

The Life and Death of Sir Henry Pierrepont, 1430-99: A Search for Identity and Memorial

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In circa 1430 Henry Pierrepont was born into one of the leading 'greater gentry' families of Nottinghamshire.¹ His family, along with others such as the Strelleys, the Cliftons and the Willoughbys, were at the apex of fifteenth-century Nottinghamshire society. In the absence of meaningful magnate or baronial power in the county it was the thirteen leading gentry families who held the influential political and administrative positions.² In many respects Henry Pierrepont can be seen as the archetypal late-medieval knight;³ representing his county in parliament and on various commissions, and acting vigorously to defend his family's identity and interests. But in certain respects Henry can be perceived as a rather isolated, even introvert figure, particularly later in life. Members of his family, including his father, were killed in an unusually high number of fatal brawls. Henry eschewed marriage into a Nottinghamshire family of similar standing, instead looking outside the county and marrying into a relatively unknown collateral branch of the Roos family. He also died without a legitimate heir. Although the family name was secured through his nephew, Henry's own memory was in danger of being forgotten. His memorial strategies, including the production of a sumptuous tomb and a cartulary listing his family's deeds, land rights and pedigree, are typical of other 'last of the line' attempts to perpetuate individual and family identity.⁴ Unlike other similar memorials within the county, the lack of extant heraldry contrasted with the representation of his allegiance to the Yorkist cause on his tomb, coupled with some unexpected executors, all indicate his isolation as he approached death.

The Pierrepont family acquired the manor of Holme during the reign of Edward I (1272-1307), when Sir Henry Pierrepont married Annora, daughter of Sir Michael Manvers. The manor subsequently became the home of the Pierrepont family, hence today's name, 'Holme Pierrepont'. It was in the parish church of St

¹ I would like to express my gratitude to Dr Peter Russell for his comments on a draft of this paper.

² S. Payling, *Political Society in Lancastrian England: The Greater Gentry of Nottinghamshire*, Oxford 1991, pp. 18, 107.

³ See C. Given-Wilson, *English Nobility in the Late Middle Ages: The Fourteenth-Century Political Community*, London 1996, pp. 69-83; C. Gravett, *The English Medieval Knight 1400-1500*, Oxford 2000, p. 4.

⁴ For a discussion of 'last of the line' memorials see B. and M. Gittos, 'Motivation and choice: the selection of medieval secular effigies', in P. Coss and M. Keen, eds., *Heraldry, Pageantry and Social Display in Medieval England*, Woodbridge 2002, pp. 143-67.

Edmund at Holme Pierrepont that Sir Henry was buried, alongside his ancestors.⁵ Henry continued to augment his family's estates in the region during the late-fifteenth century; indeed he needed to, as his grandfather (another Sir Henry) had left a rather sad legacy. Constantly fighting debt, he had been forced to sell off many of his landed estates, including Rolleston, Cotgrave, Tollerton, and Kirkby-in-Ashfield, during the 1430s and 1440s. In addition, he had fallen victim to the ambitious Ralph, Lord Cromwell, by failing to secure several manors from the Heriz inheritance, which his family had a strong claim to.⁶ He died heavily in debt in 1452, leaving no will. It was his grandson who took on the task of rebuilding his family's fortunes, eventually securing the Nottinghamshire manors of Gonalston and Widmerpool, and Tibshelf in Derbyshire, from Cromwell's executors in the 1460s. But this was done at no small cost; in return for the restitution of the Heriz manors, Henry was to donate 1,000 marks towards the building of Tattershall College, the religious foundation established by Cromwell as his intended resting place.⁷ In his will, Henry lamented his long struggle to win back his family's lands, 'at great charge and costs'.⁸ He had, however, successfully secured his heirs' landed income, even if he had suffered financially.

Through service in various administrative, legal and political roles within the county, the members of the leading gentry families of Nottinghamshire were able to consolidate their influence and power, and to increase their income, not least through land tenure. Kinship ties and networks of affinity could be strengthened (or indeed broken), and links to central government could be forged. Holding office was therefore a means of maintaining the 'worship' of one's family. It is no surprise that Henry, as heir to the Pierrepont family, fulfilled his duties within the county. As his father had done before him, he served as MP for Nottinghamshire from 1472-5 and later between 1491-2.⁹ He regularly served on

⁵ R. Thoroton, *The Antiquities of Nottinghamshire*, 3 vols., 2nd edn., Nottingham 1790, vol. 1, pp. 178-9; D. Crook, 'The widowhood of Annora de Pierrepont of Holme Pierrepont, Nottinghamshire, 1290-1297', *Nottingham Medieval Studies*, vol. 49 (2005), pp. 64-79.

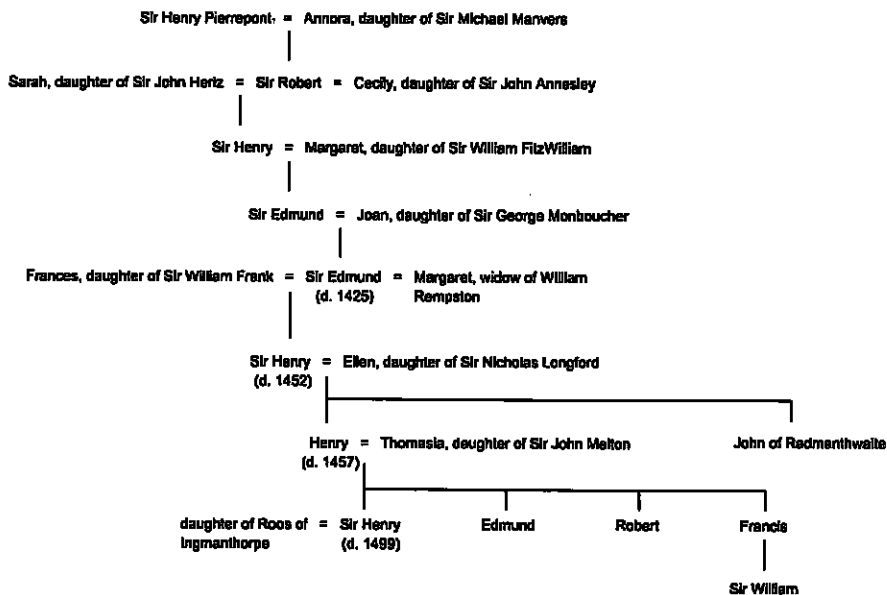
⁶ See S.J. Payling, 'Inheritance and local politics in the later middle ages: the case of Ralph, Lord Cromwell, and the Heriz inheritance', *Nottingham Medieval Studies*, vol. 39 (1986), pp. 67-95.

⁷ Payling, 'Inheritance and local politics', pp. 90-93.

⁸ Borthwick Institute for Archives, University of York, Archbishops Register, 23, f. 370r-370v (hereafter AR). An incomplete transcript of the will is provided in J. Raine, ed., *Testamenta Eboracensia, A Selection of Wills from the Registry at York* (hereafter *Test. Ebor.*), 5 vols., London 1869, vol. 4, pp. 43-5. His will was proved at York on 18 December 1499.

⁹ J.C. Wedgwood, ed., *History of Parliament 1439-1509*, 2 vols., London 1936-38, vol. 2, *Biographies of Members of the Commons House*, p. 683.

Pierrepoint of Holme Pierrepoint



Taken from S. Payling, *Political Society in Lancastrian England: The Greater Gentry of Nottinghamshire*, Oxford 1991, Appendix 4, p. 238. I am grateful to Dr Payling for allowing permission to reproduce the family tree.

various commissions within the county.¹⁰ Henry served as a loyal Yorkist, and was king's esquire to Edward IV. From 1465 to 1467 he and his brothers Edmund and Francis entered several recognisances, each for 400 marks, with King Edward to keep the peace within the city of Nottingham.¹¹ No doubt the king saw in the Pierrepoint brothers a group of loyal and trustworthy servants. On 5 May 1462, Henry was granted the manor of Staveley in Derbyshire, with the advowson of the parish church and the chantry chapel, 'for the good and laudable service which [he], at his great cost and charges, and with manifold bodily dangers against the king's rebels, levying war against him, before that time done, and still continued', through the attainder of the Lancastrian John, Lord Clifford. The following year Henry was made steward of the lordships of Mansfield in Nottinghamshire, and Bolsover and Horsley in Derbyshire, and in 1474 he was appointed one of the commissioners ordered to seize the lands of the king's troublesome brother, the duke of Clarence,

¹⁰ In 1462 he was ordered to arrest certain troublemakers within the county; in the spring of 1470 he was on a commission of array with other members of the local gentry including Sir Gervase Clifton and Henry Grey of Codnor; and in 1477 he was instructed to arrest a certain Otwel Ratclyf and bring him before the king within the year. In 1483 he sat on a commission of the peace in Nottinghamshire. *CPR 1461-1467*, p. 134; *CPR 1467-1477*, p. 199; *CPR 1476-1485*, pp. 51, 79, 569.

¹¹ *CCR 1461-1468*, pp. 327, 371, 379, 431.

in Nottinghamshire, Derbyshire, Staffordshire and Lincolnshire.¹² He held the prestigious joint shrievalty of Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire from 1468-9 and was hastily reappointed after Edward IV's return from exile in 1471.¹³ He is thought to have fought for the Yorkist cause at the battle of Towton in 1461, and on 4 May 1471 he was among the small group of knights created by Edward after his triumph on the battlefield of Tewkesbury.¹⁴ In 1484 he was granted his final Yorkist office when he was created the warden of the royal park at Clipstone, Nottinghamshire.¹⁵ It is likely that Henry fought for Richard III at the fateful battle of Bosworth in 1485. His arrest for contempt of court was ordered in 1488, although a reconciliation with the new Tudor king Henry VII is suggested by his subsequent reappointment as a justice of the peace, an office in which he served until 1493.¹⁶ Despite this, it is clear that Henry's allegiance lay with the old Yorkist regime; as will be seen, it is this loyalty which is made explicit on his tomb.

Henry's relationship with the people of Nottingham was not altogether cordial. Throughout the late 1460s he was involved in a bitter dispute with the commonalty concerning a mill on the river Leen, which he evidently thought was his by right; he attempted to appropriate it several times. The conflict was eventually resolved in favour of the burgesses of Nottingham; it obviously did little for Henry's reputation with the populace of the city.¹⁷ It appears Henry faced similar difficulties to his forebear, Annora, who also disputed her claims to land with the people of the city.¹⁸ Perhaps this confrontational attitude towards the people of Nottingham was a family trait. More damaging to his reputation among the Nottinghamshire gentry, however, were the many violent clashes between his family and others in the region. Henry's grandfather (d.1452) had been injured in a brawl with Thomas Foljambe of Walton, Derbyshire, in the parish church in Chesterfield in January 1434. Sir Henry was badly injured and his brother-in-law, Henry Longford and another associate, William Bradshaw, were killed. A commission of oyer and terminer, headed by John, Duke of Bedford, met in April to investigate. A compromise was eventually reached; Sir Henry was ordered to pay

¹² *CPR 1461-1467*, p. 185; *CPR 1461-1467*, p. 220; *CPR 1467-1477*, p. 428.

¹³ *CFR 1461-1471*, p. 221; Wedgwood, *Biographies*, p. 683.

¹⁴ W.A. Shaw, *The Knights of England: A Complete Record from the Earliest Time to the Present Day of the Knights of All the Orders of Chivalry in England, Scotland, and Ireland, and of Knights Bachelors*, 2 vols., London 1906, vol. 2, p. 14.

¹⁵ R. Horrox and P.W. Hammond, eds., *British Harleian Manuscript 433: Register of Grants for the Reigns of Edward V and Richard III*, 4 vols., Upminster and London 1979-83, vol. 1, p. 184.

¹⁶ Wedgwood, *Biographies*, p. 684.

¹⁷ W.H. Stevenson and others, eds., *Records of the Borough of Nottingham*, 9 vols., London 1883-1956, vol. 2, pp. 380-4; 415.

¹⁸ Crook, 'Widowhood of Annora de Pierrepont', pp. 64-79.

a fine of £4 and Foljambe was imprisoned in the Marshalsea.¹⁹

More fatalities were to follow. Throughout the 1450s Henry's father (another Henry) became involved in a bitter land dispute with the Plumpton family. On 21 July 1457 he was murdered by John Grene, an in-law of Sir William Plumpton, on Papplewick Moor in Sherwood Forest. Later that same day Grene was himself murdered in an act of retribution by John Pierrepont of Radmanthwaite, Henry's brother. Thomasia, Henry's widow, lodged a private appeal in king's bench, as did Grene's nephew and heir. Eventually, in 1462, Richard Bingham, a judge of Nottinghamshire origins, ordered that all appeals were to be abandoned; it appears that the dispute was resolved through arbitration.²⁰ The deaths in the family continued: in 1459 Henry accused William and Thomas Hastings and Henry Ferrers of killing his brother, Robert Pierrepont. Richard, Duke of York examined the case and both sides were ordered to keep the peace in order to avoid the 'great inconveniences which else were like to grow between them'. The Hastings brothers were to pay Henry Pierrepont a total of £40 in instalments, which he was to use to find a priest to 'sing divine service' for the soul of his dead brother.²¹ It appears the Hastings brothers escaped somewhat lightly; this is probably due to the fact that William was one of the duke of York's retainers. It is interesting to note that the Pierrepont's Yorkist connections stretched back to previous generations. Perhaps these ties were strengthened through the duke's arbitration; as noted above, Henry went on to become a loyal servant to the duke's son and future king.

Henry's formative years had therefore witnessed the deaths of several members of his family and kin. Though of age when his father was killed in 1457, his death was nevertheless sudden, and must have been a shock. Despite living through a turbulent period in the English polity, fatal clashes such as those between the Pierreponts and the Foljambes and Plumptons were exceptional; litigation was often successfully used to solve any clashes of interest.²² Henry's family had therefore been involved in an unusually high number of deaths; their reputation among their fellow gentry families within the county must surely have been damaged, and they would certainly have developed a reputation for volatility. This damaged reputation may help explain Henry's choice of marriage partner.

Though not always the case, intermarriage between leading county gentry families appears to have been the norm in fifteenth-century England; this was

¹⁹ The National Archives (Public Record Office) (hereafter TNA), KB27/693, rex rot. 6; fines rot. 6.

²⁰ Payling, *Political Society*, p. 201.

²¹ W.H. Dunham, *Lord Hastings' Indentured Retainers 1461-1483*, Connecticut Academy of Arts and Sciences Transactions 1955, p. 20.

²² Payling, *Political Society*, 202; A. Smith, 'Litigation and politics: Sir John Fastolf's defence of his English properties', in A.J. Pollard, ed., *Property and Politics: Essays in Later Medieval English History*, Gloucester 1984, pp. 59-75.

no different in Nottinghamshire. Sir Gervase Clifton (d.1491) married into the Nevilles of Rolleston, John Strelley (d.1501) married Sanchia, daughter of Sir Robert Willoughby, and Sir Nicholas Strelley had married Elizabeth Pierrepont earlier in the century. It has often been suggested that land acquisition was a primary motive in choice of spouse; indeed, marrying wealthy heiresses in order to inherit land appears to have been a popular occurrence. Intermarriage between the leading families of the county led to a contraction of the elite during the late-medieval period, and the knightly rank increasingly became a stamp of social distinction.²³ It was a self-serving activity; the identity, status and prestige of the families involved was constantly being bolstered. The decision was taken, however, to marry Henry Pierrepont to a daughter of the Roos family of Ingmanthorpe, Yorkshire. Though the exact identity of the bride is unfortunately unknown, it is probable that she was a daughter of a Robert Roos (de Ros) of Ingmanthorpe, who is mentioned in a land dispute over the manor there in 1447.²⁴ The family was a collateral branch of the more influential and affluent Roos family of Hamlake. In 1461, the Lancastrian supporter Thomas, Lord Roos of Hamlake, was attainted by Edward IV. Three years later he was captured and executed after the battle of Hexham.²⁵ Evidently, the marriage between Henry and his Roos bride took place before this date, as he quickly took advantage of the misfortune of Lord Roos, and his own Yorkist connections, to occupy the manors of Orston and Eakring. Dame Philippa Roos, the widow of Thomas, petitioned the king 'to request remedy against Henry Pierrepont, knight, who has disobeyed the king's order not to meddle with her lordships of Orston and Eakring, which he has seized'.²⁶ The choice of the Ingmanthorpe family for a marriage partner represents a curious lack of ambition for an heir of a family of the Pierrepont's standing. Perhaps the choice of brides was particularly sparse; perhaps there had been a close link between the two families, although none have been found. Perhaps the couple married through love, or the bride may have brought with her a large dowry. The vast bulk of the wealth, however, lay with the senior Roos of Hamlake line, and when Thomas was executed it was his son, Edmund, who eventually inherited the estates. The failure to place himself firmly within a close kinship network of the local elite may have isolated Pierrepont within his county. Though without a direct heir, Henry had, however, purchased lands and rebuilt the fortunes of his family, albeit to his own financial deprivation. His younger brother Francis, whose son William was to become the Pierrepont heir, would no doubt have been grateful for the situation

²³ Payling, *Political Society*, pp. 50, 66, 77.

²⁴ West Yorkshire Archives, Ingilby Records, WYL230/121.

²⁵ K. Dockray, 'Ros, Thomas, ninth Baron Ros', *Oxf. DNB*, Oxford University Press, Sept 2004; online edn., May 2006 [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/50226>, accessed 6 April 2009].

²⁶ TNA, Ancient Petitions, SC 8/336/15986.

his brother had left him in.

Henry made his will on 23 October 1489, and died almost exactly ten years later. For Henry, as for the rest of his knightly class, the importance of perpetuating his memory in death, as well as securing land for his heirs, cannot be overstressed. A primary motive here was the belief in purgatory, and the need for intercession in the form of prayers from the living to shorten one's stay there; the more prayers one could elicit, the quicker one would gain eternal salvation. The wealthier members of society were best placed to acquire as many prayers as possible; indeed it was expected of them to dispose of their worldly possessions at death, just as they were expected to display their charity and largesse during life. In this way elite society channelled their wealth into charitable acts and other bequests, in order to maintain the social hierarchy and to support conventional values.²⁷ There were clearly social as well as religious motivations involved in death and remembrance in late-medieval England. Henry showed a concern to amass as many prayers in as many different places as he could afford in his will. A sum of eight marks was left for an 'able priest' to say requiem mass for himself and his ancestors for twenty years in St Edmund's Church, Holme Pierrepont. Similarly, a priest was to sing mass at the churches in Widmerpool and Gonalston, the manors he had recovered after a long fight with Cromwell's executors. A vestment worth five pounds was bequeathed to the church at Bolsover, the manor of which he was made royal steward by Edward IV. Henry had also acquired land at Mansfield, where he was royal steward. This he left to Roger Pierrepont of Radmanthwaite; clearly a favoured and trustworthy relative, and probably the son of Henry's uncle John who had carried out the retribution killing of John Grene some thirty years earlier. In addition, Henry left another small sum of money for 'either of the convents of the friars of Nottingham', and gave five marks to any five of the poorest churches in the county, for prayers. His executors were expected to decide which churches were to benefit from his charity.²⁸

It has been argued that the parish church became the religious focus of the fifteenth-century elites, with an increasing number of families requesting burial in the secular houses. Indeed, many families would establish a mausoleum in their local churches.²⁹ There are various examples throughout the Midlands, including the collection of Fitzherbert monuments in the church at Norbury, Derbyshire, the numerous monuments commemorating several generations of the Clifton family at Clifton, and the Willoughby family mausoleum at Willoughby-on-the-Wolds, both in Nottinghamshire. These impressive collections of funerary monuments,

²⁷ J.T. Rosenthal, *The Purchase of Paradise*, London 1972, pp. 9, 12.

²⁸ AR, 23, f. 370v.

²⁹ C. Carpenter, 'The religion of the gentry of fifteenth-century England', in D. Williams, ed., *England in the Fifteenth Century: Proceedings of the 1986 Harlaxton Symposium*, Woodbridge 1987, p. 65.

set inside their chantry chapels, were the ultimate assertion of family pride.³⁰ Henry made explicit in his will that he was to be buried 'in the parish church of St Edmund in Holme, among my worshipful ancestors'.³¹ It appears that many of his predecessors were buried there, although no monuments survive in their memory.

In addition to commissioning a suitable tomb, those with an adequate amount of wealth often demonstrated a predilection for 'stamping their identity' on the landscape through repairing or rebuilding the church.³² An ostentatious example of this practice can be seen at Ralph, Lord Cromwell's college at Tattershall, the parish church being totally rebuilt (the project being partly funded by Pierrepoint) to serve as a college of priests to pray for his and his ancestors' souls. Fittingly, it was built next to the imposing castle keep he had also erected during his lifetime. Henry Pierrepoint demonstrated a similar desire to add his own contribution to the local landscape; he bequeathed ten marks towards the building of the steeple at the parish church of Tibshelf, the other manor he had won back from Cromwell. It is also likely that he paid for the rebuilding of the tower of St Edmund's, Holme Pierrepoint in the later-fifteenth century.³³ He left £20 to be spent on building a bridge at Polleford, and repairing the road that ran through his estate at Holme Pierrepoint.³⁴ It is clear through these conventional practices that 'the family religious epicentre was also the focal point of its political identity'; towers dominated the landscape, and repairing and rebuilding local amenities would not only benefit the community, but would also benefit the soul of the benefactor through grateful prayers. They also acted as tangible and long-lasting status symbols for the deceased and their family; the perpetuation of their memory would be secure.³⁵ Henry also left £20 for 'alms deeds and other things necessary, as shall be thought most profitable for my soul'.³⁶ The charitable act of helping the poor was a standard feature in late-medieval wills. The emphasis on good works in pious practices was motivated by the Seven Corporal Works of Mercy, which included the repair of roads and bridges.³⁷ It is therefore important to remember that, when referring to the secular nature of some of the commemorative practices of the gentry, the primary religious motives must not be overlooked.

In the case of Henry Pierrepoint, however, it should be stressed that the amounts he bequeathed for acts of charity and building projects were not large. The

³⁰ H. Colvin, *Architecture and the Afterlife*, New Haven and London 1991, p. 160.

³¹ AR, 23, f. 370r.

³² Carpenter, 'The religion of the gentry', p. 66.

³³ H. Gill, 'Summer excursion 1903: Holme Pierrepoint church', *Trans. Thoroton Society*, vol. 7 (1903), p. 31.

³⁴ AR, 23, f. 370v.

³⁵ Carpenter, 'The religion of the gentry', p. 69.

³⁶ AR, 23, f. 370v.

³⁷ P.H. Cullum and P.J.P. Goldberg, 'Charitable provision in late medieval York: "To the praise of God and the use of the poor"', *Northern History*, vol. 29 (1993), pp. 24-39.



Fig. 1. Tomb of Sir Henry Pierrepont (d. 1499) in St Edmund's Church, Holme Pierrepont. I would like to thank Rev. Robert Breckles for his kind permission to photograph the monuments. Author's photographs.



Fig. 2. Yorkist collar of suns and roses.

ten marks he contributed towards the steeple at Tibshelf would have amounted to a mere fraction of the total funds required. Indeed, when all his bequests are added together they represent a rather paltry sum of not much more than £70. It is likely that this was all Henry could afford; the legal proceedings through which he recovered his family's inherited estates from Cromwell, and the large amount he contributed towards building Tattershall college, could well have left him rather short of funds. A further drain on his resources may have been the tomb which he commissioned.

If there was a measure of anxiety exhibited in late-medieval commemorative practices, this was increased for those who were to die without an heir. The current identity of the family would end and be passed on through a sibling, or to another family through marriage. It was not uncommon for the last of the line to commission expensive monuments, resplendent with family heraldry and genealogical inscriptions, in order to safeguard their memory, and to firmly place them within the family lineage.³⁸ This was the case with Henry Pierrepont. He died without children, and the family name was to pass to his nephew William. Although the monuments within St Edmund's, Holme Pierrepont have been damaged and rearranged over the centuries, the tomb of Henry still lies in the south aisle of the church.³⁹ In his will, Henry asked for 'a tomb of alabaster to be made and set upon my sepulchre and graven by the discretion of my executors, if I make it not in my life days'.⁴⁰ It is likely, therefore, that the tomb was made according to his directions during his life, sometime after he made his will in 1489. The splendid alabaster monument consists of a tomb chest with a recumbent effigy in prayer lying on top (Fig 1). He is wearing a suit of plate armour with a standard of mail about the throat, and has a short sword at his side. Around his neck is a collar of suns and roses, depicting his allegiance to the Yorkist regime (Fig 2). This is one of only two examples in Nottinghamshire; the other being on a rather mutilated effigy at St Anne's, Sutton Bonington, which is traditionally attributed to Thomas Staunton, who died circa 1486. It is not possible, however, to ascertain exactly who this monument commemorates. There are several examples in the Midlands, perhaps the most notable being the tombs to the Fitzherberts at Norbury, Derbyshire.⁴¹ On Henry's collar is a cross pendant; this may represent

³⁸ See J. Denton, 'Genealogy and gentility: social status in provincial England', in R. Radulescu and E.D. Kennedy, eds., *Broken Lines: Genealogical Literature in Late-Medieval Britain and France*, Turnhout 2009, pp. 143-58; B. and M. Gitos, 'Motivation and choice', p. 144.

³⁹ J.C. Cox, *County Churches: Nottinghamshire*, London 1912, p. 116.

⁴⁰ AR, 23, f. 370r.

⁴¹ W.E. Hampton, *Memorials of the Wars of the Roses*, Gloucester 1979, pp. 144-52. The collar does not, as has been suggested, represent an early example of a collar of the Order of the Garter; see D'A.J.D. Boulton, *The Knights of the Crown: The Monarchical Orders of Knighthood in Later Medieval Europe 1325-1520*, 2nd edn., Woodbridge 2000, p. 160.

his membership of the Guild of Our Lady and the Holy Cross, founded in 1218 at St Mary and All Saints church, Chesterfield,⁴² and is a further demonstration of Henry's desire to assert his piety in his locality. The detail of his face and the rings depicted on his fingers makes the monument a splendid, and undoubtedly expensive, piece of craftsmanship. The patterns on the panels of the tomb are very similar to those seen on other local examples, such as that to John Strelley (d.1501) at Strelley and the tomb and brass of Richard Willoughby at St Leonard's church, Wollaton.⁴³ This reflects the popularity of alabaster monuments in the Midlands during the period, a region which had a plenitude of the material, and many local workshops. It may also reflect the style of the local mason commissioned to build the tombs. In 1496 a Nottingham alabasterman, Walter Hylton, was contracted to make the tomb for the long-deceased king Richard III. It may not be implausible to suggest that the same man built the tomb of Henry Pierrepont.⁴⁴

In 1482 Henry commissioned the production of a cartulary documenting his family's history and pedigree. The purpose of the manuscript was made clear:

The present work was completed at the special order and expense of the worshipful Sir Henry Pierrepont, knight, by a certain chaplain by the name and surname of Sir Thomas Wyse, in the year of our Lord 1482 ... It consists of all and singular the charters, feoffments as well as fee simple as of fee tail, and of all and singular the quit-claims, releases, letters of attorney, fines levied in the Court of the Lords of England, chirographs, royal gifts, royal licences, royal exemplifications ... pedigrees ... transcriptions of life deeds, lands and other evidence ... of all and singular the lordships, manors, advowsons of churches and chapels, villis, lands, tenements, meadows ... with all and singular their rights ... of hereditary right and lawful acquisition pertaining to the aforesaid worshipful man, Sir Henry Pierrepont, knight, and his succeeding heirs.⁴⁵

Henry was clearly anxious to place himself in his family's lineage and to officially document his retrieval and safeguarding of the family estates, to be used as a reference by future generations. He was not the only local knight who, in the same circumstances, ordered the production of a cartulary. In the early 1450s Sir Robert

⁴² J.P. Yeatman, *The Feudal History of the County of Derby*, 5 vols., Derby 1886-1910, vol. 2, pp. 324-7.

⁴³ G. Fellows, *Arms, Armour and Alabaster round Nottingham*, Nottingham 1907.

⁴⁴ N. Saul, *English Church Monuments in the Middle Ages: History and Representation*, Oxford 2009, p. 46. For the contract for Richard's tomb, see R. Edwards, 'King Richard's tomb at Leicester', *The Ricardian*, vol. 3 (1975, plus other years), pp. 8-9.

⁴⁵ Sheffield Archives, microfilm, A135, f. 6r. The original cartulary is held in British Library, Add. MS. 70512.

Woodford had the genealogy of his family documented in a cartulary; due to a family feud, he had disinherited his grandson and heir Ralph, and was facing the end of his family line.⁴⁶

In many ways Sir Henry Pierrepont appears to be a rather conventional late-medieval knight. His schemes to place himself within his family's lineage, to gain prayers for his soul, and to secure estates for his heirs are shared by other members of the Nottinghamshire gentry who were in a similar position. But one aspect of his tomb design does not appear to be shared with the likes of John Strelley or Richard Willoughby; it is almost entirely devoid of any extant heraldic decoration or inscription. It was common (though not always the case) for the elite to display their family heraldry on their tombs and monuments. Secular and religious imagery complemented each other in the display of the piety and lineage of the deceased.⁴⁷ Locally, the tomb of John Strelley included the heraldic arms of his family and other local families of standing including Kemp, Willoughby and Stanhope. The various tombs to the Clifton family in St Mary's church, Clifton, display the arms of Clifton, Neville, Cauthorpe, Cressy, and Pierrepont. The only heraldic insignia on Henry Pierrepont's monument however is a lion on which his feet are resting (Fig 1). This perhaps alludes to the Pierrepont device of Argent, semeé of cinquefoils a lion rampant sable, but there is no other insignia or inscription on the tomb.⁴⁸ There may be several explanations for the lack of heraldry, but it would have been highly remiss for an individual such as Pierrepont, who represented the end of his line, to have commissioned a tomb with no inscription or heraldry. It is therefore likely that the details were originally painted in the tomb niches, and have disappeared over time.⁴⁹

The lack of extant heraldry today is perhaps apt for a man who found himself in an isolated position later in life. He did have family, but no children and it is likely that his wife had predeceased him.⁵⁰ He had spent the earlier years of his life as an active member of the Nottinghamshire elite, but his executors included no members of the other leading county families, nor any members of his family. Among his executors are John Charnok and John Caunt, rectors of the churches at Widmerpool and Holme Pierrepont respectively, and William Coke, the priest at the parish church at Lynne, another location where Henry had purchased property.

⁴⁶ Denton, 'Genealogy and gentility', pp. 143-58.

⁴⁷ Saul, *English Church Monuments*, pp. 129-39.

⁴⁸ G.W. Marshall, ed., *The Visitations of the County of Nottingham in the Years 1569 and 1614*, London 1871, p. 49.

⁴⁹ I am grateful to Christian Steer for bringing this to my attention. The earliest known illustration of the tomb, made by Thoroton in the 1670s, shows no sign of heraldry or inscription; indeed the monument appears to be in a similar condition as it is today, Thoroton, *Antiquities of Nottinghamshire*, vol. 1, p. 181.

⁵⁰ Unusually, his wife is not mentioned in his will.

Two local esquires are also named, including Thomas Molyneux, probably the lawyer from Haughton in Nottinghamshire, who had served as one of Richard III's lawyers;⁵¹ no doubt one of Pierrepont's old Yorkist associates. Interestingly, Thomas Rotherham, Archbishop of York, his 'especial good lord',⁵² is named as supervisor. As an owner of advowsons and presenter to the hospital at Gonalston,⁵³ Pierrepont would have had the opportunity to develop a friendship with such a figure. The preponderance of clerics such as Charnok, Caunt and Coke is perhaps suggestive of his strong piety as he reached the end of his days. The absence of representatives from the other greater gentry families in the county may be indicative of his local standing at the time. Indeed, in his will of 27 April 1491, Sir Gervase Clifton warned his executors of any attempt by Pierrepont to claim his land at Stanton-on-the-Wolds.⁵⁴ The representation of a Yorkist collar on his effigy is also interesting. Although other members of the local gentry had received meaningful offices under the Yorkists – Gervase Clifton had been created a knight of the Bath by Richard III⁵⁵ – as far as is known from surviving monuments Henry Pierrepont was in very limited company within Nottinghamshire in depicting his allegiance to the House of York on his tomb. It appears he could never completely reconcile himself to the new Tudor regime. The fact that he had no children may help to explain his willingness to include such a potentially controversial symbol of loyalty on his effigy over a decade after the Yorkist regime had collapsed, and during a period when the new king was particularly sensitive to lingering Yorkist sympathies.

Piecing together the life of a late-medieval knight necessarily involves an element of conjecture. On the surface, Sir Henry Pierrepont appears to have been the typical late-medieval knight; carrying out his various duties, serving his king and defending the interests and identity of his family during life. Like other members of the gentry, Henry ordered the production of an impressive tomb, commissioned the production of a family cartulary, and bequeathed amounts of money for prayers to be said for the benefit of his soul after his death. But the funds he had at his disposal after years of fighting to win back his family's estates were not large; it had cost him dearly, but he had succeeded in restoring his family's fortunes. The flamboyant display of heraldry, as depicted on many other monuments to the gentry in Nottinghamshire, indeed throughout the midlands and the country as a whole, is missing from Henry's tomb, and his desire to depict

⁵¹ R. Horrox, *Richard III: A Study in Service*, Cambridge 1989, p. 86.

⁵² AR, 23, f. 370v. Rotherham, Archbishop of York from 1480 until his death in 1500, had been a loyal servant to Edward IV.

⁵³ See R.M. Clay, *The Mediaeval Hospitals of England*, 2nd edn., London 1966, p. 313.

⁵⁴ *Test. Ebor.*, vol. 4, p. 70.

⁵⁵ A.F. Sutton and P.W. Hammond, *The Coronation of Richard III: The Extant Documents*, Gloucester 1983, p. 323.

the Yorkist livery collar was not shared by others in the county. This, along with the lack of local gentry representatives in his list of executors in his will, perhaps reflects an isolated position later in life. He certainly had no children, and it is probable that he had already lost his wife. Gilbert Bogner has stated that 'we cannot simply define knights in this period as soldiers, local administrators, and landholders'.⁵⁶ They were individuals, with their own thoughts and lives. It is hoped that this vignette has shed a little light on the life of Sir Henry Pierrepont.

⁵⁶ G. Bogner, 'Alchemists, pirates, and pilgrims: towards a revised model of English knighthood in the Lancastrian era', *The Ricardian*, vol. 16 (2006), p. 112.