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Tomb monuments as a form of self-expression for aristocratic women in Early Modern England

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Introduction

The early modern era was a time of great change, of revolutions religious and political, technological and artistic. No country in Europe or indeed much of the rest of the world was left untouched by the rippling shockwaves brought on by the dawn of Humanist philosophy, of the widening schism between the Catholic and Protestant churches, and the technological and artistic innovations of the Renaissance. The engine driving this progress was the patronage system, with wealthy landowners, merchants, and clergy providing the funds to artists in exchange for works that would glorify themselves, their families, or push a particular cause.

In this thesis I intend to explore the contributions of a rather underappreciated segment of the early modern patronage system: widows from the lesser nobility and gentry. How does the femininity of these patrons translate across to their patronage? How do their priorities coincide with those of their male counterparts and how do they differ? To what extent are those priorities affected by the social norms governing the behaviour of women and assumptions about the dominant social, political, and legal position of men? Were there enough commonalities across the lesser and greater female nobility of England that they can be regarded as a homogenous group, or are the priorities, preferences, and aspirations of the individual unique to each case?

Patronage of wealthy widows during the Medieval period in England closely mirrored the tendencies and preferences of religious men.[1] In large part this is due to differences in the societally accepted roles and devotionary practices of men and women, and the perception by both genders that male preferences with regards to spirituality represented the most prestigious angle by which to demonstrate any form of piety.[2] Female patronage was for the most part limited to private articles intended to be used for spiritual reflection and meditation, such as books of hours, psalters, and small altarpieces for family chapels. When it came to commemorating the dead, English medieval women stuck to a relative handful of designs by prominent engravers and brass-makers, with only limited customisation.[3]

But by the dawn of the fifteenth century and Europe's entry into the early modern period, these barriers had begun to disappear. The changing legal and social framework within which widows had to act provided new opportunities to promote causes of particular interest to themselves, and artistic and technological developments provided new tools with which to express themselves.[4] increasing focus on the woman's personal family context,

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1 Gee, p. 4.

2 Ibid., pp. 4-6.

3 Saul, p. 64.

4 Ibid, p. 68.

their private piety, and the relationship between themselves and their husband. Legal precedents set in the early fifteenth century introduced new and advantageous avenues for noble women to retain control over their family's finances in the event of their husband's death.

The increase in general prosperity in England during this period was reflected in a greater number of lesser nobles with the means to pursue artistic patronage and memorialisation of their dead.[5] The lesser nobility were further enriched from the increased opportunities for military and administrative service in an increasingly centralised royal bureaucracy. All of this meant that the group were more able than ever to pursue new avenues for the display of family prestige through patronage. Widows were particularly heavily involved in the process of constructing sepulchral monuments, both as part of their duty in executing the wills of their husbands, as well as for their own purposes.

Before discussing the how and why of widow's tomb commissions, it is worth looking at exactly how common they were. Throughout the medieval period, there had been no assumption that a person's death would be marked by a memorial at all, whether simple marker or elaborate tomb.[6] This extended even up to the English royalty – only a handful of sovereigns received official commemoration up until the establishment of Westminster Abbey, and the subsequent re-focus by English kings on increasing public perception of their legitimacy through tracing lineage back through the generations.[7] And as the royalty led, the nobility followed.

As its title suggests, *The Complete Peerage* offers a remarkably complete index of all English peers and their spouses during the early modern period. Conveniently, the work also takes pains to note which members of the nobility were the subject of commemorative monuments wherever documentary evidence is available, and which of those works survived to the time of publication. Of the 2075 nobles mentioned, 1004 had no known grave marker at the time of publication.[8] In other words, only somewhere between one fifth and one half of all English nobility from the Conquest onwards had any form of commemoration in material form, with the likely figure being somewhere around one third.[9] Even for nobles living during periods where tomb building was most common, fewer than one in two of them can be proven to have been the subject of a monument. Of these, a

5 Gordon and Marshall, pp. 1-5.

6 Llewellyn (1991), p. 104.

7 Llewellyn (1990), pp. 218-40.

8 Harris (2010), p.739-40.

9 Ibid.

substantial proportion were tombs arranged through wills beforehand but executed by their surviving widows or heirs.[10]

So, given the expectations and traditions of the period, the question changes from "why didn't some nobles construct tombs?" to why so many *did*. In the following chapters I will outline the material and social advantages that acting as a patron of art, and of tomb monuments in particular, offered to an aristocratic widow of the Early Modern period. Specifically, how commemorative artworks acted as an outlet for the self-fashioning of a woman's identity at a time when there were few options available for them to pursue.

There has been a longstanding assumption in art-historical study of pre-modern era that went largely unchallenged up until only a few years ago - namely, that no discussion of self-identity, subjectivity, or the nature of individual human personality can be reasonably extended farther back than the late 17th century. Catherine Belsey, professor of English at the University of Derby, implicitly suggests that it was only after the humanist literature and the plays of the Stuart era did the idea of the self as a topic of subjective personal reflection become commonplace among the English nobility, to the point where they would act upon these ideas in the construction of monuments.[11] This cut-off point also applies to analysis of artwork and literature that might be interpreted as discussions on gender relations, on the origin and nature of female identity.[12] Others engaging in this topic of debate include Stephen Greenblatt,[13] Elizabeth Hanson,[14] and Natalie Davis, the latter arguing that the sense of self in early modern Europe is a later derivation from identity as part of a patriarchal family group which, as a social unit, provided the earlier impetus towards self-expression through patronage of these monuments.[15] This debate is ongoing, and my hope is to contribute an argument in favour of the interpretation that women of the early modern period were quite capable of establishing and asserting a self-identity separate from that of their husband.

One of the greatest issues with the existing literature covering the construction of tombs and funerary chapels is that it has traditionally been too inward-looking. Commemorative monuments have been examined largely in isolation, with interpretations

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10 Sherlock (2008), p. 2.

11 See, for example, Catherine Belsey's refutation of the existence of individual identity in the early modern period in the introduction to her 1985 book *The Subject of Tragedy, Identity, and Difference in Renaissance Drama*. London: Methuen

12 Hodgkin, p. 298.

13 Greenblatt, i-iv.

14 Hanson, pp. 1-5.

15 Davis, pp. 5-58.

limited to the execution of a single project rather than regarding that work as reflective of and integrated with both the society that created it and the individual women who commissioned it. Analyses are written in highly self-referential terms and there exist few truly comprehensive studies that highlight the socio-religious functions that these widows' commissions served. There are a number of explanations for this.

Firstly, as with any discussion of material culture from the pre-modern era, the problem of surviving examples limits the potential avenues for exploration. Barbara Harris, President of the Berkshire Conference of Women Historians, notes that records survive documenting 413 funerary monuments commissioned by aristocratic English couples.[16] Those commissioned by higher orders of nobility, on the other hand, have fared less well, in large part due to their class's preference for patronising monastic churches for their family tombs – a category which fared quite badly during the waves of iconoclasm brought on by the Reformation and the Dissolution of the Monasteries.

Compounding this is the general dearth of documentary biographical material covering the lives of women during this period, as well as the relatively limited number of patrons (owing to the small size of the moneyed classes in proportion to the general population). Of the cultural materials that survive from this period, the majority derives from subject matter and forms patronised almost exclusively by men, such as castles and fortifications, or great churches. Aside from members of the royal family itself, there is little biographical information available with regards to women during this period, at least in standard texts such as the *Dictionary of National Biography*. This is part of a greater historiographical trend that has removed or minimised the female voice from the study of economic, political, or cultural history up until relatively recently. While there have been great leaps and bounds made in filling in the gaps in the last few years, much of the damage is irreversible, with shades of meaning and context lost as what documentary evidence existed was lost.

When all of these factors are considered together, it is perhaps then not surprising that the activities of non-royal female patrons have gone largely unremarked upon by historians. Still, while much of the material has been lost to time, there remain enough examples to evidence new lines of argument and draw general conclusions as to the trends and patterns of female involvement within certain bounds.

In the 16th century, women were responsible for the commission of hundreds of tombs, effigies, and stained glass windows, all put together according to a programme that they themselves had significant input into and control over.[17] The study of these monuments represents an opportunity – an entry point into the history of female identity that cannot be accessed purely through documentary evidence alone. This is especially useful given that the diaries, journals, and memoirs that provide insight into later aristocratic individuals were not

16 Harris (2010), p. 741.

17 Helt, p. 189.

at this point in vogue, meaning that modern historians have little in the way of first-hand accounts describing the intentions behind an individual's actions, and to what degree a woman engaged in the construction of her own image.

The commissioning of tomb monuments provided ample opportunities for noblewomen to engage in self-expression and image-crafting, but they faced a number of challenges and restrictions along the way. To this end, I will spend some time examining the context in which these commissions took place, social, legal, and religious, and then move on to discussing the ways in which women were able to guide the process towards their own desired end through decisions both small and large during the commission process, from the funeral arrangements to the location of the burial to, most importantly, the form that the monument was to take. Finally, I will examine some of the motives behind these commissions – what was it exactly that women sought to gain through the purchase of these expensive monuments, and how did this differ from similar projects undertaken by their male counterparts?

THE CONTEXT OF PATRONAGE

Legal authority of female patrons within the English nobility

The rights and legal position of women in England shifted greatly throughout the early modern period; being relatively lax at some times and at others highly restrictive. However, as a whole it is certainly true to say that women had significantly fewer legal rights than men. Whether before marriage, as a wife, or as a widow, the bounds within which women could legally act were thoroughly defined. English legislation regarding the rights of women was heavily influenced by tracts from antiquity and medieval Christian thinkers.[18] These authorities outlined the proper societal position for women as subordinate to that of men.

Juan Vives (1493-1540), a Spanish humanist who had extensive contact with the upper ranks of English nobility, wrote a hugely popular treatise (more than forty editions were printed by 1600) on the role and expectations of women, and the ways in which they could enhance their reputation in comparison to men. Titled *The Instruction of a Christen Woman*, an entire section was dedicated to a discussion on widows and widowhood.[19] On the differences between the reputations of a man and a woman he wrote that "although in their education the precepts for men be innumerable, women yet may be informed with few words. For men must be occupied both at home and abroad, both in their own matters and for the common weal… as for a woman, she hath no charge to see to, but her honesty and chastity. Wherefore when she is informed of that, she is sufficiently appointed".[20] Vives' opinion reflected quite well the consensus of contemporary moralists and his ideas on the expectations of behaviour of widows had a long-lasting impact, in part because there were so few other works that broached the topic at all.[21]

In many cases, these theologians and philosophers lambasted the female sex as being unfit to take any authority or measure of independence in their own lives at all. From Aristotle to Thomas Aquinas, philosophers and theologians were quite clear in their opinion that women were incapable of acting in their own best interests and should be supervised by men wherever possible, with the sole exceptions of the domestic sphere and the raising of children. These male guardians would typically be close relations – either husbands, fathers, uncles or brothers – but, in their absence, even agents of the state might be appointed as intermediaries under some circumstances.[22]

18 Alvarez, p. 2.

19 Vives, p. 219 onwards.

20 ibid, p. 34.

21 Alvarez, p. 2.

22 Kuehn (1994), p. 208.

English common law included the concept of coverture, a doctrine which stripped women of numerous legal rights upon her marriage, from the right to enter into contracts to the right to pursue lawsuits against third parties without the consent of her husband. Coverture ended, however, with the woman's transition to widowhood.[23]

Nonetheless, it is wrong to assume that these strictures and laws were universally applied. As with any legislation, particularly those of this time period, people with sufficient resources and determination were eminently capable of sidestepping the intention of the laws while remaining true to the letter. Careful reading of the exact wording of the laws and regulations provided avenues for women to shed their male overseers and engage in otherwise male-dominated spheres such as the patronage of art. There are dozens of examples of women commissioning or paying for work either directly or through agents blatantly under their thumb.[24]

Social context of aristocratic female patronage

Since aristocratic widows represent the main source of female patronage in England during this time period, it is worth discussing the relative size of this demographic. Despite the risks of childbirth, women's life expectancy during the early modern period was significantly longer than that of men.[25] Of those male nobles who married during the late fifteenth and early sixteenth century (which was the vast majority of the total), some 70% of them were survived by their wives.[26] By the Tudor period, six out of ten noblewomen outlived their first husbands by more than a decade, and nearly four in ten by two decades.[27]

As a general rule, wives were the default choice to act as executors of their husband's wills and organise the disposition of their assets. Some 77% named their wives as the primary executor of their wills.[28] They would rarely be the sole executor,[29] with clauses often added specifying the male 'advisor' or appealing to the state to appoint one, but nonetheless the opinions of the widow were given a great deal of weight, compared to their

23 Alvarez, p. 6.

24 Barbara Harris discusses a number of monuments whose commission took place despite coverture legislation in Harris (2010).

25 Mendelson (1998), p. 194.

26 Rosenthal (1991), p. 182.

27 Ibid., p. 215.

28 Harris (2002), p. 129.

29 Kettle (1984), p. 101.

status during the marriage itself. The position of executor came with a well-defined set of obligations and a level of authority that was not typically regarded as being within the realm of feminine ability. It also came with the obligation to pay off any debts accumulated by the deceased, which was one major factor contributing to some women's refusal to take up the role.[30]

When combined with women's relative longevity, the dominant trend of older men marrying younger women makes it entirely unsurprising that there were more than twice as many widows as widowers in the English population. Demographers estimate that they made up 4.5% of the population, compared to roughly half that number for widowers.[31] Aristocratic women thought of widowhood as an almost inevitable life-stage, albeit one that could be entered at any time after marriage.

This 'life stage' of English noblewomen created a unique niche in society. Where women were expected to be either married or about to be married, and in either case under the thumb of a male 'caretaker', widows were nominally under no-ones control. However, a widow could expect respect only if she maintained an image of piety and self-effacement, ideally self-isolation. Contemporary authors of books of etiquette varied in severity though not in kind. From Gian Giorgio Trissino (1478-1550) to Girolamo Savonarola (1452-98), these writers demanded that widows be abstemious in spending and refrain from sensuality of any kind.[32] Further, they advocated that an upper-class widow confine herself entirely to domestic duties. Of course, this theory often clashed with the women's own intentions – there was simply no way to abstemiously commission a monument or funerary chapel and the very act of patronage served to draw attention to the widow herself, to her birth family, and to that of her husband, in direct contrast to the authors' cautions for humility.

There was, however, one aspect that differed between maidens, spinsters and widows – the latter maintained the prestige, social status, and at least a portion of the wealth from their marriage. Their unique legal situation allowed them to involve themselves in otherwise male-dominated spheres of activity. In practice, however, the likelihood and extent of a widow's involvement in male spaces decreased as her social position increased. Where tradesman's widows might take over her husband's entire workshop, noblewomen for the most part had to act through intermediaries and managers.[33] Only in the realm of artistic patronage could she invade male social or psychological space to any real degree.

The degree of this freedom was entirely dependent upon the legal provisions made in the contracts governing her marriage. Contracts of jointure and the stipulations of her

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30 Alvarez (2013), p. 10

31 Mendelson, p. 174.

32 King, p. 34.

33 Mendelson, p. 210.

husband's last will and testament, as well as the original dowry arrangements made by her father, would for the most part determine her level of economic security and independence in widowhood. As nobles sought to consolidate wealth within the family, the customary dowry required to marry into one became larger and larger throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.[34] Since these funds were brought to the union by the bride, they would default back to her even in cases where the rest of the estate went to others.[35] At the same time, legislation covering marriage contracts increasingly favoured male heirs, and settlements could be and in many cases were finagled or manipulated by collusion of both the husband and sons to deprive a widow of the financial security nominally guaranteed by the contract of jointure.[36]

Even in cases where the terms remained favourable for the widow, and a large dowry provided by her father, her financial security could still be disrupted by mismanagement of her husband's estate.[37] This would not necessarily have to have been while he was alive; many newly widowed women would be becoming responsible for accounting and estate management for the first time in their lives, and at a time when they were quite likely to be under significant emotional strain. This was, in fact, one of the arguments put forth for the education of young upper-class women – to give them the tools necessary to handle their own affairs after the death of her husband.[38]

Throughout the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, works of art commissioned by women became increasingly common, despite their nominal autonomy remaining fairly limited under a strict reading of the law. Still, the lack of legal recognition has led historians to largely discount those female patrons who did exist, except for those at the very highest levels. The reason is quite understandable: the relative dearth of documentary evidence. Since women acted through intermediaries, we have very, very few surviving examples of legal and financial documents for those transactions carried out by married women either for themselves or on behalf of their husbands or children.

Religious context

The Protestant Reformation, with its tendency towards iconoclasm and general spurning of decoration or imagery in anything approaching a religious context, inevitably had a great effect upon all English religious art and the English tradition of tomb-building in particular. Of

34 Stone (1977)

35 Mendelson, p. 176.

36 Alvarez, p. 16.

37 Stone (1977)

38 Mendelson, p. 177.

the Ten Articles issued by King Henry VIII in 1536 on the issue of religious doctrinal reform, the most relevant to the topic of this thesis is the abandonment of the idea of Purgatory. For centuries, one of the primary motivations for building a tomb for one's husband or ancestors was to encourage prayers for their souls from passers-by, in the hopes of speeding their passage through Purgatory and into Heaven.[39] Indulgences could be arranged by the Church to incentivise this activity, offering well-wishers a reward of their own for their charity in coming to pray at that specific tomb.[40]

The impact was at least somewhat mitigated from the potential disaster of complete wide-scale destruction by a royal decree. In 1550, the regency council of Edward VI, concerned over the maintenance of the royal tombs in Westminster Abbey and elsewhere, created legislation stating that existing tomb monuments were to be left largely untouched, with only the most 'outrageously Papist' devotionary elements to be removed, and that tomb monuments built henceforward were to be treated with a degree of leniency, provided that they made no pretension towards explicit religious imagery.[41] The edict was reaffirmed under Elizabeth a decade later and tomb decorations remained largely untouched by the waves of iconoclasm until the tumult of the Civil War in the 17th century.[42]

Under the new Protestant doctrine adopted by the English state, there was no longer any need for these intercessionary prayers. Purgatory did not exist, and so no amount of well-wishing from the living could speed one's progress towards heaven. However, the separation of the living from the dead in such a sudden fashion inevitably led to both political turmoil and personal trauma. In response, the Anglican Church made clear that while doctrine held that Purgatory did not exist, it was not forbidden to continue praying for departed souls. Protestant churches began to reframe the intecessionary prayers included by widows as an act of charity.

As such, aristocratic women throughout the rest of Henry's reign continued to include prayers in the inscriptions upon their husband's tombs. Roughly one third of the surviving monuments from this period include such petitions.[43] Many can be found that were constructed even after the stricter reforms that took place under Edward VI,[44] and a handful

39 Llewellyn (1991), pp. 26-7.

40 Marshall (2006), p. 53.

41 Aston (1992), p. 72.

42 Sherlock, p. 134.

43 Harris (2009), p. 319.

44 Llewellyn (2000), p. 30.

of inscriptions pleading visitors to offer prayers for their husbands can be found that date from the years after Elizabeth's coronation.[45]

When the theme of Purgatory and calls for mercy by the living finally went out of vogue, it was replaced by meditations on death itself, its finality and the divine judgement of the deceased that could now no longer be affected by the living. The "Dance of Death" became a popular motif among female tomb-builders just as it did for men,[46] and texts were incorporated from the standard burial services of the new faith, reflecting how the Book of Common Prayer quickly became integrated into the religious imagination of aristocratic women.[47]

Despite the extended period in which the aristocracy continued to support the inclusion of prayers for the deceased into monuments, it seems likely that those epitaphs that do not include prayers or requests for intercession are not strong evidence for the religious beliefs of the patroness. Rather, it represents a change in concerns over the purpose of monuments from religious to social and personal. By placing them on permanent and expensive monuments, they offered an excuse for widows to remind visitors of the wealth and social status of both themselves – in the role of donor – and their departed husband. Further emphasis was provided by attaching secondary texts outlining the better qualities of the patroness, as well as their relevant rank within the nobility. For example, the tomb of Dame Elizabeth Say includes a brass effigy accompanied by text reading "Here lieth Dame Elizabeth sometimes wife to Sir John Say knight, daughter to Lawrence Cheyne, esq., of Cambridgeshire. A woman of noble blood and most noble in good manners, which deceased the 25th day of Sept in the year of our lord 1473 and interred in this church of Broxbourne abiding the body of her said husband, whose souls God bring to everlasting life." "Pity me O Lord according to thy great mercy."[48]

Historians such as David Cressy, in his monograph *Birth, Marriage, and Death: Ritual Religion and the Life-Cycle in Tudor and Stuart England*, emphasise that with the demise of the doctrine of Purgatory in Anglican thought, the community of souls shrank and the relationship between the dead and the living was severed.[49] In light of this changing relationship, English patrons were forced to adapt their approach towards commemorating the dead. Firstly, the funds that once went towards the construction of chantry chapels were now in many cases diverted to acts of charity. Women arranged for endowments to

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45 Harris (2009), p. 319.

46 Llewellyn (1991), p. 26.

47 Sherlock, p. 123.

48 Harris (2009), p. 323.

49 Cressy (1999), p. 391.

almshouses, hospitals, and schools. In many cases, these benefactions were drawn from older, established chantries that were in danger of being seized by the crown.

The intention was not only to further a charitable cause, but in so doing to perpetuate the memory of the patroness and her ancestors in much the same way that chantries themselves once had. In many cases, such as that of Susan Kingston (d. 1540), it is quite clear that these endowments were a grudging replacement only – her personal piety had led her to join a nunnery after the death of her husband in 1514, and it is all but certain that she would have paid for a chantry after her death in 1540 had the political and religious climate been favourable towards its survival.[50]

50 Harris (2009), p. 321.

PROCESS OF COMMISSION

Funeral arrangements

The first and in many ways one of the most important of the affairs that the widow had to settle was the disposition of her husband's remains. Katherine Park, a Harvard University professor and scholar of the history of gender relationships in medieval and Renaissance Europe, suggests that Northern Europeans, including Britons, during the medieval and early modern periods maintained a superstitious belief that bodies retained some measure of identity and sentience for a time after death.[51] While not evidenced, so far as I can tell, in contemporary discussions about the dead, if Park is correct and early modern widows believed that their recently departed husbands remained watchful over the disposition of their remains, it would go a long way towards explaining some of the rituals surrounding the funerary customs of the elite in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, such as the care taken to keep the corpse "comfortable" and well-dressed, the degree of attention given to selecting an appropriate burial site, and other such rituals.[52]

The early modern experience of death and its surrounding rituals extended quite far in either direction from the event itself. People would typically begin preparations for death long in advance, establishing wills and settling questions of inheritance and duties, as well as making preparations for their own burial and monuments. These were rarely complete at the time of death, with much left in the hands of wives or successors when it came to the execution of the finer details.[53]

The rituals surrounding death too took a substantial amount of time and required a great deal of personal involvement from the attendant mourners. Emotional displays were expected and even encouraged from grieving widows – within the bounds of propriety, of course. Social expectations were for the state of grief to last for months or even years, with widows demonstrating both outward displays of mourning through clothing and engagement in ceremonies and commemorations, to more personal changes in lifestyle such as seclusion and the spurning of any future romances.[54]

Because of the complexity of the funerary rituals of northern European gentry during the latter part of the early modern period, the body would have to be embalmed to forestall complete decay prior to its burial. In some cases, even this would not be enough – when political or logistical obstacles became too great, funerals could take so long to arrange that even with embalming, the natural body would not be in a state suitable for public

51 Park (1995), pp. 11-20.

52 Llewellyn (1991), pp. 54-60.

53 Helt, p. 188-90.

54 Llewellyn (1991), p. 16.

presentation. In such cases, temporary effigies could be brought as stand-ins, such as death-masks.[55] Embalming itself was something that women only arranged for the bodies of their husbands, never themselves. When noblewomen were buried, their wills often outlined a speedy burial specifically to avoid an elaborate embalming and public display, even at the expense of the social advantage that might be gained through a more expansive and prestigious ceremony.[56] This is yet another reflection on the widow's self-identity as being one of retiring, private and demure nature.

From the sixteenth century onwards, fewer and fewer noblemen left instructions in their wills regarding the disposition of their bodies, leaving the issue entirely in the hands of their wives and successors.[57] Sarah Tarlow, professor of archaeology at the University of Leicester, lays the blame for this in large part on changes in the perceived purpose of the will. Where once it had acted as a last testament, an final outlet for personal and spiritual statements, over the course of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries these religious overtones were stripped away, and the document became nothing more than a means of settling one's affairs, both legal and financial, after one's death.[58]

With authority over the remains being increasingly left in the hands of the widow, the creation of tomb monuments, cenotaphs, and mausoleums began to represent an ever more important outlet for feminine creativity, self-expression and image-crafting. With no living husband to stand beholden to, they theoretically had – at least in one sense – significant leeway in the direction they could pursue with the details of the commission of the monument. In reality however, their efforts were extremely restricted in both subject matter. The focus of the work naturally had to be mourning and commemorating their late husbands or fathers. If the final work did not celebrate the man's prestige, piety, devotedness and other good qualities above all else, it would be a major faux pas.

In addition, even in those projects whose programmes were not entirely designed around the need to meet the requirements of men, their contents often had to remain suitable for filling the personal spiritual needs of the husband's dependents (particularly women) and the widow herself, all of whom might theoretically be laid to rest alongside him. Evidence of the dedication of monuments to multiple women rarely survived the depredations of time, as brass plaques were a prime target for thieves and iconoclasts, the intentions of these widows can be read in surviving archival documents and wills.[59] In all,

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55 Ibid., p. 58.

56 Mendelson, p. 198.

57 Helt, pp. 190-94.

58 Tarlow (2010), p. 39.

59 King (1998), p. 124.

female patronage of tomb monuments was all but required to remain somewhat conservative and conform to established traditions.

Within those bounds, however, there remained a remarkable degree of freedom, of room for individual expression of their own priorities. Tombs in which the widow herself intended to be buried could be further customised, including details of the widow's own side of the family – their emblems, coats of arms, and references to their own patron saints and those of their relatives. Moreover, the widow's own personal qualities and desires could be made manifest through programmes of decoration and dedication. The range of dedications extended from simple self-identification as a good wife, to personal announcements such as her intentions to remain unmarried going forward, or to be buried alongside her husband, or have deeper political or spiritual meaning. These options were only available, of course, when the husband passed before the wife. Unlike widows, widowers were under no obligation to refer to their deceased spouse as having any identity separate from their own.

The design of tomb monuments did not have to remain static once completed. Provided that the widow lived long enough, additions, extensions, and refurbishments could be planned and carried out in later years. There were many possible reasons for later alterations – but they boil down to one: changes in life circumstances. At a time in which multiple marriages being the norm rather than the exception, it was common for women to steadily accumulate wealth and power over the course of their lives.[60] Over eighty percent of men whose wives survived them left them funds and property over and above the requirements stipulated in the marriage contracts.[61] Many also became heiresses to their parents' fortunes later in life. While much of this wealth was set aside to be passed down to her own heirs, the additional funds often opened up new possibilities should she choose to revisit the design of her husband's tomb.

Paired with this new financial wealth was an accumulation of life experience. Many women remarried and went on to survive second, third or even fourth husbands.[62] As time went on, widows naturally gained familiarity with a wider range of circumstances: running households, managing estates, forming and maintaining social networks. The image of the dowager matriarch managing an extensive and far-reaching dynasty is in many cases quite accurate to the period. The result is that as a general rule, aristocratic women became more confident in pushing their self-identity as they aged and one of the ways in which this could manifest was in revisiting and updating the design of their tombs.

There are several examples where, many years after the requirements of a contract laid out by a former husband were met by the commission of a tomb, the widow later went back and redesigned the tomb in such a way as to go back entirely on the original intention.

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60 Harris. (2010), p. 739.

61 Ibid., p. 740.

62 Harris (2009), p. 324.

One of the more common reasons for doing this was a late-life conversion of faith, which naturally required an update to the devotional imagery and inscriptions for what the widow hoped to be a shared tomb after her own passing.[63] The separation in time between the original commission and these alterations made them either more palatable to the surviving male relations of the husband, or the dowager had managed to obtain a level of autonomy that made gainsaying her on the disposition of her own remains difficult even with the impact on earlier contractual obligations.

More elaborate tombs also offered a particularly public statement of fidelity to one's husband, in that the work itself would of necessity take several years or, in the case of dedicated chapels, perhaps over a decade.[64] During that time, the widow's continued engagement with the task and commitment to paying for its completion emphasised their social, emotional, and spiritual identity as being tied inextricably to their status as the widow of a single man, rather than as an eligible heiress interested in marrying again for social or financial opportunities.[65]

Deciding upon a location for the monument

After deciding to commission a monument, whether for themselves or for their husbands, the next step was to decide where to put it. This was not a foregone conclusion, for the location itself spoke volumes about the widow's intentions, ideals, and values. As Nigel Llewellyn, author of *The Art of Death* and several other publications on the theme of European death rituals and ceremonies, puts it:

"Monuments, as markers of the place of burial, were permanent manifestations of this investment in space. Their very location was a sign of power."[66]

The physical presence of the remains, while not strictly necessary for a monument to the dead, was nonetheless regarded as worth spending some efforts to set up if at all possible. And the desire for proximity of ones remains to one's memorial only became stronger as one went further up the ranks of the nobility. The royal family itself was at times almost obsessive in locating and gathering the remains of their forebears.[67]

63 Ibid., p. 333.

64 King, p. 234.

65 Ibid.

66 Llewellyn (1991), p. 105.

67 See, for example, Howarth's discussion of the lengths to which James I went in arranging the disposition of the remains of both sides of his family, as well as those of his son Henry Frederick in David Howarth (1997). *Images of Rule: Art and Politics in the English Renaissance, 1485-1649.* Berkeley: University of California Press, pp. 153-90.

A study by Vanessa Harding, Professor of London History at the University of London, shows that the lower classes had little say over the disposition of their own remains, with the vast majority being buried in places not of their own choosing within churchyards or communal burial grounds.[68] The nobility, on the other hand, usually left instructions for the executor (who, as established earlier, was often the widow). These were not always uncontentious.

Margaret Wotton, the widow of Edward, Lord Wotton who died in 1628, took the instructions in his will too literally. He stated that he wished his "Earthly tabernacle be buried in the high church of Boughton Malherbe as neere to the font (the place where I received my Baptism) as conveniently may be."[69] Dutifully, Margaret moved the font of the chapel to make room for the tomb. Compounding this, at a time when public declarations of faith on monuments were prohibited and scandalous, she placed inscriptions declaring that both she and her husband were devout Roman Catholics.[70] This was seen as egregious, as the font was one of the church furnishings most central to Catholic worship and its displacement was regarded at the time as a displacement of the religious practices of the community in favour of one individual's self-promotion. As a result, Margaret was publically lambasted and there were calls for government intervention. In the end, she was called to the High Commission Court and fined some £500, more than the entire cost of the monument itself, and was ordered to alter the monument so as to restore the font and make up for the transgression.[71]

The churchyard was the ultimate destination for the majority of human remains in England for much of the early modern period. Prior to the Reformation, those with the financial and political means would ask to not only be buried on consecrated grounds but below the floor of the church itself. The doctrine of the Catholic Church ascribed particular holiness to specific objects such as the relics of saints, blessed water, and the high altar of the church. The faithful believed that this spiritual sanctity could be transferred through proximity – motivating pilgrimages while alive and motivating nobles to have themselves buried as close as possible to these holy artefacts once dead.

As such, the churchyard was regarded as 'more holy' than the unconsecrated grounds around it; the interior of the church was more holy than the churchyard. Dedicated panels and monuments would be erected at ground level, while vaulted tombs extended

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68 Harding (2002), pp. 46-118.

69 Sherlock, p. 181-2

70 "To her beloved husband, Lord Edward Wotton, Baron of Marley, a Catholic. His grieving wife, Lady Margaret Wotton, daughter of Lord Wharton of Wharton, a Catholic." – from Lewycky and Morton, p. 62.

71 Sherlock, p. 182.

below the earth with sufficient capacity to hold generations of a paying family. But even among those who were able to pay for the honour of a tomb within the church, there was a distinct hierarchy. It was generally accepted that the closer one's final resting place was to the high altar of the church, the greater the spiritual benefits; the proximity to the sacrament of the Eucharist would ease the passage of souls through Purgatory.[72] And so, for those widows whose husband's family had not already secured a family chapel, competition for a spot near to the chancel in the east end of the church was fierce, despite the exorbitant costs involved.[73] After all, wealth was transient, while spiritual rewards were eternal.

William Stanton, 1st Earl of Coventry, ended up being buried in the church at Elmley Castle near Worcester despite the wishes of his wife – who acted as executor. She had initially desired for her husband to be buried at Croome d'Abitot in Warwickshire, close to the family estates, but was contested by her stepson who had directly inherited the land itself. He argued that her execution of the original tomb was shoddy, and made too many references to her own pedigree at the expense of creating a fitting memorial to his father. While the documentation for the resulting lawsuit is lost to history, the second tomb remains in its new location, and still bears on it the inscriptions detailing the lineage and personal qualities of the wife alongside those of William himself.[74]

Historians such as Andrew Spicer, a professor of early modern Europe at Oxford University, have concluded from what remains of the documentary evidence for the intentions of aristocrats of the early post-reformation Britain that the burial of one's remains alongside those of one's ancestors was regarded as of paramount importance, even at the expense of a long and expensive journey overland after death.[75] Once the family tomb was filled to capacity, widows undertook one of several options: moving the entire set of ancestral remains to a new location, purchasing and refitting additional areas of the church to act as a private mausoleum, or the commission of a more expansive burial aisle in the less prestigious but locationally convenient churchyard outside.[76]

Aside from those widows who sought to be buried within cathedrals or particularly prestigious monasteries, there were not many restrictions as to where the nobility could place their family tombs. Nominally, priests of even smaller local parishes had complete authority over who could be buried where within church grounds. However, as a practical matter they were often forced to accede to the demands of the local aristocracy out of

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72 Llewellyn (2000), p. 148.

73 Harding, p. 172.

74 Llewellyn (1991), p. 101.

75 Spicer (2000), p. 152.

76 Ibid, p. 153.

political or financial consideration – the clergy were, like most of the rural population of England, quite dependent upon the goodwill of the nobility. Investiture of new priests was one of the many powers afforded the gentry, and of course only those willing to pay obeisance to their noble patrons would be appointed in the first place. There are dozens of examples of this happening, from Sybil Danvers (d. 1511) taking advantage of her husband's appointment of Robert White to arrange for tomb space in the local church at Waterstoke, Oxfordshire,[77] to Lady Jane Berner's (d. 1562) appointment and subsequent commission from the priest at Ashwellthorpe in Norfolk.[78]

In cases where a wife had the opportunity to choose a burial site from the tombs of multiple husbands, the prestige of established tombs inevitably factored strongly into their decision.[79] The concern of the aristocracy for the careful placement of tombs within churches led to specific instructions to widows in wills, and often led to the displacement of remains from more churches close to the family home to more distant locations where a more spiritually beneficial spot within the church could be secured. Of course, the fact that there was a competition between widows itself led to a certain level of prestige for the winner. The sale of these plots for family tombs within the space of the church represented a significant (albeit fundamentally limited) source of revenue for the parish itself, and the Catholic Church was all too happy to accommodate bidding wars.[80]

With the rise of English Protestantism, the system saw fundamental changes. The doctrine of the new national faith held that there was no special advantage in being buried in one place over another. This did little to deter widows from continuing the practice – except in those areas such as Scotland where burials within the church were forbidden by law and threat of excommunication,[81] there was no movement among aristocratic women away from purchasing tomb space below the church floor.

There are several explanations for this. First is the matter of tradition, an aspect of social life that played a far greater part in the early modern psyche than it does today. Even with all other things held equal, widows would prefer their husbands buried in the same manner as their fathers and grandfathers. Secondly, the matter of sunk costs – oftentimes a family plot or tomb had already been secured and paid for, and maintaining it would cost less both in financial and social terms than uprooting and beginning again elsewhere. Thirdly, the social benefit of burial within as central a location as a parish church was to the

77 Macnamera, p. 172.

78 Harris (2009), p. 325.

79 Harris (2010), p. 743.

80 Tarlow, p. 39.

81 Brown (2003), p. 265.

locals cannot be overestimated. Despite changing attitudes with regards to the spiritual benefits conferred by proximity to holy relics or materials, the prestige of having one's tomb in full line of sight during sermons and other rituals remained. Many churches were more than happy to accommodate these desires, as it remained a lucrative endeavour.

To this point I have mostly discussed location as a factor in female patronage of tomb monuments in the context of commissions on behalf of their spouses or male relatives. It is worthwhile, however, to spend some time exploring the provisions that wealthy heiresses and widows made for the disposition of their own remains and the construction of their own tombs. The monuments commissioned by these women represented the state of their social network in life, which held central their marital relations and the extensions of family that unions brought with them. Balanced against this, early modern theology spoke out against the importance of these relations in the life of the soul. Christ taught that marriage itself was dissolved upon death and that, following the Resurrection, marriages were neither necessary nor desirable.[82]

In most cases, however, the ties of marriage and family outweighed theological concerns. Just like their male counterparts, women of the nobility sought to be buried alongside their family within the grounds of the churches with which their dynasty had a longstanding association. Roughly three quarters of all noblewomen in England chose to be buried with their husbands. This is, however, only part of the story. Multiple consecutive marriages were commonplace for aristocrats of the period, meaning that a single woman might have many husbands with many families and associated churches from which to select their final resting place. Ultimately, their decision tended to reflect the strongest personal attachments that they felt and the way in which they wanted to be identified to future generations.[83] There were, of course, often political considerations also to be made. The emphasis through commemorative monuments of particular relationships and their associated fortunes, titles, and lands could be quite advantageous both for the woman herself if the tomb was constructed prior to her own death, and to her heirs and family.

So, for those widows who had multiple husbands to choose from, what factors might affect the choice of location for their own tomb? First husbands were greatly favoured, as were husbands with whom they conceived their first child or their first son.[84] After this, the prestige and social status of their husbands were the most important factors; husbands with titles of high nobility were more likely to draw their widows to select them. Only a handful of women chose to be buried alongside non-noble husbands when given a choice, and in each

82 "For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels of God in heaven." – Matthew 22:30 (KJV)

83 Harris (2002), pp. 172-3.

84 Harris (2009), p. 328.

case those husbands fathered the woman's first child.[85] Finally, the length of the marriage was also a determining factor, albeit one less important than the others. While there is little documentary evidence either way, it is not clear that romance or a strong emotional connection between husband and wife was a particularly swaying factor in the decision.[86]

A second solution to the issue of having but one set of remains and multiple husbands to lay them beside is to choose one and then to honour all others in the same monument. Just as in other parts of northern Europe, the representation of multiple marriages in a single piece of commemorative art was relatively common in the early modern period.[87] These tableaus acted as a reflection of the sometimes complicated webs of kinship and marriage that arose as a natural result of an individual woman passing through multiple family networks during her lifetime. For example, Dames Isabel Johnson and Jane Arundell, two noblewomen who both died in 1551, elected to be buried in tombs shared with not one but two husbands. Isabel in fact disinterred and moved the remains of both of her husbands, Brian Palmes and Sir Thomas Johnson, to the tomb of her own family in Yorkshire to be laid with her own ancestors.[88] While Lady Bridget Marney chose to be buried with her first husband upon her death in 1549, the brass engraving she commissioned to be placed over their remains bore likenesses of both husbands together, with herself interposed between them. Her will indicating that she wished the epitaph to proclaim "the time of my decease and of what stock I came of and to what men of worship I was married unto".

The reverse is also true – in cases where a wife had but one husband who himself had had previous marriages, the widow might still choose to be buried next to him when she herself passed, under a monument of her own commission that celebrated both unions and all three individuals. Jane Fitzlewis Norton, who died in 1535 some years after the passing of her second husband, had honoured his request to be buried alongside his first wife in Milton, Kent. She then abandoned her own plans for a memorial to both of them (which was to be at Faversham) and instead amended her will to request that she be buried beside her first husband in a tomb commemorating all three of his previous wives as well as herself.[89]

A final solution that is worth mentioning, though one that was rarely employed, was the construction of multiple monuments commemorating a single woman, scattered across multiple locations. Effigies of the patroness could be erected at each tomb site, dedicated to

85 Harris (2010), p. 742.

86 Ibid.

87 Sherlock, p. 60.

88 Harris (2009), p. 330.

89 Harris (2009), p. 330.

the time she spent within that particular family. Lady Alice Burgh and Margaret, Countess of Bath are two prominent examples of widows who arranged to have their remains treated thusly.[90]

Of course, burial next to one's husband was not the only possibility when it came to widows deciding on locations for their own monuments. In many cases, particularly in those where the widow remarried, she chose to show no favourites by the simple expedient of being buried with none of them. Given that the default assumption is burial with one's husband, though, these widows tended to have special circumstances or idiosyncratic personalities.

The most common of these rare circumstances was sheer distance. If a widow moved to London after burying her husband in the far north, it was not uncommon to eschew the logistical nightmare of shipping her remains across country and instead opt for a more convenient burial in a local church near to the property she lived in. Such separate burials say little about the state of the relationship between the widow and her marital families or the memory of her deceased husband, but rather indicate a willingness to concede to financial practicality or political reality. Dame Jane Fitzwilliam, for example, elected not to be buried alongside her husband in Northamptonshire because she herself had moved, in the years after his funeral, to the family's secondary properties in London. And so she arranged for a monument to herself and her husband in the local parish church, quite a distance away from his physical remains.[91]

There was another option available to widows that separated their remains from those of their families entirely: burial within the grounds of a monastic order. This choice was relatively uncommon, but signified a great deal about the widow's personal piety. It was quite rare for noblewomen to choose to be buried away from their parish churches, for several reasons. First and foremost, the parish churches in the local area administered by the widow's family often served as physical representations of the social, political and financial status of both the widow themselves and their birth family.[92] Secondly, monasticism was on the decline. Even prior to the Reformation and Henry VIII's infamous dissolution of monastic properties, the aristocracy were becoming less and less inclined to engage with them in any matters, and burial within monastic properties was increasingly rare.[93] And even for those few heiresses and widows who did choose to express their personal piety in such a fashion, there were a limited number of such religious houses within England, and with little expansion the burial space was at a premium. Elizabeth Barnardiston, for example, was not

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90 Ibid.

91 Ibid., p. 332.

92 Finch (2000), p. 63.

93 Harris (1993), p. 111.

laid to rest in her chosen religious house near Walsignham due to lack of room. Instead, her tomb was built on the grounds of her local parish church.[94]

For others, however, burial away from one's husband was a sign of split loyalties. Of those who chose not to be buried either with their husbands, in the nearest parish church to their deathbed, or on the grounds of religious houses the remainder chose to be buried with their birth families. There are several cases in which, in the absence of any instructions to the contrary, women had their husband's remains transferred to the chapel of their own family, to be buried in matrilineal fashion. Others simply chose a separate burial, leaving their husbands in their own chapels and removing their own remains to lie next to their own ancestors.

A widow's relationship with their own parents was one of the only factors that might outweigh their obligation to their spouses in terms of their own perceived self-identity. The degree to which this is true depends primarily upon the relative wealth and status of the widow's natal family in comparison to that of their husbands'. Women in line to inherit from their families were also more likely than average to identify themselves strongly with their own lineage. Only a handful of cases have been found in which non-inheriting women from the lesser nobility chose to be buried in their family's chapel over those of their more well-placed husbands.[95]

The selection by women of the location of their husband's tomb and, more relevantly, their own, played a fundamental role in shaping the image they wished to portray to others after they passed. With the exception of those few women who chose to be buried within the grounds of religious houses or whose place of death was too distant from their family's primary holdings, their decision ultimately came down to forging a connection between themselves and one or more of the families to which they were a part, either by birth or through marriage. These connections, as well as considerations such as personal piety, status, or other elements of self-identity, were reflected in the material form of the monument itself, which is the subject of the next chapter.

Deciding upon a form for the monument

So far, I have outlined the issues facing women who sought to commission a funerary monument in the early modern period, from the assumption of authority over their husband's remains, as well as their own, to the necessary preliminary funeral arrangements and to the details and opportunities for self-expression available even in something as apparently prosaic as the choice of burial location. Once all of these aspects were settled, the next step was to decide on what form the monument was to take. There was a wide selection of potential media, sizes, fashions, and styles from which a widow could choose, and each was subtly different in the message it put out.

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94 Harris (2009), p. 333.

95 Harris (2010), p. 742.

The women of England's elite commissioned altarpieces, memorial chapels, stained glass windows and full tombs and cenotaphs within a church or graveyard. The monuments incorporated a surprisingly wide range of media, from sculpture to architecture to painting and heraldry. They could either be entirely separated from the general activity of the working church, as in the case of locked chapels and mausoleums, or designed in such a way that the average parishioner would interact in some way. Floor slabs would be walked over, altars used in rituals such as the Easter sepulchre, tomb chests could serve as the focus of charitable prayers – the aristocratic patron of a funerary chapel was well aware of, and often encouraged, its audience to physically interact with the monuments within.

It was important to decide beforehand what message exactly the monument was to convey to its audience. There were a myriad of possible motivations that prompted women to engage in artistic patronage in this format. From piety to prestige, from honouring one's ancestors to securing the status of one's children. The final form that the tomb monument would take was malleable, and could be tailored to fit almost any demand put upon it.

As with other forms of patronage, the appearance of female-commissioned self-portraits acted as a direct challenge to the male-defined feminine image of the period, bringing different ideals and values to the table. When left in the hands of men, female spirituality became all but invisible. They might be the subject of veneration, in the case of saints and the Virgin Mary, but few husbands or fathers paid mind to the religious preferences or beliefs of their female relatives when it came to including them in commissioned funerary altarpieces. [96]

Images of the donor were commonly incorporated into the design of a funerary monument, either by inclusion into a stained glass window, an engraving, or a painting. There were a number of stylistic conventions universally adhered to in such depictions throughout the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Firstly, if figures of saints or elements of the Holy Family or Trinity were present, donor figures were correspondingly shrunk and moved into a less dominating position. Women in particular, even in commissions for their own tombs, were generally placed subordinate to both the saints themselves and to any male figures present, and were sized down further. This can be assumed to be reflective of a standard of conduct which precluded women from drawing attention to themselves. While theoretically, family mausoleums and funerary chapels were private and so might be considered exempt, in practice the images could be seen by anyone and perhaps even actively engaged with the public if indulgences were attached to them. Modesty was, after all, one of the chief values instilled in young aristocratic women.[97]

This trend of distorted proportions began to disappear as the early modern period progressed,[98] but women continued to show reluctance to commission funerary portraits of themselves at life-size. Portraits featuring only themselves were truncated, scaled down, and

96 Spicer, p. 153.

97 Ibid., p. 146.

the face shown only in profile or three-quarters perspective. Widows made little attempt to have their likenesses emphasise their physical beauty in the funerary context, as it would hint at temporal vanity in an otherwise spiritual biography of her individual character. [99]

The willingness to commission life-size depictions of either themselves or of female relatives for funerary chapels correlates quite strongly with the status of the subject – women from the higher ranks of nobility, particularly heiresses who did not need to rely on their husbands wealth, commissioned such portraits as a mark of status.[100] Even so, no widows seem to have been willing to challenge the limits of their status by including life-size effigies of themselves placed in the top-most position on a tomb also featured likenesses of male relatives or spouses. For paintings that included other figures such as saints or relatives, female donors continued to make attempts at demonstrating modesty by having their likeness moved into the background of the work. In this way they would naturally appear smaller than the more important figures in the foreground without detracting from the naturalism of the image.[101]

In many ways this worked against one of the primary purposes of inserting oneself into a monument in the first place – to create a stronger connection between the patron and the saints and holy figures present in the scene through physical proximity. But compromises were necessary to fulfil the various demands imposed upon a widow as well as their own priorities in commissioning a tomb. Catherine King goes over some of the solutions undertaken by Italian noblewomen to this issue with funerary chapel paintings, but few of them were adopted with enthusiasm by their English peers.[102]

However, by the simple act of including themselves in funerary paintings at all, whether in a primary or secondary position, widows adopted a very unusual position. They became teachers, in that they took the position of providing spiritual guidance to visitors towards salvation through the figures and settings that they selected and presented. This is in blatant contravention of the normal tendencies towards sequestered devotion among women. While still quite modest, these tombs did encourage visitors to pray to the specific saints and holy figures that were selected and held above all others by the woman herself, providing a rare example of work produced by women specifically for an audience outside of the family.

The individual initiative demonstrated in these painted altarpieces is one of the more solid pieces of evidence of aristocratic widows stepping outside of the prescribed boundaries laid out by contemporary books of etiquette. Their faces are made extremely

99 Llewellyn (1991), p. 58.

100 King., p. 152.

101 Ibid., p. 173.

102 Ibid., p. 174.

public. Even those widows who chose not to include themselves in the funerary altarpieces at all stamped their mark upon the work through inscriptions or on epitaphs adjacent to the piece itself.

One of the cheapest options for a monument available to widows of the period was a simple inscription or engraving. These could be placed onto a brass plaque or stone slab covering the bodily remains of their husband. Brasses had a long history in European commemorative art. The earliest known example is a plate dedicated to St Ulrich in a vault built at St Ulrich and St Afra's, Augsburg in 1187.[103] The line of evolution that led to the establishment of brass plaques in England can be traced from the tradition of using chiselled stone slabs to cover tombs in Germany west of the Rhine. It began with inlays into decorative designs, highlighting hands or faces of figures, and gradually progressed to full figures. While English-made brass effigies were, on the whole, less elaborate than those produced on the Continent, and there was very little foreign demand for them, they nonetheless accurately portrayed the changing aspirations of a wide cross-section of English society, and their versatility allowed for a much wider base of clientele.[104]

The clergy were the pioneers in commissioning English brasses, but the class most fully represented in this format are the gentry and nobility, with commissions by and large made by widows.[105] This might seem surprising given that brasses represented a cheaper alternative open even to the lower and middle strata of English society – why then would status-conscious aristocratic widows choose the material over the more prestigious alabaster and stone monuments? The answer is that, while brasses were available at various price points, they were never stigmatised or pegged as being the sole province of a particular class. From archbishops and royalty down to the ranks of comfortably prosperous guilded craftsmen, brasses were regarded as a suitable and versatile format of commemorative decoration. There are dozens if not hundreds of examples of widows commissioning bronzes from all ranks of society for the commemoration both of themselves and of their husbands.[106]

Brasses offered a secondary advantage over busts and statuary monuments: conservation of space. When aristocratic patrons successful secured a space for their family's remains in an in-demand location, the maximum footprint of the monument was often stringently limited so as to allow the parish to lease more plots.[107] Engraved brass

103 Norris (1978), p. 61.

104 Saul (2001), p. 72.

105 Norris, p. 29.

106 Saul, p. 72.

107 Spicer, p. 164.

plaques achieved much of the same benefits as busts and other statuary monuments without protruding into the body of the church itself. Tomb chests, on the other hand, were quite restrictive in their space requirements. Not only did they take up a considerable footprint within the limited space of the church, particularly when one took into consideration the additional wall fittings and hangings that were so often associated with family chapels, but their presence often obstructed the movement of parishioners and pilgrims through the building. This was particularly problematic in those cases where widows secured a space directly adjacent to the high altar of the church, where there would be significant foot traffic during Mass and other liturgical ceremonies.

As to the inscriptions and engravings themselves, the form and quality varied according to both the price point and the period. Medieval English brasses had been relatively simplistic and adhered to a tightly defined set of stock designs and conventions. Artisans in the early modern period, in contrast, introduced a great deal of flexibility in terms of compositional elements and size. Brasses became increasingly tailored to the needs of the individual patron. Widows from the upper ranks of the aristocracy could order an elaborate schema depicting herself, her husband and children as life-size figures, under an ornamental canopy decorated with multiple coats of arms. For a slightly less elaborate example, see the brass effigies purchased by Anne Danvers (d. 1539) for the tomb of herself and her husband Sir John Danvers. **(FIG 1)** and the set of figures included by the fourth wife of Sir Richard Fitzlewis (d. 1528) into their shared tomb. **(FIG 2)** In both cases the design is quite well-rendered and customised in comparison to medieval brasses of the same type, with particular detail apparent in the coats of arms of each of the families.

Women from the gentry and upper middle class might instead commission a smaller brass depicting only their faces and an inscription.[108] Brasses commissioned during the Elizabethan and Jacobean periods began to incorporate more fanciful subject matter, with complicated programmes of allegory in the tradition of the fashionable emblem books, or detailed engravings of the couple in domestic scenes.[109]

Another change that took place between the medieval and early modern period was that attitudes towards the presence of secondary figures on tomb monuments and effigies relaxed significantly. Where, once, it was considered that since the monument's primary purpose was to encourage prayers on behalf of the deceased, there was no need for the likeness of any other person to be present, the increasing social role of tombs encouraged a more elaborate programme.[110] Widows began to commission weepers or generic earthly mourners, likenesses of living family members (not in preparation for their own burial, but

108 Norris, pp. 52-3.

109 Llewellyn (1991), p. 112.

110 Page-Phillips (1971), pp. 14-15.

simply as ornament), and even miniature figures intended to represent the children of the couple began to decorate the margins of the tomb monuments.

These scenes and figures were universally accompanied by lettered inscriptions. These are interesting in that they are the purest form of self-expression available to widows – their own words, uninfluenced by the expectations or requirements of others. Their choices in what to emphasise or minimise in their descriptions of both themselves and their families tells us much about their priorities.

The choice of language, for example, was made with several implications in mind. If the inscription included a motto from antiquity in Latin or Greek, the intention was generally to emphasise the erudition of the patron and their familiarity with classical texts. Women were markedly less likely than men to include these blatant hints towards scholarship as, with rare exceptions, study of classicism was not deemed to be a suitable pursuit for women during this period, and this is reflected in the expression of their self-identity through patronage.[111] Latin inscriptions taken from the Bible, on the other hand, had quite different connotations. The widow's choice of quoting from scripture in either English or Latin became an identifier for their religious affiliation following the reformation.

As well as the language, opportunities for personalisation and crafting of self-identity could be found in the widow's involvement in selecting everything from the style of lettering, the inlaid iconography to of course the actual content of the text. The messages included remarks intended to enhance the lasting image of the family, or to offer prayers, or to solicit prayers, or to stamp a territorial claim over the local area, as well as dozens of other religious and secular purposes.[112]

The most basic format for the inscriptions was quite short and formulaic. Chiselled into the stone of a tomb chest just below the lip of the slab, or engraved onto the brass plate above it, a simple identification of who was buried under the tomb's slab, along with dates of births and deaths, and an exhortation for the visitor to pray for the souls of the departed. The latter was considered by far the most important detail, and regardless of the form that the inscription took or its location relative to the tomb itself, the appeals would go to some lengths to convince visitors to kneel and pray for God's mercy upon the souls of those interred within. From there, additional tablets, plaques, or windows around the tomb would expand on details of their lives, their extended families, and most importantly the extent of their religious charity. Brass plaques set into the slab were more flexible in terms of content than direct engraving into the stone, allowing for the inclusion of imagery of the husband or their family, as well as detailed programmes of iconography comparable to painted altarpieces. Plaques often went into some detail on the exact terms of their commissioner's beneficence towards the church in which they were to be laid to rest.[113]

111 King, p. 161.

112 Llewellyn (2000), p. 118.

There are significantly fewer surviving examples of tomb inscriptions than might be expected based solely on the age of the monument, in large part due to the predations of iconoclasts and the financial struggles of churches during the English Reformation. Even under the protection of the Edwardian statutes that made exception for tombs in the general destruction of religious icons, the expensive brass plaques presented too tempting a target for many. Still, over thirty percent of the surviving tombs commissioned by women from before the 1530s retain their plaques,[114] and documentation survives for the same number again that attest to the patroness' commission of plaques containing prayers or solicitation of prayers.[115]

As a more expensive alternative to painted altarpieces or engraved likenesses, a widow could commission a memorial for her husband in the form of a sculpted tomb effigy. Within England, this type of monument was almost exclusively the province of male noblemen.[116] Widows almost never commissioned sculpture that depicted only themselves. When they did, the portrayal was invariably modest, placed either directly on the ground or only slightly raised, carved in low relief relative to the average for male figures, and always of stone rather than bronze. Carved effigies commemorated an active masculine life and could confer a significant amount of prestige upon the subject and his line, at least during periods when extravagance was seen as a virtue. In other, more austere, times when subdued emotion and subdued or absent decoration were regarded as virtues, the visually impressive wall chests with extensive sculptural elements were often discouraged.[117]

Effigial sculptures took many forms. At the cheapest end were simple busts to be placed on top of or nearby to an inscribed plaque or slab detailing the achievements of the deceased. Slightly more expensive and restrictive in the options they provide the widow were wall tombs and free-standing crypts with full-scale stone facsimiles of the husband, along with carved decorations of other elements such as the tools of their particular trade or secondary figures – weepers and angelic cherubs. These more expensive effigies were regarded as the sole province of the upper echelons of feudal society in England, or for the highest ranking clerics. With the exception of a handful of prestigious professions – lawyers

113 Weever, pp. 733-4.

114 Saul, p. 45.

115 Ibid.

116 King, p. 112

117 Ibid, p. 113.

being a prominent example[118] – no amount of money would suffice in making the purchase of an effigial tomb socially acceptable for widows outside of the aristocracy.[119]

Regardless of the form that they took, sculpted effigies provided the central focus for any monument to which they were attached. They were capable of conveying statements about both the individual and the patron (if they differed) through complex systems of iconography and decoration, using everything from the architectural framework to the expression, gaze and gesture of the central figures, to the presence of additional figures and heraldry. See, for example, the inclusion of individualised secondary effigies for each of the eight sons and four daughters of Sir Richard Knightley (d. 1534) along both sides of the tomb her wife commissioned for them both **(FIG 3)** – an expensive but effective demonstration of the importance of her surviving family to the image of herself and her husband that she wished to leave to posterity. Other aspects of female identity, from charity, to piety, to familial devotion, or any number of other aspirational ideals could be also be put forward by the widow commissioning a monument for her husband, and could create a reputation for either patron or subject that might not have any basis in reality.

118 Ibid.

119 Ibid, p. 118.

PURPOSE OF COMMISSIONING FUNERARY MONUMENTS

Demonstration or practice of piety

Tomb-building was only one part of the arrangements made by widows to establish a permanent chantry – a set of prayers spoken for the dead in the hopes of speeding their progress towards heaven. Chantries themselves were not the sole province of the aristocratic class; anyone with enough wealth sought to endow churches with enough of their estate to secure these services. For example, the records of All Saints' Church in Bristol reveal that common practice for married men of the merchant classes was to entrust their widows with the responsibility of making pious provision for them both.[120]

While they could no longer commission elaborate tomb monuments for the sake of social propriety, widows nonetheless undertook efforts to refurbish churches and chapels through the purchase of painted artwork, carvings, and tapestries, or to cover the expenses for expansion of the building itself. The specific terms of the benefactions committed for individual chantries were rarely laid out in the wills themselves; indeed most make no mention of any provisions at all, but a study by Clive Burgess includes several case studies of individual women whose wills make little or no mention of chantry arrangements, but who can be found to have made provisions while still alive. He argues that such funerary arrangements by widows were a well-established practice.[121]

Funerary and chantry chapels were an odd mix of the public and private. They were undeniably private works in that their commission, care, and maintenance was the sole responsibility of the widow who ordered their creation, or agents appointed to act on her behalf. While a handful of families did go to the lengths of physically blocking entrance to their chantries and chapels by installing locked gates, and in so doing demonstrate ownership of some of the most sacred spaces in their local church, this was not common practice. After all, one of the primary purposes of chantries and funerary chapels was to draw the congregation of the church into its dedicated space in order to encourage them to pray for the souls of the interred. That a funerary chapel was commissioned and to a great extent designed by a woman often threatened to upend the assumption that women were by nature passive and incapable of engaging in theological or artistic dialogue – or at least unable to produce anything that did not in every sense merely ape the innovations of their male peers.[122]

Of all forms of monumental funerary artwork, chantry chapels received the greatest impact of the changes wrought during the Reformation. After Henry's dissolution of a huge number of religious properties in 1536, aristocratic widows ceased construction of chantries

120 Burgess (1987), p. 844.

121 Ibid, pp. 842-4.

122 King, p. 232.

all but completely. This did not so much indicate a change in the belief among the nobility about the benefits of intercessionary prayer; nearly three quarters of women who commissioned tombs in the immediate run-up to the Dissolution also commissioned chantries or dedicated chapels petitioning for public prayer, with no sign of a downswing of faith in the doctrine of Purgatory.[123] Rather, the sudden cessation in widows' commissions of chantries is entirely due to uncertainty over whether the structures would be left unmolested by future religious legislation. Given that chantries received an outright ban only 11 years later in 1547, they appear to have been correct in their assumption.

Regardless of the legislative protection, the more extreme branches of Protestantism within England continued to rail against any kind of idolatrous imagery. Tombs erected by faithful Protestant widows by and large eschewed effigies and other statuary throughout the Elizabethan period. Icons of saints and depictions of the Holy Trinity were deemed heretical. As the schism widened in the mid-16th century, even the less controversial decorations such as putti and angelic figures began to disappear from the canon of tomb decoration, and did not re-emerge as a motif until the accession of the Stuarts.[124] With widows still desirous of elaborate and decorative tomb designs, they turned to more abstract forms – floral patterns, scrolls, ribbons, and other such devices intended to embellish the monument without prompting ire from the more ascetic sensibilities of the Protestants.[125]

The books of etiquette mentioned earlier not only defined appropriate ways for women of the period to comport themselves in public, but also provided advice on how best to further their spiritual development, both in private and through patronage. When it came to professions of faith and devotion, however, the visual representations that survive from this period point towards a feminine spiritual life that transcended the boundaries imposed upon them. The engravings, stained glass windows, and paintings commissioned by women of themselves show them in the context of saints, angels, and other holy figures, against backdrops that are notably different from the familiar household scenes that custom would dictate were their primary purview.[126]

Importantly, however, this permissiveness extended only to private demonstrations of piety. The boundaries between public and private female worship were much more clearly outlined than they were for men. Full panel paintings above tomb monuments that include the female supplicant, for example, edged into uncomfortable levels of public scrutiny. But, as a whole, tomb monuments provided women with a rare opportunity to

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123 King, p. 165.

124 Parry (2006), p. 95.

125 Sherlock, p. 134.

126 King, p. 165.

assert their own spirituality upon others, counteracting the otherwise entirely sequestered nature of female spirituality.[127]

Throughout the period defined by the Reformation, female patrons used the opportunity presented by tomb-building to make statements in support of or in opposition to the doctrine of the Catholic Church. While the spiritual and religious messages put forth by tombs designed by women were invariably conservative, if only because of the restrictions placed upon them by social propriety, there was nevertheless a great deal of room for noblewomen to experiment and make decisions about how best to represent their individual spiritual ideas, perceptions, and aspirations.

Those women who supported England’s break with Rome decorated their memorials with representations of Protestant virtues, articulating elements of Anglican or Reformed beliefs through inscriptions and engravings. It is slightly more difficult to distinguish memorials dedicated to a restoration of Catholic dominance from those merely adhering to traditional forms, but the upswing in fervency in the prayers and exhortations in the Latin inscriptions is a strong indicator that many had an unwavering and sincere belief in Roman traditions.

There had been a dramatic increase in the number of beatified women in the early modern period. Where once female saints accounted for only around 12% of the total number, they now constituted over a quarter of those recognised by the Catholic Church.[128] This is reflected both in the art produced during the period and in the diversity of spiritual practises held by women. Women were no longer restricted to the traditional pleas for intercessionary prayers or for the mercy of God, but were instead increasingly willing to incorporate imagery of female saints and of even more diverse decorative elements.

For example, Lady Margaret Beauchamp, who died in 1539, gave very specific instructions to the designers of her own tomb: “I will that there be made a tablet of the birth of our lord and the three kings to be set upon the wall over my body when it be buried. Also an image of alabaster three quarters of a yard in length of St. John the Evangelist with the chalice in his hand to be set over me in likewise”.[129] Above this, she commissioned a stained glass window dedicated to the Virgin Mary which contained likenesses of her own personal saints, both female: St. Dorothy, patron saint of newlyweds and love, and her own name-saint St. Anne. She included in the work an image of herself wearing her own family’s escutcheons, pleading for intercession on behalf of herself and her husband.[130] In all, the program she developed for the burial of herself and her husband at the parish church of

127 Pearson (2000), p. 122.

128 Warr (1994), p. 3.

129 Harris (2010), p. 751.

130 Ibid., p. 749.

Dauntsey in Wiltshire was both highly elaborate and uniquely suited to representing her views on her own identity, both religious and social. The efforts and expense required puts paid to her own assertion that she cared little for matters of the material world.

Many women took their responsibility for memorialising their husband as an opportunity to create public devotional images of particular saints and holy figures. Their choice of saints could be entirely personal, or could incorporate family traditions – the name-saints of close male relatives, particularly fathers, were a common choice. Lady Sybil Danvers bequeathed stained glass windows to the church at Waterstoke, Oxford, where she was to be buried, that depicted St. Barbara and St. Anne alongside the Trinity for her funerary chapel.[131] Likewise, Dame Constance Ferrers commissioned devotionary works in the name of St. Katherine for her family's parish church in Baddesley Clinton in Warwickshire.[132]

When it came time to commission their own tombs, aristocratic women used their wills as an instrument through which to project their religious identity. Essentially every testament that survives from before England's break with Rome includes phrasing that called out particular saints while also commending their souls to God. There were, however, a great many women who added additional language defining their spirituality in more individual terms. Some noted specific prayers and masses to be spoken in their chantries in place of the standard liturgy. Dame Elizabeth Brown, for instance, indicated that the priest in charge of maintaining her funerary chapel arrange for the singing of thirteen trentals in the name of St. Gregory. Others such as Dame Elizabeth Cutte simply included extensive appeals to particular saints in the inscriptions upon their tombs.[133]

After Protestantism took hold within the ranks of the nobility, widows were provided with many new options through which to define themselves religiously. The commendations and calls to God and the saints mentioned above disappeared, replaced by statements indicating a new belief that their souls would reach Heaven through their personal faith alone. The range of biblical and theological texts from which mottoes and verses could be drawn for the purpose of epitaphs grew ever larger during the English Renaissance. The Book of Common Prayer was a particular favourite – in 1549, Dame Jane Calthorpe included a quotation from the *Order of Burial of the Dead* from that text in the inscriptions for her brass effigy.[134] After her death in 1617, Elizabeth Rogers, widow of the Archdeacon at Chester, included in the epitaph for her tomb in Eccleston, Cheshire two pieces of scripture in English: "The memorial of the just shall be Blessed" (Proverbs 10:7) and "Thou shalt go to

131 Macnamera, p. 173.

132 Harris (2010), p. 751.

133 Ibid.

134 Finch, p. 77.

thy grave in a full age, as a ricke of corne cometh into due season into ye barne" (Job 5:26). Biblical figures were widely employed as metaphorical stand-ins for the dead, especially in monuments erected by women in their own name.[135]

Eventually, practicality in the face of continually increasing pressure from the English government prompted the nobility to seek new personal and communal values to which they could dedicate their memorials, to replace the earlier focus on intercessionary prayer and fear of Purgatory. The approach most solidly encouraged by the Protestant churches and adopted most enthusiastically by aristocratic widows was that of the doctrine of "Memoria", or memory crafting – the deliberate sculpting of personal image and fame for posterity after death.

Memory crafting

After the violence against tombs and monuments died down towards the end of the Reformation, noblewomen began to feel comfortable once again with the idea of commemorating their dead loved ones and ancestors. The practice of building monuments to their memories began again in earnest. But the Reformation had wrought substantial changes to the ways in which English craftsmen and noble patrons engaged with tomb-building. Throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, pleas for intercession from saints and passers-by were steadily replaced by figurative decorations extolling the virtues of the deceased. Memory, rather than the continued welfare of departed souls, becomes the primary focus.[136] See, for example, the tomb of Sir George Villiers **(FIG 4)**. Erected by his widow Kate after his death in 1628, the iconography is almost entirely secular. Images of saints have been replaced with the classical gods Neptune and Mars, with a grand effigy of Fame herself placed front and centre, emphasising the central virtue of the entombed.[137] Likewise the tomb of Ludovick Stuart, Duke of Richmond and Lennox, is crowned with a life-sized statue of Fame atop the canopy **(FIG 5),** and his wife the Duchess included an inscription outlining that the monument was indeed dedicated to his memory and fame.[138]

This approach was encouraged by Protestant churches, which emphasised the potential for memorials of the dead in educating the living, providing moral examples of

135 Sherlock, p. 124.

136 Harding, p. 157.

137 Sherlock, p. 162.

138 "[...]my deere lord and husband the Duke of Richmond and Lenox whose matchles memory and fame deeded to me shall live with me to the uttermost of affection and dutie whiles I breath on earth", in Sherlock, p. 161.

lives led and of good deaths. Memory became a duty for the pious.[139] This is not to say that fame and memory were entirely secularised. Rather, the living memory of the deceased bridged the gap between death and Heaven that had previously been occupied by Purgatory.[140]

The most basic way in which one could emphasise the importance of one's husband was through the sheer size of the monument commemorating him. From the 16th century onwards, the average height of tombs continued to increase. The importance of size as an indicator of social status was recognised enough that we have several surviving accounts of complaints between families over the tendency of lower orders of nobility to presume upon their betters by deliberately upscaling the tombs of their husbands to upstage others within the same area. A large and prominent tomb was advantageous in that it ensured that visitors to the church would be drawn towards it. As floor space became increasingly expensive within the most desirable locations, widows commissioned higher and higher tombs so as to make best use of the space they had obtained.[141] The banning of chantry chapels (and, in Scotland, all tombs) within the church interior only served to shift the battleground of height out into the churchyard itself, with mausoleums now unrestricted by any overhanging architecture.

A theme common to all English funerary monuments from the early modern period is the recognition that personal identity can be separated into body, soul and memory. This separation of identity dates from at least the late medieval period in England, and all funerary art thereafter makes reference to it. Widows would simultaneously craft an image of ageless and smooth-skinned perfection, of spiritual immortality, through effigial sculpture while simultaneously imploring passers-by to recognise their own bodily mortality through epitaphs, engravings, and minor sculpted likenesses of an anthropomorphic Death figure.[142]

In effigies and portraits, the natural features of a woman's husband in life might bear very little resemblance to the sculpted effigies she commissioned in his honour. Over time, they would be replaced entirely – the image that survived in collective memory would not be their own but one intentionally created and moulded by their widow. There was a specific stylistic language employed for tombs of women constructed separate to those they commissioned for their husbands. Effigies commissioned by women of themselves disproportionately employed the visual motif of a shroud or veil, something quite uncommon on tombs of men. These shroud tombs were intended to link together the concepts of a body in sleep with one in death, and not just on the surface level of their

139 Ibid, p. 125.

140 Ibid., p. 162.

141 Llewellyn (1991), p. 106.

142 Llewellyn (1990), pp. 214-40.

similar appearance. Rather, sleep served as a convenient theological metaphor - just as a sleeping body would eventually awaken, the dead would eventually arise in the Resurrection prior to the Last Judgment.[143]

Corporeal remains inevitably decay. In so doing, they become dangerous. Not in the sense of being vectors for the spread of disease, but through the way that corruption of the body affected the dignity and character of the deceased. Commissioning an effigy was an attempt on the part of the widow to preserve the appearance of their husband long after the natural body itself disintegrated.[144] Modern historians agree that the facial features of these effigies, stone or brass, were not intended to act as true portraits of their subject. Rather, the figures were meant to represent idealised versions of their living counterparts, essentially embodying how they would appear upon the arrival of Christ's Last Judgement and the Resurrection – healthy and in the prime of life.[145] The sculptors aimed to blur the lines between life and death and create an eternal physical representation of the deceased within the church. Other concerns, such as emphasising the wealth and prestige of the subject, were addressed through costume, emblems, and props, much as with portrait paintings of the day.

While death destroyed one's mortal remains, and the disposition of one's soul was entirely in the hands of God, a woman could nonetheless maintain control over the survival of their husband's image in the minds of the living. Fame was the key to assuring survival of memory, and fame itself was seen as the natural result of living a virtuous and moral life.[146] Tomb monuments created a space for an individual to occupy within the collective memory of the living. Through reflecting the private thoughts of a relative on the past life of the deceased, a monument cemented their future reputation, as well as that of their living heirs. This is a function of art that art historians have been slow to take seriously, in part because the conceptual vocabulary for discussing these pieces does not really exist – idealism, naturalism, and other art historical descriptors are difficult to adapt to discussions of effigies and tomb decoration.[147]

The philosophical aspects of memory-crafting were of less concern than the practical benefits for widows, however. For them, cultivating and perpetuating a mythical representation of one's dead husband was the means to securing one's own future. Fame became a central virtue for commemoration because the greater a husband's personal

143 Marshall (2004), pp. 116-7.

144 Llewellyn (1991), p. 47.

145 Llewellyn (2000), pp. 35-42.

146 Sherlock, p. 6.

147 Llewellyn (1991), p. 101.

renown, the greater the halo effect on his surviving dependents. As memory became an increasingly important factor in commemorative design, the individual character of these tombs demanded levels of attention from widows that they had not been required to put forth in the past. To commemorate one's husband required decisions about what elements of their lives to emphasise over others. While motifs could be taken from older tombs and repurposed to some degree, every monument was ultimately unique to the individual or individuals it commemorates; every solution reflected that woman's own perspective on their husband.

Often, the tombs themselves would make self-conscious reference to the act of remembrance. Inscriptions by widows made reference not now to prayer, but to memory. See, for example, the tomb of Sir John Nedham (d.1618) **(FIG 6)**, commissioned by his widow, where the inscription reads:

"This worthy knight subdued by death / is happy made by losse of breath / of heaven hath his soule / his pietie is fresh in good mens memory / heroick spirits love his name / rare vertues have extold his fame / his earthly part though nowe but dust / shall rise to glory with the just.".[148]

Dame Elizabeth Drury's monument to the memory of her husband William, who died in 1557, takes up the theme of fame and how the deeds he performed in life ensured his eternal reputation after death. An epitaph engraved into the slab reads: "He yet doth live, and shall do still, in the hearts of them that knew him" **(FIG 7)** – an entirely secular statement about existence after death.[149] Likewise, when it came time to arrange for the disposition of her own remains, she amended the monument to include references to her own earthly life. Lineage, marriages, and her descendants were all carefully enumerated, and the family crest mounted upon the tomb was a combination of both her husband's and her own coat of arms **(FIG 8)** – something that would be highly unusual if the order of their deaths had been reversed. Her second husband, who achieved the highest rank among her spouses as the Lord Steward to two of the Tudor kings, was mentioned most prominently in her own autobiographical epitaph.[150] Others saw in the construction of their husband's tomb an opportunity to establish their own reputation as a patron of monuments, a title which could further their hopes of personal social advancement and perhaps solicit advantageous marriage offers for either herself or her children. Lady Anne Clifford, for example, made certain to include an inscription linking her contribution to "past present and future memory".[151]

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148 Sherlock, p. 6.

149 Harris (2009), p. 323.

150 Ibid.

151 Ibid.

One fact above all others is likely to strike the modern eye as odd about the tombs commissioned by widows for their husbands: they commemorate the living and the dead equally. Indeed, roughly a third of the funeral monuments erected in the 15th and 16th centuries were designed to commemorate, and thus represent, the living.[152] Effigies purchased for and displayed on the tombs incorporated both likenesses of both the departed and of themselves, and also potentially their children and close family. For years after the completion of these tombs, the widow could expect to be seen in the flesh alongside her stone or brass counterpart whenever she visited the parish church. Every time a local or pilgrim encountered both together, the connection between the living and the dead would be reinforced.

The positioning of effigies on tombs commissioned by men generally maintain the focus on the lineage of the husband himself. Children that their wives conceived during an earlier marriage, for example, almost never appear as effigies or are even mentioned on plaques when the husband commissions the family tomb. Monuments commissioned by widows, on the other hand, are far more likely to take a different stance on gender relations, celebrating the matrilineal line. Take, for example, Elizabeth Swillington, the wife of a minor knight (Thomas Essex) and later an official of the town of Coventry (Ralph Swillington). Elizabeth chose to commission her own tomb in advance of her death in 1546. She secured a space amongst her kin, but included effigies of both husbands and dedications to both patriarchal lines. In so doing, Elizabeth managed to forge an image of her own identity, selecting elements to celebrate from each of her families and acknowledging her own ancestors in the choice of location.[153]

Society was much less concerned with maintaining female reputation after death than that of men; their identities hinged upon far fewer factors. The gendered nature of reputation as a social construct has deep historical roots. Pericles of Athens concluded that, unlike men, 'The greatest glory of a woman is to be least talked about'.[154] A man's reputation was relatively malleable. Failings in one aspect of life could be compensated for by emphasising their achievements in another. Bloodline, honourable works in the fields of public administration or military strategy, spiritual purity, humility and a caring familial nature, all were regarded as positive traits that could serve in the crafting of an immortal image of one's husband.

As a result, when commissioning their own tombs women were markedly more circumspect with regards to their own accomplishments and fame. Dame Margery Waldegrave, who died in 1540, ordered that her funeral be carried out with "no pompous burial nor no month's mind" with "no common assembly of poor people nor common dole

152 Llewellyn (1991), p. 17.

153 Sherlock, p. 62.

154 Thucydides, p. 122.

nor dinner to be kept".[155] Likewise, Anne Neville, Duchess of Buckingham laid out instructions for her executors to make the burial ceremony entirely private, to remove her remains as quickly and quietly as possible to her tomb in Pleshy "setting all pomp and pride of the world apart".[156]

It is unclear, however, exactly how honest these widows were when making these proclamations of humility. For example, when she died in 1508, Dame Katherine Bray left an eloquent statement in her will regarding how little she cared for the pomp and circumstance of a public funeral, saying "And as touching the funeral obsequies and ceremonial business about my body, I will that in my burying … all things be done in soberness and temperance … as it maybe be most to the honour of god and profit to my soul … all worldly pomp and superstitious vanity clear set aside."[157] Nonetheless, the will included provision for her funeral and monument to the tune of £100, a substantial sum that would be enough to support an entire family from the minor gentry for an entire year.[158]

Family prestige

While undoubtedly important for commemorating their husbands, fame and lasting memory on an individual scale was nonetheless only a small factor in the self-identity of aristocratic women during this period. To them, the status of their family – their descendants and their family name – generally took precedence. Standard tomb monument design emphasised the themes of lineage and legitimacy throughout the early modern period. It was extremely common to list one's descendants, parents, spouses, and even extended family members such as siblings and cousins in inscriptions and engravings on the tomb itself.

Reinforcing this theme, entire chapels, chantries, and sections of the parish church might be set aside to the commemoration of a single locally prominent family, with multiple tombs and monuments for each successive generation.[159] It is in fact these extensive family chapels of prominent families such as the Spencers that gives the impression that the early modern nobility were heavily memorialised, even when perhaps that was not the case. These conglomerated tombs were in large part the result of forced relocation of remains in the wake of the destruction of funerary chapels and chantries at the hands of Cromwell and other reformers during the Dissolution.[160]

155 Harris (2010), p. 751.

156 Ibid.

157 Ibid., p. 752.

158 Ibid.

159 Ibid., p. 118.

The overall effect was an impression of unbroken continuity, of a powerful and extensive family network with an entrenched connection to the land itself and to the people who lived off of it, despite the transience of any given individual and the inevitable disruption caused by the death of a prominent landlord. Several examples exist of monuments that explicitly trace family trees in the hopes of creating a sense of antiquity.[161] A clear indicator of this intention is in the use of antiquated costuming on the effigies, calling back further and further into the past in order to emphasise the family's ancient roots. This connection to ancient lineage was of quite some importance in maintaining the family's authority over and cordial relations with their neighbours and the local peasantry.

Nowhere were the opportunities for familial advancement offered by tomb monuments more widely adopted than amongst the *new* nobility. Many families were enriched and landed by royal dispensation of seized monastic properties in the mid-16th century and, in almost every case, they immediately set about crafting a narrative in which they had always been noble. This obsession with lineage and the belief that tracing ones roots to antiquity imparted prestige and legitimacy remained prominent throughout the early modern period, and inevitably led many women to embellish or outright fabricate details of their family tree, to establish connections and a sense of heritage that would provide their descendants with as much of an advantage as possible.

The hope was that by creating an air of dynastic longevity and legitimacy, their hold over the local area would be stabilised.[162] Great effort was spent documenting those members of the dynasty who were themselves less enthusiastic about spending their inheritances on providing memorials for their forebears. A study by Jonathan Finch, an archaeologist specialising in poverty and commemoration during this time period, found that in the immediate wake of the English Reformation, the parishes that received the highest number and most obviously extravagant memorials were those in areas where widows of the least-stable dynasties, in terms of status, resided.[163]

In addition to the newly landed, this also included widows who had been left caring for young children. Minorities among the aristocracies of the early modern period were invariably damaging to a family's prospects. The momentum of a family's power built up over generations, and the absence of a strong hand at the reins for up to a decade or more presented opportunities for their rivals to take advantage. Discontinuity and breakdown of social differentiation are two of the major threats posed by the death of a nobleman, and as such are the first things that a widow would seek to address through her first independent

160 Lindley (2004), pp. 53-79.

161 See, for example, the description of the Beale family in Sherlock, p. 19.

162 Tarlow, p. 40.

163 Finch, pp. 114-5.

action in commissioning the commemorative monument for her husband.[164] If death breached the continuity of family leadership, commemoration of the deceased by the surviving spouse served to cover the gap. The laying down of tomb monuments by a widow acting as guardian to the young master of a family simultaneously acted as a display of wealth and power while cementing the authority of the dynasty in a material form that any visitor to the lands would recognise.

Of the many tools employed to create this sense of antiquity, perhaps the most widely-adopted was the coat of arms. From the funeral ceremony through to the tomb design, widows employed heraldry as an identifier of both her and her husband's claims of lineage, a widow ensured recognition even after their bodily remains had decayed to the point of making physical identification impossible. Even after individual fame faded away and their physical remains had long since gone to rot, family arms continued to serve as a line of defence against the slide into anonymous obscurity.[165] Indeed, many of the monuments constructed after the Reformation served as little more than blank slates upon which to hang heraldic devices. English tomb monuments for the nobility, almost without exception, displayed the escutcheons of the families of one or both of the interred, and in most cases were the dominant feature in the composition.[166] See, for example, the tomb of Henry Manners, Earl of Rutland (d. 1563), erected by his wife Margaret Nevill **(FIG 9).** Standing atop the prone effigies of Margaret and her husband is a highly decorative panel emblazoned with the family coat of arms, almost as tall again as the rest of the monument and the only portion of the monument to feature any colour. As a result, it is the first thing that the eye of any visitor will be drawn to. Reinforcing the theme of family, the tomb includes multiple secondary figures of their surviving children.

These escutcheons, often commissioned by widows and designed and catalogued carefully by the College of Heralds, acted as something like documentation of the husband's lineage. They emphasised the noble status and the inheritance of surviving dependants. They also had significant legal value – officially sanctioned heraldry served as evidence in several legal disputes over inheritances and settlements of property from noble lines.[167] From the mid-sixteenth century onwards, widows were restricted in their design choices for personal escutcheons.

The College of Heralds was founded to oversee the process of creating and installing them onto tomb monuments. This was in large part due to a recognition by Elizabeth of the power of such displays by aristocratic widows in maintaining social cohesion and reinforcing

164 Llewellyn (1991), p. 47.

165 Tarlow, p. 40.

166 Harris (2009), p. 324.

167 Ibid.

the English hierarchy.[168] Widows do not seem to have widely acknowledged the necessity of engaging with the College for at least several decades after its founding, with only a handful of illuminated drawings of coats of arms submitted for approval for display on tombs.[169] They were, however, quite willing to make use of the secondary function of heralds – many from the College also found work as painters of commemorative panels and altarpieces to be placed in funerary chapels.[170]

While widows made the decision to include heraldic arms out of an individual need for familial prestige, to the state the projection of aristocratic power made them valuable tools for propaganda. And the degree of royal interest in heraldry in turn encouraged yet more aristocratic widows to seek official coats of arms for themselves and their husbands after death made the need apparent. Despite the number of peers remaining relatively constant throughout Elizabeth's reign, the number of families who owned coats of arms grew substantially.[171]

The royal family itself, and Elizabeth in particular, showed continued interest in maintaining the tradition of heraldic funeral ceremonies. Elizabeth herself intervened with the preparations of widows for several heraldic funerals when she felt that they did not demonstrate the level of grandeur appropriate to the social rank of the deceased. When it came to the royal family itself, Elizabeth shouldered the substantial cost of several funerals and monuments rather than allow the social importance of the lives and deaths of the deceased pass unremarked. These include Henry, Lord Hunsdon – the son of Mary Boleyn and her cousin by blood – as well as Lady Catherine Knollys, the brother of her father's final wife Catherine Parr.[172]

The choice of which personal arms to deploy on a given monument was, however, at the discretion of the widow. Between multiple marriages and her own family's arms, there were often several to choose from. A married woman's personal arms would itself differ from those of her father or husband, usually quartering elements of both to create a design that uniquely identified her. When placing them on a tomb, aristocratic women installed the arms of their husband in the commanding position, though some heiresses from particularly prominent families favoured the arms of their father even in tombs they would share with one of their husbands.

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168 Woodward (1997), p. 53.

169 Llewellyn (1991), p. 61.

170 Ibid., p. 72.

171 MacCaffrey (1993), p. 356, 364.

172 Gittings (2008), p. 182-3.

When her own escutcheon was also featured, it was placed in a subordinate position to the right or below her husbands, and was often smaller in size. We have a surfeit of documentation attesting to the importance that widows laid upon coats of arms, and the level of detail in tomb contracts can be exacting. For example, the will of Dame Katherine Grey, who died in 1505, exhorted her heirs to "make a tomb over me with a stone and therein to be set pictures of my two husbands after their honour and my picture in a winding sheet between them both, with two escutcheons of their arms and mine jointly together at every end of the same stone, with a scripture thereto accordingly. And a plate to be set in the wall over my tomb and therein mine arms and such scripture as to mine executors and friends seem best and convenient to be made, shewing what I was."[173] Unfortunately, following the collapse of the church tower in the 18th century, only the male side-figures of her husbands were rescued and the new monument reworked with the men as its primary focus.[174]

Kirsty Owen, an archaeologist working for Historic Scotland, argues in her study of the practice of church burials in Gloucestershire that the entire system of patronage of tomb monuments was set up not primarily out of piety but rather in order to reinforce the legitimacy of social inequality between the gentry and peasantry.[175] The wealthy and influential aristocrats whose widows could afford tomb monuments created assumptions about their families that they were inherently 'more spiritual' than the average person. Exclusive burial locations, expensive designs and materials for the construction itself, and the definition through fashion, style, and taste were all markers that set a cultured family's tomb apart from that of the general public. Precedent, custom and codes of conduct separated the tombs of the aristocracy from those of the lower classes. As, of course, did cost.

The net costs of conducting a heraldic funeral could be staggering. Lord Keeper Bacon's executor – his widow – was instructed by his will to spend £919 12s 1d on his funeral after his death in 1579.[176] Other historians such as Vanessa Harding concur that the ritual practices carried out by aristocratic widows in burying and commemorating their dead served to cement their position in the social pecking order, not only with regards to the class hierarchy but also to the maintenance of accepted gender and social roles for their unique position as an unmarried woman with power.[177]

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173 Harris (2010), p. 748.

174 Willats (1980), p. 5.

175 Owen (2006), pp. 1-34.

176 Llewellyn (1991), p. 63.

177 Harding, p. 3.

Accurately capturing the unrecorded emotional connections within the typical family structure of early modern period remains an unresolved problem for modern scholars; even more so translating those connections into a format recognisable to modern eyes. The traditional assumption has long been that there was something fundamentally different in the way the early modern psyche perceived and reacted to familial bonds; that the harshness of life during the period inured people to a certain level of death in a domestic context and that children, particularly the youngest, could die without long-lasting grief on the part of the parents.[178] This is not, however, borne out in the funerary arrangements of the period, particularly those by women.

For example, by choosing to include effigies of children in the design of a monument, a widow altered the very character of the work. No longer a retrospective look at the life of herself or her husband, it instead took on a forward-looking character, celebrating the continuation of the family line. The exception to this, of course, being monuments to children who had died an early death. Bereaved mothers throughout the early modern period are responsible for the creation of a substantial number of monuments to children. They praised their sons for their scholarship and attentiveness and their daughters for the purity of their innocence, raising them as immortal examples for the living.[179]

The decorations for these tomb monuments vastly outstripped the programmes for their own tombs, and both the inscriptions and sculptural works tended to be highly emotive. Even the displays of family arms take on a new meaning, transforming from a powerful statement about the family's status and connections into a study of disappointment, frustration, and grief. The patroness' reason for ordering the construction of these monuments is quite clear: a wish to project an image of themselves as a dutiful and fecund wife in spite of the misfortunes rained upon her progeny. In cases where the last male heir passed, the widow's construction of the tomb for their child acted as the "Last Rites" for an entire dynasty, and several women rose to the challenge and acquitted themselves well through sheer splendour and sentiment for the deceased.[180]

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178 Stone (1977), p. 102.

179 Llewellyn (1991), p. 28.

180 King, p. 123.

Conclusions

Tombs and monuments are a unique form of patronage, one that forces the patron to actively consider their own view of themselves, their place in the social order, and how they wish to be regarded by later generations once their own voices have faded away. These commemorative artworks are also unusual in art historical terms in the level of strict control exercised by the patron over the execution. In comparison to other forms of artistic commission, relatively little leeway was given to the sculptors, painters, masons and other artisans who wished to stamp their own mark upon the work. Every monument was unique, reflecting the ideals of the patron rather than the fancies of the artists themselves. Designs which have survived from the period are densely covered in annotations and amendments made on behalf of the patroness.

To be a successful patron then, a widow therefore had to approach the construction of a tomb monument with a clear idea of what she wanted out of it, as well as a high degree of confidence that her own vision was both socially respectable and appropriate to the medium. What allowances were made for widows by the standards of etiquette laid out by handbooks such as Vives' *Instruction of a Christen Woman* provided some wiggle room when it came to self-expression and the adoption of a didactic spiritual role. Nevertheless, those same handbooks required her to present a conservative 'family first' attitude in all aspects of life, and rarely entertained the possibility that a woman might engage in patronage on her own behalf by commissioning (or arranging for the commission in her will) of her own tomb or funerary altarpiece.

Church monuments also formed the centre-piece of ongoing rituals commemorating the dead, of the process of bereavement and mourning by the living. Conveniently, all of these layers of meaning are locked in place in stone and brass for modern historians to peruse and interpret. The early modern period, with its near-constant religious and political upheavals, provided women with ongoing opportunities to define themselves. Whether by clinging to tradition or embracing the emerging Protestant faiths, a woman in this period was capable of making statements about their personal piety and spiritual identity that were unavailable only a few generations before.

Combined with these religious functions, monuments also served as a keystone in the strategies of many families to secure and affirm their position within the social elite. Legitimacy and prestige were valuable commodities with tangible benefits for a newly widowed woman, particularly when they were left responsible for handling family affairs in the absence of an adult male heir. The commemoration of the dead was in many ways inseparable from the social dynamics of the living.

Those commissions by women commemorate their own personal and spiritual qualities, explicitly fashion their own identity, aspirations and ideals, and even publically identify them in permanent fashion through engraving their names into brass or stone. All this was in direct conflict with contemporary prescriptions of ideal feminine conduct, providing an alternate definition of what it meant to be a woman (or at least an aristocratic woman) during this time period. In commemorative artwork as in no other field of artistic

patronage could a widow engage in otherwise male-dominated spaces of public discussion, such as the ongoing battle between the Protestant and Catholic faiths within England during the 16th century.

Appendix: Illustrations

Figure 1: Brasses on top of tomb of Sir John Danvers (d.1514) and Anne Stradling(d.1539), Dauntsey Church, Wiltshire. Photo retrieved from Wikimedia Commons (http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:DanversStradlingTombBrassesDauntsey.jpg) on 2015-01-10

Figure 2: Sir Richard Fitzlewis (d. 1528) and his four wives, Ingrave, Essex. Brass engraving.

Figure 3: Tomb of Sir Richard Knightley (d. 1534) and his wife Jane Skenard, Fawsley, Northhamptonshire. Photo by Sarah Kett.

Figure 4. James Cole, *Engraving of the funerary monument of George Villiers, Duke of Buckingham* (1742). Accessed via Getty Images GRI Trust archives (http://search.getty.edu/gri/records/griobject?objectid=2550633318) on 2015-01-12.

Figure 5: Tomb monument of Ludovick Stuart, Duke of Richmond and Lennox (d. 1623), Westminster Abbey. Photo by David Conway.

Figure 6: Tomb of Sir John Nedham (d. 1618), St Martins Church, Litchborough, Northamptonshire. Photo by Amanda Miller

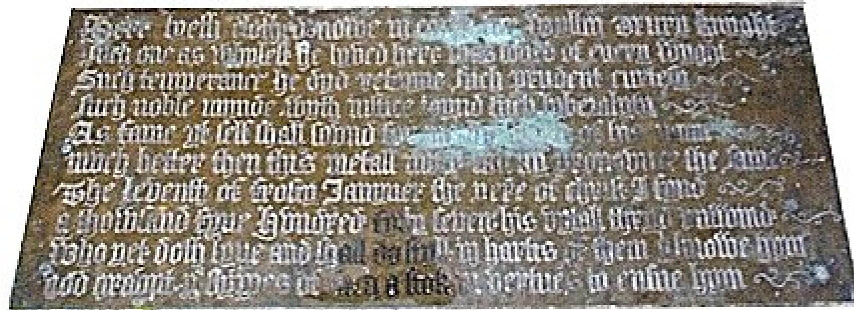

Figure 7: Engraved brass plaque mounted on the tomb of William Drury (d. 1557) and his two wives Joan and Elizabeth, at Hawsted Church, Bury St. Edmunds, County Suffolk

Figure 8: Brass coat of arms mounted on the tomb of William Drury (d. 1557) and his two wives Joan and Elizabeth, at Hawsted Church, Bury St. Edmunds, County Suffolk

Figure 9: Tomb monument of Henry Manners, Earl of Rutland (d. 1563). Bottesford, Leicestershire. Photograph by Stephen Drury.

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