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# Language, Lordship, and Architecture: The Brass of Sir Thomas and Lady Walsh at Wanlip, Leicestershire, and its Context

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The brass of Sir Thomas Walsh and his wife, dated 1393, at Wanlip (Leics.) is notable for affording the earliest extant example of an English inscription on a high-status tomb monument. It is suggested that the reason for the unusual choice of language was the patrons' desire to attract intercession from the widest possible audience in recognition of their rebuilding of the church and 'hallowing' of the churchyard, both recorded on the inscription. It is shown that the church itself is a distinguished building, notable for incorporating motifs from the new state apartments commissioned by John of Gaunt at Kenilworth Castle, a borrowing explicable in terms of Sir Thomas's close associations with Gaunt.

KEYWORDS brass, church, epitaph, inscription, language

By the last quarter of the fourteenth century inscriptions on English brasses and tomb slabs commemorating the laity had settled into three main forms of words.[1] The first of these laid emphasis on the deceased's place of burial. Typically, the opening formula was, in Latin, 'Hic iacet [. . .]' or, in French, 'Ici gist [. . .]', followed by details of the deceased's identity and social position with, at the end, a plea for God's mercy. A second common construction, like the obit, emphasized the deceased's need for intercession, opening with the words, in Latin, 'Orate pro anima [. . .]' or, in French, 'Prie pur lalme [. . .]' and again naming the deceased and concluding with a plea for divine mercy. A third, less common form dwelt on the contemporary preoccupation with mortality, drawing on the text of the Ash Wednesday liturgy — 'de terre fu fet et fourme et en terre fu retourne' ('from earth I was made and formed,

[1] For a general survey of the forms taken by English late medieval tomb inscriptions, see N. E. Saul, *English Church Monuments in the Middle Ages. History and Representation* (2009), 343–8.

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and to earth I shall return'). Between them, these three forms and their variants accounted for a high proportion of brass epitaphs of the period to 1400. The languages employed were usually Latin or French, Latin being the language of authority and French the vernacular of the upper classes. Latin was typically employed on brasses and tomb slabs of the clergy and French on those of the gentry and other laity. English was used on only a few epitaphs of the period.

The relative absence of the native vernacular is perhaps surprising given the clear evidence of its rise in status by the end of the fourteenth century. By Edward III's reign English, in its Middle English form, was again being used extensively as an everyday language of communication in legal and governmental circles after centuries in the official shadows. In 1362, in response to a parliamentary petition, it was enacted that pleadings in the king's courts should be in English 'so that everyone could the better conduct himself': implying that much pleading was already in English.[2] A decade later, when the Chancellor, Sir John Knyvet, approached the convocation of Canterbury in St Paul's Cathedral for a grant of clerical taxation, he spoke in English to persuade the clergy of the king's needs. In 1385, John Trevisa made the observation that in grammar schools pupils were translating from Latin into English, not Latin into French, so indicating that English was coming to prevail over French as the language of polite society. It seems likely that the lead in the use of English had been taken by the senior townsmen. The first petitions and official documents in English were produced at this time by the London mercantile elite, and the first extant English will is that of a Londoner, Robert Corn.[3] By Richard II's reign, however, English was being spoken and written in the very highest aristocratic and courtly circles. The poetic works of Chaucer and his contemporaries, notably John Clanvow and Thomas Usk, were showing that English could be a fitting mode of expression for the kind of elegant literature read by or recited to kings and princes. All over Europe, vernaculars were being pressed into use as vehicles of polite expression. Near the beginning of the century Dante had used Italian for his *Divine Comedy*, while in the 1350s and 1360s Guillaume de Machaut was resorting to French for the literature of courtly love.

To this background, it is all the more surprising that the choice of languages on funerary epitaphs should have remained so very traditional and conservative. While Middle English was becoming acceptable for official, even for learned, writing, Latin and French remained near universal on epitaphs.[4] Latin drew continuing strength from its association with the authority of the Church, while French was buoyed up by its close link with chivalry. For most of the fourteenth century English appears to have been used only on epitaphs commemorating those of sub-knightly rank. The earliest surviving English epitaph seems to be that on a semi-effigial slab at Stow (Lincs.), probably of *c.* 1310–40. It reads:

[2] For this example and the others which follow, see J. Coleman, *English Literature in History, 1350–1400. Medieval Readers and Writers* (1981), 51–2.

[3] F. J. Furnivall (ed.), *Fifty Earliest English Wills* (Early English Text Soc., original ser., 78, 1882), 1–2. The second earliest surviving will also comes from London, that of John Pyncheon, 1392: ibid., 3. For other English documents of London origin, see R. W. Chambers and M. Daunt (eds.), *A Book of London English, 1384–1425* (1931).

[4] For general discussion of the choice of language for tomb inscriptions, see Saul, *English Church Monuments*, 351–6.

> Alle men that bere lif Prai for Emme was Fuk wife

Of roughly the same date is an inscription on the base slab of an effigy of Ham Hill stone of a priest at Wellington (Somerset).[5] The lettering is indistinct but appears to read:

> Richard Per [son] d[e] [saint] mere of Wellingtone [here] liggith in graeve Ihu Crist Godes sonne grawunte him [res] [m[ercy

It is possible that the choice of English on this monument resulted from the commissioner being a lay relative or an executor of the deceased. From the second half of the century comes the famous inscription commemorating John the Smith at Brightwell Baldwin (Oxon.), *c.* 1370. The brass is now on the wall, but its opening line — 'Man com and se how schal alle dede be [. . .]' — has prompted the suggestion that it was once attached to a shroud effigy, now lost, the despoiled slab for which survives on the floor nearby. After *c.* 1370 there appear to be no more examples until that on the brass of Sir Thomas and Lady Walsh at Wanlip (Leics.), dating from 1393. The example on the Wanlip brass is significant for being the first on an extant brass to senior members of the gentry. As such, the brass is a memorial eminently deserving of further attention.

Taken as a whole, the Walshes' memorial affords a conventional and well-executed example of the work of London workshop 'A', one of the two main London brass-producing workshops of the day.[6] Of roughly the same date, and from the same *atelier*, are the brasses of Robert Russell at Strensham (Worcs.), Sir Edward Cerne and his wife at Draycot Cerne (Wilts.), and Sir Richard atte Lese and his wife at Sheldwich (Kent), all of which used similar patterns for the two figures.[7] A stylistic trait common to all these brasses is the carrying of the lines of the nose right down to the nostrils, rather than cutting them off half-way as on 'B' brasses. The Walshes' brass consists of the figures of Sir Thomas and his wife, Katherine, shown at prayer, with shields surmounted by crests above their heads (these now lost, but the indents remaining), and, surrounding the whole, a marginal inscription with symbols of the Evangelists at the corners (Figure 1). Sir Thomas is shown in coat armour of the period with a mail aventail around his neck and his feet resting on the back of a lion, while his wife is in a *surcoat ouverte* with a tight-fitting kirtle visible beneath and a long mantle hanging from the shoulders fastened by a cord. The lady's headdress is of the reticulated type, with the hair retained in a jewelled network but allowed to fall to the shoulders (Figure 2).

The opening words of the epitaph — 'Here lyes [. . .]' — indicate that the slab was placed over the place of burial, or intended place of burial, of the couple commemorated. It reads in full (with the contractions expanded):

[5] I owe this example to Sally Badham.

[6] London-engraved brasses of the late Middle Ages may be classified stylistically by analysis of the different ways in which armour details and particular facial features such as the nose and eyes were represented. The workshops are known impersonally as style 'A', style 'B', and so on, because it is not always possible to identify those who headed them or who practised in them. The key article for stylistic analysis remains J. P. C. Kent, 'Monumental Brasses: A New Classification of Military Effigies, *c.* 1360–*c.* 1485', *Jnl of the Brit. Arch. Assocn*, 3rd ser., 12 (1949), 70–97.

[7] The brass of atte Lese and his wife, which dates from one year after that at Wanlip, affords a particularly close comparison, with the knight's figure having the same lightly hunched shoulders as that of Walsh.

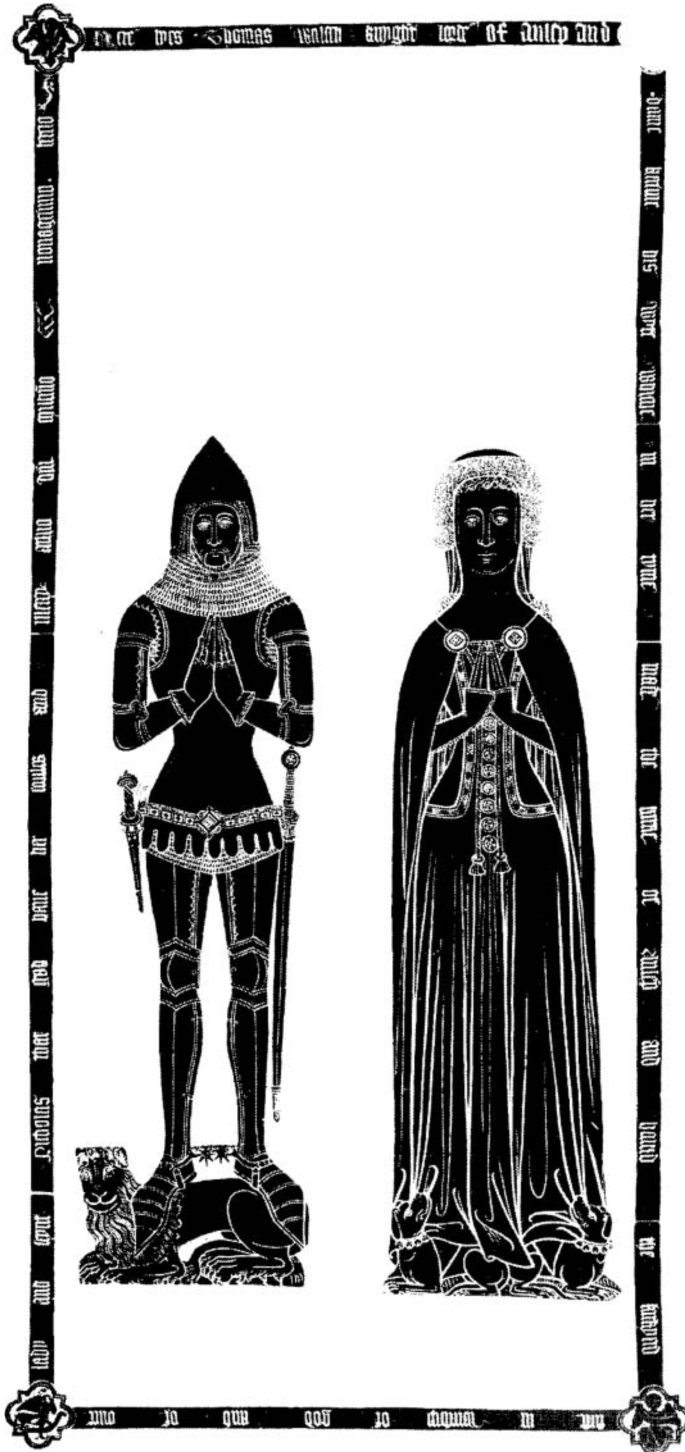

FIGURE 1 Rubbing of the brass of Sir Thomas and Lady Walsh, 1393, Wanlip church.
*Photo: Martin Stuchfield*

FIGURE 2 The upper parts of the figures on the brass of Sir Thomas and Lady Walsh, Wanlip church.
*Photo: Martin Stuchfield*

> Here lyes Thomas Walssh knyght lorde of Anlep and dame Katine his wife whiche in her tyme made the kirke of Anlep and halud the kirkyerd first in Wurchip of god and of oure lady and seynt Nicholas that god have her soules and mercy anno domini millesimo CCC nonagesimo tercio.

The inscription strikes a slightly unconventional note. Contrary to the expectation aroused by the opening, it does not go on, as most inscriptions do, to record the dates of death of one or other of the couple commemorated. Its concern is exclusively with their work in building (or, strictly, rebuilding) Wanlip church and acquiring burial rights for the churchyard attached to it. The date at the end, significantly in Latin, the language of authority, is the date of the church's rebuilding and elevation in status. Strikingly, no date of death is given for either party. By implication, the brass was commissioned in the couple's lifetime. Walsh is, in fact, known to have lived until about 1397, and his wife on the evidence of her will until as late as 1421.[8] The

[8] J. S. Roskell, L. Clark, and C. Rawcliffe (eds.), *History of Parliament. The House of Commons, 1386–1421* (4 vols, Stroud, 1992), IV, 757. There is no inquisition post mortem for Walsh because he did not hold his lands in chief from the Crown. His date of death can be inferred from a plea of debt which his executors brought in the court of Common Pleas in Michaelmas 1397 in which Katherine, one of the plaintiffs and a co-executor, is described as his widow: The National Archives (hereafter TNA), CP40/547, m. 134. For Katherine's own date of death, see F. Madan, *The Gresleys of Drakelowe* (William Salt Arch. Soc., new ser., I, 1898), 53, 292. She made her will in 1421 and presumably died soon after.

purpose of the brass was evidently to honour their achievement for the parishioners of Wanlip and not, in a strict sense, to commemorate the pair personally. In a limited way, the brass may be seen as constituting a legal record.

It is tempting to compare the brass with one laid a few years earlier at Etchingham (Sussex) to another church builder, Sir William de Etchingham (d. 1389). On this memorial, on a semicircular plate above the knight's figure, Sir William's role as builder of the church is singled out, much as the Walshes' was to be at Wanlip. The text reads (with contractions expanded):

> Iste Willelmus fecit istam ecclesiam de novo reedificari in honorem dei et assumpcionis beate Marie et sancti Nicholai qui quondam fuit filius Jacobi de Echingham militis.[9]

We know from the historical record that the sequence of events compressed into this brief narrative was broadly comparable to that recorded at Wanlip. As a result of the initiative of the lord of the manor, the church was provided with burial rights which it had previously lacked, an enlarged churchyard was created, and the church itself entirely rebuilt.[10] The rebuilding followed, and in some ways represented a celebration of, an elevation in the church's status. It is important to note, however, a couple of important differences between the two brasses which are otherwise so similar in purpose. The first is that at Etchingham the brass was laid after the death of the founder, whereas at Wanlip it was commissioned in the couple's lifetime. Sir William de Etchingham's date of death — 18 January 1389 — is given elsewhere on his brass, whereas, as we have seen, no dates of death are given on the counterpart epitaph at Wanlip.[11] The second difference is to be found in the languages employed. At Etchingham Latin was used for the inscription whereas at Wanlip, unconventionally, resort was had to English. In the case of the Etchingham brass there can be little doubt that close attention was given to the matter of language, as a different language — French — was used on a second inscription at the foot, on which the date of death was recorded. Presumably the foundation of the church was deemed to be an event of such overriding importance as to require recording in the language of authority.

Why, in that case, did the same considerations not lead to the use of Latin at Wanlip? The most likely explanation is that Thomas Walsh and his wife were concerned above all to reach the largest possible audience. If the inscription had been in Latin, it would have been accessible only to the clergy and better-educated laity. Composed in English, the popular vernacular, it could be comprehended by all literate folk, lay and clerk alike. The quality of accessibility was important if the brass were to perform its function of attracting intercessory prayer for the persons commemorated, a primary function of all medieval epitaphs. Since the Walshes' 'making' of the church and 'hallowing' of the churchyard constituted good works in contemporary theology, and were accordingly deserving of remembrance in prayer, the couple wanted to secure the intercession of the largest number of petitioners, lay

[9] C. E. D. Davidson-Houston, 'Sussex Monumental Brasses, Part II', *Sussex Arch. Collecns*, 77 (1936) 167–8.

[10] For the story of the acquisition of burial rights at Etchingham, see N. E. Saul, *Scenes from Provincial Life. Knightly Families in Sussex, 1280–1400* (Oxford, 1986), 146.

[11] The year is given on the epitaph as 'mill trois Centz quat(re)vintz oept' — that is to say, 1388 in the old form, when the year changed in March: 1389 in the modern calendar.

as well as clerk.[12] Earlier tomb monuments had been directed to an audience composed principally of the priest and chaplains: for this reason they were commonly placed close to or in front of altars. By the fifteenth century, however, as the market for monuments broadened and larger numbers of layfolk were commemorated in churches, a wider and less exclusive audience was assumed. In his will of 1420, Edmund Hampden of Great Hampden (Bucks.) was to request an English text for his epitaph begging passers-by to offer 'a pater noster and an ave' for his and his wife's souls.[13] The brass at Wanlip affords an early instance of this late medieval trend towards thinking in terms of an audience embracing the entire congregation of God's faithful. Its prominent position in the centre of the chancel floor, between the two sets of stalls, on the route taken by communicants to the altar, reinforced the message conveyed by the vernacular epitaph. No one could have failed to notice the brass; indeed, on entering the chancel they would have found themselves walking right over it.

For all the attraction to Walsh and his wife of use of the vernacular on the epitaph, however, the decision was still a remarkable one, with few if any precedents among high-status monuments of the period. It raises important questions about the attitude of the patrons to the place of English in the linguistic hierarchy of their day. The rise of English to a position of respectability was by no means either a simple or a straightforward progression. The literary English of the late fourteenth century drew extensively on both the ideas and vocabulary of the learned literature in Latin and French, and it has been argued that it had few, if any, roots in writing in current Middle English.[14] At the same time, it should be recalled, the actions of the early Lollards in the 1380s and 1390s in undertaking Bible translation were making the use of English in religious settings a matter of controversy. One of the most active and important centres of early Lollardy was Leicester itself, only a few miles to the south of Wanlip, while John Wyclif, whose theology had inspired the movement, had spent his last years in retirement in his rectory at Lutterworth, ten miles further south still.[15] Partly as a response to Lollard activity, in the early fifteenth century the ecclesiastical authorities were to encourage the translation and production of orthodox texts in English to meet the needs of clergy unable to read Latin or French materials

[12] A similar concern for the use of English is found on the brass of another couple who secured burial rights for their church, in this case Chearsley (Bucks.) — John Franklin and his wife, Margaret, 'which ordeyned lestowe to this chirche and divine service to be doones every holyday in the yere' 1462. As at Wanlip, the year must refer to the date of acquisition of the rights, not to the year of death of those commemorated.

[13] TNA, PROB 11/2B, f. 178r. Hampden requested 'a white stone' ('una petra alba'), presumably an alabaster incised slab or sculpted monument, bearing the following text: 'Ye yat thys see pray ye for charite For Edmundes soule and Jones a Pater Noster and an Ave'. The monument was to go in Great Hampden church within a year of his decease. No pre-Reformation monuments survive in the church today.

[14] J. I. Catto, 'Written English: the Making of the Language, 1370–1400', *Past & Pres.*, 179 (2003), 24–59, argues for the striking novelty and ambition of Chaucer and the other Ricardian poets. W. Scase, 'The English Background', in S. Ellis (ed.), *Chaucer. An Oxford Guide* (2005), 272–91, provides a context for Chaucer's work in the vernacular manuscript culture and devotional literature of the fourteenth century, but does not address Catto's main point: namely that it is inadequate to interpret Chaucer's writing in a monoglot context.

[15] There is a vivid account of early Lollardy at Leicester in G. H. Martin (ed.), *Knighton's Chronicle, 1337–1396* (1995), 277–325, the work of a canon of Leicester Abbey and therefore a probable eye-witness to the activities. For discussion of the historical background to midlands Lollardy, see G. L. Harriss, *Shaping the Nation. England, 1360–1461* (2005), 376–95.

adequately. Walsh and his wife could hardly have been unaware of the possible — and the diverse — reactions to the use of English on a memorial brass in a church.

To this background, it is worth reiterating that the Walshes themselves were almost certainly the parties principally responsible for drafting or, at least, overseeing the epitaph. A number of clues point to this. First and foremost, as we have seen, the brass was commissioned in their lifetimes and thus under their direct supervision. It was they who would have approved the contract with the engraver in London in which the text of the epitaph would in all likelihood have been set out.[16] Second, elements in the morphology of the inscription point to authorship in the east midlands or north. The forms 'kirke', 'kirkyerd', and 'halud' are ones common in the linguistic lexis of the east midlands in the late fourteenth century, while 'lyes' rather than 'lyeth' is a variant found in broadly the same area.[17] It may very well have been the case that some editing of the text was undertaken in the engraver's workshop in London; the genitive pronoun, for instance, is of southern form, with 'her' being used instead of 'ther'. But what is important in the present context is that the decision to use English was one which would have been made by the patrons, and they seem to have been entirely at ease with it. In all probability, English was their first and most immediate language. Certainly, there can be little doubt that English would have been their first language of spoken discourse. While French, the international language of chivalry, was still in widespread use among the aristocracy, it was an acquired language, like Latin. English, by virtue of being the language of the nursery, the home, and the locality, would for most have been the mother tongue. Indeed, it had probably been so for nearly two centuries. In the 1250s, the Franciscan Roger Bacon, with the educated and literate class in mind, had said that 'we speak English, French and Latin'. In the same decade, royal letters patent announcing Henry III's intention to abide by the rulings of his new baronial council had been issued in both French and English.[18] In 1295, during hostilities with the French, Edward I had made a blatant appeal to the linguistic patriotism of the knightly class by accusing the French of wanting to suppress the English tongue. By the mid-fourteenth century, the literary French of some at least of the English aristocratic class may actually have been growing rusty. In 1354, when Henry of Grosmont, Duke of Lancaster, came to write his penitential treatise, the *Livre de Seyntz Medicines*, he apologized for its literary defects saying that, being English, he had little acquaintance with French. His apology may have been a shade disingenuous: his French was passable, and he was a man of cosmopolitan taste. It is worth recalling, nonetheless, that it was probably for his son-in-law, John of Gaunt, that Chaucer wrote his first masterpiece, the *Boke of the Duchesse*, a lament on the death of an aristocratic lady called Blanche.

One way of interpreting the use of English on the Walshes' brass, then, is to see it as the product of a shared linguistic community, a call to prayer but, at the same

[16] The wording of the inscription was given in the contract which in 1466 Richard Willoughby made with the engraver James Reames for his brass to go in Wollaton church, near Nottingham: N. E. Saul, 'The Contract for the Brass of Richard Willoughby (d. 1471) at Wollaton (Notts.)', *Nottingham Medieval Studies*, 50 (2006), 166–93, at 168.

[17] I am grateful to David Griffith for advice on the morphology of the inscription.

[18] For these examples, see M. T. Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record. England, 1066–1307* (1979), 159, 171.

time, a communal witness to an act of charity. To turn from the brass to the church, however, is quickly to be made aware that there were also quite different priorities at work. The high quality of the church's architecture points to a concern on the couple's part to emphasize the power of their lordship over the community. In rural parishes where there was a resident lord of the manor, a church was more than a place of communal worship; it was a witness to proprietorship and a forum for the display of seigneurial power. In the late Middle Ages a good many lords took to turning the churches adjacent to their manorial dwellings into family mausoleums with brasses and sculpted effigies jostling for space in chapels and side aisles. When churches were rebuilt or enlarged in this way by members of the gentry, the work was in many cases undertaken not — or, at least, not so much — to create extra seating space or to improve the physical setting of worship, but to provide a showcase for lordly power. In this respect, the rebuilding of Wanlip church was to prove no exception (Figure 3).

The occasion for the Walshes' rebuilding project appears to have been the acquisition by Wanlip church of full churchyard burial rights. Almost certainly, the church of Wanlip had originally been a chapel of ease dependent on the mother church of

FIGURE 3 Wanlip church: exterior from the south-west.
*Photo: Martin Stuchfield*

Rothley, just over two miles away to the north-west. Its dependence on Rothley is indicated by the liability of the rector of Wanlip to pay the sum of half a mark annually to Rothley since what was referred to as time 'ab antiquo'.[19] At some stage in the church's history full parochial rights were secured by the villagers. In the Lincoln episcopal registers of the fourteenth century the incumbents of Wanlip are always referred to as rectors, and their church as either an 'ecclesia' or 'parochialis ecclesia' — never as a 'capella'.[20] The implication, however, of the statement on the brass that the churchyard was 'hallowed' at the Walshes' behest is that the church, although parochial, was still without full burial rights. This defect appears to be confirmed by the absence of any monuments either within the church or without dating from before the late fourteenth century. A likely reconstruction of events is that, on the initiative of Walsh, as lord of the manor, some arrangement was made with the incumbent at Rothley, and the right of interment in the churchyard was obtained or confirmed.[21] Not long afterwards, Sir Thomas undertook the rebuilding of the church to celebrate the elevation of status. At Etchingham, the rebuilding of the church likewise seems to have been a celebration of the acquisition of burial rights, in this case at the expense of the former minster church of Salehurst.[22]

It is not inconceivable that Walsh's interest in providing a new parish church formed part of a wider programme of upgrading Wanlip as a lordship seat. Walsh held two manors in Leicestershire — Wanlip and Burton Overy — and additional property in the same county at Syston, Cropston, Thurmaston, and Barkby Thorpe. His keen interest in Wanlip church suggests that he was making the manor his main seat and was seeking to improve it accordingly.[23] In the middle of the next century the manorial complex is known to have consisted of a hall, three chambers, a kitchen, two barns, and a stable.[24] This complex of buildings probably stood on the site of the later Wanlip Hall very close to the church, at the northern end of the village.[25] Walsh may have initiated measures to ensure that the church and the manor house were brought into a closer visual relationship. At Etchingham, when Sir William de Etchingham rebuilt the church, he extended the moat encircling the adjacent

[19] J. Nichols, *The History and Antiquities of the County of Leicester* (4 vols in 8, London, 1795–1815), III, ii, 1097.

[20] See, for example, Lincolnshire Archives Centre, Register X (Register of Bishop Buckingham, I), f. 280v: 'ad ecclesiam de Onlep; Register XI (Register of Bishop Buckingham, II), fos. 213r, 221v, 227r: 'ad ecclesiam parochialem de Anlep'. The parish of Wanlip had been served by rectors since 1230 or earlier: Nichols, *History and Antiquities of Leicestershire*, III, ii, 1098.

[21] At Allensmore (Heref.) Mabel, widow of Sir John le Rous, as lady of the manor actively supported her co-parishioners in their campaign to secure burial rights for the local church in opposition to the claims of the dean and canons of Hereford, who insisted on their burial in the cemetery attached to the cathedral: I. Forrest, 'The Politics of Burial in Late Medieval Hereford', *Eng. Hist. Rev.*, 125 (2010), 1110–38, at 1122–7.

[22] Saul, *Scenes From Provincial Life*, 146.

[23] His interest in his properties is indicated by a grant to him in 1391 of free warren in his demesne lands at Wanlip, Cropston, Barkby Thorpe, and Syston (*Calendar of Charter Rolls 1341–1417*, 326).

[24] Leicestershire Record Office (hereafter LRO), 5D33/196, f. 36r (Leicestershire medieval village notes collected by George F. Farnham).

[25] Wanlip Hall is now demolished. It is shown, however, with the church in the background, in an early nineteenth-century print pasted to unnumbered folios in LRO, 5D33/196.

manorial complex so as to include the church.[26] Walsh may have contemplated something of the same sort at Wanlip.

The strongly proprietorial impression which the church would have created was reinforced by the character of its architecture. Although it was not a large building, measuring barely 100 ft in length internally, its fabric exuded a certain distinction. Walsh chose to retain the west tower and the short two-bay south aisle from the old structure; the rest of the fabric he rebuilt as a single cell axial structure with no structural differentiation between nave and chancel. Externally, the impression of stateliness was reinforced by the battlemented parapet along the side walls, a characteristic of many gentry churches.[27]

By remarkable good fortune, it is possible to locate the design sources of Walsh's church with some exactness. It is lit in its side walls by a set of highly distinctive windows with steeply four-centred heads containing alternate tracery, cusped in the chancel, uncusped in the nave and the east window (Figure 4).[28] The windows are similar in design to those which illuminate the magnificent great hall which John of Gaunt built at Kenilworth Castle, a work substantially of 1370–73 and brought to completion probably around 1390–93 (Figure 5).[29] Gaunt's hall in its turn was heavily indebted for much of its architectural detailing to the chancel and chapter house of St Mary's church, Warwick, begun around 1367 by Thomas Beauchamp, Earl of Warwick.[30] The exceptionally distinguished architectural pedigree of the Wanlip windows points to the considerable ambition of Walsh's church. The structure, although conceived on a modest scale, made explicit acknowledgement to buildings of very high status. The window design in particular makes it reasonably probable that Walsh had in his pay a mason who had worked for Gaunt at Kenilworth and was familiar with the details of the new building's design. A likely candidate is Robert Skillington, presumably a native of Skillington (Lincs.), who is known to have been working for Gaunt at Kenilworth at the time that Wanlip church was being built.[31] According to an entry on the patent rolls, in 1391 Skillington was awarded a royal writ of aid to impress up to twenty carpenters and labourers in

[26] Sir S. P. Vivian (ed.), *The Manor of Etchingham cum Salehurst* (Sussex Rec. Soc., 54, 1953), xxvii. The manor house stood just to the east of the church, on the site of the present railway station. Interestingly, the manor house moat was extended to take in the church at another Etchingham property — Udimore, near Rye; see http://homepage.mac.com/philipdavis/English%20sites/1114.html (visited 5 May 2011).

[27] Good examples are afforded by the churches of Chrishall (Essex), Whaddon (Cambs.), and Tong (Shropshire), built by the de la Pole, Descalers, and Pembridge families respectively. The south aisle at Wanlip in its present form is a rebuilding of 1904.

[28] The term 'alternate' describes straight reticulated tracery: J. Harvey, *The Perpendicular Style* (1978), 71 and fig. 9.

[29] For John of Gaunt's rebuilding of the apartments around the inner ward at Kenilworth, see J. Goodall, *The English Castle* (2011), 293–4, and R. K. Morris, 'Sidelights on the 14th-Century Architecture at Kenilworth Castle', in L. Monckton and R. K. Morris (eds.), *Coventry. Medieval Art, Architecture and Archaeology in the City and its Vicinity* (British Arch. Assocn Conf. Trans., 33, 2011), 344–60, in particular 349–51.

[30] For the works at Warwick as a model for style in the midlands, see Goodall, *English Castle*, 287–9. Warwick was, in its turn, indebted to the early Perpendicular works at St Peter's Abbey, Gloucester (now Gloucester Cathedral).

[31] For Skillington, see J. Harvey, *English Mediaeval Architects: A Biographical Dictionary down to 1550* (2nd edn, 1984), 275, and Goodall, *The English Castle*, 334. Skillington is five miles south-west of Grantham, close to the Leicestershire border.

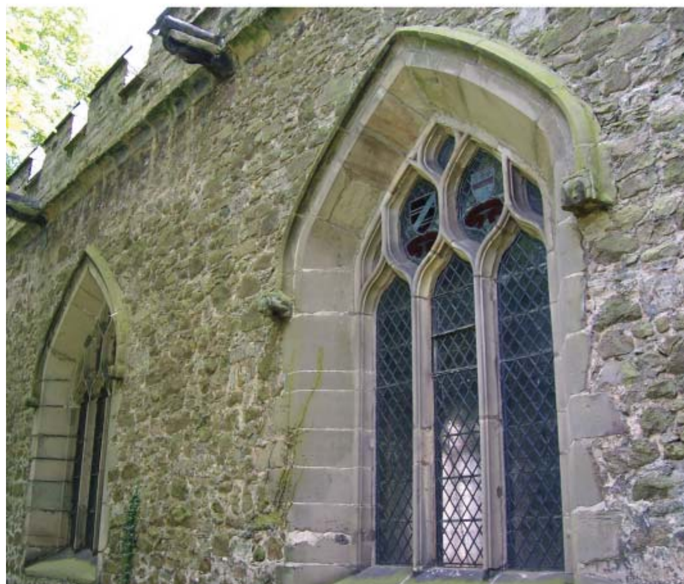

FIGURE 4 The windows on the north side of Wanlip church. *Photo: Nigel Saul*

FIGURE 5 The windows of the great hall of Kenilworth castle, *c.* 1370–73. *Photo: John Goodall*

Warwickshire, to assist in Gaunt's works at Kenilworth, and payments to him in the duchy of Lancaster accounts suggest that he was in direct control of that force.[32] The works with which Skillington was associated are said to have comprised a great hall, 90 ft long by 45 ft wide, flanked at each end by a tower, and a series of state apartments. In other words, it is possible that he was responsible for completing the great

[32] *Calendar of Patent Rolls 1388–1392*, 449–50; Harvey, *English Mediaeval Architects*, 275.

hall, which had been begun by Gaunt some twenty years before. The case for identifying Skillington as the architect of Wanlip is further strengthened by the evidence that in the years immediately following the building of the church he was engaged on works for Gaunt, close by, at Leicester. Leicester, like Kenilworth, was one of the main centres of Lancastrian estate administration in the midlands. For three years from 1397 Skillington acted as Gaunt's master mason at the collegiate church of St Mary in the Newarke, the Lancastrian mausoleum which had been founded in 1353 by the Duke's father-in-law, Henry of Grosmont, and which was probably an important source of early Perpendicular in the midlands.[33] In the light of the evidence of Skillington's service at Leicester as well as at Kenilworth, there is a reasonable case for believing that he was the master mason to whom Walsh turned for his church at Wanlip.

Walsh's ability to secure the services of a top Lancastrian mason becomes understandable once we consider his own affiliations and career. Walsh was a man who could lay claim to close Lancastrian connections himself and who occupied one of most important positions in the ducal administration in the north midlands.[34] Walsh's ties with the house of Lancaster and its affinity stretched back to the 1360s. In the late summer of 1369 he had joined Gaunt on his ravaging of the Pays de Caux in Normandy, after the French renewal of the war with England, probably winning his spurs on that occasion. Early in the next decade, and perhaps in appreciation of that service, he was taken on as one of the Duke's permanent retainers, although the exact date is not recorded. In 1376 his high-profile association with the Duke was to be a cause of some local embarrassment to him. In May that year he was to complain that he had been assaulted by the abbot and some of the canons of Leicester Abbey, and his fish ponds at Wanlip had been fished in.[35] A few weeks earlier, Gaunt and those associated with him in government had been strongly criticized by the Commons in the Good Parliament, and Walsh may have been paying the price for his tie with a highly unpopular political figure. By the beginning of the 1380s, however, his affairs had begun to prosper again. He was being regularly appointed to local office in Leicestershire, a county in which the Lancastrian interest was dominant. In 1381–82 and between 1390 and 1394 he served as a justice of the peace in the county, and on no fewer than fifteen occasions between 1371 and 1397 he was elected one of Leicestershire's two knights of the shire in parliament. By the 1390s, around the time that he was undertaking the rebuilding of Wanlip church, his administrative talents were earning him appointment to senior positions in the Lancastrian administration. In August 1392 he was appointed steward of the ducal estates in Warwickshire, Leicestershire, Nottinghamshire, Northamptonshire, and Rutland, and two years after that was named constable of Leicester Castle. In the absence of new appointments to these offices until after his death in about 1397, it can be taken that he

[33] For the college of the Newarke, see A. Hamilton Thompson, *The History of the Hospital and the New College of the Annunciation of St Mary in the Newarke, Leicester* (1937). The house had been founded as a hospital by the Duke's father in 1331 and was reconstituted as a college of secular canons in 1353. For discussion of its architectural significance, see J. A. A. Goodall, 'The College of St Mary in the Newarke, Leicester', in *Coventry. Medieval Art*, 318–26.

[34] For Walsh's career, see *History of Parliament. The House of Commons*, IV, 756–8.

[35] *Calendar of Patent Rolls 1374–7*, 322.

held them both for the rest of his life. The fees which the offices brought, coupled with his normal retaining fee, would have added substantially to his income from landholding.

Given the clear evidence of Walsh's Lancastrian affiliations, one way of interpreting the rebuilding of Wanlip church is to see it as illustrative of the dissemination of architectural taste in a magnate retinue. Because of the easy access he enjoyed to Lancastrian architectural know-how, Walsh was able to reproduce in his building some of the most striking motifs developed in the previous decades by the best Lancastrian masons. It is not often possible to delineate so clearly the dissemination of cultural and, more specifically, architectural taste from lord to dependant retainer. From early in the next century another excellent example is afforded by the Wilcotes chantry at North Leigh (Oxon.), a building directly indebted to the architecture of the earls of Warwick, with whom William Wilcotes, the founder's husband, had been associated.[36] Northleigh bears a close similarity to Wanlip in making use of the distinctive angular headed windows which had their immediate local origin in the ambitious 1370s rebuilding of St Mary's church, Warwick, and, before that, a source in William Ramsey's works at Gloucester and in the chapter house of Old St Paul's Cathedral.

Walsh predictably made a point of highlighting his distinguished Lancastrian ties in the scheme of decoration of his church. In the manner of other patrons of his rank, he commissioned a lavish display of heraldry to go in the stained glass windows. The greater part of the glass is now lost, but it was recorded before destruction by William Burton, whose work was later drawn on by Nichols.[37] Across the chancel windows Walsh distributed an array of royal and Lancastrian arms. In the big east window, above the kneeling donor figures of himself and his wife, he placed the royal arms as adopted by Edward III in 1340, England and France quarterly. In the first window on the south side he placed a set of five shields honouring the house of Lancaster, as follows: the arms of John of Gaunt quartered with those of Castile and Leon, indicating the Duke's claim to the twin kingdoms though his second wife, Constance of Castile; the arms of Henry of Grosmont, Duke of Lancaster, *gules three lions passant gardant or* with a label; and the arms of the Duke's three illegitimate Beaufort sons, each with an appropriate mark of cadency. In the north window of the chancel he placed the arms of England and France quarterly again, this time with a border, and the arms of Beaumont, another Leicestershire landowning family. In the remaining windows on the north side of the church were the arms of Walsh, *gules two bars gemelles*, *a bend argent*, and of the Walshes' neighbours and associates among the midlands gentry. In the west window, under the tower, were the arms of Walsh surmounted by a helmet and crest, a form of representation used on the brass (where only the indents today remain). The hierarchical arrangement of the shields, with those of the aristocracy and princes of the blood in position of honour in the chancel, was one which had been employed in the 1370s by Sir William de Etchingham at Etchingham.[38]

[36] K. Heard, 'Death and Representation in the Fifteenth Century: the Wilcote Chantry Chapel at North Leigh', *Jnl of the Brit. Arch. Assocn*, 154 (2001), 135–49.

[37] Nichols, *History and Antiquities of the County of Leicester*, III, ii, 1098. A few shields survive in the window heads on the north side of the church.

[38] Saul, *Scenes From Provincial Life*, 148–52.

It was in this newly built church, with its rich array of social and political reference, that Sir Thomas and his wife were eventually to be buried, under the tombstone which they had provided. One element normally *de rigueur* in high-status gentry churches, however, was missing here, and this was the provision of space for future burials. Usually such churches incorporated a side chapel, a transept, or side aisle extension, in which family burials could be made for generations ahead. Such space was often associated with the establishment of perpetual chantry foundations. At Wanlip, however, there is no evidence that a perpetual chantry was ever founded by the Walsh family. No licence for the alienation of land into mortmain is enrolled, and no deed of foundation transcribed in any Lincoln episcopal register. Nor in the planning of the new building was any provision made for a family burial chapel in which a priest could intercede at an altar close to the tombs of the deceased. The new church, as we have seen, was actually quite small, consisting of a nave and chancel without structural division, and a short south aisle retained from the earlier building. There is no sign that the side aisle was conceived as a possible burial space; nor are there are any tomb recesses in the chancel. To this background, the commissioning of a brass by the founder and his wife made perfect sense because a brass could lie flush with the floor, in this way not claiming or obstructing space. Its position directly on the route to the altar is paralleled in the positions of the brass of Sir Edward Cerne and his wife in the similarly small church at Draycot Cerne (Wilts.) and the Cobham family brasses at the much larger Cobham.

As events were to show, the lack of dynastic burial space in the church was not to pose a problem for the family. The founders' own brass was to be the only Walsh memorial placed in the building in the Middle Ages. It is not known where earlier and later members of the family were buried.[39] It is possible that some of Sir Thomas's forebears had been buried in one of the mendicant houses in Leicester, as mendicant precincts were much favoured for burials in the thirteenth century; yet evidence to confirm this suggestion is lacking. As for the preferences of later members of the family, nothing at all can be said in the absence of wills. By 1400, however, as fate would have it, the family's glory days were drawing to a close. Walsh left behind him three sons, the eldest of whom was to die without issue, leaving as his heir the second-born Thomas, who in or before 1422 lost his wits. The family estates were entrusted to the custody first of Thomas's sister, Margaret, and her husband, Sir Thomas Gresley, and then, in 1440, of his kinsmen the Boyvilles, before passing by inheritance to his nephew, another Thomas (d. 1463).[40] This man was to be the last of the Walsh family line.[41] Conceivably there are no later Walsh monuments in the church because no later Walsh burials were made there.

[39] The Walsh family had held Wanlip since at least 1248: LRO, 5D33/196, f. 32v.

[40] *History of Parliament. The House of Commons*, IV, 757; E. Acheson, *A Gentry Community. Leicestershire in the Fifteenth Century, c. 1422–c. 1485* (Cambridge, 1992), 255–6. In 1440 Margaret and her husband were accused of wasting the family estates: LRO, 5D33/196, f. 36r.

[41] He died before October 1463 (Acheson, *A Gentry Community*, 256). His widow Margery married as her second husband Robert Staunton, who is commemorated with his first wife by the spectacular canopied brass at Castle Donington (Leics.).

The church stands, therefore, very much as an expression of the personal vision of its co-founders in the 1390s. Like so many gentry churches, it was rich in emblematic reference to lordship and 'bastard feudal' affiliation. As at Etchingham, the co-founders' act of patronage was commemorated on their prominently positioned memorial brass. What was distinctive about Wanlip was the choice of language made for the epitaph on that brass. Through his use of English instead of Latin or French, Sir Thomas reached out to enlist the intercessory aid of the whole body of the local faithful. While the selection of imagery in the church was both elitist and exclusive, an expression of lordly taste, Sir Thomas was nonetheless explicit in acknowledging his dependence on local and communal solidarities in the arrangements that he made for the salvation of his soul. The fabric of Wanlip church and the brass to its co-founders both in their different ways capture the tensions and ambiguities at the heart of late medieval gentry religion.

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