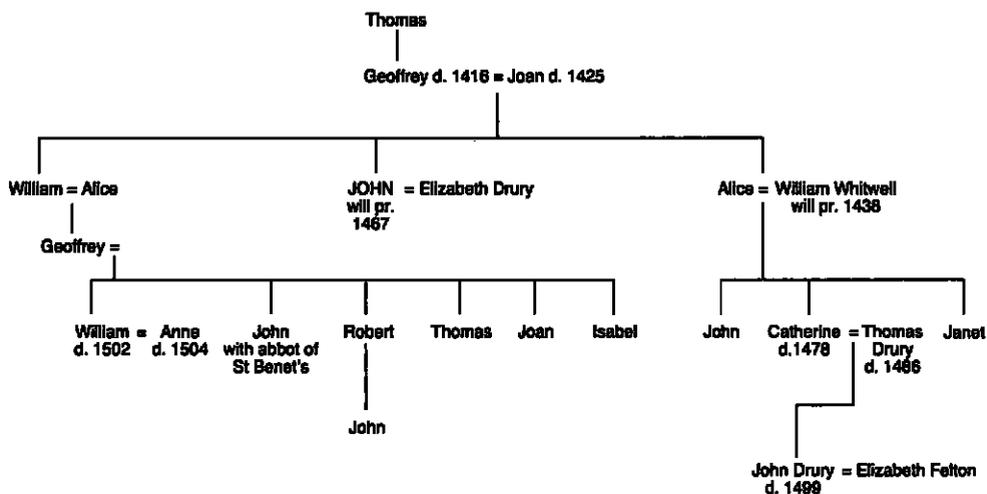
⁵ William Cratfield was abbot of Bury 1390-1415, A. Goodwin, *The Abbey of St Edmundsbury*, Oxford 1931.

⁶ Will of Geoffrey Baret, SROB, IC500/2/1, f. 142.

⁷ Will of Joan Baret, SROB, IC500/2/1, f. 168.

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Baret Family Tree



noted a Geoffrey Baret of Blythburgh who supplied timber to the churchwardens of Walberswick and a Thomas, of Walberswick, who owned two fishing boats.⁸ These names correspond very well with the family members mentioned in the Baret wills.⁹

John Baret married Elizabeth Drury, daughter of Sir Roger Drury of Rougham, probably after the death of her father, Sir Roger Drury, in 1420; perhaps an injection of cash from a wealthy trading family may have been acceptable to the more aristocratic Drury family.¹⁰ There were no children of this marriage, and there is no overt indication of a warm, loving relationship with Elizabeth. The only thing he left to her was a ring with an image of the Trinity. John Baret's niece, Katherine, married Elizabeth Drury's nephew, Thomas. John Baret's affection for Thomas and Katherine, who had a son, John, and a daughter, Anne, is beyond doubt. Were the Baret line to die out, John Baret wished their Drury descendants to inherit his estate. Another member of the Drury family who received a bequest was Clement, to whom

⁸ C. Richmond, *John Hopton: A Fifteenth Century Suffolk Gentleman*, Cambridge 1981, pp. 40, 169–71, 194, 219.

⁹ It is no doubt a coincidence that John Hopton bought Easton Bavents from Lady Ella Shardlow in 1435. She was living in Bury when she died in 1457. Her will: Tymms, *Wills*, pp. 13–14; she left a diamond ring to John Baret's wife, Elizabeth Drury. The lawyer John Yaxley of Mellis acted as steward of the Hopton lands during Arthur's minority, Richmond, *Hopton*, p. 194. Yaxley was the grandson of John Baret's friend John, commonly called Jankin, Smith, Bury's outstanding benefactor; John Yaxley's grandmother, Anne Smith, received a bequest from Lady Shardlow, Tymms, *Wills*, p. 14.

¹⁰ Interesting connections through the Drurys have been explored by G.M. Gibson, *The Theater of Devotion: East Anglian Drama and Society in the Late Middle Ages*, Chicago 1989.

JOHN BARET OF BURY

John Baret left 'a browne cuppe of erthe curyd',¹¹ which seems to be an early instance of earthenware regarded as a treasured possession. Clement Drury lived in Hatter Street, and he was one of a small group of Bury men who proudly called themselves "burgess" in the early years of the second half of the fifteenth century when there was a revived interest in affairs concerning the administration of the town and Jankin Smith was setting up his gift to provide funds for the payment of town taxes.¹²

John Baret lived close to the Church Gate, the main ceremonial entrance to the church of the abbey of St Edmund, in a house in what is now called Chequer Square.¹³ Its site can be determined from the details given in the sacrist's rentals of 1433 and 1526.¹⁴ Rooms which are mentioned include the entry with a stone wall by the street, a little buttery under the stairs, the hall, the study, the white chamber,¹⁵ the parlour, the parlour beneath the house next to the Falcon, Janet Whitwell's chamber, the chamber over the kitchen, the chamber next the well with a door opening into the lane, the chapel, the kitchen and the storehouse. There was also the spinning house, which could be entered through a door from the parlour. Several of these rooms had draught chambers which seem to have been used as sleeping quarters for a servant, and also, perhaps, for storage. He mentioned the gate at the street side and a door at the lane side. There was a well within the bounds of the property, and one in front of his house. There were also gardens, including the great garden, a barn and 'Robert Nustedes place', which must have been somewhere within the complex. From the will it is apparent that Baret had built a new house, with three tunnels of chimneys, on this site.

Baret arranged for two female relatives to live in his 'head place' after his death. One of these was his niece, Janet Whitwell. On his death she could choose whether to remain in the chamber in which she had hitherto slept, or

¹¹ Registered copy of John Baret's will: SROB, IC500/2/2, ff. 95v-105v, printed, Tymms, *Wills*, pp. 15-44. References here are to the printed version, this one being at p. 42.

¹² Discussion: M. Statham, ed., *Accounts of the Feoffees of Bury St Edmunds Town Lands, 1569-1622*, Suffolk Record Society, forthcoming 2003 (hereafter Statham, *Accounts*). Clement Drury must represent other men in Baret's circle involved in town affairs.

¹³ The house was substantially modified by William Steggle, who took the property on a repairing lease from the trustees of Dorothy Calthorpe's charity in 1813, and converted it into a girl's school, for many years run by his daughter, SROB, HB502/12/4. However, the English Heritage *List of Buildings of Architectural and Historic Importance* (Bury St Edmunds) notes that 'a section of thick wall, covered with render and panelling, but apparently of stone or rubble, runs along part of the rear of the front range from its south end and contains a small blocked early C14 stone doorway with a pointed arch, set in a deep segmental-arched recess.'

¹⁴ The present 3 Chequer Square, called Baret House. On Warren's town map, 1747, it appears to have been built round a courtyard, not in the present L shape.

¹⁵ In the white chamber was a crucifix for which an architectural setting seems to have been made. Baret left it to Margaret Spurdance or Purdance, an ancess of Norwich, and a replica had to be made to take its place, Tymms, *Wills*, p. 36.



2. Carved wooden panel, now in St Mary's church, with John Baret's coat of arms and beneath, his entwined initials, 'jb'.

to move to the chamber above the kitchen, both of which had a draught chamber belonging to them. If she chose the latter, she was to have the storehouse which belonged to it, for her possessions. Janet was at all times to have access to the chapel to make her devotions, and she was to be free to go in and out of the gate at the street side and the door at the lane side. She could use the kitchen to cook her food, take water from the well in the yard, and also use the privy in the yard. Janet was also to have a key to the garden gate so she could go in whenever she wished with her servant and her friends. Part of the garden was to be set aside to enable her to grow her herbs and store her wood. John Baret ensured that she had all the furniture and household goods she needed. Among other things he left her a bed, with bed curtains decorated with his arms and a green coverlet. Some of things she would use were her own, for Baret noted that the feather bed had been given to her by her mistress in London. Like other girls of her class from Bury, Janet had been employed for a time in London. Her mistress, Isabel Bussy, who had left him twenty marks for her. Her uncle explained that he had given Janet five marks from this sum, in the presence of Thomas Drury, so there was a further £10.00 for her to have.¹⁶ In addition, John Baret had in his care a number of items belonging to Janet which he had not used. These included a table, a tablecloth, a towel, six napkins, a flat piece of chased silver to make a salt cellar, two large basins, a pair of low candlesticks and a round table. The detail in which the furniture and equipment set aside for Janet are mentioned gives an idea of the care and precision with which John Baret described his possessions. Janet was to use them all during her lifetime, but afterwards

¹⁶ Perhaps she was apprenticed to Isabel Bussy, in the same way as Margaret Odeham, almost certainly (because it is an unusual name) the daughter of John and Margaret Odeham, had been apprenticed as a silk woman to Isabel Frowick, wife of Henry Frowick, Mayor of London. W.G. Dan, *The Ancestry of Mary Isaac*, Portland, Maine, 1995. I am most grateful to Anne Sutton for this reference.

they were to go to the owner of his head place. Finally, when the money was received from the sale of those things which he had not bequeathed, Janet was to be given a further sum of 10 marks (£6 6s. 8d.). He also provided for another relative, Joan Cratfield *alias* Baret, the daughter of his elder brother, William. She was aged and in some way handicapped and could not very well look after herself, which encouraged this kindly gentleman to 'tender' (care for), her more than ordinarily. William Baret or whoever else lived in his head place was required to find her food and clothing and somewhere to live in the house. John Baret had been executor of Joan's father's will and he recounted the arrangements he had made with her brothers, Geoffrey and Robert, relating to an annuity she was to have.

In front of the house there was a common well. John Baret instructed his executors to repair the 'drawth' – the equipment for raising the water. The stone work round it was to be repaired and timber work erected over it, with four posts and a cross on top. In typical medieval fashion the instructions state that this was to be like one at Eye, or better, and that it was to be substantial and well covered to last, but in no way extravagant.¹⁷ The work was to be carried out in consultation with Thomas Ide. In 1617 the Guildhall feoffees paid Sparke the carpenter £1 7s. 6d. for work on this well, including a new covering.¹⁸ When the well disappeared is not known; perhaps, when the obelisk from St Mary's Square was moved to Chequer Square early in the nineteenth century, it was placed on the site of the well in front of what had once been Baret's house.¹⁹

Baret's will makes it clear that he was extremely proud to wear the livery of the abbot of Bury, although it is by no means certain what his position was. Samuel Tymms speculated that he was lay treasurer of the abbey, but no confirmation of this has been found, although some financial position would be perfectly possible. As John Baret was equally proud of his collar of the king's livery, are we also to assume some position in the service of the Crown? If so, this could represent another source of income. It is interesting to note that his father left money to John and his mother to buy sheep, while his will refers to a spinning house within his residence; had John Baret an early manufactory in his house? Involvement in cloth making in some way is very likely. In addition, a certain amount of income would arise from rents from the properties he owned.²⁰ He left his merchant's pouch to a well known Bury draper, and husband of one of the town's benefactors, John Odeham. This was made of leather decorated, 'wrought', with silk. Some of his activities

¹⁷ Tymms, *Wills*, p. 20.

¹⁸ SROB, HD1150/2, f. 38.

¹⁹ The obelisk was in Chequer Square before 1818: drawing by Henry Davy, reproduced M. Statham, *The Book of Bury St Edmunds*, rev. edn., Whittlesbury 1997, p. 18. The obelisk was moved a few years ago to a new place in the Square as part of an improvement scheme.

²⁰ As well as houses he had 112 acres in the fields of Bury when he died, Tymms, *Wills*, p. 24.

involved business in London. This is made clear by the bequest of 6s. 8d. to Thomas Vale's son who lived with Sir Thomas Cook, Mayor of London in 1463. John Vale was Cook's man of affairs and made extensive copies from the family archives while living in the Cook household.²¹

Many passages in the will reveal Baret's love of beautiful objects and show that his house was luxuriously furnished. He had an interest in books, three of which he mentioned in the will. To Dame Joan Stoonys, nun at Campsea Ash, he left a book of good exhortations in both Latin and English. For someone as preoccupied as he was with the life to come after death, it is appropriate that he should leave a copy of *Disce mori* to Master Robert Lawshull. The third book he mentioned was written by a monk of Bury, John Lydgate: Baret left his copy of the *Siege of Thebes* to his cousin, Sir John Cleye, who was a priest with Master Prisots. Baret was a patron of writers, and may himself have been the author of the *Epitaph on the Duke of Gloucester*, formerly attributed to Lydgate.²² John Baret's relationship with John Lydgate, one of the foremost poets of the fifteenth century, has not yet been worked out in detail. In 1439 Lydgate was granted 10 marks a year for life for his service to King Henry VI, his father, uncles and Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester. This was increased to £7 13s. 4d. in 1440, but the validity of these Letters Patent was questioned and in November 1441, the king accepted a petition submitted by Lydgate and ordered the issue of new Letters Patent to Lydgate and John Baret jointly.²³ It is hard to think why these two names are joined, unless the ageing Lydgate relied on Baret to collect his pension from the appropriate department of the exchequer when he was in London on business, and sought to have Baret's name added to facilitate this.

Inevitably John Baret was a member of the Candlemas Guild, to which all those who had any pretence to status in Bury St Edmunds belonged. He left a gallon of wine every year to the brethren, or 8d. in lieu thereof, to enjoy at their dinner or drinking. A reference to this was written in one of the Candlemas Guild's books of benefactors. Although much of it has been scored out, being regarded at a later date as superstitious, the reference to the gallon of wine can still be read.²⁴ In the feoffees' accounts from 1582–3 onwards this wine was regularly received and consumed at the annual dinner held at first on Candlemas Day and, later, on whichever day the accounts were audited. It seems certain that problems facing the town were discussed by the Candlemas Guild, and that some of the members of this influential guild were seeking ways in which they could improve matters. One of the town's problems was the sum of a hundred marks which the townsmen were required to pay on

²¹ Printed and calendared in *John Vale's Book*.

²² *Ibid.*, pp. 120–21.

²³ *CPR 1441–1446*, p. 28, issued to Lydgate and Baret jointly, dated 21 November 1441.

²⁴ SROB, H1/2/1. This book contains copies of the wills of John Smith and Margaret Odeham, terriers of the lands they gave to the town, and the rhymed bidding prayer used at the Commemoration of Jankin Smith.

the election of each new abbot. This was often referred to as the 'abbot's cope', and John Baret required the owner of his head place to pay this and other taxes levied upon the St Mary priests for whom he provided homes in his house. It was principally to provide funds to meet this imposition that Baret's friend John, commonly called Jankin, Smith established what has developed into the Guildhall Feoffment Trust in 1470, although it was not to come into effect until his death in 1481.²⁵ Similarly, in providing accommodation for the St Mary priests of both parishes John Baret demonstrated an awareness of the problems of the clergy serving the town's two parish churches, for which there were no clergy residences. After his death a new house he had built with three 'tunnels' of chimneys was to be used by the St Mary priest of St Mary's church. In return, the St Mary priest was pray for John Baret's soul at every meal, saying grace and *De profundis* openly, so that all those who heard him might say 'God have mercy on his soul', thereby, as Eamon Duffy has pointed out, conscripting diners as his bedesmen.²⁶ The parlour beneath the house next to the *Falcon* was reserved for the St Mary priest of St James's church, provided that he agreed to say mass once a week and after the gospel say Baret's name openly with *De profundis* for his soul. That Baret's concern was especially for the two St Mary priests highlights his devotion to Our Lady.

Further interest in town affairs is shown in Baret's bequest for repairing the Risbygate, then the most ruinous of the five gates of the town. He was concerned to know whether brick could be used rather than stone and flint. His executors were to consult Simon Clerk, who, from 1445 or earlier until his death in 1489, lived in Bury and was master mason at the abbey. He was, therefore, one of Baret's colleagues as a member of the household of the abbot. Simon Clerk did much work elsewhere, his contracts including the royal foundations of Eton College and King's College, Cambridge. These survive to show the quality of his work, while his Bury work was swept away at the dissolution of St Edmund's Abbey.²⁷ At Bury he was presumably engaged on rebuilding the west tower of the abbey, which partially fell down in 1430 and became so dangerous that it had to be demolished. In 1465 fire destroyed the wooden roof of the abbey church and caused the collapse of the wooden spire on the central tower – perhaps Clerk replaced the wooden roof with a fan vault of stone. Bricks were already being used for some work at the abbey of St Edmund, or on its estates, for Abbot Curtis had made a contract with two

²⁵ John Smith, the town's outstanding benefactor, gave lands in and near to Bury in 1470, augmented in 1473, so that after his death the abbot's cope and other taxes, local and national, could be met from the income. This is discussed in the Introduction to *Statham, Accounts*.

²⁶ E. Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars*, New Haven and London 1992, p. 329.

²⁷ Simon Clerk's career: J. Harvey, *English Mediaeval Architects: a biographical dictionary down to 1550*, rev. edn, Gloucester 1987, pp. 55–61.

Germans to make bricks at Chevington in 1440.²⁸ The surviving drawings of the Risbygate do not show clearly what material was used.

Baret's parish church, St Mary's, a little way up Crown Street from his house, also benefited from his generosity. His motto, 'Grace me Governe', is painted on the spandrels at the east end of the magnificent angel roof in the nave. This was in place long before Baret made his will, so there is no evidence to show to what extent he was involved in the provision of one of Suffolk's best angel roofs. It could mean no more than that he paid to have the eastern most angels, the angels of the canopy, painted. Another outstanding feature of the church, which still remains to delight and amaze us today, is the painted ceiling of his chantry chapel.²⁹ It gives some feeling of the high quality of the decoration with which the whole chapel was once decorated.³⁰ When John Baret made his will, Jankin Smith had already built the north chancel aisle and was contemplating building a similar aisle on the south side. Much of the Baret chapel at the east end of the south nave aisle was already there, and there are long passages in the will which instruct his executors how to make alterations if and when the chancel aisle was built.³¹ Apart from the painted roof, with its stars of looking glass which sparkle in the sunshine and still impress the most hardened tourist, only Baret's tomb and a wooden carving with his coat of arms remains from what must have been a most lavishly decorated chantry chapel.³² The decoration of the piscina on the south side described by Tymms remains under the modern wall finishing.³³

Baret's tomb had been prepared during his lifetime, and originally stood on the north side of his chapel, between the two pillars of the nave arcade.

²⁸ J. Caley *et al.*, eds, *Sir William Dugdale's Monasticon Anglicanum*, 6 vols, London 1846, vol. 3, p. 130.

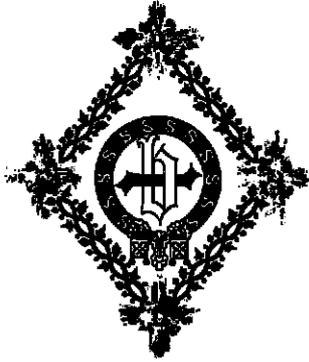
²⁹ Tymms, *Will*, pp. 233–38 gives a detailed description of Baret's chantry chapel and his monument, including transcriptions of the verses. The woodcuts reproduced here are from Tymms.

³⁰ Robert Pygot, an artist mentioned in the will in connection with the decoration of the chantry chapel, is known to have worked at Ely in 1445 on a wooden canopy for the shrine of St Etheldreda. K.L. Scott, 'Lydgate's Lives of Saints Edmund and Fremund: a newly-located manuscript in Arundel Castle', *Viator*, vol. 13 (1982), p.365 n. 94. I am grateful to Anne Sutton for this reference.

³¹ Chitting recorded stained glass in St Mary's church which had an inscription indicating that the two chancel aisles and the sanctuary of St Mary's were completed in 1470 at the expense of Jankin Smith, D. MacCulloch, 'Henry Chitting's Suffolk Collections', *Proceedings of the Suffolk Institute of Archaeology and History*, vol. 34, pt 2 (1978) p. 111.

³² Tymms, *Will*, p. 238, says the carving with Baret's arms was found among rubbish in a Bury painter's shop. He assumed that it once formed part of the parclose screen. This may well have been the case, but Baret's will shows that his arms and motto were often used decoratively in his house and it seems equally possible that this panel could have been taken from Baret House when William Steggle was adapting it in 1813.

³³ Tymms, *Will*, p. 237. The collars of SS enclosing his monogram JB show up on a slide I took, using flash rather than a long exposure.



3. One of the panels from the ceiling of John Baret's chantry chapel. The gilded 'stars' at each corner have a piece of mirror to reflect the light.

As it is now, its orientation was changed when it was removed from its original site to be placed close into the south wall of the church. Everything at the present west end is plain and must originally have stood against the east end of the chapel. As assembled now, there is a sculpture of a skeletal Baret in a shroud, on top.³⁴ It is placed above a fine slab of Purbeck marble. Had it been intended that the sculpture should rest on the top, marble would have been used only as the cornice. Were the sculpture to be removed it might be revealed that here, as on the tomb with two figures in shrouds in Denston church, there originally was a brass on top, for in that case the indent should have survived under the effigy. But even so it would still not be clear how the component parts of Baret's tomb were originally arranged, for the effigy slightly overlaps the marble slab at the ends, so it is difficult to see how it could have been placed at a lower level, with the tomb chest above it. The plinth on which the tomb stands may not have been part of this monument originally.³⁵ Around the skeleton, are the verses of his own composition such as

Ion Ho that wil sadly beholde me with his ieBaret
May se hys owyn merowr a' lerne for to die

and others with similar sentiments.³⁶ There must surely, as originally designed, have been a full sized effigy of Baret in all his worldly glory on this monument, either in the form of a brass or a sculpture. All that remains now is one of the panels on the north side of the tomb with a scroll with the word 'me' from the motto 'Grace me Gouverne'. This scroll is held by a figure in fifteenth-century dress, wearing a collar of SS, which must be taken to represent John

³⁴ Unlike on some other cadaver tombs, there is no portrayal of worms or other creatures consuming the flesh. See also the article by Pamela King elsewhere in this volume.

³⁵ I am most grateful to Bob Carr of the Suffolk County Council Archaeological Service, for discussing the problems of Baret's tomb with me.

³⁶ All the verses are printed in Tymms, *Wills*, pp. 234, 237.

Baret. These collars of SS, which feature so much in the decoration of this chantry chapel in St Mary's church, were the badge of retainers of the house of Lancaster. Further research might show how Baret became entitled to wear the king's livery, which was, as his will makes clear, a source of great pride to him. However, because of some irregularity in the way in which he obtained the silver from which one of them was made, his executors were instructed to sell them both and to spend the money arising from the sale in deeds of alms for the soul of Edmund Tabour, from whom he had obtained this silver.³⁷ Baret's conscience was deeply troubled about this transaction, and some others.

Baret was very anxious that the chimes both at St Mary's altar and in the church steeple should be carefully maintained. A new barrel and other things which had already been made ready were to be installed under the supervision of John Elys by his executors, who were enjoined to spare no expense to ensure that this was done well and John Elys suitably rewarded.³⁸ Eight shillings a year were to be spent on looking after the clock and chimes; Baret hoped the sexton of St Mary's would undertake this work 'for his wags be but smale'.³⁹ Overall responsibility for the care of the chimes was reposed in the St Mary priest who was to have 3s. 4d. a year for repairing them as required, otherwise this sum might be added to his stipend. If more than 3s. 4d. was required, the owner of the head place was to make a contribution. Land had been identified from which the owner of his head place could meet these payments.⁴⁰ It is interesting to see the way in which John Baret burdened those who were in future to live in the house in Chequer Square, or to own other property which he owned, with these and other charitable payments which he wanted to continue for ever. His friend, Jankin Smith, only a few years later left lands to feoffees to provide for the charitable payments which he, too, wished to continue in perpetuity.

As Baret was a member of the abbot's household, there are, of course, small bequests to all his colleagues there.⁴¹ He left the abbot himself a good purse, with 6s. 8d. in it, his white amber rosary with a ring of silver gilt and his best standing cup. While some of his bequests to obedientiaries seem to be marks of respect to the office as much as signs of affection for the holders of them, some of the monks received what are obviously personal mementos. Many of these were rosaries or tables of ivory, but he left his spectacles with silver gilt frames to John Exning,⁴² and another monk, John Kirtling, was given his fork for eating green ginger.⁴³ It was only to be expected that he would

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 41.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 28.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

⁴¹ That he had accommodation provided for him at the abbot's manor of Elmswell is shown by his reference to a coffer there, *ibid.*, p. 33.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 15.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 40.

leave an offering for the shrine of St Edmund: his heavy noble piece which weighed 20s., his best hart of gold with angels and a ruby with four labels of enamel were to be hung on the shrine. If 'herte' is used here as a hart, the animal, rather than heart, the anatomical organ, the imagery of the Wilton Diptych springs to mind.

Space only allows mention of a few of the items which John Baret left to his friends and relations. He was proud of his family and wished the name of Baret to continue, so it is not surprising that there is a group of objects ornamented with his arms or motto. For instance, he left to Thomas Drury his gold ring, next best to his signet, on which was written 'Grace me Governe' and his initials, J B.⁴⁴ Other possessions indicate his interest in the imagery of his day: his travelling bed had striped curtains of light and dark blue decorated with the image of Our Lady in gold paper.⁴⁵ A set of stained cloths was decorated with the seven ages of man.

A modern edition of this will, with annotations explaining the many obscure passages, would render it more accessible to those who are not skilled in interpreting Middle English. Architectural historians may well have observations to make on the passages about John Baret's house and his chantry chapel. A great deal might already be said about the beneficiaries and executors of his will, and no doubt more work would reveal further information about them. Our museums may well have examples of artefacts similar to those which John Baret described in his will. A sumptuously illustrated book based on this fascinating document would be a pleasing tribute to a most engaging character, whom we know so well, thanks to his will.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 37.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 34. His travelling bed was left to his page, John Aleyn, perhaps the son of Richard Aleyn, whose will was proved in 1468. From this will it is clear that Richard Aleyn was a carpenter, who left a book of examples to John Wylwys. He must be considered when seeking a craftsman who might have carved the angel roof at St Mary's, or worked on Baret's chantry. Aleyn's will is SROB, IC500/2/2, ff. 118–119v. I am most grateful to Peter Northeast who brought this will to my attention.

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