

Vowesses in the Province of Canterbury, c. 1450-1540

Laura Mary Wood

Royal Holloway, University of London

Thesis submitted for the degree
of Doctor of Philosophy in History

Declaration of Authorship

I, Laura Mary Wood, hereby declare that this thesis and the work presented in it is entirely my own. Where I have consulted the work of others, this is always clearly stated.

Signed:

Dated:

Abstract

This thesis is a contribution toward putting vowesses back into our understanding of pre-Reformation and early Reformation England, after a long period of near-obscurity. Although these women were known to antiquarian scholars, they were almost entirely forgotten until rediscovered and studied by Mary C. Erler and others in the mid-1990s. There have since been several articles on individual vowed women and some consideration of the vocation itself, but this thesis is the first full length exploration of the topic. It focuses upon the southern province as much pre-existing work has had a decidedly northern bias.

The thesis examines vowesses' unique position in England as half-lay, half-religious. Having taken one of the three monastic vows, they occupied liminal space between the world and the cloister, and between active and contemplative piety. They also balanced their identification with their (usually deceased) earthly husbands with their position as a bride of Christ. Detailed biographical work exposes how these women reconciled the intrinsic tensions of the vocation, and reveals the variety amongst the lives of vowed women. The thesis argues that the significance of the vocation, both to the English Church and to society, has historically been underplayed: not only were vowed women more commonplace than originally thought, they were active in most spheres of public life. Vowesses' freedom to hold and manage property and to dictate their own domestic and religious habits lent them an agency that was unusual for women at the time. Furthermore, the implied ecclesiastical sanction of a woman vowed at an episcopal ceremony, and the fact that her chastity was formally and publicly recognised, increased her public influence. Far from being religious recluses, these women were integrated into and upheld by their communities.

Table of Contents

Declaration of Authorship.....	3
Abstract.....	4
Table of Contents.....	5
List of Illustrations.....	7
Acknowledgements.....	8
Note on the Text.....	10
List of Abbreviations.....	11
Introduction.....	12
Chapter One: 'Beginning at the End': Vowesses in Death.....	38
'A Different Kind of Immortality': Vowesses' Monumental Brasses.....	39
Vowesses' Funerals and Commemorative Arrangements.....	71
Preambles to Vowesses' Wills.....	81
Conclusion.....	89
Chapter Two: 'The Bride of Christ': Spiritual and Physical Marriage.....	91
Matron-Mystics: Continental Influences on Vowess Piety.....	93
'As you had in my life my heart and love...': Vowesses' Earthly Marriages. .	106
'They Were Troubled by Holy Church': Failed Vowesses.....	129
Conclusion.....	140
Chapter Three: 'I Doo Unfaynedly Loue You': Vowesses' Worldly Ties.....	141
A Man's World?.....	141
Social Networks: The Capital and Beyond.....	155
Conclusion.....	166
Chapter Four: 'A Lady Most Devout and Charitable': Vowesses and Church Institutions.....	168
Hospitals and Almshouses.....	168
Fraternities and Confraternities.....	172
Parish Churches.....	178
Conclusion.....	203
Chapter Five: 'The Practical and the Pious': Vowesses and their Wealth.....	205

Self-Indulgence and Self-Denial: Vowesses' Lifestyles.....	208
'A Verray Patroness'.....	219
Conclusion.....	232
Conclusion.....	234
Appendix 1: Vowesses of the Canterbury Province, c. 1450-1540.....	239
Appendix 2: Wills of Vowesses of the Canterbury Province, c. 1450-1540.....	251
Appendix 3: Vows of Women in the Canterbury Province, c. 1450-1540.....	254
Bibliography.....	264
Manuscript Primary Sources.....	264
Printed Primary Sources.....	266
Printed Secondary Sources.....	269
Online Publications.....	282
Online Databases.....	283

List of Illustrations

1. The benediction of a widow: Corpus Christi, Parker MS 49.....	23
2. The dioceses of England, 1133-1540.....	32
3. Brass of Juliana Anyell at St Margaret's, Witton.....	42
4. Brass of Joan Braham at St. Andrew's, Frenze.....	43
5. Brass of John and Katherine Colman at St Lawrence's, Little Waldingfield.....	45
6. Brass of John and Joan Cooke at St Mary de Crypt.....	48
7. Brass of John and Ellen Hampton at Holy Trinity, Minchinhampton.....	54
8. Brass rubbing of John and Susan Kyngeston at St Mary the Virgin, Childrey. .	59
9. Brass of Susan Kyngeston at St Edward the Confessor, Shalstone.....	60
10. Brass of William and Margaret Browne at All Saints', Stamford.....	65
11. Brass of John and Agnes Browne at All Saints', Stamford.....	66
12. Brass of Thomas Urswick and family at St Peter and Paul, Dagenham.....	69
13. The Raglan Ring.....	119
14. The bell donated by Alice Hampton to Holy Trinity, Minchinhampton.....	186
15. Plan of the precincts of Halliwell nunnery.....	193

Acknowledgements

Firstly, I would like to gratefully acknowledge a doctoral award from the Arts and Humanities Research Council, which has funded this work.

My supervisor, Dr Clive Burgess, has taught me a great deal and, not only have his insights been invaluable, he has always provided tea and biscuits when we met in his office. Early on in this work, he telephoned me to arrange a supervision and was, I think, a little taken aback when he asked how I was and I replied, “Not great – my house is full of ants!” He bought me some ant powder; and he has been consistently kind like that (to me, clearly not to ants). My adviser, Professor Peregrine Horden, has also been supportive.

I would especially like to thank Professor Caroline Barron, who introduced me to vowesses in the first place, supervised my MA dissertation on Alice Hampton, and, along with Dr Jonathan Harris, made invaluable suggestions at my upgrade viva. She has since been unfailingly generous with her time, reading drafts, and providing academic and moral support. I am conscious that, were it not for Caroline and her interest in my MA dissertation, I would not be studying history.

Similarly, Dr Nicola Clark and Dr Joanne Edge have read drafts, answered endless questions, coached me through the whole process, and been very great friends.

Thanks are also due to the library and archive staff who have assisted me on numerous occasions, and to those scholars, acknowledged in the footnotes to the thesis, who have very kindly shared their thoughts and their findings with me. To their number I would add David Hepworth, who acted as a ‘sounding board’ in the run up to my upgrade, and Dr Gillian Williamson, who heroically drove me around the countryside to look at monumental brasses.

This thesis would not have been possible without the support of my family and friends. My parents, Alan and Christine Richmond, have eased my domestic responsibilities, regularly providing meals and childcare. I would also like to thank those friends who encouraged me and believed that I could do this even when I did not, in particular: Dr Nick Lowe, Rose Adams, Diana Saunders, Peter Ford, Julie Aherne, and Hayley Grocock.

Finally, heartfelt thanks to my husband, Jon Wood, who has consistently accommodated, or enabled, my obsession with vowels. He built me a customised database, taught me how to format the thesis, and rescued me from my own technological ineptitude on a daily basis. In the final weeks before submission, he ran himself ragged doing everything else so that I could focus on editing.

The thesis is dedicated to Arthur Wood, my son and ‘all my worldly joy’.

Note on the Text

Forenames of medieval men and women have been modernised, while surnames have not. Where a person's name appears with a variety of spellings, the most frequent has been used consistently. Titles of the gentry and aristocracy have only been used for those of royal families, such as Lady Margaret Beaufort and Countess Katherine Courtenay, though titles such as 'Earl of Rutland' have also been used to easily identify named individuals. Place names have been modernised. In transcriptions from manuscript sources, abbreviations have been expanded and modern punctuation has been imposed, but the original spelling has been preserved, unless the original transcriber of a printed primary source has modernised the spelling. Monumental brass transcriptions have retained the original abbreviations, punctuations and spelling, unless reproduced from a secondary source. Translations are the author's own unless otherwise indicated.

Some of the research on Alice Hampton was submitted toward my MA dissertation: 'Alice Hampton, d. 1516: The Life of a Late Medieval Vowess' (Royal Holloway, University of London, 2010) and was written up for the May 2012 update of the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. Early reflections upon the Continental mystics and upon the case of Margaret Singleton have appeared on the *Women's Literary Culture and the Medieval Canon* project blog and in *Notches: (re)marks on the history of sexuality* respectively.

List of Abbreviations

Add. MS	Additional Manuscripts
BL	The British Library
C	Court of Chancery
CC	Commissary Court
CPL	Calendar of Papal Letters
CPR	Calendar of Patent Rolls
CPR_{eg}	Calendar of Papal Registers
E	Court of Exchequer
EUL	Exeter University Library
HW	Husting Wills
KJV	King James Version (for Biblical quotations)
LMA	London Metropolitan Archives
LR	Office of the Auditors of Land Revenue
NCC	Consistory Court of Norwich
NRO	Norfolk Record Office
ODNB	Oxford Dictionary of National Biography
OED	Oxford English Dictionary
PCC Prob.	Prerogative Court of Canterbury Wills
SC	Special Collections
SRO	Suffolk Record Office
STAC	Court of Star Chamber
TNA	The National Archives
VCH	Victoria County History

Introduction

'Chastity - the most unnatural of all the sexual perversions,' wrote Aldous Huxley.¹ Yet, historically, the western Church has prized chastity above any other female virtue, in spite of the opposition of sexual abstinence to the divinely ordained 'natural' order of things and to necessary procreation.² To reconcile this, the word 'chastity' in the late medieval period could also be applied to marital fidelity.³ Nonetheless, the view of sexual intercourse as corrupting to body and soul remained, and virginity was considered the highest spiritual state. Although the *Speculum Virginitatis*, an anonymous twelfth-century treatise on female monasticism, admits a virtuous wife to be superior to a sinning virgin, by extension a virtuous virgin was also superior to a virtuous wife.⁴ Similarly, in the *Book of Margery Kempe* (c. 1373 - after 1438), Christ acknowledges to Margery: 'the state of maydenhode be mor parfyte and mor holy than the state of wedewhode, and the state of wedewhode mor parfyte than the state of wedlake,' before reassuring her of his love for her in spite of her married state.⁵ Traditional patriarchal theology, heavily influenced by Aristotelian thought, regarded women as lesser and more imperfect beings, the 'weaker vessel'. Descended from Eve, the instrument of mankind's downfall, women were considered to be more susceptible

1 Aldous Huxley, *Eyeless in Gaza* (1936), chapter 27: *The Oxford Dictionary of Quotations*, ed. by Elizabeth M. Knowles (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 397.

2 Mark 10.6-9: 'But from the beginning of the creation God made them male and female. For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and cleave to his wife; and they twain shall be one flesh: so then they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.' (KJV)

3 Sarah Salih, *Versions of Virginity in Late Medieval England* (Cambridge: Brewer, 2001), p. 16.

4 Rabia Gregory, 'Marrying Jesus: Brides and the Bridegroom in Medieval Women's Religious Literature' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of North Carolina, 2007); accessed online at <https://cdr.lib.unc.edu/indexablecontent/uuid:dbcaac3a-c91e-4eb3-bb18-852a84d09859> [accessed 12 December 2015], p. 56 and 84.

5 *The Book of Margery Kempe*, ed. by Lynn Staley, *TEAMS Middle English Texts*, 1996 <<http://d.lib.rochester.edu/teams/publication/staley-the-book-of-margery-kempe/>> [accessed Jan 2015-Jan 2017], i, 116-118. For a translation into contemporary English, see *The Book of Margery Kempe*, ed. and trans. by Anthony Bale (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015). The text will be revisited in chapter two.

to moral and sexual corruption.⁶ Chastity, then, was emphasised for women more than for men.

In England, there were a number of avenues for women who wished or were compelled to live a dedicated religious life, and all of them demanded chastity.⁷ They were defined by varying degrees of seclusion from the world: one might be enclosed, protected from distractions or influences which might hinder prayer and contemplation, or one might conduct a more active religious life, remaining in the world to do deeds of piety and charity. One of the more secluded options was, of course, becoming a nun. Nuns took the monastic vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience, and left their families to live in convents. As Kathleen Cooke writes, convents could be merely ‘repositories for surplus or otherwise unmarried daughters,’ but they also offered young women opportunity to develop their spiritual, intellectual, and leadership qualities.⁸ Life in a convent was life in a community, although admittedly a sheltered one. Another, less sheltered, option was to become a hospital sister. The word ‘hospital’ was applied to various medieval institutions, all of which hosted regular liturgical worship and prayer for their benefactors. Some specialised in hospitality to travellers and pilgrims and others in care of the elderly or sick, whilst others also supported some education and study. A woman might enter a hospital as a corrodian, someone who had paid to live there and to be nursed in old age, or as a nurse to others.⁹ Little documentation of this role survives, but hospital sisters evidently took vows, if not full monastic ones, and had regular contact with secular visitors.¹⁰

Becoming a female anchorite, on the other hand, at least theoretically entailed full enclosure. Much of what we know about female anchoritism

6 Carole Hill, *Women and Religion in Late Medieval Norwich* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2010), p. 3.

7 For the spiritual lives of laywomen in their parish churches, see chapter four.

8 Kathleen Cooke, ‘The English Nuns and the Dissolution’, in *The Cloister and the World: Essays in Medieval History in Honour of Barbara Harvey*, ed. by John Blair and Brian Golding (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), pp. 287-301 (p. 292).

9 Susan Steuer, ‘Widows and Religious Vocation: Options and Decisions in the Medieval Province of York’ (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Minnesota, 2001), pp. 43-9. For a fuller account of late medieval hospitals, see chapter four.

10 See the almoner’s cartulary of St John’s hospital, Reading: London, British Library, Cotton MS Vespasian E V. This is discussed in chapter four.

originates in texts which serve as ‘guides’ or ‘rules’ for how to live as an a female anchorite, the most prominent of which are *Aelred’s Letter* (c. 1162) and *Ancrene Wisse* (c. 1220).¹¹ These specify all the details of daily life: food, dress, sleep, fasting, vigils, prayer, reading, work, the cell, and servants. The *Ancrene Wisse* is the more famous of the two, originally written for three well-born ladies, who lived with a cell each, sharing two maids and a kitchen boy. The *Ancrene Wisse* is, in general, gentler than *Aelred’s Letter*, and more celebratory of the women who pursued this life. It also states repeatedly that these practical considerations are the ‘outer rule’ which is flexible: what matters is the ‘inner rule’ of the heart, attitude and intention.¹² The lifestyle described in the *Ancrene Wisse* cannot simply be projected on to all medieval female anchorites. Similarly, it is not known how anchoritism developed over the subsequent centuries.

The *Ancrene Wisse* suggests a very solitary life: three small, shielded windows for conversing with visitors, no eating with guests, and strict limitations upon speech. However, anchorites are known to have had friends. For example, Margaret Kirkby (d. c. 1394) was a friend of the charismatic hermit and mystic Richard Rolle (d. 1349). He wrote a vernacular commentary on the Psalms for her.¹³ Likewise, London vowess Margery de Nerford left her books to the anchorite outside Bishopsgate in 1417, a more personal gift than the usual bequest of money.¹⁴ Neither were anchorites entirely excluded from their community: Carole Hill has demonstrated that they served as ‘a focus for the seeking of commissioning of intercessory prayers in their locality.’¹⁵ They were also available to offer counsel: Margery Kempe sought the approbation of anchorite Julian of Norwich (c. 1342 - c.1416) and spoke with her at length.¹⁶ Margery

11 Ann K. Warren, *Anchorites and their Patrons in Medieval England* (Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1985), p. 103.

12 *Ancrene Wisse*, ed. by Robert Hasenfratz, *TEAMS Middle English Texts*, 2000 <<http://d.lib.rochester.edu/teams/publication/hasenfratz-ancrene-wisse/>> [accessed 6 Jan 2017]. See part eight, 180-4.

13 Carole Hill, ‘Julian and her Sisters: Female Piety in Late Medieval Norwich’, in *The Fifteenth Century VI: Identity and Insurgency in the Late Middle Ages*, ed. by Linda Clark (Suffolk: The Boydell Press, 2006), pp. 165-88 (p. 180).

14 Mary C. Erler, *Women, Reading, and Piety in Late Medieval England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 48.

15 Hill, ‘Julian and her Sisters’, in *The Fifteenth Century VI*, ed. by Clark. p. 172.

16 *The Book of Margery Kempe*, ed. and trans. by Bale, pp. 41-3.

Kempe and Julian of Norwich, despite their many differences, were both mystics, and so the role of the mystic might be seen as another avenue for women within the late medieval English Church. Very few women are known to have been mystics, however, though this may be because women's visions tended to go unrecorded. Women's mysticism also tended to attract controversy: Julian of Norwich's *Revelations of Divine Love* emphasises her orthodoxy at length and Margery Kempe was repeatedly accused of heresy.¹⁷

Another possible avenue for religious women may have been a life similar to that of a beguine. Beguines were groups of women living together under informal religious vows in a domestic setting in the Low Countries between the thirteenth and sixteenth centuries.¹⁸ They are believed to have existed only on the Continent, but Norman Tanner argues that there were communities resembling beguinages in Norwich in the mid fifteenth century.¹⁹ He found three of these small groups of women recorded, described as 'dedicated to chastity' or 'under a vow of chastity,' informal communities living religious lives outside of the framework of the established monastic orders. St John's, formerly a hospital attached to Reading Abbey, may have housed chaste women cohabiting in a similar arrangement.²⁰ Very little record of such communities survives.

Chastity was a requirement for all the above vocations, yet none was perhaps so defined by chastity as the role of the vowess. Vowesses were women, usually widows, who took a vow of chastity without the accompanying monastic vows of poverty and obedience. Like other religious women, they were qualified by their formally recognised chastity to self-identify as brides of Christ: the monumental brass of Agnes Browne names her as such, and Alice West referred, in her will (1395), to 'the ring with which I was yspoused to God.'²¹ These women

17 *Revelations of Divine Love by Julian of Norwich*, ed. by A. C. Spearing and Elizabeth Spearing (London: Penguin, 1998), see especially pp. 87-9; *The Book of Margery Kempe*, ed. and trans. by Bale, pp. 37, 104-5, 118-23.

18 Beguines are discussed in more detail in chapter two.

19 Norman P. Tanner, *The Church in Late Medieval Norwich, 1370-1532* (Canada: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1984), pp. 64-6.

20 See chapter four.

21 For Agnes' Browne's brass, see chapter one. For Alice West, see Henry Harrod, 'On the Mantle and the Ring of Widowhood,' *The Archaeologia*, 40 (1866), 307-10. The position of the

were also free to own property, to live where they chose, and to dictate their own patterns of religious observance. As such, they could select their own position on the continuum between enclosure and integration, between contemplative and active piety.²² The vowess vocation was unique in its flexibility.

Almost all vowesses were widows and widowhood was understood to be an integral aspect of the vocation.²³ The origins of a formalised chastity vow for widows are unknown, but vowing ceremonies in England date back to at least the seventh century.²⁴ Many women, when vowing, described ‘the purpose and vowe of perpetuel castitie acordyng to the rule and ordinaunce of the blessid apostill seynte Paule.’²⁵ They probably referred to the teachings on widowhood in 1 Timothy 5, and, indeed, widows have had a unique role in Christianity from the early Church onwards.²⁶ Widows also had a unique legal status, as they were able to act independently of the guardianship of either father or husband.²⁷ As well as formalising the intention not to remarry, the chastity vow lent further ecclesiastical sanction to the autonomy often enjoyed by medieval widows.

The structures which allowed widows to take formal chastity vows appear to have been unique to England. A papal letter of 1484 describes a woman who had taken ‘a vow of perpetual chastity before the local ordinary, in accordance

vowess as a bride of Christ, despite having had an earthly husband, will be discussed in chapter two.

22 Steuer, ‘Widows and Religious Vocation’, pp. 69-71.

23 For more on this, see chapter two.

24 Mary C. Erler, ‘English Vowed Women at the End of the Middle Ages’, *Medieval Studies*, 57 (1995), 155-203 (pp. 159-60); and also: Susan Steuer, ‘Identifying Chaste Widows: Documenting a Religious Vocation’, in *The Ties that Bind: Essays in Medieval British History in Honor of Barbara Hanawalt*, ed. by Linda E. Mitchell, Katherine L. French and Douglas L. Biggs (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2011), pp. 87-105 (p. 87); Patricia Cullum, ‘Vowesses and Veiled Widows: Medieval Female Piety in the Province of York’, *Northern History*, 32 (1996), 21-41 (p. 23).

25 The vow quoted is that of Isabel Hyatt, 1481. See the third appendix to this thesis.

26 See especially 1 Tim 5.9-10: ‘Let not a widow be taken into the number under threescore years old, having been the wife of one man. Well reported of for good works; if she have brought up children, if she have lodged strangers, if she have washed the saints’ feet, if she have relieved the afflicted, if she have diligently followed every good work.’ (KJV). Susan Steuer has tracked widows in the Church from its origins to the medieval period: ‘Widows and Religious Vocation’, pp. 1-31.

27 Barbara Hanawalt, *The Wealth of Wives: Women, Law, and Economy in Late Medieval London* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 104.

with a certain custom still observed in the kingdom of England.’²⁸ This suggests that the same vowing ceremony may have been performed elsewhere previously but had been stopped or had died out, though evidence of this is elusive. Widows on the Continent who desired to embark upon a religious life without becoming nuns often became beguines or tertiaries, members of the Third Order of Franciscans or Dominicans who participated in monastic work without taking monastic vows.²⁹ Perhaps the vowess vocation developed or continued in England because it filled a gap which, on the Continent, was occupied by tertiaries or beguines. There is evidence to suggest that vowing may have spread beyond England to the rest of Britain: vowess Anne Herbert lived at Raglan Castle in Monmouthshire when she was vowed.³⁰ In 1459, Thomas Bekynton, Bishop of Bath and Wells, vowed Joan ap Thomas of Llangattock, Powys, at the manor house in Wookey, Somerset.³¹ It may be that Welsh women who wished to take the vow travelled to England to do so, or simply that women of the Welsh and Irish population of the West Country adopted this English custom.³² A ‘chaste widow’, namely Rose Meyler of Duncormick, County Wexford, is also recorded as having founded the walls of New Ross in the mid thirteenth century.³³ To what extent there were vowesses beyond England’s borders is outside the scope of this thesis but merits investigation on another occasion.

Even in England, vowing was not an option available to all women. Although it was not canonically a requirement in order for the vow to take place, a vowess did need to be able to support herself financially and therefore the lower

28 *Calendar of Papal Letters Relating to Great Britain and Ireland*, ed. by Michael J. Haren, 19 vols (Dublin: Irish Manuscripts Commission, 1893-1998), xv (1978), pp. 32-3, no. 60.

29 For examples of such women, see chapter two.

30 Anne Herbert’s life is narrated in chapter two.

31 *The Register of Thomas Bekynton, Bishop of Bath and Wells 1443-1465*, ed. by H. C. Maxwell-Lyte and M. C. B. Dawes, 2 vols (Frome and London: Somerset Record Society, 1934-5), i, p. 326.

32 See Peter Fleming, ‘Identity and Belonging: Irish and Welsh in Fifteenth Century Bristol’, in *The Fifteenth Century VII: Conflicts, Consequences and the Crown in the Late Middle Ages*, ed. by Linda Clark (Suffolk: Boydell, 2003), pp. 175-93.

33 She is named in the ‘Chronicles of Holinshed’ and a poem by Michael of Kildare: see George Griffiths, *Chronicles of the County Wexford* (Enniscorthy: Watchman, 1887), pp. 87-8. Griffiths wrote that Rose Meyer had vowed not to marry ‘without license’ in order to be assigned an allowance from her husband’s lands, but whether this involved becoming a vowess is unclear.

classes appear to have been excluded.³⁴ Vowesses, then, range from the urban mercantile class, through the gentry, right up to aristocracy and indeed royalty. Lady Margaret Beaufort, mother of Henry VII, first took a vow of chastity in 1499, with the permission of her then husband, Thomas Stanley, and established a separate household at Colyweston. After Stanley's death in 1504, she renewed the vow. Likewise, Countess Katherine Courtenay, daughter of Edward IV, took a vow of chastity after being widowed in 1511.³⁵ There seem to have been considerably fewer aristocratic and royal vowesses than their lower status counterparts, no doubt because noblewomen comprised a smaller percentage of the population, but also probably because these women were more politically and financially valuable and so would have been less likely to meet with approval when removing themselves from the marriage market. Most vowesses were of the upper mercantile and lower gentry classes, although some had considerable wealth.³⁶ The age of these women varied: for example, Susan Kyngeston probably vowed in her early twenties, while Margaret Browne seems to have been elderly.³⁷

Personal piety was one reason for a woman to become a vowess, but there were many others. As explained by Susan Steuer, evaluation of these women's motivations from source materials is rarely possible.³⁸ So much is speculation. It seems likely that women like Alice Hampton, who spent much of her life in and around convents, and Maud Baker, who devoted her energies to her parish church in Bristol, may have taken vows partly out of a sense of religious vocation.³⁹ Equally, after subservience first to their fathers and then to their husbands, for most women widowhood was the first experience of autonomy and a religious life could serve as a 'second career' after raising a family.⁴⁰ Vowesses may have had

34 Cullum, 'Vowesses and Veiled Widows', 21. This issue, along with the few known cases of vowesses in financial hardship, is discussed in chapter five.

35 Both vows appear in the third appendix to this thesis.

36 This conclusion is based on vowesses in the southern ecclesiastical province, but Susan Steuer found that the same was true of northern women: 'Widows and Religious Vocation', p. 151.

37 A short biography of each of these women appears in chapter one.

38 Steuer, 'Widows and Religious Vocation', pp. 206-8.

39 These women and their participation in religious communities are discussed in chapter four. The will of Maud Baker's husband also stipulated that she was to vow, as quoted in chapter two.

40 Steuer, 'Widows and Religious Vocation', p. 33.

greater access to literary and educational opportunities at convents than widows who had not vowed, but, unlike nuns, they were able to remain with their families, to travel, to hold property, and to dictate and develop their own daily routine and devotional habits. They were not required to sever themselves from their former life and identity.⁴¹ A vowess probably also enjoyed elevated status in her community: vowed women were more likely to be addressed as ‘Dame’, and a woman’s spiritual credentials were enhanced significantly by the formal recognition of her chastity.⁴²

Other possible motivations for vowing are varied and numerous, and many of these recur throughout the thesis. For merchants’ widows who continued trading on behalf of their husbands, the vow may have enhanced their business credibility when this was perceived to be weakened by their gender.⁴³ The vow may have safeguarded a widow’s reputation at a time when an unsupervised woman was considered by some to be a risk.⁴⁴ Women may have vowed in imitation of their peers and of influential, high profile vowesses like Lady Margaret Beaufort.⁴⁵ The vow may have offered a widow some protection from her political enemies or from those with a financial interest in her remarriage.⁴⁶ Wealthy widows could face pressure from friends, family, and potential suitors, and a vow would be likely to put an end to that.⁴⁷ Disinclination for remarriage could be due to the dangers of childbirth, or the fact that some of these women had already buried three or four husbands.⁴⁸ A woman might vow out of devotion

41 For vowesses’ privileged access to convents, see chapter four. Mary C. Erler elaborates upon the advantages of becoming a vowess in ‘Three Fifteenth-Century Vowesses’, in *Medieval London Widows, 1300-1500*, ed. by Caroline M. Barron and Anne F. Sutton (London: The Hambledon Press, 1994), pp. 165-84 (p. 165), and ‘English Vowed Women’, 157.

42 Erler, ‘English Vowed Women’, 157 and 182. Chapter one of this thesis refers to the frequency of the title ‘Dame’ in vowesses’ wills.

43 These women are discussed in chapter three.

44 Steuer, ‘Widows and Religious Vocation’, p. 66.

45 See chapter three.

46 The former seems to have been the case for Elizabeth Talbot, Countess of Shrewsbury, and the latter for Margery Roper of London: see chapter two. See also Steuer, ‘Widows and Religious Vocation’, pp. 172-4.

47 Hanawalt, *The Wealth of Wives*, p. 106.

48 Susan Steuer has explained these factors in far more detail: ‘Widows and Religious Vocation’, pp. 163-9.

to the husband she had lost and bereavement could influence her decision-making.⁴⁹

Some husbands stipulated in their wills that their widows' vowing was to be a condition of inheritance. In these cases, the vow of chastity served as a vehicle for formalising the intention not to remarry in order to receive money, land, or goods bequeathed. One woman who vowed under these conditions was Joan Byfeld: when she was widowed in March 1482, her husband's will stated that she was to receive certain properties 'under this condition that the same Johan during her life kepe her sole without husband.'⁵⁰ Her vowing ceremony took place the day after his funeral.⁵¹ As Henrietta Leyser observes, the husband's prohibition of his widow's remarriage was not merely the exercise of sexual control from beyond the grave: it protected the couple's children from the claims of stepfathers or half-siblings in the future.⁵² A widow who remarried brought with her into that marriage the inheritance of any minor children for her new husband's use, if not ownership: a Venetian visitor to England c. 1500 reported that children there never received full value of their father's estate.⁵³ The will of John Brackenbury of London (1487) even forbade his mother from remarrying, or else she would forfeit his lands, though whether or not she went on to vow is unknown.⁵⁴

The legitimacy of a woman's reasons for becoming a vowess, and her suitability for the role, were assessed before she was permitted to take the vow. A woman who wished to vow would issue a request to a bishop or archbishop, who would establish both that she was of good reputation and that she had the financial means to be self-sufficient. If satisfied, the bishop or archbishop would send a commission, a letter of recommendation sometimes known as a certification or a

49 For more on this, see chapter two.

50 London, The National Archives, Prerogative Court of Canterbury, Probate 11/7/64.

51 Alison Hanham, *The Celys and their World: An English Merchant Family of the Fifteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p. 310.

52 Henrietta Leyser, *Medieval Women: A Social History of Women in England, 450-1500*, (London: Phoenix Giant, 1995), p. 172.

53 Hanawalt, *The Wealth of Wives*, p. 95.

54 TNA, PCC Prob. 11/8/117. Susan Steuer expressed confidence that Elizabeth Brackenbury had, indeed, vowed in 'Identifying Chaste Widows' (p. 95) but the reasons for such certainty are unclear.

license, to another bishop, or occasionally to an abbot or suffragan, requesting that he perform the vowing ceremony.⁵⁵ One of the fullest commission letters to survive is from John Arundel, bishop of Coventry, and dates from the early sixteenth century. It recommends Margery Middlemore of Edgbaston, Warwickshire, as a suitable candidate to vow:

‘On behalf of the worthy woman Margery Midlemore, relict of Richard Midlemore, prayer was humbly made to us, that whereas she piously intends for the more profitable health of her soul and the more stringent order of widowhood to be kept to the honour of God more devoutedly and openly, to take on herself a vow of continence and to cherish continence in an explicit and solemn manner; also to take upon herself as the sign of widowhood of this character for ever, God granting, by wearing the veil or cloak with the dress due and accustomed by widows of this class, and to adopt it for a life of chastity as she alleges, we are willing that she should enter upon her pious purpose. And considering a prayer of this nature to be pious and devout and pleasing to God, and being otherwise much occupied, whereby we cannot give due effect to the intent of the said Margery, we therefore entrust authority to you by these presents expressly and solemnly to receive the said Margaret’s vow of continence and promise of chastity, and for the sign of continence and chastity of this class, by keeping a perpetual promise, the said Margery is to be veiled or clad in a cloak, and is to be given the habit of widowhood usual to be assigned to widows of this class at the profession of chastity, together with one ring only, to do, exercise and perform all other things which in affairs of this sort are known to you to be by law or custom needful or convenient.’⁵⁶

55 This process is described by Steuer: ‘Widows and Religious Vocation’, pp. 56-62, and Erler, ‘English Vowed Women’, 166.

56 Translated from Latin by W. P. W. Phillimore: *Some Account of the Family of Middlemore of Warwickshire and Worcestershire* (London: Phillimore and Co., 1901), pp. 30-32. He quoted Dugdale’s *Antiquities of Warwickshire* (ii, p. 895). No date or recipient for this letter is given.

Having received such a letter, the bishop would conduct a ‘benediction of widows’ ceremony. Mary Erler has described what took place at such an event from an account in an early sixteenth-century pontifical. Before the gospel was read at Mass, the woman, in her ordinary clothes but carrying dark clothing over her left arm, led by two male family members, approached the seated bishop. She knelt, placed the paper with her vow written on it at the bishops’ feet, and read the vow.⁵⁷ She then marked the document with a cross on the bishop’s knee and gave him the paper. The bishop blessed her and asperged her new clothes and ring with holy water. After this came the offertory of the Eucharist, and then the new vowess received the bishop’s blessing once more and kissed his ring.⁵⁸ This ceremony appears in other pontificals, one of which, held at Corpus Christi, Cambridge and dating from the early fifteenth century, is illustrated with a seated bishop blessing a kneeling woman.⁵⁹ The vowess’ new clothing often included a veil and a hood, but most important symbolically seems to have been the profession mantle, since vowesses were commonly known as widows who had ‘taken the mantle and the ring.’⁶⁰

57 For a list of vows, see the second appendix.

58 Erler, ‘Three Fifteenth-Century Vowesses’, in *Medieval London Widows*, ed. by Barron and Sutton, pp. 165-6. The pontifical cited is reproduced in F. C. Eeles, ‘Two Sixteenth-Century Pontificals Formerly Used in England’, *Transactions of the St Paul’s Ecclesiological Society*, 7 (1911-5), 69-90.

59 Other such pontificals are discussed by Erler in ‘English Vowed Women’, 159-60, Steuer, ‘Identifying Chaste Widows’, in *The Ties that Bind*, ed. by Mitchell, French, and Biggs, p. 87, and Cullum, ‘Vowesses and Veiled Widows’, 23. The illustration: Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, Parker Library MS 49.

60 Profession mantles were a common bequest in vowesses’ wills: see chapter five. For contemporary and near-contemporary references to ‘the mantle and the ring’ see *The Book of Margery Kempe*, ed. by Staley, i, 773-83, and Michael Sherbrook, ‘the Falle of Religious Howses, Colleges, Chantreyes, Hospitalls, &c.’ in *Tudor Treatises*, ed. by A. G. Dickens (Wakefield: Yorkshire Archaeological Society, 1959), pp. 89-142 (p. 132).

This image has been removed for copyright reasons

1. *The benediction of a widow: image from Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, Parker Library MS 49 (early c15th), kindly provided by Dr Katherine Harvey.*

Vowesses, and the fact that the Church had previously had a public role for consecrated widows, were familiar to antiquarian scholars, but appear to have been forgotten for most of the twentieth century. Michael Sherbrook (c. 1591) wrote nostalgically that ‘all the said Religious Persons, which far passed the Number of the Secular Priests, there were many more, yea thousands, as Ancerers, both men and women; and widdows that had taken the mantle and Ring...’⁶¹ Since then, vowesses were mentioned in Thomas Dudley Fosbrooke’s *British Monachism* in 1802, and the theme was picked up many times throughout the late

61 Sherbrook, 'the Falle of Religiouse Howses', in *Tudor Treatises*, ed. by Dickens, p.132.

nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, both citing examples of vowed women and remarking upon the phenomenon in general.⁶² After this, however, no more was said of them until Joel Rosenthal, Barbara Hanawalt, and Mary Erler revived the subject in 1993, though, for each, vowesses were little more than an aside.⁶³ It was Erler who then developed the topic, publishing a series of articles about vowesses, individually and corporately, through the mid-1990s.⁶⁴ Erler explained the process of vowing and the advantages it offered to women, as well as taking several vowesses as case studies and providing a provisional list of known vowed women.⁶⁵ At the same time, Patricia Cullum focused upon vowesses in the northern ecclesiastical province and presented the methodological difficulties in identifying vowed women.⁶⁶ This was complemented by Susan Steuer's doctoral thesis on northern religious widows in 2001.⁶⁷ The thesis was not solely dedicated to vowesses but they featured heavily, and Steuer explored many of the topics touched upon in this Introduction: the place of widows in the Church, options for those wishing to pursue a religious life, and the question of motivation. She developed Cullum's methodological exploration in an article, published in 2011.⁶⁸

62 Thomas Dudley Fosbrooke, *British Monachism, or the Manners and Customs of the Monks and Nuns of England* (1802), quoted: Roberta Gilchrist and Marilyn Oliva, *Religious Women in Medieval East Anglia* (Norwich: University of East Anglia, 1993), p. 19; Harrod, 'On the Mantle and the Ring of Widowhood,' 307-10; *Testamenta Eboracensia: A Selection of Wills from the Registry at York*, ed. by James Raine, 5 vols (London and Durham: Surtees Society, 1836-84), iii (1864), p. 312; Francis Joseph Baigent, 'Thomas Burgh and Isabella his Wife, with a Few Words on the Benediction of Widows', *Surrey Archaeological Collections*, 99 vols (London: Surrey Archaeological Society, 1858-2016), iii (1865), 208-19; J. L. André, 'Widows and Vowesses', *Archaeological Journal*, 49 (1892), 69-82; F. J. Snell, *The Customs of Old England* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1911), pp. 10-26; *Lincoln Diocese Documents, 1450-1544*, ed. by Andrew Clark (Lincoln: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner and Co., 1914), pp. 19-21; Edward L. Cutts, *Scenes and Characters of the Middle Ages* (London: Simpkin, Marshall, Hamilton, Kent & Co., 1925), pp. 152-156.

63 Joel T. Rosenthal, 'Fifteenth-Century Widows and Widowhood: Bereavement, Reintegration, and Life Choices', and Barbara A. Hanawalt, 'Remarriage as an Option for Urban and Rural Widows in Late Medieval England', both in *Wife and Widow in Medieval England*, ed. by Sue Sheridan Walker (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1993), pp. 33-58 and 141-64; Mary C. Erler, 'Margery Kempe's White Clothes', *Medium Ævum*, 62.1 (1993), 78-83.

64 Erler, 'Three Fifteenth-Century Vowesses', in *Medieval London Widows*, ed. by Barron and Sutton, pp. 165-84; 'English Vowed Women', 155-203; 'Syon's "Special Benefactors and Friends": Some Vowed Women', *Birgittiana*, 2 (1996), 209-22.

65 The list: 'English Vowed Women', 183-203.

66 Cullum, 'Vowesses and Veiled Widows', 21-41.

67 Steuer, 'Widows and Religious Vocation'.

68 Susan Steuer, 'Identifying Chaste Widows' in *The Ties that Bind*, ed. by Mitchell, French and Biggs, pp. 87-105.

For most of the last fifteen years, however, little has been done to continue this line of enquiry into vowesses. Cullum speculated in 1996 that vowesses' quasi-religious state was the reason for their neglect: their vow excludes them from research into lay piety and yet they do not qualify for studies of professed female religious.⁶⁹ They are mentioned occasionally as a footnote, and Mary Erler has done some further biographical work on individual vowed women, but a full-length prosopographical study of vowesses is still lacking.⁷⁰

This thesis contains the beginnings of such a study. It examines women in the southern ecclesiastical province, or the archbishopric of Canterbury, in order to balance the northern bias of more recent scholarship and to facilitate comparison with the findings of the research undertaken by Cullum and Steuer. Unlike Steuer's thesis, it focuses exclusively upon vowesses, and it adopts a less statistical approach. It favours, instead, Mary Erler's method of using biographies of vowed women as a starting-point, but endeavours to do this in as complete and comprehensive a manner as records allow. It contains a survey of pre-existing scholarship and adds to this a body of work on previously unknown or unstudied vowesses. It aims, essentially, to reinsert this group of women into our understanding of late medieval England.

While following up the vowesses named in Mary Erler's list was relatively straightforward, the task of identifying previously unknown vowesses was more complex. Women are sometimes named as vowed in their wills, using the term 'vowess' but also 'avowess', 'advowess', and 'widow professed.'⁷¹ They are occasionally identified as such in others' wills.⁷² Some vowesses' wills include a

69 Cullum, 'Vowesses and Veiled Widows', 21.

70 An example of vowesses mentioned: Maria Hayward, *Rich Apparel: Clothing and the Law in Henry VIII's England* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2009), pp. 248-9. Mary Erler's further biographical work appears in *Women, Reading, and Piety*, particularly the sections on the Fettyplace family.

71 Avowess: TNA, PCC Prob. 11/9/115 and 11/14/120; advowess: TNA, PCC Prob. 11/6/240 and 11/24/176; widow professed: *The Pre-Reformation Records of All Saints' Church, Bristol*, ed. by Clive Burgess, 3 vols (Bristol: Bristol Record Society, 1995-2004), iii (2004), pp. 51-4.

72 Alice Beselles names her granddaughter and executor, Susan Kyngeston, as a vowess: TNA, PCC Prob. 11/22/150. Katherine Kerre of Norfolk included a bequest to a named vowess in her will (1497): Norwich, Norfolk Record Office, Norwich Consistory Court 90-1.

ring, a mantle, or, more rarely, a hood of profession.⁷³ Inscriptions on monumental brasses occasionally name a woman as a vowess or refer to a vow, but the costume of the woman's image on a brass does not conclusively indicate vowed state.⁷⁴ Leases, legal records, and papal records also sometimes identify a woman as a vowess.⁷⁵ Episcopal registers include commissions and vows but these were recorded sporadically: it seems that many went wholly undocumented and survival of the registers is patchy at best.⁷⁶ For many women named as vowesses in other sources, a corresponding vow is absent from the bishops' registers. It may have been lost to time, or the vowing ceremony may have been conducted but not recorded, since the surviving registers vary in detail and thoroughness. Women's vows may have been viewed by some as of insufficient importance for records to be kept, and Susan Steuer speculates that the women in the registers may be those whose marital decisions were considered to be of political importance or whose age or recent bereavement rendered them likely candidates for breaking their vows.⁷⁷

The disparate nature of the source material and its extensive chronological and geographical scope render any comprehensive trawl for vowesses an impossibility, or at least a life's work. As a result, the updated list of confirmed vowesses for the province of Canterbury, 1450-1540, the first appendix listing the women on whom this thesis is based, is far from complete. It is the result of a search which focused upon the following lines of enquiry: those relevant episcopal registers which are in print; a sample of the unpublished bishops' registers for Winchester, 1447-1528; and searches for relevant terms in archive catalogues and in printed catalogues of monumental brasses.⁷⁸ If widows were

⁷³ These examples are discussed in chapter five.

⁷⁴ See chapter one.

⁷⁵ For such a lease, see Westminster Abbey Muniments, Westminster Abbey Lease Book II, fol. 170v.; for a Chancery deed, see TNA, Chancery 147/169.; for a papal letter, see *CPL*, ed. by Haren, xv, pp. 32-3, no. 60.

⁷⁶ Vows of the women in this study are listed in the third appendix.

⁷⁷ Steuer, 'Widows and Religious Vocation', p. 205.

⁷⁸ The Winchester registers are held at Hampshire Record Office and were selected for geographical convenience. A sample was taken of the registers of Waynflete, Courtenay, Langton, and Foxe. The sample contained a record of the vow of Agnes Salman but yielded no other vowesses. Archive catalogues favoured were those at The National Archives and London Metropolitan Archives, as Mary Erler's list indicated their usefulness, but also included local

found in a vowess' circle of acquaintance who had demonstrated potential pious inclinations through their giving or through close association with professed religious, these were identified as likely or possible vowess candidates. Other such candidates included women who remained widows for more than a decade, or whose husbands' wills forbade a remarriage or stipulated a vow. These widows' wills were also checked, where they survived, along with any secondary or printed record of their widowed lives, in case these should mention a vow. In addition to this, vowesses were identified in secondary literature, particularly the *Peerage* and *Victoria County History* volumes, in which a woman's vow is sometimes mentioned as an aside. There has been a necessary element of serendipity about the search for vowesses, due to the impossibility of scouring all potentially relevant material.

Once a woman was identified as a vowess, as full a biography as possible was constructed, with varying success on account of incomplete survival of documents and records. For example, Cecily Bedell was identified as a vowess from a lease at Westminster Abbey, and also appears in several other leases, the churchwardens' accounts at Westminster, entries in Lady Margaret Beaufort's household accounts, and her husband's will, as well as an account of her family, marriages, and property in the *Victoria County History* for Hertfordshire.⁷⁹ Isabel Hyatt, however, is recorded as taking the vow and as living in Whitbourne, Worcester, in 1481, in the records of Thomas Myllyng, bishop of Hereford, but no more of her could be traced.⁸⁰ Equally, some vowesses had already received significant scholarly attention, such as Kay Lacey's biography of Margaret Croke and Mary Erler's of Alice Lynne, whilst others, like Cecily Bedell and Katherine Langley, remained obscure in spite of a comparative abundance of source material.⁸¹ The thesis provides more detailed biographical information, where

record offices.

79 See chapters three and four. I am indebted to Prof. Katherine French, who first identified Cecily as a vowess and shared her findings with me.

80 For Isabell Hyatt's vow, see the third appendix to this thesis.

81 Kay Lacey, 'Margaret Croke (d. 1491)' and Erler, 'Three Fifteenth-Century Vowesses', in *Medieval London Widows*, pp. 143-64 and 167-71 respectively.

possible, about individual vowesses, in order to highlight the variety amongst these women and to draw more accurate conclusions about the vocation.

A further difficulty has been the uncertainty around the indications that a woman was vowed and how conclusive these are as evidence that the vow actually took place. Commissions, for example, prove that a vow was intended, had been agreed by a bishop, and was in the process of being arranged, but they do not guarantee that the vowing ceremony actually went ahead.⁸² Elizabeth Talbot, widow of John, Earl of Shrewsbury, was commissioned nine days after her husband was killed at the Battle of Northampton in 1460.⁸³ Two years later she petitioned the Pope, requesting that espousals she had made might be annulled so that she could marry another. She secured a royal license to marry whomever she chose in 1464, but died unmarried nine years later.⁸⁴ Since there was no mention of a broken vow in these documents, it is unlikely that Elizabeth ever took the ring and mantle, in spite of the commission.

Similarly, the fact that a man's will specifies his wish that his wife should vow does not guarantee that she did so. Numerous examples of men's wills forbid a remarriage or prescribe the ring and mantle for their widows, but for many no further evidence concerning a vow exists. One such will is that of William Edlington of Castle Carlton, Lincolnshire (1466):

'I make Christian, my wife, my sole executor on this condition, that she take the mantle soon after my decease; and in case she will not take the mantle and the ring, I will that William my son [and other persons named] be my executors, and she to have a third part of all my goods moveable.'⁸⁵

82 Cullum, 'Vowesses and Veiled Widows', 26-7.

83 *The Complete Peerage of England, Scotland, Ireland, Great Britain and the United Kingdom Extant, Extinct, or Dormant*, ed. by George Edward Cockayne et al., 2nd edn, 14 vols (London: St Catherine Press Ltd, 1910-98), xi (1949), pp. 704-5; *Testamenta Eboracensia*, ed. by Raine, iii, p. 335.

84 *CPL*, ed. by Haren, xii (1933), pp. 150-1. See chapter two for more detail on this case.

85 Quoted in Snell, *The Customs of Old England*, p. 17.

It is unclear whether Christian went on to vow as her husband wished.⁸⁶ Cecily, the wife of Roger Flore (d. 1427), inherited her husband's Lincolnshire lands 'while sole', to be forfeited if she should marry, and was wed to William Karnell by 1432.⁸⁷ A husband's bequests may not have been the best financial option for his widow, if a wealthy suitor came along, and some women may have preferred married life to widowhood.

Another indicator that a woman may have been vowed is the phrase 'in my pure widowhood': the will of Margaret Browne includes it and later refers to a profession mantle.⁸⁸ Other women, such as Elyn Brent (d. 1540), a gentlewoman of Elizabeth of York, and Elizabeth de Vere, Countess of Oxford (d. 1537), used this phrase in their wills and it is unclear whether they were vowed or not.⁸⁹ Although the wording appears promising, it does not prove that a vow had taken place and it is likely that the phrase was used to project an image of widowed piety on other occasions. The will of Elizabeth Bouchier (née Tilney), dated 1472, uses the phrase but also reads: 'I will that my feoffees give all my said manors... to me only, or to me and the person with whom I shall marry.' She evidently had made no chastity vow and indeed went on to wed Thomas Howard, who became Duke of Norfolk.⁹⁰

Of course, one might consider women to be vowesses who had not been consecrated by a bishop but had privately resolved upon a chaste life. Susan Steuer describes this as 'tacit profession': just as novices could live as nuns for a

86 For other examples, see the wills of: William Strauxhill of London (1449) in David Blair Foss, *The Canterbury Archiepiscopates of John Stafford (1443-52) and John Kemp (1452-54) with Editions of their Registers* (unpublished doctoral thesis, King's College, University of London, 1986), pp. 664-72; William Catesby, hanged after Bosworth (1485) in D. Williams, 'The hastily drawn up will of William Catesby, esquire', *Leicestershire Archaeological and Historical Society Transactions*, 51 (1975-6), 43-51; Laurence Stevens of Wiltshire (1486): TNA, PCC Prob. 11/7/332; and Edmund Bedingfield (1496): TNA, PCC Prob. 11/11/6. It is unclear whether any of the widows vowed as directed.

87 *The Fifty Earliest English Wills in the Court of Probate*, ed. by Frederick J. Furnivall (London: Trübner, 1882), pp. 55-64 (p. 59) and TNA, C 1/7/109.

88 TNA, PCC Prob. 11/8/525. See the first appendix and chapter one for further details.

89 See TNA, PCC Prob. 11/28/313 and 11/27/144. Elizabeth de Vere was certainly a very pious woman: A. I. Doyle, 'Books Connected with the Vere Family and Barking Abbey', *Transactions of the Essex Archaeological Society*, 25 (1955-60), 222-43.

90 W. A. Copinger, *The Manors of Suffolk: Notes on Their History and Devolution*, 7 vols (London: Unwin, 1905-11; repr. London: Forgotten Books, 2013), ii (1905), p. 354.

year and then continue legitimately without the need for a ceremony, widows may have similarly substituted a formal vow for a trial period and still been recognised as vowesses.⁹¹ The boundary between vowesses and widows who informally pursued a semi-religious life inevitably blurs. It is tempting to include women such as Margaret Purdans of Norwich and Alice Chester of Bristol, both of whom are discussed in chapter four as leaders in their parishes, close associates of known vowed women, and pious widows, as vowesses, although there is no conclusive evidence of a vow. This evidence may have been lost or the vow may not have been recorded in episcopal registers. Ultimately, though, it is impossible to ascertain with any certainty who may have taken vows which were not recorded or do not survive, as it is impossible to identify women who vowed privately. As Mary Erler writes: ‘the difficulty of recovering such vows forces us to rely upon the public, and hence recorded, examples.’⁹² A survey of vowesses which casts too wide a net becomes a survey of religious widows, a worthy project in its own right - and, indeed, this was Susan Steuer’s doctoral thesis – but it lacks the exploration of the vowess vocation as a unique phenomenon.

To conduct such a prosopographical study, one must decide who qualifies for inclusion and who does not. The list of vowesses in this study includes those who were commissioned but for whom no corresponding vow survives, on the basis that most who went to the trouble and expense of securing a license would proceed with the vow.⁹³ Elizabeth Talbot’s deceptive, or indecisive, behaviour does not seem to be typical of her contemporaries. Women whose husbands stipulated a vow have not been included, however, unless backed by more conclusive evidence that the vow took place.⁹⁴ A commission letter suggests that the woman intended to vow, whilst a husband’s will only indicates his intention

91 Steuer, ‘Identifying Chaste Widows’, in *The Ties that Bind*, ed. by Mitchell, French, and Biggs, pp. 95-6.

92 Erler, ‘English Vowed Women’, 166.

93 Patricia Cullum shares this view: ‘Vowesses and Veiled Widows’, 27.

94 An exception has been made for Joan Cooke of Gloucester, since her monumental brass and her widowed life are strongly suggestive of a vow. Perhaps equally probable are Margaret Purdans of Norwich and Alice Chester of Bristol, both of whom are discussed in chapter four. Neither have been added to the list, since detailed biographical work has already been undertaken by Carole Hill and Clive Burgess respectively, and to avoid ‘opening the floodgates’ to all other pious widows of the time.

that she should vow: it was ultimately her decision. She might be pressured by others, but a man could not force his wife to vow from beyond the grave and she was legally entitled to a third of his estate, whatever she did.⁹⁵ Women whose wills refer to ‘pure widowhood’ have also been excluded, since it is unclear precisely what was meant. Susan Steuer evades this difficulty by classing ‘pure widows’ as a separate category of female religious, but the term is essentially a wider, more inclusive one for vowesses.⁹⁶ Some would have been ‘true’ vowesses, having taken a vow before a bishop, but it is impossible to know which without further evidence. Women who broke their vows have been included, but their wills have not been used in any discussion of vowesses’ wills, if they were no longer vowesses when the will was composed.⁹⁷

The restriction to the southern ecclesiastical province is likewise not without its problems. Although a survey of vowesses in the see of Canterbury was needed to complement Susan Steuer’s collection of vowesses in the see of York, allocating each vowed woman individually to either York or Canterbury is problematic. The borders between the provinces were much disputed and altered over time.⁹⁸ Many women, particularly those of aristocratic or royal status, travelled frequently; they had different family and regional connections; some had residences in the north and the south; some were vowed away from home. For example, Margaret Fox was vowed at Pontefract Friary, West Yorkshire, in 1492, but was named as resident of Chesterfield, Derbyshire. Her own diocesan was the bishop of Coventry and Lichfield, and indeed she was later sanctioned for subverting protocol and vowing before the wrong bishop.⁹⁹ She was therefore of the province of Canterbury, despite the fact that her vow appears in the York register. The location of a woman’s vow, her birthplace, or her home in widowhood could all be argued to be the defining geographical area to which she

95 This methodology differs from that of Susan Steuer’s thesis as she included all such women as vowesses, unless she found evidence of remarriage: ‘Widows and Religious Vocation’, p. 113.

96 *Ibid.*, pp. 114-9, 122-6.

97 See the second appendix for the wills included.

98 Roy Martin Haines, *Ecclesia Anglicana: Studies in the English Church of the Later Middle Ages* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1989), pp. 69-105.

99 Erler, ‘English Vowed Women’, 199; *The Register of Thomas Rotherham*, ed. by Barker, no. 558; *Testamenta Eboracensia*, ed. by Raine, iii, p. 357.

should be attributed as a vowess. This study has favoured the last of these approaches as most indicative of the local community to which a woman belonged, but has considered the allegiances of each vowess on a case-by-case basis.

This image
has been
removed
for copyright
reasons

2. *The dioceses of England, 1133-1540*, from A. L. Poole, *From Domesday Book to Magna Carta, 1087-1216*, 2nd edn (Oxford: Clarendon, 1955), p. 168.

The see of Canterbury is much larger than the see of York, comprising two thirds of England. It is also more disparate: between 1133 and 1540, York consisted of three dioceses, while Canterbury comprised fourteen.¹⁰⁰ Record-keeping was therefore more inconsistent, in what was written down, the level of

¹⁰⁰ Poole, *From Domesday Book to Magna Carta*, p. 168.

detail, and how much of the diocesan archival material survives today. There may also have been more variation within the province of Canterbury in the procedures of vowing and how many women were vowed. Steuer suggests that vowing was more popular in the see of York than in the see of Canterbury, with 50% of known vowesses in just 15% of England's population. This is unlikely to accurately reflect the proportional number of vowed women in each ecclesiastical province. Steuer, in her doctoral thesis, listed 180 known vowesses in the northern province 1300-1536, while the first appendix to this thesis lists seventy in the southern province 1450-1540.¹⁰¹ If the two sees held equal numbers of vowesses, that would put just under 40% of vowesses in the final ninety years. It may be that vowing was more popular toward the end of the Middle Ages, and certainly more vowesses can be identified in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries because more records have survived. However, Steuer's criteria for inclusion were considerably more generous than those employed here: she listed as northern vowesses all women whose vows were supervised by ecclesiastics in the York province, as well as all who ever lived there or considered it an ancestral family seat and all of those who ever married into a northern family at any time in their lives. She also considered all women to be vowesses whose husbands expressed a wish that they should vow, regardless of whether any evidence of the vow itself survives.¹⁰² Furthermore, fewer episcopal registers from the southern province have been surveyed and published than northern equivalents, so there are likely to be many more vowesses still to be found in the Canterbury see.¹⁰³ Ultimately, any statistical comparison is doomed, due to variations in record-keeping and document survival in different areas, and because it is unclear what proportion of vowed women are known about today.

The ninety years between 1450 and 1540 were selected because they include both the period when vowing appears to have been most popular and its decline at the early Reformation. The relatively brief chronological scope of the thesis has allowed greater biographical depth and more thorough research into

101 Steuer, 'Widows and Religious Vocation', pp. 124, 221-8.

102 *Ibid.*, pp. 111-3.

103 Erler, 'English Vowed Women', 167.

each woman on the list. The aim was to include all known vowed women who were alive, and had been vowed, from 1450 onward, including those who had been vowed before then. However, it was rarely possible to identify a date of death for women whose vows and commissions were recorded 1400-1450. Where a woman was vowed or commissioned before 1440, if no evidence of her survives after that date, she was omitted.

The latest known vow was that of Agnes Wyggeston of Leicester in 1536 and, although no edict specifically regarding widows' vows has survived from the 1530s, it seems likely that vowing was discontinued alongside the Dissolution.¹⁰⁴ Patricia Cullum argues for a 'peak' in the popularity of widows' vows in the 1480s, falling away gradually after 1500. She cites the rise of cults such as that of St Anne, often depicted as a vowess-like figure, and the influence of royal vowesses such as Lady Margaret Beaufort and Cecily, Duchess of York, as contributing factors.¹⁰⁵ The theory is convincing, and although it is not clear to what extent the 'peak' may be a trick of inconsistent record keeping and document survival, it is not contradicted by the list of Canterbury vowesses here.

Cullum also argues that vowing was 'relatively common' among the gentry and urban elites, especially in the second half of the fifteenth century, while Steuer describes the vowesses which have been identified as only 'the tip of the iceberg.'¹⁰⁶ The extent to which vowesses were seemingly forgotten in the twentieth century led Joel Rosenthal, in 1993, to claim that 'the number was surely small', but research published since then, by Mary Eler and others, indicates otherwise.¹⁰⁷ Jones and Underwood have described Lady Margaret Beaufort's vow as 'fairly common practice among widows in her day.'¹⁰⁸ In 1865,

104 *Lincoln Diocese Documents*, ed. by Clark, pp. 209-10. For more on the end of vowing, see chapter two and the Conclusion.

105 Cullum, 'Vowesses and Veiled Widows', 27-9. Carole Hill, in *Women and Religion in Late Medieval Norwich*, describes St Anne during this period as 'a prosperous thrice-married merchant's wife' (p. 18), very like many of the vowesses described in this thesis. Lady Margaret Beaufort's influence will be revisited in chapters three and five.

106 Cullum, 'Vowesses and Veiled Widows', p. 41; Steuer, 'Identifying Chaste Widows' pp. 102-3.

107 Rosenthal, 'Fifteenth-Century Widows and Widowhood' in *Wife and Widow in Medieval England*, ed. by Walker, p. 45.

108 Michael K. Jones and Malcolm G. Underwood, *The King's Mother: Lady Margaret Beaufort, Countess of Richmond and Derby* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

Francis Joseph Baigent wrote of the ‘benediction of widows’ ceremony: ‘though the administration of this ceremonial was probably of frequent occurrence, it is seldom noticed or deemed of sufficient importance to be recorded.’¹⁰⁹ Vowesses have long been obscured by inconsistent record keeping and poor survival of episcopal registers, but ‘the mantle and the ring’ were commonplace enough to be part of the English cultural milieu. Michael Sherbrooke’s treatise testifies to this, as does the *Book of Margery Kempe*, and John Gower’s *Mirour de l’Omme*:

‘...la dame aici qui voet tenir
 Sa chasteté, dont revestir
 Se fait d’anel par beneïoun
 D’evesque, apres pour nul desir
 Se porra lors descontentir.’¹¹⁰

The likely popularity of the widows’ vow enhances its significance. Having taken one of the three monastic vows, these women occupied liminal space between the world and the cloister. They were distinctively quasi-religious. Their unique position had long been recognised by both the Church and wider society, and vowesses were a fundamental part of the social and spiritual fabric of late medieval England. This thesis aims to reinsert consecrated widows into our understanding of the period, into England’s parishes, its monastic houses, its education system, its charity and patronage, its commemorative practice, its mercantile elite, its leading families, the Wars of the Roses, and much besides. The methodological complications, where vowesses are concerned, can be daunting, but this only serves to highlight the importance of the work. Women’s history is defined by overcoming invisibility.

Mary Erler’s list of known vowesses from 1995 has been essential as a starting-point.¹¹¹ Fifty-four women were taken from this list, since they met the

109 Baigent, ‘Thomas Burgh and Isabella his Wife’, 208-9.

110 ‘...the lady who wants to remain chaste. She asks to wear the ring blessed by a bishop. Afterwards, never will she be able to give up continence, whatever her desire.’ Quoted and translated: Marie-Françoise Alamichel, *Widows in Anglo-Saxon and Medieval Britain* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2008), p. 194. For discussion of references in the *Book*, see chapter two.

111 Erler, ‘English Vowed Women’, 186-203.

chronological and geographical requirements of the study, and a further sixteen previously unidentified vowesses were added. Although one might be tempted to group these women according to social class, or by location, or by whether they lived in urban or rural areas, or even according to their lifestyle, all of these variants are so fluid that such a system quickly breaks down. One is struck by the variety amongst these women: some lived in their homes and some in convents; some vowed when they were old and some still in their twenties; some appear to have been very pious and some do not. Vowesses are not a homogenous group and generalisations must be made cautiously. The vocation, above all, was defined by its flexibility to accommodate a range of preferences and habits.

Nonetheless, when vowesses' wills, for example, are compared with those of other widows, certain trends and tendencies can be identified which are particular to vowed women, although these are never universal. These are extracted and discussed in the first chapter, which takes commemoration as its theme, since so much source material – wills, monuments, chantry records – is concerned with how these women wished to be remembered and prayed for after their decease. Descriptions of the surviving monumental brasses for vowesses are paired with biographies of these women: this introduces individuals who recur throughout the thesis and demonstrates the variety amongst them. Chapter two explores how consecrated widows balanced their social identification as wives of their husbands with their spiritual identity as a bride of Christ. It describes some of the Continental 'matron-mystics' who were models for non-virgin sanctity and explains how English women were exposed to their influence; it takes two aristocratic vowesses, their earthly marriages and their vowed widowhood, as a detailed case study; and it considers women who broke their vows and married after they had been consecrated to Christ. Chapter three challenges the general misapprehension of vowesses as reclusive holy women and the tendency to discuss them from a limiting gendered perspective, in the context of female piety, when most regularly interacted socially and spiritually with men. Taking London as a case study, it then considers vowesses in relationship with one another and how the ties of shared vocation were manifest. Chapter four examines the

relationship between vowesses and church institutions of all kinds, but particularly parish churches and convents. If the parish church can be said to embody the devotional life of the laity and the monastic house that of professed religious, the vowess uniquely belonged to both. Finally, chapter five considers vowesses' material possessions, ascetic leanings, and lifestyles, in the context of the tension between self-indulgence and self-denial. It then explores their patronage, philanthropy, and interest in education: how they sought to use their wealth to ensure speedy access to Heaven upon decease for themselves and their loved ones, to enhance liturgical worship, and to benefit their fellow Christians both individually and corporately. The thesis aims to present a more rounded picture of vowesses, who were not simply religious women: they were wives, mothers, sisters, friends, parishoners, landowners, businesswomen, and benefactors. They were, above all, individuals. Any prosopography of vowesses must be, like the women themselves, multi-facted: parochial, monastic, societal, and domestic.

Chapter One:

'Beginning at the End': Vowesses in Death

It may seem counter-intuitive, to begin at the end, but this is what historical research inevitably does. Whatever can be deduced about any individual who is now dead, is only known because of what was recorded, either what the individual wished to preserve about himself or herself, or what others wished to preserve. Our view of history relies upon sources which were constructed with an agenda. Many such sources, and specifically those with which this chapter is chiefly concerned - wills and monumental brasses - were constructed at or because of a death. Death causes us to reassess our values, our priorities, and our identity, and so these sources are rich in information about the values, priorities, and identities of the individuals concerned.

A study of vowesses is a study of individuals: any attempt at discussing them as a homogeneous group must allow for the fact that each woman was unique. To what extent, then, can generalisations be made? How central was the vowed status of these women to their public and private identity? How distinctive were they? A survey of vowesses' monumental brasses is a worthy starting point for answering such questions. Discussion of an individual's brass invites a brief biography, which demonstrates the variety amongst these women and introduces some who will recur throughout the thesis. Furthermore, a monumental brass is a testament to an individual's public identity: these brasses depict how some vowesses saw themselves, perhaps, but, more than this, they depict how these women wished to be seen and remembered. The vowess would obviously not have physically constructed the brass herself, but she, or those close to her, usually her family or those she appointed her executors, would have provided detailed instructions. Although there is the possibility that these women's representatives may have disregarded their wishes, the fact that many brasses were made during

the lifetime of the individual commemorated makes this far less likely.¹ Wills, with which the second and third parts of this chapter are primarily concerned, are uncertain with regard to their composition and closeness to the testator, particularly in the minutiae of the wording.² This is to be borne in mind but does not render these sources without value. This chapter will examine the funeral and commemorative arrangements outlined in vowesses' wills, and then discuss in detail the wills' preambles, in order to gain new insight into the values, priorities, and beliefs of vowed women. The wills and monumental brasses may have resulted from these women's deaths, but they reveal just as much about their lives.

'A Different Kind of Immortality': Vowesses'

Monumental Brasses

'Monuments and epitaphs represent a continuing effort to connect present and past, to attach the seemingly transient to the permanent, and also to assert individuality against the threat of personal annihilation. The presentation of images of those now dead as if they were alive is part of this, as are the allusions to remembrance and perpetuity... the physical memorial had for the Catholic the aim of assisting his or her salvation by invoking prayer and intercession, as well as securing a different kind of immortality for his or her personal identity.'³

It is with this personal identity that this section on vowesses' monumental brasses is chiefly concerned. With a few exceptions, the monumental brass, as Vanessa Harding observes, depicts the dead as if alive, as a means of preserving the identity of the living individual. Consideration of how vowesses are depicted on their brasses sheds light upon the nature of that identity which they wished to

-
- 1 The fact that death dates were left blank on several of the brass inscriptions recorded below testifies to the likelihood that the brass was constructed before the woman's death.
 - 2 The difficulties with regard to this issue are explored in the section on will preambles below.
 - 3 Vanessa Harding, *The Dead and the Living in Paris and London, 1500-1670* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 157.

preserve. Monumental brasses may not tell us about a person's true identity or characteristics, but they do communicate how a person wished to be remembered, namely their public identity. This section, then, will provide what background information is known about the vowesses for whom monumental brasses survive (or for whom detailed descriptions survive of brasses now lost) and will then go on to describe the brasses in detail. There are ten remaining monumental brasses depicting known vowesses, plus one lost with a surviving detailed description, for this period and geographical region, suggesting that approximately one in seven identified vowesses has a brass which exists today.

Juliana Anyell and Joan Braham

Juliana Anyell's brass is at St. Margaret's church in Witton, Norfolk, and it dates from c. 1500. Aside from the brass, all that testifies to Juliana's existence are the will of her husband, Robert, and two documents in the chancery records at The National Archives.⁴ These show her to have been involved in disputes over property in Suffolk. Similarly, very little is known of the life of Joan Braham, whose brass, dated 1519, is on the floor of the nave of the church of St. Andrew, Frenze, also in Norfolk.⁵ She is likely to have been born Joan Reydon, lived at Braham's Hall in Wetheringsett, Suffolk, and had a daughter, Margaret, who married into the Blennerhassett family.⁶ It seems logical to group these two brasses together, as so little is known of the vowesses' lives and because the brasses themselves are nearly identical.

Each vowess is depicted alone and facing forwards with her hands raised in prayer. She wears a wimple around her head, the plaited 'barbe' or chin cloth over her chin and neck, and a long veil covering her shoulders like a cape. Joan Braham also wears a girdle with long tasselled ends that reach almost to the

4 Muriel Clayton, *Catalogue of Rubbings of Brasses and Incised Slabs* (London: Stationery Office, 1915; repr. London: Victoria and Albert Museum, 1979), p. 131; TNA, C 1/184/14 and C 1/235/32.

5 Clayton, *Catalogue of Rubbings of Brasses and Incised Slabs*, p. 131.

6 Bill Jehan, 'Blennerhassett Family Tree: Norfolk, Suffolk and Fermanagh' <<http://www.blennerhassettfamilytree.com/Family-Tree.php>> [accessed 14 January 2014].

ground. Below her portrait are three brass shields bearing arms.⁷ Julian Anyell's inscription reads:

Orate p' a'i'a d'n'e Juliane Anyell // votrias cui' a'i'e p'pici de' .⁸

Joan Braham's inscription is lengthier and includes more information:

Hic iacet tumulata d'na Johanna Braham vidua ac deo dicata // olim
uxor Joh'ns Braham Armiger que obiit xviiio die Nove'bris // A'o
d'ni millimo CCCCco xixo cuius a'i'e p'picietur deus Amen.⁹

These brasses make a statement about the vowess' identity as an independent woman, whose autonomy is sanctioned by the Church. In each, the woman is depicted alone, separate from her family, and in widow's weeds or in the mantle and veil she would have received at her vowing ceremony.¹⁰ Both also mention the woman's status as a vowess in the inscription. The fact that these women were vowed is thus presented as a defining characteristic.

7 *The Hamline University Brass Rubbing Collection* <<http://www.hamline.edu/brass-rubbings/>> [accessed 14 January 2014].

8 Translation: 'Pray for the soul of Dame Julian Anyell // vowess, on whose soul may God have mercy.'

9 Translation: "Here lies buried Dame Joan Braham, widow and dedicated to God, // formerly wife of John Braham, Esquire, who died the 18th day of November // in the year of our Lord 1519, on whose soul may God have mercy, Amen.'

10 For more about this ceremony, see: Erler, 'Three Fifteenth-Century Vowesses', in *Medieval London Widows*, ed. by Barron and Sutton, pp. 165-84 (pp. 165-6).

This image
has been
removed
for copyright
reasons

3. Monumental brass of Juliana Anyell at St Margaret's, Witton, Norfolk. Photograph reproduced from The Geograph Britain and Ireland Project <<http://www.geograph.org.uk/photo/917151>>.

This image
has been
removed
for copyright
reasons

4. Monumental brass of Joan Braham at St Andrew's, Frenze, Norfolk. Photograph reproduced from Bill Jehan, 'Blennerhassett Family Tree: Norfolk, Suffolk and Fermanagh' <<http://www.blennerhassettfamilytree.com/Family-Tree.php>>.

Katherine Colman

Katherine Colman's brass is at St. Lawrence's church, Little Waldingfield, Suffolk, and is dated 1506. There is likewise an air of mystery about Katherine but not because we know so little about her - her will survives and is quite detailed - rather because her image has disappeared from the brass. Her husband, the wealthy clothier John Colman, and her six sons and seven daughters, survive in brass but she has vanished.¹¹ The inscription reads:

Orate pro Animabus John's Colman et Kateryne uxor eius
 _'quidiii // John's obiit vicesimo Septimo die mensis Januam anno
 domini // milimo quingestino sexto quo_u Animali_ p'picietur d'
 Amen.¹²

Katherine's will, proved 10 February 1532, describes her as 'advowes' and requests burial in the parish church at Little Waldingfield.¹³ It makes the usual charitable bequests to those attending the funeral and at the month's mind, as well as stipulating £4 for mending the highways from Little Waldingfield toward Leimes. Other gifts include houses and land, as well as domestic items such as pots and kettles, items of clothing, and rosary beads, mostly bequeathed to her children and their families.¹⁴ Although Katherine's brass places her image within her family unit, it is unclear whether she wore her ordinary clothes or the more severe dress of the widow and vowess.

11 Clayton, *Catalogue of Rubbings of Brasses and Incised Slabs*, p. 94.

12 Translation: 'Pray for the souls of John Colman and his wife Katherine, the which // John died the 27th day of the month of January in the year of our Lord // 1506 on whose soul may God have mercy, Amen.'

13 TNA, PCC Prob. 11/24/176.

14 These will be discussed further in chapter five.

This image
has been
removed
for copyright
reasons

5. Bottom of the monumental brass of John and Katherine Colman at St Lawrence's, Little Waldingfield, Suffolk, depicting their children and the inscription. Photograph reproduced from Simon Knott, 'Churches of East Anglia: Suffolk' <<http://www.suffolkchurches.co.uk/lwaling.htm>>.

Joan Cooke

A biography of Joan Cooke and her husband, John, appears in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*.¹⁵ John was an alderman and four times mayor of Gloucester, dying in 1529. In his will, he expressed his desire that Joan refrain from remarrying and left her a large fortune and extensive property in the city and county to use 'as she doo know my full mynde'.¹⁶ It had been John Cooke's wish that Joan found a school and so, at the Dissolution, she purchased a large part of the estate of Llanthony Priory with which she built and endowed the Crypt School, positioned adjacent to St. Mary de Crypt church in Gloucester. The school, which was completed by the end of 1539, is still operational today, despite

15 Caroline Litzenberger, 'Cooke, John (d. 1528)', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, Oct 2006; online edn, May 2011
<<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/94981/>>[accessed 15 May 2012].

16 TNA, PCC Prob. 11/22/615.

several changes of site.¹⁷ Joan Cooke's will, proved in February 1546, made elaborate provision for the celebration of her husband's obit, as well as leaving £40 for distribution to the poor and making numerous bequests to relatives and godchildren.¹⁸ A portrait of John and Joan Cooke survives, but it is of uncertain authenticity.¹⁹

Joan Cooke appears in brass with her husband at St. Mary de Crypt church, Gloucester.²⁰ The figures are in semi-profile with their hands raised in prayer. Joan stands to the right of her husband, wearing her widow's, or vovess', weeds: the veil headdress, a stiffly pleated barbe, and, over a simple dress with cuffed sleeves and confined by a belt, a plain mantle that is partially looped under her right arm and pulled up slightly by her left arm. On the third finger of her left hand she wears a ring, which could be her wedding ring or profession ring.

The brass is more elaborate than most others described here, since both figures have a pediment above them, which is part of a triple canopy. Its side shafts, along with the brass inscription, have been lost. Cecil T. Davis noted that the pediment over Joan was also lost and that it contained in its oculus a sort of interlaced fret with a rose in the centre.²¹ Since the present canopy is identical with that over John Cooke, it is probably the section restored in 1923. Over John's head, the pediment has a rounded, cusped head and an oculus in which a seeded rose with five petals and five barbs is surrounded by trefoil-filled spandrels. A central pediment, not on the rubbing below, consists of two panelled pinnacles, between which is a pediment with the figure of John the Baptist with a book in his left hand. On this, the Lamb of God holds a cross, from the stem of which is a flag with a cross and two streamers. The raised index finger of St John's right hand points to the Lamb. Represented with long hair, beard, bare feet, and a long gown, part of which is raised by his left arm, St John stands on a corbel between two smaller pediments. Above him a branch forms a triple-headed arch and above that

17 The foundation of this school is discussed in detail in chapter five.

18 TNA, PCC Prob. 11/31/182.

19 The painting is now at Gloucester Folk Museum.

20 Clayton, *Catalogue of Rubbings of Brasses and Incised Slabs*, p. 119.

21 Cecil T. Davis, *The Monumental Brasses of Gloucestershire* (London: Phillimore, 1899; repr. Bath: Kingsmead Reprints, 1969), pp. 154-8.

is a crocketed, straight-side gable.²² The presence of St John here may simply have been chosen because of the couple's Christian names, or perhaps it illustrates a particular devotion of the couple during their lifetime.

Cut in stone above the elaborate canopy is this surprisingly minimalist three-line inscription:

Johannes Cooke, fundator scholae juxta hanc ecclesiam obiit //
Anno Domini Mo CCCCco xxixō // Johanna uxor eius obiit Anno
Domini Mo CCCCco xlo ivo.²³

²² Description adapted from *The Hamline University Brass Rubbing Collection*.

²³ Translation: 'John Cooke, founder of the school next to this church, died // in the year of our Lord 1529. // Joan, his wife, died in the year of our Lord 1544.'

This image
has been
removed
for copyright
reasons

*6. Monumental brass of John and Joan Cooke at St Mary de Crypt,
Gloucester. Brass rubbing reproduced from The Hamline University Brass
Rubbing Collection <<http://www.hamline.edu/brass-rubbings>>.*

Margaret Croke

A detailed biography of Margaret Croke appears in Kay Lacey's chapter of *Medieval London Widows*.²⁴ Her husband, John, was a London alderman, skinner, royal official in the Exchequer, tax collector, and merchant of the Staple of Calais. He died in 1477, leaving in his will numerous bequests to his parish church of All Hallows', Barking-by-the-Tower, the skinners' fraternities of Corpus Christi and the Blessed Virgin, various friaries, prisons, hospitals and leper hospitals, his apprentices, former apprentices and servants, and his children and grandchildren.²⁵ Margaret is described as irritable and melancholy in the months after this in surviving letters from Thomas Betson, who was later to marry her granddaughter.²⁶ Margaret continued to administer her husband's business affairs in the trade of wool and woolfells, and she died in 1491.²⁷ In her will, she requested burial at the church of the Friars Preachers of London, and left money and gifts to various friaries, to All Hallows', to the church of Our Lady of Aldermary where her parents were buried, and to family, friends, and servants.

Margaret and John Croke's brass no longer survives, but it was described in detail in John Stow's *Survey of London* (1598).²⁸ It was situated at their parish church of All Hallows, and dated to 1477.²⁹ On the right side, John was depicted, kneeling at a prayer desk on which was an open book and a rosary, with the smaller figures of his eight sons kneeling behind him. A scroll from his mouth was completely corroded away by the time that Stow was writing, as was also his head and that of his eldest son. He wore a tunic or gown with close-fitting sleeves edged with fur and had a large pouch at his girdle. Over all was his fur-lined

24 Lacey, 'Margaret Croke (d. 1491)', in *Medieval London Widows*, ed. by Barron and Sutton, pp. 143-64.

25 TNA, PCC Prob. 11/7/80.

26 *The Stonor Letters and Papers, 1290-1483*, ed. by C. L. Kingsford, 2 vols (London: The Camden Society, 1919), ii, p. 28, no. 185, 224. This will be discussed further in the next chapter.

27 Lacey, 'Margaret Croke' in *Medieval London Widows*, ed. by Barron and Sutton p. 156.

28 'Memorials in the Church: Brasses', in *Survey of London: Volume 15: All Hallows, Barking-by-the-Tower*, ed. by G. H. Gater and Walter H. Godfrey, ii (London: London County Council, 1934), online edn <<http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=74973>> [accessed 20 November 2010].

29 Clayton, *Catalogue of Rubbings of Brasses and Incised Slabs*, p. 119.

alderman's mantle, open in front and buttoned on the right shoulder. His sons were all dressed alike in the usual civil tunics or gowns with close sleeves. Above this was a shield bearing the Croke arms. On the left side, Margaret appeared, also kneeling at a prayer desk with an open book, with the smaller figures of her five daughters kneeling behind her. A scroll unfurled from her mouth, on which was written: 'Miserere mei de' scd'm magnā mi[isericordia]m tua' ('God, have mercy on me according to your heartfelt mercifulness', the beginning of Psalm 51). Margaret was dressed in widow's clothing, with a veil, pleated barbe and kirtle, with close sleeves and a mantle. The daughters all had butterfly head-dresses and wore low-necked fur-trimmed gowns. The two eldest had necklaces. The shield to the left was lost by the time Stow recorded the brass.

Alice Hampton

Alice Hampton was born in Minchinhampton, Gloucestershire, the daughter of a local gentry family. The early deaths of many of her siblings resulted in her becoming the heiress of both her father and her uncle, William Hampton, mayor of London, who died c. 1483.³⁰ Alice was, at that time, living in an oratory at Dartford Priory, Kent. A papal privilege of 14 October 1484, issued in response to a petition, records that she had fasted herself into illness and could no longer safely observe the austerities to which she had bound herself. Consequently she was licensed to have mass and the other offices celebrated in her oratory, and also to choose her own confessor, who could commute her fasts for other pious works.³¹

By 1492, Alice Hampton was living, at least part-time, at Halliwell Priory in the northern suburbs of London. An indenture from that year between her and

30 For a fuller biography of Alice Hampton, see my MA dissertation 'Alice Hampton, d. 1516: The Life of a Late Medieval Vowess' (Royal Holloway, University of London, 2010) or my entry on her in the *ODNB*: 'Hampton, Alice (d. 1516)', May 2012 <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/102118>> [accessed 2 Jan 2017]. Alice's life is also discussed in detail in chapter four of this thesis. I am indebted to Dr Jessica Freeman, who shared her insights on the Hampton family.

31 *CPL*, ed. by Haren, xv, pp. 32-3, no. 60.

Prioress Elizabeth Prudde records that Alice had been licensed to build an 'entree or tresauce' at the west end of the convent. She was also granted various privileges, including the right to use the prioress' well and washing house, for which she paid the prioress eight pounds of pepper a year.³² Alice was also a major benefactress of Syon Abbey, as in 1507-8 she began the process of handing over her whole estate to that community.³³ Her name appears at the front of Syon's 'Martyrlogue', in an obituary list of 'Special Benefactors and Friends' for whom the nuns at Syon prayed.³⁴

Alice Hampton's will, dated 13 May 1514, focussed almost exclusively on Halliwell, Syon presumably being omitted because it had already received substantial benefactions.³⁵ It would seem that she was now no longer connected with Dartford, but she had retained important links with Minchinhampton, where she is recorded as leasing properties in 1499 and where proceedings in the manor court were conducted in her name in 1507.³⁶ She gave a bell, inscribed with her name and dated 1515, to one of the town's market-houses, and it was later transferred to the parish church.³⁷ She also set up an almshouse for three poor people, each with an allowance of 1d. a day, and this was maintained after her death by Syon Abbey.³⁸ Her only bequest to the parish church was the ring by which she became a vowess, of greater sentimental than material value, but it seems likely that she made other gifts which disappeared at the Reformation. Alice Hampton died on 27 September 1516, and her will was proved on 4 October following.³⁹ The only vowess known to have never married, she was also unique in having formed links not just with one nunnery, but with three.

32 TNA, LR 14/813.

33 TNA, Exchequer 211/375.

34 Exeter University Library, MS. 95, Canon Fletcher's MS, vol. 10. I am indebted to Dr Virginia Bainbridge, who kindly provided a copy of this.

35 London Metropolitan Archives, Commissary Court 9171/9, fol. 5v-6.

36 TNA, E 210/10318; SC 2/175/85.

37 Arthur Twisden Playne, *A History of the Parishes of Minchinhampton and Avening* (Gloucester: J. Bellows, 1915), p. 70.

38 George James Aungier, *The History and Antiquities of Syon Monastery, the Parish of Isleworth and the Chapelry of Hounslow* (London: Nichols, 1840), p. 450.

39 Erler, 'Syon's "Special Benefactors and Friends"', 214.

Alice Hampton appears on her parents' monumental brass in Minchinhampton parish church.⁴⁰ Cecil T. Davis cited Samuel Rudder's *History of Gloucestershire* (1799), which described the monument as laid on a flat stone in the north aisle, though between 1799 and the first publication of Davis' *The Monumental Brasses of Gloucestershire* in 1899, it was affixed to the north wall at the west end of the church, presumably so that it would not be further worn away by being walked upon.⁴¹

It depicts Alice's parents, John and Ellen Hampton, on the left and right respectively, as a pair of cadavers in shrouds, with their hands folded in prayer and their heads tilted slightly to face one another. As is typical, their children are depicted beneath them, all standing with their hands in prayer and likewise facing inwards: six sons beneath their father and three daughters beneath their mother. One son and one daughter, probably the eldest, are larger than the others. The larger son is dressed as a monk and the larger daughter, who is Alice, David Verey and Alan Brooks describe as dressed 'as a nun.'⁴² However, as the antiquarian Canon J. M. J. Fletcher observed, her dress is actually that of a vowess.⁴³ The nun's habit and the dress of a vowess appear, in this case at least, to have been indistinguishable. Alice is depicted with a veil, headdress, mantle, cape, and rosary. The other daughters are bareheaded with flowing hair. Davis suggested that this could be because they died young, or because they were young when the brass was carved.⁴⁴ A brass plate below the effigies reads:

Of yo charite pray for the soules of John Hampton gentilman, Elyn
his wife // all their children, specially for the soule of dame Alice
Hampton his daugh // ter, whiche was right beneficiall to this
church, p'ish, whiche John decessed // in the yere of o' lord
mccccclvj, on whose soules ihu haue mercy, Amen.

40 My thanks to Rev Dr Chris Collingwood and his family for allowing me to see Alice's parents' memorial brass and for their kindness to me during my visit to Minchinhampton.

41 Davis, *The Monumental Brasses of Gloucestershire*, p. 110.

42 *The Buildings of England: Gloucestershire: The Cotswolds*, ed. by David Verey and Alan Brooks 3rd edn (London: Penguin, 1999), p. 480.

43 EUL, Canon Fletcher's MS, vol. 10.

44 Davis, *The Monumental Brasses of Gloucestershire*, p. 113.

The date must be incorrect. Davis suggested that the brass itself was engraved c. 1510 and the date was added later, thus rendering it impossible for Alice's sisters to have been young at the time.⁴⁵ In fact, the inscription seems to suggest a later date than 1510, as it refers to Alice's benefactions to the church and parish.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

This image
has been
removed
for copyright
reasons

7. Monumental brass of John and Ellen Hampton at Holy Trinity, Minchinhampton, Gloucestershire. Brass rubbing reproduced from Playne, A History of the Parishes of Minchinhampton and Avening, p. 68.

Susan Kyngeston

The life of Susan Kyngeston and her family is documented in *Women, Reading and Piety in Late Medieval England* by Mary Erler.⁴⁶ Susan, the daughter of Richard Fettyplace and Elizabeth Beselles, was married to John Kyngeston, a marriage possibly arranged by Anthony Fettyplace, as Susan was his niece and John was his ward.⁴⁷ John died early in the marriage, when he was only 23 years old, leaving Susan all his goods and appointing her his sole executrix.⁴⁸ Susan then lived at Syon Abbey for the remainder of her life, though the varying sums entered for board in the monastic accounts suggest her presence there was not continuous. She appears in the accounts from 1514 to 1537 with some breaks, and ‘Lady Kyngeston’s chamber’ is mentioned in a post-Dissolution inventory.⁴⁹ She had probably left Syon before the nunnery was surrendered on November 25, 1539, and died less than a year afterwards. Her will, in which she left money for the founding of a school, remains in the archive of Canterbury wills.⁵⁰

Various other sources recount aspects of Susan’s intellectual and spiritual life. She was addressed in the prologue to a sermon by St Cyprian, translated by her stepbrother, Thomas Elyot, alongside her sisters, Dorothy and Eleanor, who were nuns at Syon. When Dorothy made her will, as all who entered Syon as nuns were expected to do, on 24 April 1523, she included: ‘Imprimis I will there be bestowed vpon A song booke / and other Inglishe bookes for my self suche as my Suster Kyngeston will apointe the sum of iij li’.⁵¹ This testifies to the family’s literary interests, which Mary Erler has outlined in detail. Susan’s grandmother, Alice Beselles, who was also a vowess at Syon, appointed Susan the executrix of

46 Erler, *Women, Reading and Piety*, pp. 85-99.

47 Stanford E. Lehmborg, *Sir Thomas Elyot: Tudor Humanist* (Texas: University of Texas Press, 1960), p. 191.

48 Erler, *Women, Reading and Piety*, p. 86.; TNA, PCC Prob. 11/17/538.

49 Syon cellaress’ foreign accounts: TNA, Special Collections: Ministers’ and Receivers’ Accounts 6/Hen 8/2214, 2215 (1514-5) through to SC 6/Hen 8/2244 and 2245 (1536-7) show yearly board amounts for Susan ranging from a high of £33 18s. 3d. (she occasionally paid for others’ board) to a low of 55s. (1536-7). The inventory is TNA, Office of the Auditors of Land Revenue 1/112. See also: Erler, *Women, Reading and Piety*, p. 86, 179.

50 TNA, PCC Prob. 11/28/484.

51 TNA, PCC Prob. 11/24/99v.

her will. Since the will describes Susan as a vowess, we can deduce that Susan must have taken the vow before the will was composed on 24 May 1526.⁵² Susan also appears in two lists, dated autumn 1533, of persons to whom supporters of Elizabeth Barton, the Nun of Kent, had communicated her revelations. Some of the persons on these lists were questioned and Susan herself may have been interrogated.⁵³ Additionally, evidence of a number of legal disputes, in which Susan was involved, survive at the National Archives.⁵⁴

Susan Kyngeston is the only known vowess to leave behind not one, but two, surviving monumental brasses. The first of these is at the church of St Mary the Virgin, Childrey, Berkshire, on the floor of the chancel north of the altar.⁵⁵ Here she appears with her husband beneath an image of the Holy Trinity, though actually without the dove signifying the Holy Spirit, and two coats of arms: the one on the left depicting the Kyngeston arms and the one on the right depicting the Kyngeston arms impaling the Fettyplace arms. The brass has lost two shields and parts of each of the two mouth scrolls. On the back of the Trinity and one of the remaining shields are two parts of the figure of a lady, very similar to Susan's figure. Although there is nothing in the part of this fragmentary figure that indicates any mistake was made by the engraver, it is possible that it was meant for Susan's figure until an engraving error caused it to be turned over and reused. The mouth scrolls were possibly complete when Elias Ashmole was collecting material for *The Antiquities of Berkshire*, published in 1723. He read them as 'O Jhesu, dulcedo omnium te amantium' ('O Jesus, the delight of all who love you') from John Kyngeston's mouth, and 'Et semper adjutor ad te perorantium' ('And always the helper of those who finish you') from Susan's. The latter transcription is clearly a mistake. Even in its current partial state, it can be seen that the last word ended 'clama[n]c[iu]m'. William Clarke's *Parochial Topography of the Hundred of Wanting* gives the whole word as 'proclamantium' (to call upon). This

52 TNA, PCC Prob. 11/22/150.

53 Erler, *Women, Reading and Piety*, p. 89.

54 TNA C 4/41/138, C 4/59/84, C 4/106/8, C 1/531/29.

55 Clayton, *Catalogue of Rubbings of Brasses and Incised Slabs*, p. 45.

makes much more sense. The wording of mouth scrolls on brasses often has obvious sources, such as the Apostles' Creed, but this example is more obscure.⁵⁶

John Kyngeston and Susan are depicted turned toward one another in semi-profile positions with their hands raised in prayer. John is depicted in armour, clean-shaven, and with hair falling to his shoulders. Susan wears the popular pedimental headdress of the time, the hair itself being enclosed in a cap visible behind the head. Her dress has a close-fitting bodice, furred cuffs, a full skirt trimmed with fur at the hem, and a long decorative belt buckled loosely in front with one end hanging almost to the ground.⁵⁷ This fashionable dress contrasts sharply with the vowess' clothing on Susan's other brass at Shalstone, Buckinghamshire, and on many of the other surviving examples of vowesses' brasses.

The inscription at the foot of the brass reads:

Of yowr Charite pray for the sowle of John Kyngeston Esquier
sonne & ayer sumtyme to John Kyng // ston, the wyche forsayd
John deptyd from thys transytory lyfe the xvj day of Apryle in the
yer of ower lord //god mvxiiij and for the sowle of Suzan his wyfe
the wyche deptyd from thys transytor lyfe the // the yere of ower
Lord mv and on whoys sowlles Jhu have mercy. Amen.

The date of Susan's death was never completed on the inscription, probably because she was buried and commemorated in brass at Shalstone.⁵⁸ This brass is not dissimilar to the brasses of Julian Anyell and Joan Braham. Susan is very clearly depicted as a vowess, in a mantle, barbe, and veil. A rubbing of this

56 John and Susan Kyngeston's brass was described as The Monumental Brass Society's 'Brass of the Month: February 2010: John Kyngeston, 1514, and his wife Susan, Childrey, Berkshire' <<http://www.mbs-brasses.co.uk/brass%20of%20the%20month%20february%202010.html>> [accessed 14 January 2014].

57 The second part of the description of John and Susan Kyngeston's brass has been adapted from *The Hamline University Brass Rubbing Collection*.

58 Clayton, *Catalogue of Rubbings of Brasses and Incised Slabs*, p. 131.

brass appears in *Women, Reading and Piety*, in which Mary Erler has commented on the family likeness of a broad face and dimpled chin.⁵⁹

The inscription of this second brass of Susan is almost a miniature biography in itself:

Here lyethe buried dame Susan Kyngeston vowes the el // dest
dowghtr of Rychard Fetyplace of East Shefford in the // county of
berkr esquier deceased, late the wyfe of John // Kyngeston of
Childrey in the said countye of berksr esquier // also decessyd the
wyche said dame Susan dyed the xxii // day of Septembr in the yere
of our Lord God mcccc // xl on whose sowle and all xtien soules
ihu have mcy a'

59 Erler, *Women, Reading and Piety*, p. 92.

This image
has been
removed
for copyright
reasons

8. Monumental brass rubbing of John and Susan Kyngeston at St Mary the Virgin, Childrey, Berkshire. Brass rubbing reproduced from the Monumental Brass Society website <<http://www.mbs-brasses.co.uk/brass%20of%20the%20month%20february%202010.html>>.

This image
has been
removed
for copyright
reasons

9. Monumental brass of Susan Kyngeston at St Edward the Confessor, Shalstone, Buckinghamshire. Brass rubbing reproduced from Erlor, Women, Reading and Piety, p. 92.

Margaret and Agnes Browne

Margaret and Agnes Browne were both sisters and sisters-in-law. Daughters of John Stokke, they were originally from Warmington, Northamptonshire, but married brothers and wealthy wool-merchants William and John Browne of Stamford, Lincolnshire.⁶⁰ Alan Rogers observes that the Browne brothers' father, also John Browne, held land in Warmington, so that is probably how the families were introduced. William Browne founded the almshouse Browne's Hospital whilst his brother, John the younger, commissioned a church tower and spire at All Saints', Stamford.⁶¹ William died in 1489 and his will appointed Margaret as executrix, whilst for John the younger, who died in 1476, there is no surviving will.⁶²

Wills do survive, however, for both Margaret and Agnes. Margaret's will is complete and includes two codicils.⁶³ The original, sealed with her own great seal, is in the keeping of the Elmes family, descended from Margaret herself. It comprises, amongst other items, bequests to All Saints', to other local parish churches and friaries, to the parish church of Warmington, to Lincoln cathedral, to the nunnery of St. Michael's, Stamford, to Our Lady of Walsingham, to guilds, friends, and many family members. Margaret has been hitherto unrecognised as a vowess, but the evidence that she was vowed is convincing: in her will, she describes herself as 'in my pure widowhode' and she leaves 'my mantell that I was professed in' to the sub-prioress of St. Michael's. Alan Rogers argues that she was a money-lender in her own right and these mercantile leanings are altogether too worldly to sit comfortably alongside the vowess' spiritual ethic. He believes vowesses to have been universally reclusive.⁶⁴ However, many known vowesses continued their husband's business interests and vowesses varied considerably in

60 I am indebted to Prof. Alan Rogers for sharing with me his research on the Browne family.

61 Additional information on the Browne brothers, as well as a detailed appreciation of the brasses, has been sourced from: Reinhard Lamp, 'The Browne Brothers, All Saints', Stamford, Lincolnshire' <http://www.pegasus-onlinezeitschrift.de/2010_1/erga_1_2010_lamp-2_en.pdf> [accessed 14 January 2014].

62 William Browne's will: TNA, PCC Prob. 11/8/322.

63 TNA, PCC Prob. 11/8/525.

64 Prof. Alan Rogers: personal communication.

their worldliness.⁶⁵ Alan Rogers explains the profession mantle by speculating that the Stokke sisters may have boarded at St. Michael's in their youth and been professed, like nuns, whilst at school. It seems, however, more plausible that Margaret became a vowess during the last six months of her life.

Agnes' original will is now lost but much of it has been preserved in James Wright's *The History and Antiquities of the County of Rutland* (1684).⁶⁶ Wright cited the original will as belonging to Christopher Broune of Tolethorpe Hall, but it cannot now be traced. Wright also dated the will to 1470 but this must be an error: Wright described Agnes as a 'Widdow' whilst her brass proves that John Browne died in 1476 and so the will must date from between then and 1484, when she died. It also seems likely that Wright provided his own translation of the Latin. He described Agnes as a 'charitable Benefactress' and lists her bequests to, amongst others, All Saints, St. Michael's, Lincoln cathedral, various friaries, her godchildren and, surprisingly, the church of Ampthill in Bedfordshire.

Both sisters appear with their husbands in brass at All Saints', Stamford, as does John Browne the elder and his wife. The brasses have been described in detail by Reinhard Lamp.⁶⁷ That of William and Margaret lies on the floor, against the south-eastern corner of the chapel beside the chancel, in its original position. It is not complete: the entire left-hand half of the double canopy, the top of the remaining one and the shields have disappeared. The figures are positioned in prayer, and William wears a fur-lined gown and mantle as he stands upon two woosacks, indicating his trade, whilst Margaret wears a gown and mantle, with a veil over her horned headdress, with a small pet at her right foot. Above each figure is an arched prayer scroll. William's reads: 'me spede', with a cross as a symbol for Christ, thus referencing the Browne family motto. Margaret's reads: 'Der lady help at nede'. The Brownes' heraldic emblem, a stork, appears in the canopy gable.

65 See Alice Lynne of London in Erler, 'Three Fifteenth-Century Vowesses', in *Medieval London Widows*, ed. by Barron and Sutton, pp. 165-184.

66 James Wright, *The History and Antiquities of the County of Rutland* (London: Bennett Griffin, 1684), pp. 129-30.

67 Lamp, 'The Browne Brothers, All Saints, Stamford, Lincolnshire'.

The brass of John the younger and Agnes appears on the wall in the north aisle of the church, beside the monument to John the elder. Again, the figures stand as if in prayer. John wears a fur-lined gown and mantle, with a large purse hanging from his belt, whilst Agnes wears her widow's, or vowess', clothing, with a mantle over her kirtle and her head veiled and wimpled. This has not been noted before, but, on closer scrutiny, Agnes may have been wearing a profession ring on her finger, though equally this may have just been damage to the brass.

The inscriptions on the brasses of Margaret and Agnes' Browne are far lengthier than on the other brasses described in this chapter. Generally speaking, some brasses have more detailed inscriptions than others: some give more information about the deceased, although there are common characteristics, such as beseeching the viewer to pray. The Browne monuments, however, contain full-length poems.⁶⁸ Reinhard Lamp has provided transcriptions and translations. Margaret's and William's reads:

Rex regum, dominus dominantum, tu quia solus –
 Velle tuo suberit omne quod est vel erit.
 Intravit terram corpus, sed spiritus ad te
 Currere festinat – tu deus, accipe me!
 In te sperantem, fili deus et pater alme
 Altitonansque Deus spiritus – accipe me!
 Peccavi, mala multa tuli – me pœnitet huius!
 Ad te clamantem, tu deus, accipe me!
 Non intres, domine, iudicare, mihi nisi primo
 Digneris veniæ reddere, quod satis est.
 Et quia pro nostris animabus suscipiendis
 Rex terrenus eras, tu deus, accipe me!⁶⁹

68 Another vowess' brass with a poem like this is that of Joan Clopton at Quinton, Gloucestershire, c. 1430. Its inscription is quoted in chapter five.

69 Translation: 'King of kings, Lord of lords, o Thou, because Thou art one and only – // All that is and will be shall be subjected to Thy will. // My body entered the earth, but my spirit to Thee // Hastens to run. Thou God, accept me, // Who put my hope in Thee, Son God, kind Father, // And God Holy Ghost thundering from on high – accept me! Receive me! // I have sinned, I have done much evil, and rue this. // Thou God, accept me, receive me, who am

John's and Agnes' reads:

Te precor, O Christe, matrisque patris miserere!
 Non sim deiectus! Nos omnes claudito cælis!
 Est meo nomine idemque pari labor unus utrique.

Milleno C quater sexageno simul xv
 Vitam mutavi Februarii mensisque trideno.
 Huc ades, o coniux, Agnes, mea cara fuisti.
 Dum mundo vixi; post me sis sponsaque Christi.
 Anno milleno C quarter
 Mensis Mundum liquisti cælestia regna petisti.⁷⁰

It is unlikely that these poems were written by the vowesses themselves, or their husbands, although they may have approved them. The poems provide an insight into contemporary theology and possibly even into family sentiments or priorities. Both poems emphasise the hope of heaven and, implicitly, the fear of hell. Salvation appears as by no means guaranteed by faith, but rather it is something that must be begged for. The second inscription refers to Agnes more personally and it would be pleasing to think that it represents the sentiments of John Browne himself. This, along with Agnes' position as 'the bride of Christ' after John's death, will be revisited in the next chapter.

calling out to Thee // Enter not, Lord, in judgement, unless beforehand // Thou deignest to give me of Thy redeeming grace, which is enough. // And since for the sake of the salvation of our souls // Thou, a King, wast on earth, receive me, my God!

70 Translation: 'I beseech Thee, O Christ, on the mother and on the father have mercy! // I would not be cast away! Enclose us all in Thy heavens! // The trouble undertaken on my behalf is one and the same for each of the spouses. // In 1475 // I changed life, on the thirteenth of the month of February. Come hither, o my wife, Agnes! My beloved you were // While I lived in the world, and after me may you be the bride of Christ. // In the year 14_ // Of the month ____ you left this world behind, bound towards the heavenly realms.'

This image
has been
removed
for copyright
reasons

10. Monumental brass of William and Margaret Browne at All Saints', Stamford, Lincolnshire. Photograph reproduced from The Geograph Britain and Ireland Project <<http://www.geograph.co.uk/snippet/12769>>.

This image
has been
removed
for copyright
reasons

11. Monumental brass of John and Agnes Browne at All Saints', Stamford, Lincolnshire. Photograph reproduced from The Geograph Britain and Ireland Project <<http://www.geograph.org.uk/snippet/12769>>.

Katherine Langley

Katherine, formerly the wife of Henry Langley of Rickling, Essex, died in 1511.⁷¹ A collection of her confraternity letters and papal indulgences survives at the National Archives, along with an inquisition post mortem, while the London Metropolitan Archives contains her lengthy and distinctive will within the

⁷¹ I am indebted to Dr Christian Steer and to Angela Clark, both of whom have shared with me their thoughts on Katherine.

episcopal register of Richard FitzJames.⁷² The will, which suggests that Katherine divided her time between London, Stepney, and Rickling, lists a detailed inventory of Katherine's personal possessions. It also testifies to her intimate involvement in a religious and intellectual circle, which centred around the Cambridge theologian William Chubbes.⁷³

Just as there are two surviving brasses for Susan Kyngeston, it is probable that Katherine Langley originally appeared on as many as three. Her will reads: 'If that I decease and dy in london or at Stepney or within iii myle of London then I will that my body be Buried in the Gray ffriars in london...' and Charles Kingsford, in 1915, recorded Katherine's monument, now lost, in the London Greyfriars. Although he did not specifically state that it was a brass, the fact that he gave only the inscription and no further description of its features suggest that it was not an effigy or a tomb chest like the others he described.⁷⁴ A further brass at Rickling, Essex, depicting Henry, Katherine, and their three daughters, was recorded in John Weever's *Ancient Funerall Monuments* (1631).⁷⁵

The only surviving image of Katherine now, however, is on the brass on her parents' tomb at St Peter and St Paul, Dagenham. Katherine's father had been Thomas Urswick, chief baron of the Exchequer and Recorder of London, knighted for his part in resisting Fauconberg's assault on the Capital in 1470.⁷⁶ The Urswick brass depicts Thomas in his judicial robes, with a lion at his feet, and beside his second wife, Isabel, the daughter of Richard Ryche, Sheriff of London.⁷⁷ She wears an elaborate headdress and flowing sleeves, and has a small dog at her heels. Two of the original four coats of arms remain. Beneath Thomas and Isabel

72 LMA, MS 9531/9, fols viii to x (3d ser.), fol. 30v. The letters and indulgences are examined in chapter four, whilst extracts from the will are discussed in chapters one and five.

73 This is outlined in chapter three.

74 Charles L. Kingsford, *The Grey Friars of London* (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1915), p. 76. Kingsford also described the chest tomb and brasses of vowess Joan Danvers (d. 1457) and her husband at Greyfriars on p. 94. I am grateful to Christian Steer for directing me to these and to Katherine's brass at Rickling.

75 John Weever, *Ancient Funeral Monuments* (London: 1631), pp. 637-8.

76 Summerson, 'Urswick, Sir Thomas (c.1415-1479)', in *ODNB*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, Jan 2008, <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/28025/>> [accessed 4 Sept 2016].

77 Isabel was named as Anne in *Records of the Family of Urswyk*, ed. by Urwick and Urwick, pp. 63-80, but was later correctly identified by Henry Summerson.

are nine daughters and the outline of four sons, now lost. The eldest daughter is dressed in a religious habit, whilst behind her two of her sisters have headdresses like their mother and the other six have flowing hair, symbolic of maidenhood. Five of these nine daughters were the surviving heirs of their father.⁷⁸ A descendant of the family, Thomas Augustus Urwick, listed the children in 1893, describing each of them in turn.⁷⁹ Urwick claimed that the eldest daughter on the brass was born of Thomas Urswick and his first wife: ‘of the eldest (the nun) we can, of course, say nothing, as her name was buried with her when she took the veil’. Urwick named the second daughter as Katherine. However, although Thomas Urswick died in 1479, at which time Urwick claimed Katherine was ‘aged 21 years and more... for some time married to a Mr Henry Langley’, the brass may well have been constructed later, perhaps funded by Katherine herself. If the brass dates from Katherine’s widowhood, the ‘nun’ may in fact be the vowess Katherine herself, which would explain why no record of this supposed nun has survived.

78 Summerson, ‘Urswick, Sir Thomas (c.1415–1479)’, in *ODNB*.

79 *Records of the Family of Urswyk*, ed. by Urwick and Urwick, pp. 63-80.

This image
has been
removed
for copyright
reasons

12. Monumental brass of Thomas Urswick and family at St Peter and Paul, Dagenham. Brass rubbing reproduced from 'Dagenham Village' <<http://www.dagenhamvillage.co.uk/church/monuments/index.html>>.

Vowesses' Monumental Brasses: Conclusions

It may be helpful to divide these brasses into three categories. Firstly, there are those brasses, like Julian Anyell's, Joan Braham's and Susan Kyngeston's at Shalstone, in which the vowess is depicted alone and in her widow's weeds, or the mantle and veil she would have received at her vowing ceremony.⁸⁰ These are more likely to mention that the woman was a vowess in the inscription. Secondly, there are the brasses, like Susan Kyngeston's at Childrey and Margaret Browne's, in which the vowess is depicted with her husband and in her ordinary clothes. Thirdly, there are those brasses, like Joan Cooke's, Agnes Browne's, Margaret Croke's, and Alice Hampton's, which depict the vowess in her vowess' or widow's clothes but as part of her family unit. Katherine Colman's image on her brass is lost and it is unclear which image on the Urswick brass is Katherine Langley, so these women may have belonged either to the second or the third category.

Vowesses whose brass falls in the first category made a clear statement. The vow of chastity enabled them to stand independently in the world, and to forge their own place in society as a religious woman. Their vowed state was an essential part of their public identity. It is tempting to identify similar brasses of women for whom no definite proof of a vow survives, and to chalk these women up as further vowesses. However, barbes and religious dress could also be worn by other widows, and so a brass can only constitute proof that a woman was a vowess if it names her as such in the inscription. If more vowesses could be positively identified and a larger survey of widows' brasses were taken, however, the correlation between a known vow and a 'vowess-like' brass might be more concretely established.

Brasses in the second category depict the vowess, first and foremost, as the wife of her husband. The fact that she was vowed is not presented as a significant part of her public and social identity. However, such brasses may have been constructed before the vow was taken or intended and, indeed, before the

⁸⁰ This may be what these women wore on a daily basis, or the clothing may be symbolic of the vowess state. Vowesses' clothes are discussed further in chapter five.

husband's death. As such, they commemorate the family as it was at the time, and the wife of living husband rather than a widow and vowess. Brasses in the third category suggest a compromise: the vowess is marked apart by her clothing, and yet she still appears as part of the family unit. This serves as a reminder that, as Mary Erler has observed, one of the advantages of the vowess vocation was a woman could pursue a religious calling without leaving her family behind as a nun would have done. The vowing ceremony initiated and recognised the beginning of a new life without demanding that the vowess sever herself from her previous life and identity.⁸¹

Our three freestanding vowesses, then, may have considered their vowess vocation to define them more completely and may have felt themselves to be of greater significance and influence in their own right after their husbands' deaths. However, like Susan Kyngeston and Katherine Langley, it was not unusual for an individual to be commemorated by more than one brass. If, as Vanessa Harding writes, brasses present 'those now dead as if they were alive', it seems natural for a woman to be depicted at differing points in her life-cycle of daughter, wife, and widow.⁸² That is not to say, though, that all such women were originally depicted on three different brasses. More likely, women, and their families, made choices about which state or states were most important to them. Our first category, particularly those brasses in which the woman is named as a vowess, certainly testifies to how some women, or their representatives, perceived the vow to be an essential aspect of their whole lives, not just their widowhood. They desired to be known and remembered as vowesses. Above all, though, the variety amongst these brasses demonstrates the variety amongst these women, and the flexibility of the vocation to accommodate different preferences and identities.

Vowesses' Funerals and Commemorative Arrangements

When vowess Elizabeth Willford made her will in 1441, she commended her soul to God, the Virgin and all the saints, and her body to be buried in her late

⁸¹ Erler, 'English Vowed Women', 157.

⁸² Harding, *The Dead and the Living in Paris and London*, p. 157.

husband's tomb in the parish church of St Mary Somerset, London.⁸³ She bequeathed her lands and tenements with appurtenances in Toure Street in the London parish of St Dunstan's to Roger and Joan Whale, on the condition that they maintain a perpetual anniversary in the aforesaid church for her soul, the souls of her former husbands and their late wives, their parents, friends, and all Christian souls. The sum of 20s., deriving from the rents and profits from the said lands, was to be spent annually as follows: 12d. to the parson for a placebo, a dirige, and a mass of requiem; 6d. to each stipendiary priest attending the anniversary; 8d. to the parish clerk for bell-ringing and other necessary offices and ornaments; 6s. 8d. in bread, cheese, spices, and ale to be provided for parishioners and others in attendance; and 2s. for two new wax tapers to be provided by Roger and Joan Whale to burn at the head and foot of her grave during her anniversary. Immediately after her requiem mass each year, the remainder of the 20s. was to be distributed by Roger and Joan among the poor of the parish to pray for the aforementioned souls. The 1548 London and Middlesex chantry certificate records that Roger and Joan Whale did as requested and arranged for Elizabeth's commemoration to continue after their own deaths at a cost of 20s., though the sums listed are simply 10s. 10d. spent at the obit and 9s. 2d. to the poor.⁸⁴ Surviving parish records for this period are scant and so it is rare to be able to match the commemoration specified in a woman's will to evidence of services which actually took place. Although the manner in which Elizabeth's annual 20s. was divided had been altered, a hundred years after she made her will, the arrangements she made lasted intact until the chantries were dissolved.

These arrangements are fairly typical of vowesses in the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries.⁸⁵ This section will use the surviving thirty-two wills of vowesses in this study to ascertain whether any characteristics of the

83 BL, Harley Charter, 55 H 16. Dr Jane Williams kindly provided a transcription.

84 *London and Middlesex Chantry Certificate, 1548*, ed. by C. J Kitching (Kent: London Record Society, 1980), no. 102.

85 Barbara Harris has similarly discussed the burial, commemoration, and public identity of aristocratic women during this period: 'Defining Themselves: English Aristocratic Women, 1450-1550', *Journal of British Studies*, 49.4 (2010), 734-52.

commemoration specified in vowesses' wills are particular to vowed women.⁸⁶ As Clive Burgess wrote in his essay on the shortcomings of wills in the context of examining medieval piety, many funereal and commemorative arrangements were made in the testator's lifetime and omitted from the will.⁸⁷ This is confirmed by the case of Alice Hampton, who ensured that she was remembered at her parish church of Minchinhampton in Gloucestershire by donating a bell inscribed with her name.⁸⁸ She gave the bell shortly after writing her will, and the will does not at any point refer to her intention.⁸⁹ This examination of vowesses' funeral arrangements must, then, remain incomplete, perhaps raising more questions than it answers. Nonetheless, it will go some way toward establishing whether vowesses' funeral arrangements differ in any way from those of their contemporaries.

One of the primary functions of a will was usually to stipulate where the individual wished to be buried. Elizabeth Willford was explicit in her intention that she be buried with her late husband, and Agnes Wyggeston took this further, desiring to reside in 'the body of the church and chapel that my husband there founded as nye to my husband as may be.'⁹⁰ This suggests either a marital fondness which remained strong, in Elizabeth's case, more than thirty years after she was widowed, or a desire to be associated with the husband for reasons of status.⁹¹ Either way, it raises the question of the extent to which vowesses, who were usually widows, identified themselves with their dead husbands or the extent to which they claimed independence, a theme touched upon in the previous

86 See the second appendix for a list of these wills.

87 Clive Burgess, 'Late Medieval Wills and Pious Convention: Testamentary Evidence Reconsidered', in *Profit, Piety and the Professions in Later Medieval England*, ed. by Michael A. Hicks (Gloucester: Sutton, 1990), pp. 15-33.

88 Playne, *A History of the Parishes of Minchinhampton and Avening*, p. 70.

89 LMA, CC 9171/9, fol. 5v-6.

90 BL, Harley Charter, 55 H 16; *A Calendar of Charters and Other Documents Belonging to the Hospital of William Wyggeston at Leicester*, ed. by A. Hamilton Thompson (Leicester: Edgar Backus, 1933), pp. 46-9.

91 Elizabeth Willford was vowed in 1407. See the register of Nicholas Bubwith, Bishop of London, transcribed by Una C. Hannam: 'The Administration of the See of London Under Bishops Roger Walden (1405-6) and Nicholas Bubwith (1406-7) with a Transcript of their Registers' (unpublished MA dissertation, University of London, 1951), pp. 163-4. The vow also appears in the third appendix to this thesis.

section and to be further developed in the next chapter. Burial with one's spouse was the usual choice but not universal: some women were buried alone, although this may have been also due to practicalities and where they were when they died.

Another popular request amongst vowesses was burial in the local parish church. Margaret Davey resolved the conflict between her loyalties to her husband and her parish church by asking to be buried with her husband, at All Hallows' church in Maldon, but adding that a dirige and mass should also be said for her in the parish church at Bardwell 'so that the vicary may have his offering as he shuld have If I had be buried here.'⁹² Another popular burial location for vowesses was in a religious house: Jane Chamberlayne asked to be buried at Kilburn Priory, Alice Beselles at Syon Abbey, Agnes Burton at Taunton Priory, and Margaret Croke at the convent church of the Friars Preachers of London.⁹³ Finally, two vowesses asked to be buried in front of a particular saint's statue: Agnes Burton 'bifore the ymage of seynt Botolphe', and Margaret Croke 'afore the image of seint Sithe' (St Zita).⁹⁴ This is a means of indicating a precise location but equally it may be indicative of a devotion to that particular saint, providing a potential insight into these vowesses' personal piety.

St Zita was one of the more popular saints which the Church presented as a role model for late medieval women.⁹⁵ Carole Hill has written about several such saints, and about what their cults meant to women in late medieval Norwich.⁹⁶ The most prominent of all female saints was, of course, the Virgin Mary, mother of Christ, 'queen of heaven and empress of hell' and 'intercessor without equal.'⁹⁷ Her mother, St Anne, also modelled ideal maternity and childrearing, but additionally offered hope to the infertile and was 'often portrayed as a prosperous

92 TNA, PCC Prob. 11/8/289.

93 TNA, PCC Prob. 11/9/115; 11/22/150; 11/14/120; 11/9/12. Jane Chamberlayne here is not to be confused with the Joan Chamberlain of Susan Steuer's thesis. Vowesses' relationship to female religious houses will be explored in the fourth chapter of this thesis.

94 TNA, PCC Prob. 11/14/120; 11/9/12.

95 Caroline M. Barron has written in detail on St. Zita: 'The Travelling Saint: Zita of Lucca and England', in *Freedom of Movement in the Middle Ages: Proceedings of the 2003 Harlaxton Symposium*, ed. by Peregrine Horden (Donington: Shaun Tyas, 2007), pp. 186-202.

96 Hill, *Women and Religion in Late Medieval Norwich*: Hill dedicates each of the first four chapters to one saint.

97 *Ibid.*, pp. 1-2.

thrice-married merchant's wife.'⁹⁸ Other popular female saints were Mary Magdalene, the rehabilitated fallen woman of the gospels; St Margaret of Antioch, virgin martyr and patron of safe childbirth; and St Bridget, whose life was of particular relevance to vowesses.⁹⁹ Nicola Lowe writes of St Zita:

'The saint, who spent her life in domestic service, was a model not just for female servants but, because of her chastity, charity and piety, for the daughters of better-off families too. This aspect of the feminine ideal conditioned women's social activity and their devotional responses, providing a practical, visual and sensual vocabulary for religious expression which drew upon the physical nature of their everyday tasks and their involvement with all the processes of life and death. Apart from running the home and providing food and clothing, women gave birth, they cared for babies, both their own and other people's as wet-nurses, they taught their children, and cared for their families, for the poor, the infirm, the dying and the dead. Such activities are valorised in the increasingly domestic religious imagery of the period.'¹⁰⁰

St Zita did not simply exemplify behaviour which women were expected to imitate: she was perceived to embody domestic virtues which were explicitly feminine. Margaret Croke may have wished for her body to eternally reside in front of St Zita's statue because, having raised her own family before vowing, she wished to be associated with this image of the actively pious wife and mother.

Wills also served as a means for testators to arrange a funeral. A medieval funeral was not a single ceremony. Joan Byfeld stipulated that her funeral was to last almost continuously for a month, with 'every day by a moneth next suyng afre my decesse placebo drige and masse of requiem by note.... that is to wit

98 *Ibid.*, pp. 12, 17-60.

99 *Ibid.*, pp. 12-13, 61-85 (St Margaret), 86-106 (Mary Magdalene), 107-17 (St Bridget). St Bridget will be revisited in the next chapter.

100 Nicola A. Lowe, 'Women's Devotional Bequests of Textiles in the Late Medieval English Parish Church, c. 1350-1550', *Gender and History*, 22.2 (2010), 407-429 (p. 422).

every day on eve placebo and dirige by note and on every morowe folowing masse of requiem by note.¹⁰¹ This would then have been followed by the month's mind and anniversary services. The month's mind was the celebration of requiem services and prayers one month on from the date of death or the burial. Making funeral arrangements was therefore not so much the organisation of an event as providing long-term, even perpetual, commemoration for oneself. Elizabeth Willford's will exemplifies this: she required Roger and Joan Whale to maintain her anniversary and went on to provide two contingency plans should they fail to do so, arranging the reversion of her land to others who were similarly obliged.¹⁰² Margery Middlemore arranged for a priest to sing and say prayers at her parish church in Edgbaston, Warwickshire 'on hole yere' after her decease.¹⁰³ Alice Brice provided a priest for three years.¹⁰⁴ Agnes Burton went so far as to arrange for the revenue from her property to provide a priest 'contynnally for ever', including plans for replacing him with another after his decease and for replacing the feoffes who paid him after their deaths.¹⁰⁵ Like many of their contemporaries, most vowesses were concerned with the longevity of their memory and desired that they should go on being prayed for long after their decease. Often their deeds of charity, such as staffing their parish church, arose seamlessly from their arrangements for funeral and commemorative observances. Several of these vowesses' wills, quoted above, are remarkable in the level of detail specified in these arrangements.

The provision of the priest to sing the funeral services is itself an issue which merits consideration. Some vowesses were more specific than others about their choice of priest: Alice Brice merely required 'an honest priest', while Jane Armstrong named Robert Andro.¹⁰⁶ Katherine Langley appointed five priests to sing for herself, her friends, and her family, naming the first as Richard Consett

101 TNA, PCC Prob. 11/9/253.

102 BL, Harley Charter, 55 H 16.

103 TNA, PCC Prob.11/24/14.

104 TNA, PCC Prob. 11/11/576.

105 TNA, PCC Prob. 11/14/120.

106 TNA, PCC Prob. 11/11/576; *Lincoln Wills Registered in the District Probate Registry at Lincoln*, ed. by C. W. Foster, 3 vols (Lincoln: Lincoln Record Society, 1914-30), ii (1918), p. 143.

and requiring that the others only 'be chosyn and takyn of such as be of goode name and lyke to profitt in divinite within the universite of Cambrege and Oxford.'¹⁰⁷ Agnes Burton referred to a verbal agreement with priest John Wile and went on to stipulate precisely which commemorative services she desired: 'the said preest shall say... the masse of the fyve Wounds every moneth driges and comendations with the psalmes of the passion.'¹⁰⁸ Katherine Courtenay, Countess of Devon was still more specific: she required that the three priests she funded should say the Trinity mass on Sunday, St Katherine's mass on Monday, St Thomas of Canterbury's on Tuesday, the Five Wounds on Wednesday, the Corpus Christi on Thursday, the Name of Jesus on Friday, and the Assumption of Our Lady on Saturday, except on feast days, when they should substitute for the appropriate service. They were also to meet weekly for dirige with commendations and dirige with nine lessons, and then the following morning to meet again for seven psalms and the Latinie, with the common suffrage following and a requiem mass.¹⁰⁹ Such elaborate specifications provide insight into the religious interests of women who were not simply pious, but well-versed in the liturgical options available and the latest devotional trends.

Agnes Burton was also meticulous about the material requirements for her chantry and funeral services. She put money from her lands aside to 'be putt in a coffre for the reparation of my chanterye', which may have been shared with her husband and built at his death some fifteen or so years previously, and may have already required maintenance. Whether or not this was the case, it is clear that Agnes envisioned her chantry as a long-term, even perpetual, fixture (although, unknown to her, it would be destroyed at the Reformation), and as such it would be in need of repair and maintenance from time to time. Agnes also requested that her executors 'make a pall of velvet and silke to give to the herse in the daies of the obite of Richard Burton and me and that it be kept with the implements of my

107 LMA, MS 9531/9, fols viii to x (3rd ser.), fol. 30v.

108 TNA, PCC Prob. 11/14/120. For more about the devotion and Mass of the Five Wounds of Jesus, see: Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England 1400-1580* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1992), pp. 238-48.

109 George Oliver, 'The Will of Katharine, Countess of Devon, Daughter of Edward IV', *Archaeological Journal*, 10 (1853), 53-8

chanterye.¹¹⁰ Again, the level of detail in the stipulations for funerary and commemorative arrangements here is striking. It provides a template for how others may have made similar arrangements outside of their wills, especially since chantries were commonly established before death. Equally, though, it may indicate that vowesses like Agnes Burton simply expended more energy on such things than was usual.

One material requirement for funeral services commonly specified in vowesses' wills was torches and/or wax tapers for burning. Alice Beselles' will reads: 'I will there be at my burying xii torches and xii pour men to holde them while the dirige and masses be a seying and they to have everich of them a black gowne and a hood after as the custume is used at burialls.' The torches were then to be given to poor churches at her executrix' discretion.¹¹¹ Joan Byfield went so far as to stipulate where each of her twenty torches should go: to various parish churches in London, to guilds in her home parish of St. Dunstan-in-the-East, to the Minoresses without Aldgate, to the chapel of Our Lady of Willesden, to the parish of Our Lady of Chalke beside Gravesend, and to the altar in St. Paul's 'wher the priest singing for myn husbondes soule useth to say his masse.'¹¹² Thus Joan Byfeld, like Agnes Burton, made arrangements that were both highly detailed and suggestive of her loyalties in life.

In a similar vein, vowesses ensured that not only they, but their family, friends, and benefactors, were commemorated and prayed for. Jane Armstrong arranged that her priest would 'syng for my soule and my frende soullys' while Margery Middlemore and Katherine Rippelingham planned prayers for their husbands' souls, and Margaret Croke also named her parents and provided for them to be prayed for.¹¹³ Katherine Langley's will is exceptional in that she provided individual priests to sing for herself, her husband, her parents, William Chubbes, and all whom she may have wronged.¹¹⁴ She goes on to name twelve

110 *Ibid.*

111 TNA, PCC Prob. 11/22/150.

112 TNA, PCC Prob. 11/8/253.

113 *Lincoln Wills*, ed. by Foster, ii, p. 143; TNA, PCC Prob. 11/24/14; 11/6/240; 11/9/12.

114 Katherine's relationship with William Chubbes will be discussed in chapter three.

different friends and family members for whom trentalls were to be said.¹¹⁵ The care in these arrangements demonstrates her belief in the power of prayer to assist the soul after death. In several of these wills, the list of people to be prayed for is almost formulaic: Joan Byfeld's is 'my soule and the soule of my said Late husband and for the soules of our ffadres and modres and benefactours and for all christen soules'; Alice Brice's is 'my soule the soules of my husbonds... my frendes benefactors and all cristen soules'; and Elizabeth Willford's is her husbands' souls, their former wives and 'the soulis of oure ffadyrs l and modyrs and al oure ffrendis soulis to whom we be holdyn nedefully And of al true crystyn people.'¹¹⁶ The 'friend' here can mean a friend in the usual sense of the word, but it is frequently accompanied by the word 'benefactor' to mean someone who provided for the vowess, financially or spiritually. Although a testator might feel obligated to provide prayer and commemoration for the souls of those who have benefited him or her on earth, the relationship, however, was a reciprocal one. The testator would equally expect to be helped through Purgatory by the prayers of the saints and of those, known in life, who were already there. This can be extended to embrace the whole Church: 'all Christian souls'. It is also perhaps why Agnes Burton, ever thorough, provided a long list of names of people to be remembered.¹¹⁷ The naming of individuals to be prayed for tells us not only who these vowesses might have cared for, but with whom they wished to be identified and, perhaps more importantly, with whom they identified themselves.

Funeral arrangements highlight the importance to vowesses, as to many of their contemporaries, of being prayed for continually and effectively after their decease. An additional means of ensuring this was paying for it specifically. Katherine Ripplingham left 6s 8d. to Westminster Abbey 'to pray for my housbands soule... and for my soule'; and Margaret Croke left money and goods to the London Friars Preachers to pray for her and her husband's souls.¹¹⁸ Vowesses also paid clergy, friars, and other religious personnel to attend their funerals. Jane

115 LMA, MS 9531/9, fols viii to x (3rd ser.), fol. 30v.

116 TNA, PCC Prob. 11/9/253; 11/11/576; BL, Harley Charter, 55 H 16.

117 TNA, PCC Prob. 11/14/120.

118 TNA, PCC Prob. 11/6/240; 11/9/12.

Chamberlayne's will reads: 'I bequeth to the prioresse [of Kilburn Priory]... if she be present at my dirge on nyght and masse on the morowe xx d. And to every suster of the same place and preest being at the same dirge and masse xii d.'¹¹⁹

Similarly, Katherine Colman stipulated that 'at the day of my burying there be given to every sole priest coming thereto 4d., and to every clerk 2d., and to every poor man, woman and child that cometh to my said burying 1d.'¹²⁰

The poor were identified as having a unique role as intercessors in prayer. Agnes Burton required her executors to 'ordeyne for me xii gowones of fryce and vi torches for poore men to bere theym takyng every of theym mete and drynke and iii d in mony', and Joan Byfeld desired that the wax and torches at her funeral service 'behold by xxiiii poure persones.'¹²¹ The wills also frequently include almsgiving as part of the funeral. Margery Middlemore required her executor to 'bestow at my burying xx li amongs preests clerks poore people'; Margaret Croke left 'in alms to poor people at my burying peny mele 40s.'; and Margaret Chocke arranged for 5d. a week to be distributed amongst the poorest in Long Ashton, Somerset for six months after her decease.¹²² Katherine Langley included almsgiving in the instructions for her month's mind and extended this to a public dinner at her husband's family seat of Rickling Hall in Essex.¹²³ The obvious biblical emphasis on care for the poor was enhanced, for the late medieval testator, by the fact that the prayers of the poor were believed to be especially effective in speeding the soul through Purgatory.¹²⁴ Altruism thus collided and combined with self-interest: by assisting others, one assisted oneself by ensuring the best possible chances in the afterlife. Clive Burgess describes this as a 'self-help salvation': Purgatory was good news, making salvation widely accessible and

119 TNA, PCC Prob. 11/9/115.

120 TNA, PCC Prob. 11/24/176. 'Sole' priest could be another way of saying 'each' priest or it could refer specifically to a chantry priest.

121 TNA, PCC Prob. 11/14/120; 11/9/253.

122 TNA, PCC Prob. 11/24/14; 11/9/12; 11/7/156. The phrase 'peny mele' is not in the Oxford English Dictionary and its meaning appears to have been lost.

123 LMA, MS 9531/9, fols viii to x (3rd ser.), fol. 30v. For more on vowesses' charity, see chapter five.

124 Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars*, pp. 354-7.

encouraging penitential acts of charity which benefited the parish, the church, and the poor.¹²⁵

The overall impression is that vowesses' commemorative arrangements, as outlined in their wills, do not differ significantly from those of their contemporaries.¹²⁶ However, some of these wills are unusually detailed in their specifications. It seems that some vowesses, at least, were especially conscious of the commemorative opportunities offered by the late medieval Church to those who could afford to pay for them. The piety of these women was conventional, but it was an informed piety: vowesses tended to be particularly familiar with the Church and how it operated. They could thus utilise it effectively for their own commemoration and to accelerate their progress through Purgatory. Having consecrated herself to God, a vowess could be argued to have had a special call to prayer which she might have wished to continue after her death. It is likely that some women who were not vowed would have shared this rather intense interest in prayer and liturgical commemoration, but, given the number of lengthy specifications in such a small sample of vowesses' wills, it seems that vowesses were more frequently inclined to be this way. We cannot know what was arranged outside of wills, but the wills alone prove that many vowesses were meticulous about ensuring that everything for ongoing funeral services - priests, chantries, torches, even the grateful poor - was in place.

Preambles to Vowesses' Wills

Although the preambles to these documents are universally formulaic, they are nonetheless relevant to the question of the distinctiveness of vowesses' wills. This section will consider to what extent will preambles can be said to reflect the piety or wishes of the testator and then apply this to the wills of vowed women in this study. It will itemise the preamble formula, step by step, (though in a few

125 Clive Burgess, 'A Fond Thing Vainly Invented: An Essay on Purgatory and Pious Motive in Later Medieval England', in *Parish, Church and People: Local Studies in Lay Religion, 1350-1750*, ed. by S. J. Wright (London: Hutchinson, 1988), pp. 56-84.

126 See Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars*, pp. 301-76.

cases one or two steps are missing), whilst extracting themes of interest in the minutiae of the wording. It will then go on to consider if anything about vowesses' preambles is unique by briefly comparing the thirty-two vowesses' wills with a survey of twenty other contemporary wills.

Margaret Spufford has highlighted the conventional character of will preambles, the role of scribes, such as local clerics or scriveners, in composition and copying and, indeed, editing, and the fact that wills were often based on model wills in precedent books, almanacs, and devotional treatises.¹²⁷ M. L. Zell adds that we cannot be sure that the testaments were written by the testators, wholly or in part.¹²⁸ For this reason, preambles' trustworthiness as indicators of personal belief is suspect and impossible to ascertain.¹²⁹ This is a contributing factor in the problematic nature of using will preambles to chart the prevalence of Lollardy or the rise of Protestant belief. Eamon Duffy has explained how and why identifying Catholic and Protestant wills is in fact far more complex than it first appears, and this extends to Lollard wills also.¹³⁰ Any attempt to identify vowesses by their will preambles, unless they explicitly identify the woman as such, is doomed to failure. However, when one has a sample of wills of women known to have been vowesses, the preambles are more likely to be of use in ascertaining whether any characteristics are suggestive of vowed status. As J. D. Alsop writes, how widespread the reliance upon will formularies was is unknown and, while it is often unclear to what extent a preamble was part of a set form and to what extent it reflects the wishes of the testator, it is clear that some testators took the initial bequest of the soul very seriously and seized this opportunity to express 'heartfelt' convictions.¹³¹

127 Margaret Spufford, *Contrasting Communities: English Villagers in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974), pp. 320-44.

128 M. L. Zell, 'The Use of Religious Preambles as a Measure of Religious Belief in the Sixteenth Century', *Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research*, 50 (1977), 246-8.

129 J. D. Alsop, 'Religious Preambles in Early Modern English Wills as Formulae', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 40 (1989), 19-27 (pp. 26-7).

130 Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars*, pp. 506-23.

131 Alsop, 'Religious Preambles in Early Modern English Wills as Formulae', 20-22 and 19 respectively.

Of the wills in this study, those of Joan Danvers and Alice Lynne, dated 1453 and 1458 respectively, are the only ones entirely in Latin, although Joan's has an English codicil.¹³² That the majority of the wills are in English is explained by the fact that most date from the end of the fifteenth century and the beginning of the sixteenth, as the composition of wills gradually shifted from Latin to English over the latter half of the fifteenth century. The wills of Joan Danvers and Alice Lynne are amongst the earliest wills in the study, though not the very earliest: Elizabeth Willford's will is dated 1441 and is in English.¹³³ The scarcity of vowesses' wills from before approximately 1470 may be explained by the spike in popularity of vowing ceremonies around this time, as discussed in the Introduction, or it may be that more abundant surviving records have enabled more vowesses to be identified in the latter two thirds or so of this ninety year study.

Each will begins with 'In the name of God, amen', either in English or in Latin, with the exception of three: Margaret Browne lengthened this to 'In the name of Almighty god Amen'; Agnes Wyggeston to 'In the name of the highe & most blessid trinyte'; and Alice Chester to 'In the name of almighty god three persons in Trynitie and oon god in deitie my maker redemer and of graces gever and of the glorious virgin and moder of Jhuchiste and of all the hole company of heven.'¹³⁴ Although the Trinity was a popular devotion, to begin a will in this way is eccentric, possibly unique, suggestive an extremely earnest, even anxious, piety. Generally speaking, the switch from Latin to English for the phrase 'In the name of God, amen' seems to occur around 1500, though some earlier wills do use the English. 'In the name of God, amen' is universally followed by the date, which is of obvious necessity.

132 TNA, PCC Prob. 11/4/212; LMA, Husting Wills, CLA/023/DW/01/210, no. 13. Alice Lynne's will was not proved until 1480 and she was still living on Mincing Lane in 1470, so the will considerably predated her death: Erler, 'Three Fifteenth-Century Vowesses', in *Medieval London Widows*, ed. by Barron and Sutton, pp. 165-84 (p. 169).

133 BL, Harley Charter, 55 H 16.

134 TNA, PCC Prob. 11/8/525; *A Calendar of Charters...*, ed. by Thompson, pp. 46-9; TNA, PCC Prob. 11/14/662. Alice Chester here is not to be confused with the contemporary widow of All Saints', Bristol, who shared the name.

The vowess then went on to identify herself, and word choice here potentially reveals a great deal about how vowesses saw themselves and how they wished to be seen. In approximately half of these wills, the vowess adopted her title of 'Dame', such as 'I Dame Jone Cooke'.¹³⁵ This title was accorded to vowesses, although not exclusively, and was a mark of respect. That half of the vowesses studied should disregard her title was possibly a show of humility. Another half or so of the vowesses, all but one of whom were widows, identified themselves as 'widow', while even fewer explicitly called themselves a vowess.¹³⁶ This suggests that some vowesses did not consider their vowess status to be crucial to their social position. The failure on the part of more than half of vowesses to declare their vowess status in their wills, combined with the incomplete survival of bishop's registers, has contributed to the ambiguity around the popularity of vowing.¹³⁷

More than half of the thirty-two vowesses made some reference to their location when identifying themselves: again, Joan Cooke referred to herself as 'within the cite of gloucester'.¹³⁸ This could be to avoid confusion with another woman of the same name, but it also suggests loyalty to a locality. A further half of the vowesses mentioned to whom they were married, and most of these went on to list their former husband's trade, achievements, or social position. Joan Cooke specified that her husband was 'one of the aldermen of the same cite'; and Agnes Wyggeston described hers as a 'merchaunt of the staple at calys.' John Cooke and William Wyggeston were both also mayors but strangely their wives' wills did not mention this.¹³⁹ Margaret Chocke named her husband as 'Syr Richard Chocke Knyght oon of the Kynges Justices of the comyn place.'¹⁴⁰ Elizabeth Willford stated that her father was 'Cytezeyn while he lyved and wolman of the

135 TNA, PCC Prob. 11/31/72.

136 See the Introduction for how vowesses referred to themselves as vowed in their wills. It is likely that a disproportionate number of vowesses appear to have done this because the ones who did are easier to identify.

137 This is further discussed in the Introduction.

138 TNA, PCC Prob. 11/31/72.

139 *Ibid.*; *A Calendar of Charters...*, ed. by Thompson, pp. 46-9.

140 TNA, PCC Prob. 11/7/156. For a biography of Richard Chocke, see Joel T. Rosenthal, 'Sir Richard Choke (d. 1483) of Long Ashton', *Somerset Archaeology and Natural History*, 127 (1983), 105-121. The couple's tomb survives at All Saints' Church in Long Ashton.

seid Cytee of london.'¹⁴¹ Lady Margaret Beaufort predictably named herself as mother of Henry VII.¹⁴² Katherine Courtenay, Countess of Devon, styled herself 'Daughter, Suster, and Aunte of Kynges'.¹⁴³ This suggests that, even after a man's death, his wife's and, to a lesser extent, his daughters' place in society was determined by his own, and some vowesses seem to have declared the achievements of their husbands, or other male family members, as evidence of their own exalted position.

The next section of the formulaic preamble fulfilled legal requirements in two parts: firstly, the vowess stated that she was of sound mind and, secondly, that she was making the following testament. Some vowesses choose to embellish this section, however: Alice Lynne added that she was also of sound body; Jane Chamberlayne paused to quickly thank God for her sound mind, as did Joan Marler and Joan Byfeld.¹⁴⁴ Alice Hampton included a similar pious interjection: 'bryng lawde and prayse unto allmighty god.'¹⁴⁵ Katherine Langley added to the assurance that she herself is making the testament the fact that she did so 'after the custome and ordenence of our mother holy Church', confirming her orthodoxy as well as the legality of the will.¹⁴⁶ Joan Danvers inserted an interesting philosophical thought, common at the time, contrasting the certainty of death with the uncertainty of when one can expect to die: '...satis sciens nature legibus diffinitum quod certius nil morte incertius nil hora mortis et ut sit hora mortis inopinata sagaci ordinacione queat securius praeveniri'.¹⁴⁷ Lady Margaret expressed a similar statement, as Katherine Courtenay, Countess of Devon, and Alice Beselles, who added her compliance: 'willing to be redye therunto when I

141 BL, Harley Charter, 55 H 16.

142 Caroline A. Halstead, *Life of Margaret Beaufort, Countess of Richmond and Derby* (London: Smith, Elder and Co. Cornhill, 1839), pp. 242-7.

143 Oliver, 'The Will of Katharine, Countess of Devon', 53-8.

144 LMA, HW, CLA/023/DW/01/210, no. 13; TNA, PCC Prob. 11/9/115; unregistered PCC will; 11/ 9/253.

145 LMA, CC 9171/9, fol. 5v-6.

146 LMA, MS 9531/9, fols viii to x (3rd ser.), fol. 30v.

147 TNA, PCC Prob. 11/4/212. Translation: '...knowing well enough because of natural laws it has been established that nothing is more uncertain than death nor the hour of death nor can the unexpected hour of death be anticipated with a wise arrangement.'

am called.¹⁴⁸ Margaret Chocke, more simply, described herself as ‘thinking of this transitory and passing dayes.’¹⁴⁹ The decoration of these legal formalities with such devout interjections suggests not only piety but the self-conscious presentation of piety. This conforms to the fact that the vowess state was defined by chastity, and by extension piety, being formally and publicly recognised.

The next section of the formula is that in which the vowess recommended her soul to God, the Virgin Mary, and all the saints.¹⁵⁰ Again, the embellishments of this part of the preamble reveal not simply piety but also the public projection of piety, to the reader of the will and to God. Perhaps the most obvious example is Joan Danvers, who declared herself to be ‘in puritate et sinceritate fidei catholice.’¹⁵¹ She also described herself as ‘interiori devocione et omni mortis desiderio.’¹⁵² The fact that she claimed to desire death suggests confidence, or projected confidence, in attaining a place in heaven. Agnes Wyggeston bequeathed her soul ‘to his infynyte goodnes besechyng hym to receve it into the number of them that shalbe saued and to be oon of the parte takers of the merytes of his blissed passyon.’¹⁵³ Such sentiments reflect the ongoing theological debates in the later Middle Ages, concerning predestination, divine grace, and free will.¹⁵⁴ The preambles suggest that some of these women, or those involved in the composition of their wills, were familiar with these concepts.

In these wills, God is almost universally described as ‘almighty’ and just under half of the vowesses also identified Him as their ‘creator’ or ‘maker’ whilst most of these also added ‘saviour’ and/or ‘redeemer’. Mary, likewise, is, in most instances, ‘Our Lady’, in many also, ‘blessed’ and, in a few instances, ‘glorious’.

148 Halstead, *Life of Margaret Beaufort*, pp. 242-7; Oliver, ‘The Will of Katharine, Countess of Devon’, 53-8; TNA, PCC Prob. 11/22/150.

149 TNA, PCC Prob. 11/7/156.

150 The exceptions to this, as one would expect, are the later wills, in which the soul is recommended only to God or the Trinity.

151 TNA, PCC Prob. 11/4/212. Translation: ‘in purity and sincerity of the catholic faith’.

152 Translation: ‘with inward devotion and with full desire of death’.

153 *A Calendar of Charters...*, ed. by Thompson, pp. 46-9.

154 For more on this, see Francis Oakley, *The Western Church in the Later Middle Ages* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1979), pp. 133-48, summarised: W. A. Pantin, *The English Church in the Fourteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1955), p. 131. This topic, with reference to the will of Katherine Langley, will be revisited in chapter three.

Maud Baker gave Mary the most elaborate epithet: 'Queen of Pity and Mother of Mercy.'¹⁵⁵ Margaret Chocke described similarly her as Christ's 'blissid moder quene of mercy and of grace.'¹⁵⁶ The saints are also, in just under half of the wills, the 'holy' or 'celestial' 'company of heaven. These pious additions reveal a conventional, if fairly intense, spirituality, projected into the will as part of the vowess' identity. The simplest version of this part of the formula appears in the will of Susan Kyngeston (1540): 'First I bequeath my soul unto Almighty God', omitting Mary and the saints.¹⁵⁷ It is difficult not to associate this with the fact that, in the preceding years, Susan witnessed the conviction and execution of Elizabeth Barton, and saw her beloved Syon dismantled. The preamble cannot be said to express Protestant convictions, but it is certainly indicative of the times in which Susan Kyngeston lived.

The preamble formula concludes with the vowess' desired place of burial. Four vowesses, after stating a preference for where they would like to be buried, added a clause which essentially left it to the convenience of the executors. In Joan Byfeld's words, 'if it may so esely be done.'¹⁵⁸ The will of Margery Middlemore adds, 'or wherels ther that yt shall please god that I die.'¹⁵⁹ Agnes Burton's will refers to the grave itself with reverence: 'my body to the holy grave and sepultur'. This does not refer to a site which had already been blessed, as she did not stipulate that she was to be buried with her husband or anyone else. Perhaps it suggests, like Joan Danvers' will, a perception of something innately holy and therefore desirable about a Christian death.¹⁶⁰

Vowesses' wills are clearly embellished to demonstrate piety. The question remains, however, whether these embellishments and thus this piety were unique to vowesses or whether they surface in other contemporary wills. A survey was taken of the preambles to twenty other wills, those of five women and fifteen men, of a similar social position to the vowesses and also similar in date. It was, of

¹⁵⁵ *The Pre-Reformation Records of All Saints' Church, Bristol*, ed. by Burgess, iii, pp. 33-9.

¹⁵⁶ TNA, PCC Prob. 11/7/156.

¹⁵⁷ TNA, PCC Prob. 11/28/484.

¹⁵⁸ TNA, PCC Prob. 11/9/253.

¹⁵⁹ TNA, PCC Prob. 11/24/14.

¹⁶⁰ TNA, PCC Prob. 11/14/120.

course, impossible to prove that the women were not vowesses, but women were specifically chosen who did not identify themselves as 'Dame' to reduce the likelihood of this. Five of these twenty thanked God for their good health or sound mental state. When the soul was recommended to God, He was, again, almost universally described as 'Almighty' and, in five instances, also as the testator's 'maker' or 'creator', in a further six, as his or her 'saviour', twice as 'redeemer', once as 'lord' and once as 'fadre of heuen'. Mary was, in thirteen instances, 'Our Lady', in eight instances, 'blessed' and, in three instances, 'glorious'. The saints were specifically acknowledged as 'holy' on nine occasions and as 'blessed' on one.

The overall impression is that these qualifiers do appear with higher frequency in vowesses' wills, though the difference is not profound. More striking are the extended additions to the formula, such as Maud Baker's addressing the Virgin as 'Queen of Pity and Mother of Mercy', Alice Chester's beginning 'In the name of almighty god three persons in Trynitie and oon god in deitie my maker redemer and of graces gever and of the glorious virgin and moder of Jhuchiste and of all the hole company of heven', and Joan Danvers' declaring herself to be 'interiori devocione et omni mortis desiderio'. These more elaborate additions are missing from the other set of wills.¹⁶¹ The wording of vowed women's wills, when referring to religious matters, tended to be more intense and highly wrought.

The findings from such a small sample are more convincing when considered alongside Peter Heath's study on Hull wills (1450-1530). Out of 335 Hull wills, in twelve, God is described as 'my creator' and, in five, as 'my saviour'. Heath's description of his findings states that, apart from a few testators, such as one particular circle who knew each other and who name many saints in their wills, the preambles were much shorter and simpler than for our vowesses. It can be concluded, then, that, despite the problems and issues surrounding will preambles, it is clear that those to vowesses' wills are, in general, more elaborate and indicative of fervent piety. Also, as with vowesses' funeral arrangements, the

¹⁶¹ *The Pre-Reformation Records of All Saints' Church*, ed. by Burgess, iii, pp. 33-9; TNA, PCC Prob. 11/14/662; 11/4/212.

preambles suggest theological awareness and familiarity with the Church and how it operated.

Conclusion

This survey of vowesses' monumental brasses, funeral arrangements, and will preambles has highlighted the variety amongst vowed women. Vowesses were not required to sever themselves from their families, as nuns were, and many chose to remain as much a part of the family unit as ever. Their brasses, burials, and wills emphasise family connections as paramount to social identity. Other women chose to seize the ring and mantle as a means to greater independence and influence in their own right. The vow offered the opportunity for a woman to be known in her community as a quasi-religious figure, depicted in a habit on her monumental brass, naming herself as 'vowess' upon it and in her will. Some vowed women's brasses and wills thus present an image of intense piety, whilst others are fairly indistinguishable from those of other widows. The vocation was characterised by its flexibility: the only requirement made of vowesses was chastity, and so living arrangements, devotional practice, and public identity varied from woman to woman according to personal preference. Any simplistic discussion of vowesses as a homogeneous group inevitably falls flat.

Equally, however, this sample of vowesses' wills reveals some general characteristics which are considerably less prevalent in other contemporary wills, even those of widows. It appears that vowesses were especially familiar with the commemorative opportunities offered by the Church and with how these could be utilised to maximum effect. The level of detail in their specifications, particularly where they relate to the parish church, suggests that these women were more intimately involved and more emotionally invested in proceedings there.¹⁶² Vowesses' will preambles, similarly, indicate a more intense and better informed spirituality than those of the general population. This may have been the result of a closer association with the clergy or professed religious, or greater exposure to

¹⁶² Vowesses' parish involvement will be explored in chapter four.

devotional literature. These are, of course, generalisations and do not apply to every single will, but nonetheless they suggest that the chastity vow was often more than a means to satisfy conditions of a husband's will, or the result of external pressure, or an escape from the inconvenience of remarriage and the danger of childbirth. They also suggest that, for many of these women, vowed status was an essential aspect of their self-image and their role in society.

Chapter Two: ‘The Bride of Christ’: Spiritual and Physical Marriage

Widowhood was integral to the medieval understanding of the vowess vocation, as the custom of vowing was believed to have originated from St Paul's teachings on widows. As discussed in the Introduction, many women at their vowing ceremony referred to the vow as ‘the purpose and vowe of perpetuel castitie acordyng to the rule and ordinaunce of the blessid apostill seynte Paule.’¹ Others referred to being a vowess in their wills by describing themselves as ‘in my pure widowhood’ although this was not a guaranteed indicator that a woman was vowed. The vast majority of vowesses were widows.

The exceptions, then, are worth studying more closely, and there are only a few within the parameters of this study. The Introduction describes how Lady Margaret Beaufort vowed with the permission of her husband and set up a separate household, then renewed her vow after she was widowed.² Her wealth, political power and position as the king's mother enabled her to break with convention without being questioned. Vowess Emma Cheyne, who was granted an allowance to live upon from the London petty customs in 1449, was named in a patent roll as ‘late the wife of the recluse of Bury St Edmund's.’³ Her husband, William, was enclosed in 1430, and Emma is described in 1449 as having been professed for twenty-two years.⁴ This shows that the couple seem to have mutually agreed upon a religious life whilst still married. Likewise, the register of Hadrian de Castello, bishop of Bath and Wells, records that Eleanor Gille gave her husband permission to enter a monastery before taking her vow and going to live

1 For further examples of such vows, see the third appendix to this thesis.

2 C. H. Cooper, ‘The Vow of Widowhood of Margaret, Countess of Richmond and Derby...’, *Communications Made to The Cambridge Antiquarian Society*, i (1859), 71-9 (72-3). The vow is now at St John’s College Archives, Cambridge: C7.11, fol. 47.

3 *Calendar of Patent Rolls, Henry VI*, ed. by Henry C. Maxwell-Lyte, 5 vols (London: Stationery Office, 1901-9; repr. Nielden and Lichenstein: Kraus, 1971), v, p. 304.

4 BL, Additional Manuscripts 14848; *CPR, Henry VI*, ed. by Maxwell-Lyte, v, p. 304

at Canonsleigh Abbey.⁵ Another unusual case was singlewoman Alice Hampton of whom a brief biography appears in the first chapter of this thesis. It seems likely that she became a vowess rather than a nun with the financial support of her uncle William Hampton, who was mayor of London, after she unexpectedly inherited the family estates.⁶

Margery Kempe, mentioned in the Introduction, may be another example of a woman who took the mantle and ring before she was widowed. The *Book* recounts how she asked the Bishop of Lincoln to vow her and he refused, yet, later, when she was nursing her husband in his old age, each ‘haddyn mad avow to levyn chast.’⁷ Mary Erler writes that it was ‘highly doubtful’ that Margery Kempe ever took a formal vow and that the ring which she considered to be her marriage-ring to Christ was probably never blessed by a bishop.⁸ Whether Margery Kempe was a vowess or not, she was exposed to the same influences as her vowed contemporaries - and near-contemporaries - and so her *Book* may shed some light on vowess piety.

This chapter will begin by exploring the concept of the non-virgin ‘bride of Christ’, examining married female mystics on the Continent and how their ideas on the subject influenced English women. It will then consider the earthly marriages which, in most cases, preceded the vowess’ symbolic spiritual union with Christ, and the effect upon a vowess’ life as a wife upon her later life as a widow, taking two aristocratic women, Anne Herbert and Lady Margaret Beaufort, as an extended case study. Finally, this chapter will present the cases of some ‘failed’ vowesses, women who remarried after taking the vow, considering the repercussions of this choice, the motivations for doing so, and what these examples tell us about women’s experience of vowing.

5 *The Registers of Oliver King, Bishop of Bath and Wells 1496-1503, and Hadrian de Castello, Bishop of Bath and Wells 1503-1518*, ed. by Henry C. Maxwell-Lyte (London: Somerset Record Society, 1939), pp. 121-2.

6 More detail on Alice’s circumstances is provided in chapter four.

7 *The Book of Margery Kempe*, ed. by Staley, i, 758-817; ii, 4239-91 (4259).

8 Erler, ‘Margery Kempe’s White Clothes’, 81.

Matron-Mystics: Continental Influences on Vowess Piety⁹

For the vowess to identify and be identified as a bride of Christ initially appears to be theologically problematic because, except on rare occasions, she was not a virgin. The widespread acceptance in England of vowesses as widowed, or occasionally married, brides of Christ, as on Agnes Browne's monumental brass, owes much to Continental influences. Since ecclesiastical structures for and recognition of the vowess vocation did not exist outside of England and Wales, it may seem surprising that this is the case. This section will explain the nature of these Continental influences, how English women were exposed to them, and how they went on to shape English female religious options in a unique way. Of course, not all women vowed chastity for pious reasons but it was because of religious ideas adopted from Germany and the Low Countries that the vowess vocation flourished and was rendered more accessible by its increased popularity.

This section will first introduce some of these concepts with five individual Continental matron-mystics whose writings and biographies taught that the religious life and a spousal relationship with Christ were available to women who were or had been married. These women and their ideas are discussed in Rabia Gregory's unpublished doctoral thesis, 'Marrying Jesus: Brides and the Bridegroom in Medieval Women's Religious Literature'. She writes of these matron-mystics: 'Each... experienced mystical visions during marriage and into widowhood, each became a bride of Christ, and each presented a unique example of the arrangements a worldly woman must make to accommodate the needs of both her earthly and heavenly husbands.'¹⁰ This was exactly the situation of vowesses in England. Writings of and about these women in Germany and the Low Countries spread to England where they were sources of inspiration, encouragement, and validation for vowesses.

9 Some reflections here are replicated in 'Matron-Mystics', my blog post on the Women's Literary Culture and the Medieval Canon project blog, hosted by the University of Surrey, 18 July 2016 <<http://blogs.surrey.ac.uk/medievalwomen/2016/07/18/matron-mystics/>>.

10 Gregory, 'Marrying Jesus', p. 95.

This happened in a number of ways. A large proportion of vowesses were merchant class, the daughters and wives of men who travelled to and stayed in Europe for trade. These men would have brought home literature and ideas in conversation. Furthermore, throughout the Wars of the Roses, there was a strong link between the House of York and Burgundy. These connections would have exposed aristocratic women on both sides of the conflict to more Burgundian influences, women who also had more money for books than their lower status counterparts. The advent of printing in the latter half of the fifteenth century meant that books could be produced and distributed more cheaply and quickly. Lady Margaret Beaufort, mother of Henry VII, patronised and supervised Caxton's press, commissioning him to print the literature of which she approved.¹¹ The literary inclinations of religious women, including vowesses, were highlighted by Mary Erler in 2006.¹² Perhaps most significant of all to these women were the itinerant friars who distributed Continental mystical thought both verbally and in written form.¹³ Friars and vowesses were both frequent visitors to convents, and there is evidence to suggest that these were the setting in which some exchange of ideas took place.¹⁴ Thus this section will also consider the transmission of religious thought from Germany and the Low Countries to women in England, focusing on the examples of Margery Kempe and Alice Hampton.

Alongside individual matron-mystics, a major Continental influence on vowesses in England was the *Devotio Moderna*. This religious movement manifested in male and female households or communes centred on devotional activity, which sprung up from the thirteenth century onward. Participants refused to vow as religious but equally shunned the marriage and property integral to the lay state. The men were derisively termed 'lollards' and the women 'beguines'.¹⁵

11 For more on Lady Margaret Beaufort's patronage of Caxton, see chapter five of this thesis.

12 Erler, *Women, Reading, and Piety*. Erler tracks the ownership and exchange of women's devotional books.

13 For an introduction to the friars, see R. W. Southern, *Western Society and the Church in the Middle Ages*, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970; repr. 1986), pp. 272-84.

14 The relationship between vowesses and nunneries will be discussed in more detail in chapter four.

15 John Van Engen, *Sisters and Brothers of the Common Life: The Devotio Moderna and the World of the Later Middle Ages* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), p. 1.

Despite widespread criticism, the practice spread, and its attached theology and devotional activity spread further, beyond those who joined such a community. The *Devotio Moderna* emphasised spiritual reading for self-improvement, though not for purposeless intellectualism, alongside self-examination and meditation upon scripture.¹⁶ Participants were encouraged to vividly imagine biblical narratives which would have led seamlessly to the mystical 'visions' recounted by many. It was also common practice to write up biographies, or 'lives', of deceased companions to serve as inspiration to others.¹⁷ Similarly, some matron brides of Christ, like Dorothea von Montau and, in England, Margery Kempe, shared their experiences of a divine wedding with male confessors who recorded them for the same purpose. Others wrote down their own experiences and reflections. These were then used as sources for 'lives' as well as being distributed alone.¹⁸

Beguines, however, did not tend generally to refer to themselves as brides of Christ.¹⁹ Rather, they were part of a general movement of making religious experience open to those who had not taken monastic vows. In the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, the laity enjoyed ever increasing opportunities for religious participation. In addition to the *Devotio Moderna*, there was the rise of the Third Order: tertiaries did not take monastic vows but could participate in monastic work. The new model of worldly piety embraced by these devout laypeople, and by the friars, accommodated new levels of enthusiasm for charity, prayer, penance, pilgrimage, and voluntary poverty from the laity. People began to devote themselves to God without removing themselves from the world and so models for holy living had to be adapted to accommodate families, property, and other responsibilities.²⁰ Models for female piety thus needed to incorporate the saintly wife and mother: Mary was frequently depicted as such and saints with a domestic emphasis, such as St Zita, rose to popularity.²¹ Dyan Elliot writes that 'in the later Middle Ages there was a greater tendency among the laity to internalise

16 *Ibid.*, pp. 269-81, 294-6, 300-1.

17 *Ibid.*, p. 6.

18 Gregory, 'Marrying Jesus', p. 19.

19 *Ibid.*, p. 5.

20 *Ibid.*, p. 83.

21 The importance of St Zita in late medieval England is outlined in the previous chapter.

hagiographical models due to the increased circulation of saints' lives' and that symbolically wedding Christ was a part of this.²²

The idea of a non-virgin 'bride of Christ' had initially been a controversial, even heretical, one. The term was originally used for the Church or the Virgin Mary but was also associated with virgin martyrs and was transferred to nuns with the development of cenobitic monasticism.²³ Jerome, Ambrose, Chrysostom, and other early writers used bridal language exclusively in their exhortations to chastity for virgins, never for widows.²⁴ When Bernard of Clairvaux wrote his sermons on the *Song of Songs*, and the two anonymous bridal treatises, the *Speculum Virginum*, and the *St Trudperter Hohelied*, were composed in the twelfth century, these were the first recorded instances of women self-identifying as brides of Christ. The soul to catch the eye of the divine Bridegroom was pious, chaste, and unequivocally virginal.²⁵ However, the *Speculum Virginum*, which was popular with matron-mystic Bridget of Sweden and the women of the *Devotio Moderna*, emphatically states that spiritual virginity, or the intention to remain chaste, is to be prized above physical virginity, and a virtuous wife is superior to a sinning virgin.²⁶

Thus, as opportunities for religious participation increased, married and widowed women in Germany and the Low Countries began to identify as brides of Christ. They justified their position through mystical experience, virtuous or apostolic living, religious conversion, pilgrimage, and even preaching.²⁷ Many of them are now recognised as saints by the Catholic Church, including all five of the examples given in this section. However, for the medieval Church, they could be problematic. Marrying Christ may have signified saint-like holiness to some, but it also freed a woman from the authority of her husband and even the Church itself. Margery Kempe, who modelled herself on these Continental women, found

22 Dyan Elliott, *Spiritual Marriage: Sexual Abstinence in Medieval Wedlock* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1993), p. 216.

23 *Ibid.*, p. 20.

24 *Ibid.*, p. 7.

25 *Ibid.*, p. 5.

26 Gregory, 'Marrying Jesus', p. 56 and 84.

27 *Ibid.*, p. 20.

that neither her vow of chastity - whether or not it had been officially sanctioned - nor declaring herself a bride of Christ were sufficient to protect her from accusations of heresy.²⁸ Most vowesses were considerably less controversial in their behaviour, however, and attracted less comment. The greatest challenge for them was perhaps the personal conflict of having both an earthly, if deceased, husband and a heavenly one, with both inevitably competing for her attention and her social identification.²⁹ The matron-mystics of Germany and the Low Countries navigated this same difficulty and their writings and biographies are likely to have been helpful to English women in this way.

However, the perspectives of Continental matron-mystics on this subject are far from uniform. Franciscan tertiary Angela of Foligno (1248-1309) felt that familial responsibilities and a religious life were incompatible. She converted whilst still a wife and mother and shockingly recounted:

‘And then in accordance with God's will, my mother died; she had been a great hindrance to me. Later, my husband and all my children died within a short time. And because I had already begun the way of the cross and had asked God that they should die, I felt a deep consolation following their deaths. I knew that God had accomplished these things for me, and that my heart would always be in God's heart and God's heart would always be in mine.’³⁰

This can only be described as bizarrely unfeeling, but it does demonstrate that Angela believed that she could not be free to pursue her religious calling whilst her husband and children lived. Similarly Susan Steuer writes of vowesses: ‘by tradition, implication and anecdotal information, widows needed to be free of earthly responsibilities, particularly to their husbands, but also to their children,

28 *The Book of Margery Kempe*, ed. and trans. by Bale, pp. 37, 104-5; 118-23.

29 Gregory, 'Marrying Jesus', p. 20.

30 *Angela of Foligno's Memorial*, trans. by Cristina Mazzoni (Cambridge: Brewer, 1999), pp. 26-7.

before devoting themselves to God.’³¹ In reality, however, this was often not the case: Alice Lynne had five underage children when she vowed in 1421.³²

Unlike Angela of Foligno, who wished her husband dead so that she might accept Christ as a new spouse, Dorothea von Montau (1347-94) was portrayed as perceiving the abuse she suffered at the hands of her husband, Adalbert, as spiritual training from God, her heavenly spouse. Dorothea’s biographer, Johannes von Marienwerder, wrote:

‘...because of her responsibilities to her husband, servants, and the world she could not entirely cleave unto God and abandon everything. For this reason the Lord sent her the Holy Spirit who was to console her and correct her whenever she offended God.’³³

The Holy Spirit ‘corrected’ Dorothea with Adalbert’s fists. She would be frequently taken up in ecstasies which caused her to neglect domestic duties and to which Adalbert responded with violence. Each time she was taken up in raptures only served to remind Adalbert which of Dorothea’s two husbands truly possessed her, and yet, according to von Marienwerder, God used Adalbert as an instrument in bringing Dorothea to spiritual perfection. God regularly provoked Adalbert to attack Dorothea in order to teach her to love suffering and to submit to the divine will. Her time as simultaneously a wife and mystic, serving two husbands, was a period of education for Dorothea. The intrinsic conflict was a deliberate divine strategy as God used Adalbert’s blows to teach Dorothea to be patient and to share in the sufferings of Christ. Her worldly obligations and her subjugation to Adalbert were preparation for her total subjugation to God.³⁴ Von Marienwerder was also careful to emphasise that Dorothea was a devoted wife and mother, essential virtues for any non-virgin, or at least she was as devoted as

31 Steuer, 'Widows and Religious Vocation', p. 148.

32 Erler, 'Three Fifteenth-Century Vowesses', in *Medieval London Widows*, ed. by Barron and Sutton, pp. 165-184. The vow, reproduced on p. 168, is at LMA: register of Henry Chichele, Archbishop of Canterbury, fol. 343v.

33 Johannes von Marienwerder, *The Life of Dorothea von Montau, a Fourteenth-century Recluse*, trans. by Ute Stargardt (Lewiston: E. Mellen Press, 1997), p. 182.

34 Gregory, 'Marrying Jesus', pp. 122-4.

one could be when prone to lengthy meditation and paralysing mystical raptures.³⁵ Adalbert died when Dorothea was on pilgrimage to Rome, by which time eight of her nine children had died and the remaining daughter was deposited at a Benedictine convent. Dorothea had earned her freedom to devote herself utterly to a religious life, and she was enclosed as an anchoress in 1393.

Flanders beguine Marie d'Oignies (1177-1213) is also reported as having wed Christ and engaged in secret ascetic practices whilst still married to an earthly husband. Her biographer Jacques de Vitry wrote that she was married at fourteen, then converted and engaged in passionate religious devotion so that 'the Lord looked on the humility of his handmaid and hearkened to the tears of the suppliant, and John, who previously had had Marie as a wife, was inspired to entrust her to the protection of God.'³⁶ Like other married brides of Christ, Marie desired chastity as essential to enable her to give herself fully to God. The conflict of having both a spiritual spouse and an earthly one living could never be reconciled, so that widowhood or separation, putting the earthly spouse in the past, was necessary. Marie and John both vowed chastity and even nursed lepers together.³⁷ One is reminded of vowess Emma Cheyne and her husband, William, from the introduction to this chapter: they also vowed chastity together and each pursued a life devoted to God.

Bridget of Sweden (1303-73) was very popular in England in the late medieval period and also exemplified the ideal of being an excellent wife to one's earthly spouse before giving herself fully to the celestial one. Her religious career began as a pious mother, committed to the spiritual well-being of her children, and it was not until after her husband's death that she became a tertiary and wedded Christ.³⁸ She went on to found a new religious order and was considered an important mystic and prophet throughout Europe.³⁹ Her husband had been Ulf, to

35 *Ibid.*, p. 127.

36 Jacques de Vitry and Thomas of Cantimpré, *Two Lives of Marie d'Oignies*, ed. by Margot H. King and Hugh Feiss (Toronto: Peregrina, 1998), p. 55.

37 Elizabeth Spearing, *Medieval Writings on Female Spirituality* (New York: Penguin Books, 2002), p. 88.

38 Gregory, 'Marrying Jesus', p. 100.

39 *Ibid.*, p. 93.

whom she was portrayed as devoted: her biographer, Archbishop Gregersson, wrote that, when Ulf became ill, Bridget was ‘full desolate for hir husband sekenes.’⁴⁰ Like Dorothea von Montau and Marie d'Oignies, she is described as engaging in ascetic and penitential practices secretly to avoid incurring her husband's displeasure: ‘When hir husband was fro hir, she wald wake pe maste parti of pe night in praier, and sho spared nocht hir bodi in [k]nelinges and bettings.’⁴¹ Yet it was not until Ulf had died that Christ appeared to Bridget, she had her revelations, received the Holy Spirit and married Christ.⁴² As for Dorothea von Montau and possibly for English vowesses, the responsibilities of a wife and mother were seen as training for the higher religious life, the celestial spouse a reward for submission or good service to the earthly one.

Elizabeth of Hungary (1207-31), another widowed Franciscan tertiary, was cited by Johannes von Marienwerder, Dorothea von Montau's biographer, as evidence that ‘not only virgins and those who live chastely enter the kingdom of heaven but also married people who with true faith and good works earn God's grace.’⁴³ She married young and was twenty years old with three small children when her husband died on crusade. She was a prominent royal figure and dramatically harsh ascetic, believed to have worked several miracles and converted many. She modelled the life of a high born religious widow and her life and visions were popular in fourteenth and fifteenth-century England.⁴⁴ It seems likely that she may have served as inspiration, in particular, for Lady Margaret Beaufort, who was well-read and lived as Elizabeth's equivalent in England almost three hundred years later.

Evidence for the influence of these matron-mystics upon vowesses initially appears sparse. The *Book of Margery Kempe*, however, reveals a great deal about one late medieval English woman's understanding of these Continental saints and how she came to be exposed to their stories. Margery was an extraordinary

40 *The Liber Celestis of St Bridget of Sweden*, ed. by Roger Ellis (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), p. 2.

41 *Ibid.*, p. 1.

42 *Ibid.*, pp. 2-3.

43 Von Marienwerder, *The Life of Dorothea von Montau*, p. 57.

44 Gregory, 'Marrying Jesus', pp. 94-5.

woman and, whether she was vowed or not, by no means does she exemplify the broad scope of vowess piety: her *Book* repeatedly describes her as 'synguler.'⁴⁵ Yet her circumstances were fairly typical of women of her class. She was the daughter of the merchant and mayor of Bishop's Lynn (now King's Lynn), John Brunham. She married town official John Kempe and had many children. She was of the same urban 'middling sort', prominent in her town and of moderate means, as so many of the vowesses in our study, and would have been exposed to similar influences.

The *Book* of Margery Kempe details Margery's struggle, as a bride of Christ, to claim or reclaim her virginity. Sarah Salih describes this as 'reformulating the self as virginal.'⁴⁶ Christ is still depicted as requiring a virgin bride, but Bernard of Clairvaux's 'spiritual virginity' is paramount, and Christ consoled Margery: 'dowtyr I lofe the as wel as any mayden in the world.'⁴⁷ The *Book* explicitly acknowledges these Continental matron-mystics and consciously allies Margery with them. It cites Elizabeth of Hungary as justification of her weeping and wailing, claiming that the saint 'cryed wyth lowde voys, as is wretyn in hir tretys.'⁴⁸ It also refers specifically to 'a woman clepyd Maria de Oegines and of hir maner of levying, of the wondirful swetnesse that sche had in the word of God heryng, of the wondirful compassyon that sche had in hys Passyon thynkyng, and of the plentyuows teerys that sche wept.'⁴⁹ Margery clearly identified with Bridget especially: at one point Christ tells her: 'I telle the forsothe rygth as I spak to Seynt Bryde ryte so I speke to the, dowtyr, and I telle the trewly it is trewe every word that is wretyn in Brides boke, and be the it schal be knowyn for very trewth.'⁵⁰ Whilst in Rome, Margery visited a surviving maidservant of Bridget's to ask about the saint and knelt on a stone upon which Bridget had received revelations.⁵¹

45 Salih, *Versions of Virginity*, p. 168.

46 Salih, *Versions of Virginity*, pp. 181-5.

47 *The Book of Margery Kempe*, ed. by Staley, i, 1116-9.

48 *Ibid.*, 3664.

49 *Ibid.*, 3610-3.

50 *Ibid.*, 1084-91.

51 *Ibid.*, 2223-36.

The influence of the matron-mystics upon Margery is also evident more subtly in the decisions that she made. Like many of her Continental counterparts, she was loyal to her husband until he agreed to a separation and her vow of chastity. The *Book* also claims that she practised secret asceticism whilst married: ‘sche gat hir an hayr of a kylne swech as men dryen on malt and leyd it in hir kyrtylle as sotyllych and prevylich as sche mygth that hir husband schuld not aspye it, ne no mor he dede, and yet sche lay be hym every nygth in his bedde, and weryd the hayr every day, and bar chylderyn in the tyme.’⁵² In travelling to Jerusalem and Rome, Margery followed in Bridget's footsteps, opting for the same voluntary poverty, and visited Danzig, the home of Dorothea von Montau. Margery also nursed John Kempe in his old age, just as Dorothea nursed Adalbert.⁵³

Margery's perception of herself as a heavenly bride is clearly coloured by those of her Continental predecessors, particularly Bridget. Margery describes a vision she had in Rome of a wedding ceremony between herself and the Godhead - unusually, not Christ. By the time of Margery's pilgrimage to Rome, she was already wearing a ‘bone maryd ryng to Jhesu Crist’, and her reluctance to participate in union with the Godhead at Rome may have been because of this: in a sense, she now had three husbands.⁵⁴ Naoë Kukita Yoshikawa connected the description of Margery's marriage in Rome with her contact with holy sites dedicated to Bridget during her sojourn in Rome.⁵⁵ Unlike Bridget, Margery married Christ, and the Godhead, before being widowed, which made her life rather more complicated. Her relationship with Christ was passionate, even sexual: at one point she heard him say, ‘whan thu art in thi bed, take me to the as for thi weddyd husband, as thy derworthy derlyng... as a good wife owyth to love hir husbonde. And therfor thu mayst boldly take me in the armys of thi sowle and kyssen my mowth, myn hed, and my fete as swetly as thow wylt.’⁵⁶ She was not,

52 *Ibid.*, 277-80.

53 Gregory, 'Marrying Jesus', pp. 115, 94-5, 103.

54 *The Book of Margery Kempe*, ed. by Staley, i, 1822-3; Gregory, 'Marrying Jesus', p. 118.

55 Naoë Kukita Yoshikawa, 'Margery Kempe's Mystical Marriage and Roman Sojourn: Influence of St Bridget of Sweden', *Reading Medieval Studies* 28 (2002), 39-57 (p. 39).

56 *The Book of Margery Kempe*, ed. by Staley, i, 2103-8.

however, free of her spousal obligations to John: her formal or informal vow of chastity was hard-won and much of the *Book* is concerned with her endeavours to achieve it.

The *Book* reveals not only that Margery was influenced by the Continental matron-mystics but how she came to be exposed to those influences in the first place, namely through the friars. B. A. Windeatt has tracked her many interactions with friars, including John Capgrave, an Augustinian friar in Lynn, who produced a number of vernacular saints' lives for women readers, and Thomas Constance, a Dominican, who cited the example of Marie d'Oignies to her.⁵⁷ Carmelite friar Alan of Lynn has been identified as the author of an index of Bridget's revelations and prophecies; the *Book* mentions his support early on in Margery's career, when some masonry and roof timbers at St Margaret's church fell on her head and he retrieved and weighed them, declaring it a miracle that she had not been killed or seriously injured.⁵⁸ He was evidently a lifelong friend, as he appears again much later in the *Book* when he was banned from conversing with her and then the two were reunited in 'gret joy and gladnes'.⁵⁹ The *Book* also states that he 'enformyd hir in qwestyons of Scriptur' and it is likely that he spoke to her about Bridget of Sweden.⁶⁰

Friars were a key part of the religious landscape of late medieval England. They comprised four main orders: Franciscan, Dominican, Augustinian, and Carmelite, but these were essentially similar in purpose and practice. The friars were international and itinerant: they transmitted new teachings and devotional practices around Europe.⁶¹ Margery's association with them seems to have been usual for a pious citizen. Although friars did circuits of the countryside, preaching and begging, the friaries were deliberately built in urban areas to maximise

57 Barry Windeatt, 'Margery Kempe and the Friars', in *The Friars in Medieval Britain: Proceedings of the 2007 Harlaxton Symposium*, ed. by Nicholas Rogers (Donington: Shaun Tyas, 2010), pp. 125-41 (pp. 127, 132-3).

58 *The Book of Margery Kempe*, ed. by Staley, i, 408-504.

59 *Ibid.*, 4039.

60 *Ibid.*, 3980. Windeatt; 'Margery Kempe and the Friars', pp. 126-31.

61 For a fuller introduction to the friars, see Southern, *Western Society and the Church in the Middle Ages*, pp. 272-84.

potential to minister to the laity. Friars also needed to be visible due to their dependence upon charitable giving, and their emphasis upon preaching and teaching ensured that they were heard as well as seen. They were on hand to hear confession and dole out spiritual advice, in accordance with the philosophy of 'exhortation in public, correction in private' which originated in the *Devotio Moderna*.⁶² The friaries may have appealed especially to alien merchants and their families in the major cities, who were not accommodated by the parish churches and with whom some friars may have shared a mother tongue, allowing for further transmission of Continental ideas to the friars to be then passed on. Friars were the embodiment of active piety, of a religious life pursued within the world, so it would be natural for vowesses, who shared that state, to also gravitate toward them. As Clive Burgess writes, although wills by no means give a complete or uncomplicated picture of late medieval testamentary provision, the ubiquitous presence of friars and friaries in wills does suggest that they were valued and taken seriously.⁶³ That some vowesses requested burial at a friary is evidence of their perceived significance: Joan Danvers and Katherine Langley both requested burial at the London Greyfriars' and Margaret Croke at the Friars Preachers.⁶⁴ Katherine Langley also appointed the warden at Greyfriars as one of the executors of her will. Margaret Croke's will included a number of bequests to the friary and to individuals there, even though she was a parishoner at All Hallows' Barking and so it would be more usual for her to be buried and commemorated there. Vowesses also took their vows at friaries, such as Joan Manfeld and Isabel Portyngton at Blackfriars, Oxford, and Margaret Fox who, although her own diocesan was the bishop of Coventry and Lichfield, was vowed at Pontefract Friary.⁶⁵

62 Van Engen, *Sisters and Brothers of the Common Life*, pp. 281-3.

63 Clive Burgess, 'Friars and the Parish in Late Medieval Bristol: Observations and Possibilities', in *The Friars in Medieval Britain: Proceedings of the 2007 Harlaxton Symposium*, ed. by Nicholas Rogers (Donington: Shaun Tyas, 2010), pp. 73-96 (p. 76).

64 TNA, PCC Prob. 11/4/212; LMA, MS 9531/9, fols viii to x (3d ser.), fol. 30v; TNA, PCC Prob. 11/9/12.

65 The vows of Joan Manfeld, and Isabel Portyngton can be found in the third appendix to this thesis. Margaret Fox's vow is recorded in *The Register of Thomas Rotherham, Archbishop of York 1480-1500*, ed. by Eric E. Barker (Torquay: Canterbury and York Society, 1976), no. 558.

The influence of the friars is clearly evident in the will of vowess Alice Hampton, which focuses upon Halliwell Priory, where Alice spent her latter years.⁶⁶ Her executors were Joan Lynd, the prioress, and Augustinian friar Edmund Bellond. Bellond was also bequeathed a ‘mantell furryd with martine’ and appears to have been a personal friend. He was evidently a learned man, holding a doctorate in theology, and was both prior and procurator of Halliwell around 1510.⁶⁷ He rose to be prior provincial of the Augustinan Order of England, and owned a manuscript which still survives in the Vatican Library.⁶⁸ Alice's life demonstrates the intimate connection between both friars and convents and vowesses and convents, which further increased the influence of friars and the ideas they brought with them upon vowess piety.

Alice was also connected with Syon Abbey, to whom she transferred her Gloucestershire estates. Just as Dartford was the only Dominican nunnery in England, Syon was the only Bridgettine one, and, as such, Bridget's influence there was obvious and extremely pervasive. The nuns lived according to *The Rewyll of Seynt Saueoure*, given to Bridget by divine revelation. It was at Syon that *The Orchard of Syon* was produced, a fifteenth-century translation of the writings of Catherine of Siena, who had shunned both marriage and a nunnery to become a tertiary and saint and would have been another inspirational figure for vowesses.⁶⁹ Syon's library was famous and the brethren were often Cambridge graduates. It would naturally have been visited by friars and, crucially, shared their ethos of the importance of education. Although enclosed, the outlook of Syon as an institution was not dissimilar to that of the friars, of many vowesses, and indeed of the *Devotio Moderna* on the Continent: it acknowledged the need

66 LMA, CC 9171/9, fol. 5v-6. For more on Alice Hampton's association with Halliwell and with Syon Abbey, see chapter four.

67 A. B. Emden, *A Biographical Register of the University of Cambridge to 1500*, 3 vols (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963), i, p. 53; Erler, ‘Syon's “Special Benefactors and Friends”’, 215. *The Religious Houses of London and Middlesex*, ed. by Caroline M. Barron and Matthew Davies (London: Institute of Historical Research, 2007), p. 136. See TNA, C 1/547/10, LR 14/129, and LR 14/491 for examples of Bellond as prior.

68 Erler, ‘Syon's “Special Benefactors and Friends”’, 215. The manuscript is Vatican Library, Ottoboni Lat. MS 746.

69 *The Orchard of Syon*, ed. by Phyllis Hodgson and Gabriel M. Liegey (London: Oxford University Press, 1966).

for professed religious to participate in life beyond the cloister as well as for the laity to participate in devotion.⁷⁰

It is evident, then, that, although English women heard about Continental spiritual figures and ideas in various ways, the friars were key players in the distribution of verbal and written religious and devotional material. Vowesses would have encountered them both at religious houses and around their home towns and cities, deliberately blurring the boundary between lay and religious life and sharing stories of the Continental matron-mystics who proved that wedding Christ was an option even for non-virgins. Vowesses occupied a liminal space between sacred and secular and sometimes struggled to reconcile their deceased earthly and immortal celestial spouses, as this chapter will go on to explore. The lives and teachings of these women would have provided welcome inspiration and validation.

‘As you had in my life my heart and love...’: Vowesses’ Earthly Marriages

The spiritual ideas outlined in the previous section had to translate practically in the lives of vowesses, many of whom had earthly responsibilities. The variations among the characters and the lives of vowesses already presented should make us wary of discussing them as a homogenous group. This is to be considered when considering vowesses' marriages, alongside the fact that the marital relationship is so culturally specific that it is difficult for the modern historian to fully comprehend the dynamics of any medieval or early modern marriage.⁷¹ Nonetheless, the tension of accommodating social identification with and perhaps affection for a deceased earthly spouse alongside a new celestial one is central to the vowess vocation. Where evidence survives, then, this section will examine to what extent a husband or multiple husbands, in death, continued to

70 Syon Abbey, its vowesses and its participation in religious and secular life will be discussed in more detail in chapter four.

71 Hanawalt, *The Wealth of Wives*, pp. 116-7. She cites as examples the fact that corporal punishment of wives was socially acceptable and the rigidity of gender roles.

affect the vowess, as well as the influence of deceased husbands upon the public and private identity of individuals.

The commemorative arrangements outlined in the first chapter provide some indications of vowesses' allegiances, and to what extent personal and public identity was tied to that of a deceased husband. Some vowesses chose to be buried with their husbands whilst others did not, but this should not be read as not an uncomplicated indicator of marital affection or lack thereof. For example, Katherine Langley was content to be buried alone at the London Greyfriars, should she die in London or Stepney rather than at her husband's Essex home, but her will continues: 'wher as my housband thorowe negligence or Ignorance of such as was a bowte hym the day and tyme of his buriall was not burid accordyng to his laste will expressid in his testament be removid and buried in the said place wher as was his will that is to say in the Chancell of (the) p(ar)ishe church of our lady of Rickling.'⁷² Katherine's stipulation that her husband's corpse should be moved in accordance to his wishes demonstrates her concern for him and his affairs, although it is surprising that she waited so long to arrange the reburial: Henry Langley had died more than twenty years earlier.⁷³ In the design of vowesses' monumental brasses, the depiction of the couple together seems to suggest a vowess' desire to be forever associated with her husband, whilst, at other times, the vowess seemed to prefer to branch out alone. The impression at the end of the previous chapter was of the remarkable flexibility of the vowess vocation to accommodate a range of different circumstances and preferences: although the women were mostly reasonably wealthy widows, their public image and their marriages seem to have varied considerably. This chapter will explore in more detail the experience of these women as wives.

One aspect of this was referred to in the Introduction: the fact that several women, and perhaps others now forgotten, vowed chastity in response to their husband's stipulation that they do so. These stipulations also varied and sometimes

72 LMA, MS 9531/9, fols viii to x (3d ser.), fol. 30v.

73 Katherine's will is dated 13 April 1510, while Henry Langley's inquisition postmortem is dated 1487/8: TNA, C 142/3/44.

provide hints about the marital relationship. Another example of such an edict, besides that of John Byfeld, is that of Thomas Baker, a grocer of Bristol, who made his will in 1492/3.⁷⁴ It reads: ‘if all my children die... then the money and silver are to go to my wife, Maud, who is to enjoy them... as long as she remains single’, and, later, ‘...the residue of all my goods... I give and leave intact to my wife Maud for her prosperity, on the condition that the same Maud should remain sole and unmarried for the rest of her life.’ The tone is unemotional and authoritative. This contrasts with the 1468 will of William Herbert, urging his wife, Anne, to take the vow ‘as I love and trust you’, adding later, ‘pray for me, and take the said order that you promist me, as you had in my life my heart and love.’⁷⁵ The inscription on the monumental brass of John and Agnes Browne in Stamford, Lincolnshire, described in the previous chapter, expresses in a similarly affectionate manner the husband’s wish for his widow to vow: ‘mea cara fuisti. // Dum mundo vixi; post me sis sponsaque Christi.’⁷⁶ The implied marital love here may be simply a literary flourish but nonetheless contrasts sharply with the more business-like tone of the stipulations in some of the wills.

Although most vowed women were gentry or merchant class, many more records survive for aristocratic vowesses. Thus it is possible to gather a much clearer picture of their marriages and their subsequent lives as widows. Much of the remainder of this section, then, will narrate a detailed case study of two aristocratic vowesses: Anne Herbert and Lady Margaret Beaufort. There are various biographies of Lady Margaret, the most detailed and comprehensive of which is *The King’s Mother* by Michael Jones and Malcolm Underwood, but Anne’s life has received little a scholarly attention.⁷⁷ The two women were contemporaries, and both key players in the Wars of the Roses, on opposite sides but closely connected. Their lives in parallel shed new light on the female

74 *The Pre-Reformation Records of All Saints’ Church, Bristol*, iii, pp. 30-3.

75 TNA, PCC Prob. 11/5/125.

76 Translation: ‘My beloved you were // While I lived in the world, and after me may you be the bride of Christ.’ The brass is at All Saints’, Stamford, Lincolnshire and described in more detail in the previous chapter.

77 I am, however, indebted to Ian Dawson for his research on the Herbert family, which he has very kindly shared with me.

experience of the conflicts of the latter half of the fifteenth century. Anne was married once, Lady Margaret four times, but both women's marriages had a lasting effect on their personal and political lives as vowesses. Lady Margaret and Anne also demonstrate that, while the aristocratic vowess may indeed have been pious, she was by no means withdrawn from the world: she remained politically active with strong familial allegiances, many of which were inevitably a result of marriage.

The marriage of Yorkists William and Anne Herbert seems to have been one of fierce loyalty amidst great turbulence and danger. William married Anne at her family home in Weobley, Herefordshire between 10 August and 30 November 1449. Anne was around sixteen years old. Both her and William's fathers were wealthy landowners in Wales and on the Welsh border, and both had served in France under the Duke of York. Anne's father, Walter Devereux, was also one of York's senior councillors, strengthening William's links to York who, in 1449, was heir apparent to the crown. Devereux agreed to pay a dowry of 500 marks, to provide 'meat and drink' for William 'and forty of his men and their horses', and to pay for Anne's 'apparrell competent pertaining to her degree.'⁷⁸ Just a few months later, William joined an English army in Normandy and was captured at the battle of Formigny, while newly-married Anne was left to run Raglan Castle alone. He paid a ransom and was freed, but the Herbert family's troubles were far from over. The years between 1450 and 1455 were dominated by a struggle between the Dukes of Somerset and York to be the King's chief councillor. William supported the Duke of York and was involved in a number of outbreaks of violence. These culminated in the battle of St Albans in May 1455, in which Herbert and Devereux both fought for York.⁷⁹ They survived, but their participation had put Anne in a vulnerable position. She was twenty-two years old

78 The agreement is quoted in full in D. H. Thomas, *The Herberts of Raglan and the Battle of Edgecote, 1469* (Lincoln: Freezywater Publications, 1994), p. 104.

79 R. A. Griffiths, 'Herbert, William, first earl of Pembroke (c.1423–1469)', in *ODNB*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, Jan 2008
 <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/13053/>> [accessed 1 Jan 2016].

and either heavily pregnant or recovering from the birth of their eldest son. Anne went on to have at least nine children in total.⁸⁰

Lady Margaret Beaufort, at this time, was even more vulnerable. She was born on 31 May 1443, a wealthy heiress whose father died, a probable suicide, before her first birthday. Her wardship was given to William de la Pole, earl of Suffolk, and she was married to his son John at the age of only six. Suffolk became unpopular, was accused of treason (it was said that his son's marriage to Lady Margaret was part of a plot to dethrone the king), and was then murdered whilst leaving for exile. Lady Margaret's marriage was dissolved and her wardship passed to Edmund and Jasper Tudor. She was then married to Edmund, though he was twenty-two and she only twelve, small and underdeveloped for her age. Nonetheless, he consummated the marriage and she fell pregnant in early 1456.⁸¹

It was then that Lady Margaret's fortunes first overlapped with those of the Herberts. On 10 August 1456, Walter Devereux and William Herbert led 2000 men to recapture Carmarthen Castle for the Duke of York from King Henry's men. Edmund Tudor was captured there and imprisoned. He was then released but he died of the plague at Camarthen on 1 November. Lady Margaret was thirteen years old and heavily pregnant. She sought protection from her brother-in-law, Jasper. At his home, after a long and difficult labour, she gave birth to a son, Henry, on 28 January 1457. It is likely that the birth damaged her in some way, possibly because she was so young, as she was never to have another child. Meanwhile, Herbert and Devereux had been put on trial for treason in front of King Henry and Queen Margaret. Walter was imprisoned but William was pardoned. Anne may have been instrumental in this: ladies of her rank would often plead for mercy on behalf of their male family members. The trial took place in Hereford, only thirty miles from Raglan, so Anne may have been able to personally entreat for her husband and father.

80 A seventeenth-century history of the Herberts, the *Herbertorum Prosapia*, contains an illustration of William and Anne's tomb at Tintern Abbey (destroyed in the sixteenth century) which shows carvings of nine children on the tomb, three boys and six girls. Seven of the children were still living in 1469 when William made his will. The *Herbertorum Prosapia* is Cardiff Central Library, MS 5.7.

81 Jones and Underwood, *The King's Mother*, pp. 36-9.

Lady Margaret Beaufort married Henry Stafford on 3 January 1458, a few months before her fifteenth birthday. Like the union between William and Anne Herbert, the marriage seems to have been an affectionate one. Lady Margaret also appears to have been popular with Stafford's mother, the Duchess of Buckingham, who left books in her will to 'my daughter Richmond' and also lent her some further books, with accounts from Stafford's receiver noting that Lady Margaret ordered her servant, William Bailey, to return them.⁸² Stafford's will, composed after thirteen years of marriage, describes Lady Margaret as his 'beloved' wife and appoints her executrix.⁸³ The two also travelled together regularly and their accounts show that they regularly celebrated their wedding anniversary in an extravagant fashion.⁸⁴

Walter Devereux died in April 1459 and was succeeded by his son, also Walter. The following October, he was with the Duke of York at the battle of Ludford Bridge, confronting the King's army near Ludlow. York fled, but Devereux was captured and convicted of treason. He escaped execution after kneeling before Queen Margaret and begging for pardon. In an endeavour to placate the king, the Herberts planned to present him with the gift of an expensive and richly illustrated book, in which the first illustration depicts William and Anne kneeling in front of him, hands outstretched, perhaps in supplication. However, the book was still in production when the Yorkists returned from exile and captured King Henry at the battle of Northampton. As it was now unnecessary to earn royal favour, the unfinished book was collected by the Herbert family and remained in their possession.⁸⁵

In early 1461, William Herbert left Raglan and Anne probably did not see him again for over three months. York had been killed at the battle of Wakefield the previous December and had been succeeded by his 18-year-old son, Edward. Herbert and Devereux fought for Edward at Mortimer's Cross, his first victory,

82 *Ibid*, pp. 142-3

83 TNA, PCC Prob. 11/7/2.

84 Jones and Underwood, *The King's Mother*, p. 142

85 This is reproduced in Peter Lord, *The Visual Culture of Wales: Medieval Vision* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press), p. 260.

then accompanied him to London where Edward was proclaimed king. Anne was almost certainly waiting anxiously at home whilst managing William's family, household, and lands. Lady Margaret would have been equally fearful: both Stafford and her stepfather, Lord Welles, fought at Towton for Henry VI. Fortunately, they survived and the new king pardoned them for opposing him. On 30 September, Pembroke Castle surrendered to William Herbert and, shortly afterwards, Jasper Tudor joined his half-brother, Henry VI, and Margaret of Anjou in Scotland.⁸⁶

This left Lady Margaret's Beaufort's four-year-old son, Henry Tudor, without protection. As a close relative of Henry VI, Lady Margaret's heir, and the potential heir to his father's confiscated lands, he was a particularly valuable child. He reputedly later told the chronicler Philip de Comines that 'from the time he was five years old he had been always a fugitive or a prisoner.'⁸⁷ He was taken into the custody of William Herbert who was later granted his wardship for £1000. The young Henry was placed in Anne's care, joining Henry Percy, earl of Northumberland, and, of course, the Herberts' own children.⁸⁸ He was raised in a manner befitting a young nobleman and his relations with the Herbert family were friendly from then on. Lady Margaret and Stafford visited Henry at Raglan in September 1467.⁸⁹ Henry's wardship was the beginning of a closer association between Lady Margaret, who adored her son, and Anne, who effectively raised him. Both would go on to be powerful and influential women.

The next few years afforded some happiness and stability for the Herberts. They were richly rewarded by the new king: William was given offices, lands, and titles, becoming Earl of Pembroke in 1468, after he captured Harlech castle, the last castle in Wales to surrender to King Edward. He was also awarded Jasper Tudor's lands. For Anne, at Raglan Castle, life would have been busy. She continued to fall pregnant and William's success brought still more children into her care as wards. There were also the masons, sculptors, glaziers, tilers, painters,

86 Jones and Underwood, *The King's Mother*, p. 41.

87 Philip de Comines, *Historical Memoirs* (London: W. McDowall, 1817), p. 313.

88 Jones and Underwood, *The King's Mother*, pp. 41-2.

89 *Ibid.*, p. 48.

and other craftsmen, as William sought to create a home to reflect the Herberts' newly elevated position.⁹⁰ Family and guest apartments had large, glass-filled windows, and tapestries hung on the walls. The castle was surrounded by fruit orchards, gardens, and a deer park. William's absences were frequent and lengthy, so Anne oversaw the improvements. Estate accounts show her making purchases, receiving cash, and paying creditors, all daily business of supervising a major building project.⁹¹ She presumably accompanied William to London in 1465 for the coronation of Edward's queen, Elizabeth Woodville, and for the marriage in 1466 of their eldest son, 11 year-old William, to Mary Woodville, 10 year-old sister of the queen.

Peace was not to last. In 1469, Richard Neville, earl of Warwick, and the Duke of Clarence, Edward's brother, rebelled against the king. William Herbert was entangled in the hostilities, named in a proclamation as one of 'certain seditious persons' guilty of misleading the king and damaging the realm.⁹² Herbert and his brother duly raised a Welsh force on the king's behalf, heading east to join another royal army led by the earl of Devon. Henry Tudor was twelve years old and considered old enough by his guardian to join the fighting. Herbert and his men joined the king at the Battle of Edgecote, near Banbury, on 26 July 1469. It was a disastrous defeat: the king was captured, as was William Herbert, and the latter was executed soon afterwards.

In William's will, as quoted above, he entreated Anne to take the chastity vow. Herbert had also specified that she was to 'have the chief rule in performing my will and to be one of my executors.'⁹³ This is further evidence of the trust between them, and it ensured that Anne was kept busy. William and Anne's eldest son, William, inherited but was still underage, so Anne received all her husband's property on her son's behalf on 23 November 1469, a grant confirmed in May

90 J. R. Kenyon, *Raglan Castle* (Cardiff: Cadw, 2003).

91 G. H. R. Kent, 'The Estates of the Herbert Family in the Mid-Fifteenth Century' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Keele, 1973), pp. 43-4.

92 Elizabeth Norton, *Margaret Beaufort: Mother of the Tudor Dynasty* (Stroud: Amberley, 2009), p. 84.

93 TNA, PCC Prob. 11/5/125.

1470.⁹⁴ She was also given lordship of Chepstow until her death.⁹⁵ William's will stipulated that his daughter, Maud, was to be married to Henry Tudor, and two of his other daughters, Anne and Jane, to Lord Powis and Edmund Malafant respectively.⁹⁶ Anne had already proved herself more than capable of managing the Herbert home and children; as a widow and vowess, she came into her own as her responsibilities multiplied.

Lady Margaret was spared bereavement as Henry Tudor almost miraculously survived the battle. He was rescued by Richard Corbet, one of Anne's kinsmen, and delivered to her brother's house at Weobley, where Anne was also sheltering. Warwick successfully restored the enfeebled Henry VI in the autumn of 1470 and Edward fled to Burgundy. However, by spring 1471, he had returned and reclaimed the throne.⁹⁷ Anne spent much of the early 1470s administrating her son's estates. Papers, accounts and numerous examples of payments all bear her writing, demonstrating her competence and skill in these affairs.⁹⁸ It is unknown exactly when she took her vow of chastity, but by the 1470s Anne was firmly established as a matriarch and a force in her own right.

Henry Tudor was in very real danger. With the deaths of Henry VI and his son, the fourteen-year-old Henry now had the best claim to the house of Lancaster and, as such, Edward IV would view him as a rival. The safest course was for him and Jasper to flee to Brittany. Lady Margaret was not to see her son again until 1485, but kept in contact through messengers and furthered his cause from home. They sought to arrange his marriage to Maud Herbert, as outlined in William Herbert's will, in order to win the family's support. Messengers were sent to Maud's brother, Walter. Anne may have been excluded because of her gender or because she would disapprove: she prevented the marriage by marrying Maud to Henry, earl of Northumberland, another of the Herbert wards.⁹⁹ This contradicted William Herbert's will but does not indicate disloyalty to him. William did not

94 Thomas, *The Herberts of Raglan*, p. 97.

95 *Ibid.*, p. 107.

96 TNA, PCC Prob. 11/5/125.

97 Jones and Underwood, *The King's Mother*, pp. 49-57.

98 Thomas, *The Herberts of Raglan*, p. 97.

99 Norton, *Margaret Beaufort*, p. 130.

know, in 1468, that Henry Tudor would be in exile with a decidedly uncertain future. Anne clearly felt confident, and had been trusted by William, to ensure the family's interests.

Further sorrow was in store for Lady Margaret. Stafford had been wounded fighting for Henry VI at Barnet in April 1471. He returned to her at their manor in Woking but his health declined. He made his will on 2 October and died two days later. With her husband dead and her son in exile, Lady Margaret was isolated and found herself under the suspicion of the king: her Lancastrian allegiances had been evident during Henry VI's restoration only months before.¹⁰⁰ If she had any desire to vow chastity at this point, it was simply not an option, nor was the luxury of mourning. She needed a new husband, a male protector, as soon as possible.

Just eight months later, Lady Margaret married Thomas, Lord Stanley. Despite having shown support for Henry VI at the restoration, Stanley was in royal favour and held the office of Lord Steward of the Household, which would have kept him close to the king. Lady Margaret sought reconciliation with Edward both to ensure her own safety and to secure the return of her son. Stanley had strong connections with the Woodville family, as his eldest son, George, had married the queen's niece. Also, unusually for a major landowner in the fifteenth century, he had managed to keep himself out of any fighting in the Wars of the Roses.¹⁰¹ This disinclination for battle significantly decreased the likelihood that he would die any time soon, leaving Lady Margaret once again a widow and unprotected. Lady Margaret's marriage to Stanley was a pragmatic and political arrangement.

Lady Margaret gradually came to favour at court, all the while working tirelessly to further her son's cause. In 1476, she was prominent in her attendance on Elizabeth Woodville at the reburial of Edward's father, Richard, Duke of York. At the christening of Edward's youngest child, Bridget, in 1482, she was given the honour of holding the infant. In June of that year, Edward agreed that Henry

¹⁰⁰ Jones and Underwood, *The King's Mother*, p. 58.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.* pp. 58-60.

Tudor could receive a share of Lady Margaret's lands worth £400 a year, on the condition that he return to England. Edward also discussed with Lady Margaret, Stanley, John Morton, Bishop of Ely, and the Bishop of Worcester the possibility that Henry could marry Elizabeth of York. This would have made Henry the king's son-in-law. There survives a draft pardon for Henry from Edward and it looked likely that Lady Margaret would soon be reunited with her son.¹⁰²

However, on 9 April 1483, Edward IV died suddenly, leaving the pardon incomplete and his twelve-year-old son, Edward V, next in line to the throne, with his uncle, Richard, Duke of Gloucester, as protector. Young Edward was never crowned. Richard seized the throne, imprisoning Edward and his younger brother in the Tower of London, where both conveniently disappeared. Lady Margaret adapted quickly. She and Stanley were prominent figures at the coronation of Richard III and his wife, Anne Neville, on 6 July 1483. Lady Margaret bore the queen's train and sat to her left during the ceremony. Stanley carried the mace before Richard III as he entered Westminster Abbey.¹⁰³

In spite of this show of loyalty, the uncertainty around the throne was too good an opportunity to miss and Lady Margaret began plotting against the new king in favour of her son. The plan was to proceed with Henry's marriage to Elizabeth of York, uniting the houses of York and Lancaster, and to put Henry on the throne. Lady Margaret was a central player in this conspiracy.¹⁰⁴ Her initiative and independent spirit may have helped make her a formidable vowess in the years to come, but these qualities predated her vow and indeed ensured her survival through turbulent times. Of course, they could also get her into trouble and, when Richard learned of the plot, Lady Margaret was in very real danger of being executed for treason.

The furious king called a parliament at the end of 1483 at which Henry Tudor and all involved in the conspiracy were attainted for high treason.

102 *Ibid.* pp. 60-61.

103 'Coronation of King Richard the Third', in *Excerpta Historica, or Illustrations of English History*, ed. by Samuel Bentley (London: Richard Bentley, 1833), pp. 379-84 (p. 380).

104 Jones and Underwood, *The King's Mother*, pp. 62-4.

According to Hall's Chronicle, Stanley was expected by many to be amongst those condemned and 'in this troubleous ceason, nothings was more merueled at then that the lord Stanley had not bene taken and reputed as an enemy to the king, considerynge the workyng of the ladye Margarete his wife mother to the earle of Richemond.'¹⁰⁵ It is possible that Richard relied upon Stanley's support and this forced him to be lenient to Lady Margaret. The act read:

'Forasmuch as Margaret Contesse of Richmond, Mother to the kynys greate Rebell and Traytour, Henry Erle of Richemond, hath of late conspired, confedered, and comitted high Treason ayenst oure soveraigne lorde the king Richard the Third, in dyvers and sundry wyses, and in especiall in sendyng messages, writyngs and tokens to the said Henry, desiryng, procuryng and stirryng hym by the same, to come into this Roialme, and make Werre ayenst oure said Soveraigne Lorde... Yet neverthelesse, oure said Soveraigne lorde, of his grace especiall, remembryng the good and faithfull service that Thomas lord Stanley hath doon, and entendeth to doo to oure said Soveraigne lorde, and for the good love and trust that the kyng hath in hym, and for his sake, remitteth and woll forbere the greate punyshement of atteynder of the said countesse, that she or any other so doeyng hath deserved.'¹⁰⁶

Lady Margaret's marriage to Stanley saved her life: her sentence was commuted to life imprisonment. She was 'imprisoned' at her husband's residences of Lathom and Knowsley, though Stanley kept her in comfort and allowed her a great deal of latitude. She remained in contact with her son. It is possible that Stanley secretly supported Lady Margaret in her endeavours, despite his show of loyalty to Richard.

105 Edward Hall, *Hall's Chronicle, containing the history of England, during the reign of Henry the Fourth, and the succeeding monarchs, to the end of the reign of Henry the Eighth* (London: J. Johnson, et al., 1809), p. 398.

106 *Rotuli Parliamentorum; ut et Petitiones, et Placita in Parlamento*, ed. by John Strachey et al., 6 vols (London: 1767-77) vi (1777), pp. 250-1.

Henry Tudor emerged to challenge Richard III for the crown in 1485. Again, the nobility of England were divided and the Herberts were at the centre of the conflict. Anne's kinsman, Richard Corbet, was one of the first to pledge his support to Henry, who must have made a favourable impression in 1471. Anne's brother, Walter Devereux, fought for Richard III. Anne must have felt emotionally invested on both sides. Despite their strong ties to Henry and to Lady Margaret Beaufort, the family had equally strong ties to Richard III. Anne's eldest son, William, had become a widower and then married Richard's illegitimate daughter, Katherine, though there is no evidence that he fought at Bosworth. Anne's son-in-law, Henry, earl of Northumberland, had dutifully lined up on Richard's side but took no part in the fighting. Anne's second son, Walter, who had grown up with Henry at Raglan in the 1460s, was one of the men sent by Richard III to intercept Henry as he marched out of Wales. Walter Herbert's loyalties are unclear, but there is no evidence that he attempted to stop Henry's march through Wales.

Henry faced Richard at Bosworth on 22 August 1485 and was victorious, becoming Henry VII. He duly married Elizabeth of York, uniting the York and Lancaster houses. His reunion with Lady Margaret is not recorded, but he summoned Anne warmly to London in February 1486, granting safe passage to his 'most dear cousin.'¹⁰⁷ Anne died approximately six months afterward and was buried with her husband at Tintern Abbey.¹⁰⁸

Anne Herbert was a capable woman and a political force in her own right, motivated by strong familial loyalty. Her only marriage was an affectionate one, a partnership which remained solid through years of turbulence and danger. Potential further evidence of this is a gold signet ring which was found near to Raglan Castle in 1998.¹⁰⁹ It has a circular bezel, engraved with a design of a lion on a bed of flowers, within a single cable border with the legend: '*to yow feythfoull*' or '*feythfoull to yow*' and the initials W A either side of the lion. It dates

¹⁰⁷ *Materials for a History of the Reign of Henry VII*, ed. by William Campbell, 2 vols (London: Longman et al., 1873-7), i, p. 320.

¹⁰⁸ *Herbertorum Prosapia*: Cardiff Central Library, MS. 5.7.

¹⁰⁹ 'Metal detector discoveries from Monmouthshire: Two spectacular treasure finds', *The National Museum of Wales*, 16 April 2007 <<http://www.museumwales.ac.uk/1903/>> [accessed 17 December 2015].

from between about 1440 and 1475, and so may well have belonged to William Herbert. Its size suggests that it was worn by a man, probably over a leather glove.¹¹⁰

This image
has been
removed
for copyright
reasons

*13. The Raglan ring. Photograph reproduced from the BBC website
<<http://www.bbc.co.uk/ahistoryoftheworld/objects/RwuYrQlaSrOjF5QBDPJGpQ/>>.*

It was not religious enthusiasm but Anne's strong and harmonious marriage which was central to her later life as a widow and vowess. She almost certainly engaged in the usual devotional practices of the time, but her vowed life was defined by the work of furthering the family's political interests and managing estates in lieu of her underage son. A further clue to her widowed life appears in one of the poems of Guto'r Glyn. The fifteenth century was a great age for Welsh poets and Guto'r Glyn was one of the finest. He was also resident poet at Raglan and wrote a poem to comfort Anne after William's death:

¹¹⁰ 'The Raglan Ring', part of the *A History of The World* series on the BBC website <<http://www.bbc.co.uk/ahistoryoftheworld/objects/RwuYrQlaSrOjF5QBDPJGpQ/>> [accessed 17 December 2015].

'a wife has been equally endowed, possessing a hundred rents, to
maintain Gwent after her husband.

All women and their grace are mere vanity
compared with the Deifr of the blood of Devereux,
a second Sibyl, wise and fair,
from the court of Weobley...

My originator never created
an earl's wife more true to her husband,
a widowed woman covering herself
in expensive black, from the stone house over there,
mother of an earl with a bloody weapon,
wife of the best earl of Christendom.....

You are an Isolde fiercely grieving for Tristan
after your husband, Ann,
a Martha in the vigour of martyrdom,
a mournful Mary after her brother's death,
the sleeplessness of the queen
on account of her father, one with the hue of Maytime and fair
weather...

Gwent has a ring and mantle,
never was there a fairer face in black.'¹¹¹

Of course, this cannot all be taken at face value: the praise is excessive and Guto'r Glyn would have recognised the need to flatter his employers. However, it is telling that he felt the need to comfort Anne at all, describing her as 'fiercely grieving.' This serves as a reminder that some vowesses would have been

111 A full edition (with translations) of the Guto'r Glyn poems can be found at <http://www.gutorglyn.net/>. Poem 26 appears in full, ed. by Barry J. Lewis, with translation and notes, at <http://www.gutorglyn.net/gutorglyn/poem/?poem-selection=026&first-line=023> [accessed 17 December 2015].

experiencing genuine bereavement and it seems likely that Anne was amongst them. Guto'r Glyn even refers to Anne's vowing ceremony: her 'ring and mantle', although no other evidence of the vow has been found. His assertion that there was never 'an earl's wife more true to her husband' echoes the fidelity expressed in the inscription on the signet ring. It is most likely that the poem was composed around 1471, in which Anne would have been coming to terms with her grief and recovering from the flurry of disasters in preceding years, looking hopefully to her children and the future.¹¹²

Anne's story may have been over in 1486, but Lady Margaret was still reaching the height of her power. At her request, Henry passed an act of Parliament, which read:

'And furthermore hit be ordeined, enacted and stablISHED by the same auctoritee, that the same countesse, in her name sole, by the name of Margaret countesse of Richmond, modre of the most Christian prince King Herrie the VIIth, King of England and of France, maie fro'henceforth terme of her lyfe sue all manner of actions reals and personalls and also all actions mixtes, and plede and be ympled for all manner of causes in all manner of courts spirituells and temporells, ayenst all persons, as any other persone or persones may or shall more doe, in as good, large and beneficiall manner, as any other sole persone not wyfe ne covert of any husband, att anie tyme might or maie do. And that she, as well do as with other persones, att her pleasure may from henceforth, dueringe her lyfe, as well make, as take and receive, all manner of feoffments, states, leases, releases, confirmations, presentations, bargains, sales, yefts, deeds, wills and writeings, as well of landes and tennements and all manner of hereditaments, as of all manner goods, cattells and other thinges, to her owne use oonly, or to the use of such as shall please her.'¹¹³

112 *Ibid.* See 'Notes' tab.

113 *Rotuli Parliamentorum*, ed. by Strachey et al., vi, pp. 284-5.

This gave Lady Margaret the legal rights of a widow, independent of male control. For a married woman to have this autonomy was unprecedented, and it demonstrates the elevated position which Lady Margaret now held. It also paved the way for her vow of chastity in 1499: though Stanley remained alive, Lady Margaret became legally and spiritually a widow.¹¹⁴ With her son on the throne, she no longer needed Stanley, though the separation seems to have been an amicable one and the two were not estranged: they welcomed Henry and Elizabeth to Stanley's home together at Lathom castle in 1495.¹¹⁵ On vowing, she set up her own household at Collyweston in Northamptonshire, in addition to Coldharbour, the fine London residence provided by Henry.

From then on, Lady Margaret's life exemplified the vowess vocation, a blending of the secular and the religious. Henry Parker, who would later become Lord Morley, arrived in Lady Margaret's household towards the end of the fifteenth century to serve her as her carver or cupbearer, and more than forty years after her death, he set down an account of her household for her great-granddaughter, Mary I. Although the accuracy of his description might be questioned after so much time had passed, and he may have exaggerated to construct a pious example for Mary, there is no reason to doubt that, when not at court, much of Lady Margaret's daily routine centred around devotional activity.

‘Thus did she use her life, her grace was every mornynge in the chapple betwixt five and sevyn of the clock, and dayly sayde matyns off the day with one off her chaplyns, and that sayde from sevyn tyll yt was eleven off the clocke, as sone as one preist had said masse in her syght another beganne, one tyme in a day she was confessyd, then going to her dynner how honorably she was seruyd I think fewe kings better, her condityon alwaies of the begynnyng of her dyner was to be joyous, and to heare those tales that were honest to make her mery, the myddes of her dynner either her amner or I redde some vertuous tale unto her of the life of chryst,

114 Jones and Underwood, *The King's Mother*, pp. 153-4.

115 *Ibid.*

or such like, the latter ende off hir dinner agayne she was disposed to talk with the bishop [John Fisher] or with her chauncelour which satt at her bordis ende of some goldly matter.’¹¹⁶

Lady Margaret in no way distanced herself from her familial and political interests. During Elizabeth of York's first pregnancy, she prepared a set of ordinances which set out the protocol for the queen's confinement, the christening of the child, and arrangements for the royal nursery.¹¹⁷ Lady Margaret's first grandchild, Arthur, was born on 20 September 1486. Her second, a girl, was born 28 November 1489 and named Margaret in her honour. She was named godmother to the princess, making her a gift at her christening of ‘a chest of silver and gilt, full of gold.’¹¹⁸ Elizabeth of York would eventually bear eight children. Lady Margaret also maintained her links with the Herbert family. In the early 1500s, she kept rooms at Collyweston for one of Anne's daughters, Anne Powis. This Anne was one of Lady Margaret's companions until her death. Lady Margaret left in her will a piece of jewellery, ‘a heart of gold with a fair sapphire’, to Anne.¹¹⁹

Lady Margaret's relationship with Henry remained close as ever: her first surviving letter to him, dated 1501, begins: ‘My own sweet and most dear King, and all my worldly joy...’¹²⁰ A letter from him to her, dated July 1504 and signed ‘with the hand of your most humble and loving son’, demonstrates that he sought her advice and discussed with her his political affairs. It is also affectionate beyond the respect dictated by duty:

‘And my Dame, not only in this but in all other things that I may know should be to your honour and pleasure, and weal of your soul, I shall be as glad to please you as your heart can desire it, and

116 BL, Add. MS 12060: ‘A Book of Miracles and Examples of Virtue for the Guidance of a Ruler, Dedicated to Queen Mary by Henry Parker Lord Morley.’

117 Norton, *Margaret Beaufort*, p. 159.

118 *Ibid.*, p. 162.

119 Jones and Underwood, *The King's Mother*, p. 162.

120 *Original Letters, Illustrative of English History*, ed. by Henry Ellis, 1st ser., 3 vols (London: Harding and Lepard, 1825) i, p. 46.

I know well that I am as much bounden so to do as any creature living, for the great and singular motherly love and affection that it hath pleased you at all times to bear towards me.'¹²¹

In the same month as that letter was written, Stanley died at Lathom and Lady Margaret renewed her vow of chastity.¹²² She was now, as a true widow, a more conventional vowess, if indeed she could ever be described as conventional, and she remained busy as always. In addition to her active participation in family and political life and her religious devotions, she refounded Christ's College, Cambridge, in 1505 and took an active interest in Caxton's press, patronising it and requesting a number of personal and religious texts.¹²³

The adult royal family was dwindling as Arthur had succumbed to an unknown illness soon after his wedding to Katherine of Aragon in 1502, and the following year Elizabeth of York had died of complications from childbirth. Lady Margaret was now the first lady in the land. Henry himself died on 21 April 1509. Lady Margaret would have been devastated and was, by then, very elderly, but she was unlikely to have been left to her grief. Her grandson became Henry VIII just before his eighteenth birthday, and, although he would have been officially considered fit to rule, it is possible that he relied upon his grandmother's experience.

Lady Margaret died shortly after her grandson's coronation, and left a very long will, dated 6 January 1508. She was buried in Westminster Abbey, and she named as one of her executors Charles Somerset, Earl of Worcester, who was married to Anne Herbert's granddaughter, further evidence that Lady Margaret had maintained her links with the family. Her bequests are numerous but not remarkable: they include money and gifts to various churches and chapels, usually in return for funeral commemoration, as well as to the poor and to her family and

121 'A Letter from the King to his Mother', in *Specimens of English Prose-Writers, from the Earliest Times to the Close of the Seventeenth Century*, ed. by George Burnett, 3 vols (London: Longman et al., 1807), i, pp. 347-50.

122 Cooper, 'The Vow of Widowhood...', 72-3; St John's College Archives, C7.11, fol. 47.

123 More details on Lady Margaret's patronage at Cambridge and of Caxton can be found in chapter five.

friends.¹²⁴ There is a strong emphasis upon Christ's College, to which she left all plate, jewels, vestments, altar-clothes, books, and hangings in her chapel not otherwise bequeathed, and John Fisher used additional money from her estates for another foundation at Cambridge, St John's College.¹²⁵

Lady Margaret's married life was undoubtedly turbulent and her life as a widow not much less so. Indeed, in her funeral sermon, John Fisher claimed that 'she never yet was in that prosperite but the gretter it was the more alwaye she dredde the aduersyte', weeping at her son's coronation for fear of when the family's luck would change.¹²⁶ Her first two marriages were brief and beyond her control, which may have driven her to seek further control over her own life, with the act of Parliament asserting her financial and legal independence, when she was older. Her third marriage does seem to have involved affectionate attachment but her fourth was primarily pragmatic. Lady Margaret differs from Anne Herbert in that, while her husbands were influential in swaying her political fortunes, she was always essentially her own woman, and it was as the king's mother, not as any man's wife, that she was ultimately known. The same shrewd and spirited nature shines through in her married and her vowed life, and the same could be said of Anne: both women were immensely capable and made the best of difficult circumstances. Both also dispel the stereotype of the vowess as holy recluse and were actively politically engaged.

The same is true of Katherine Courtenay, Countess of Devon.¹²⁷ She was the sixth daughter of Edward IV, and married William Courtenay in 1495. The couple were apparently happy, enjoying royal favour and spending lots of time at court until 1502, when William was charged with conspiracy against Henry VII, along with Katherine's cousin, Edward de la Pole, Earl of Suffolk, and various

124 Jones and Underwood, *The King's Mother*, appendix 4.

125 For more on this, see chapter five.

126 *The English Works of John Fisher, Bishop of Rochester*, ed. by John E. B. Mayor (London: Trübner, 1876), pp. 305-6.

127 For a biography of Katherine, see Margaret R. Westcott, 'Katherine Courtenay, Countess of Devon, 1479-1527', in *Tudor and Stuart Devon: The Common Estate and Government*, ed. by Todd Gray, Margery Rowe and Audrey Erskine (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1992), pp. 13-38.

others. Hall's *Chronicle* states that it was William's closeness to Katherine's kin that caused him to be implicated.¹²⁸ This began a succession of tragedies for Katherine: her eldest son died a few months later; William remained in prison for the rest of Henry VII's reign; and Katherine's sister, the queen, who had been providing for Katherine's two remaining children, died from complications in childbirth in 1503. When Henry VIII was crowned in 1511, he released William and restored the title and lands he would have inherited from his father, who had died in 1509. Unfortunately, after his long imprisonment, William himself died shortly afterwards, and Countess Katherine vowed a month after his death. She was 32 years old. The following year, the king granted her the estates of the earldom of Devon for life, to be inherited by her children. She spent most of her time from then until her death in 1527 running her Devon estates, which she seldom left.¹²⁹ She did this in her own right, styling herself 'daughter, sister, and aunt of kings', but equally she held her husband's title and actively managed his lands.¹³⁰ She was, perhaps, an example of middle ground between Anne Herbert's identification with her husband and Lady Margaret Beaufort's self-sufficiency.

Vowesses like Lady Margaret, Anne Herbert, and Countess Katherine would have been set apart by their aristocratic birth. However, there are parallels between aristocratic vowesses and those lower down the social scale. There are echoes of William Herbert's apparent love for and trust in for Anne in the will of John Cooke of Gloucester, directing his trustees to act 'to such uses purpose and ententes as [his wife, Joan] shall declare thereof by hir lerned counsel to the performauce of my wille as she do know my full mynde in these purpose.'¹³¹ Just as Anne Herbert saw her role as vowess as being to 'maintain Gwent after her husband', and Countess Katherine devoted herself to Devon, vowesses of lower status also needed to manage their deceased husband's affairs.¹³² Diligence in

128 Hall, *Hall's Chronicle*, p. 496.

129 *Ibid.*, pp. 19-24.

130 Westcott, 'Katherine Courtenay, Countess of Devon', in *Tudor and Stuart Devon*, ed. by Gray, Rowe and Erskine, p. 23.

131 Roland Austin, *The Crypt School, Gloucester, 1539-1939* (Gloucester: John Bellows, 1939), pp. 140-44; TNA, PCC Prob. 11/22/615.

132 Vowesses' legal and business affairs, often carried out on behalf of deceased husbands, are discussed in more detail in chapter three.

doing so could be interpreted as indicative of marital affection or simply as financial prudence. The will of William Bedell, whose wife was to vow upon his death, reads: ‘The residue of all my goods... I leve to Cecill my wife whom I make soole myn executrice to dispose the same goods to the most profite of my synfull soule as trewely and lovyngly as she wolde I shulde doo for her yf she were in caase like whom I trust above all creatures.’¹³³ This is as explicitly affectionate as William Herbert’s will and places the same faith in the wife’s ability to manage the family property. Although outpourings of spousal affection are rare in wills, which were primarily legal documents, many vowesses were appointed sole executor upon being widowed. This was both an expression of trust and suggestive that these wives were closely acquainted with their husbands’ financial affairs.¹³⁴

Another vowess who was diligent about her husband’s interests was Margaret Croke.¹³⁵ After her husband, John, died in 1477, she continued to administer his business affairs in the trade of wool and woolfells. She shipped fells in the right of her husband as a merchant of the staple of Calais.¹³⁶ An insight into the newly-widowed Margaret appears in a letter from Thomas Betson to Elizabeth Stonor, Margaret’s daughter. Eight months after John Croke’s death, Betson wrote:

‘she wold scarcely oppyn hir mouth unto me: she is displesid and I know nat whereffore, with owte hir old sekenes be fallen on hir agayn: God send hir ones a mery countenance, and a ffrendly tonnge, or else shortly to the mynnores [Minories].’¹³⁷

Six months after, that he wrote:

133 TNA, PCC Prob. 11/19/8.

134 Hanawalt, *The Wealth of Wives*, p. 121.

135 For a detailed biography of Margaret Croke, see Lacey, ‘Margaret Croke (d. 1491)’, in *Medieval London Widows*, ed. by Barron and Sutton, pp. 143-64. For more on vowesses managing their husbands’ affairs, see chapter three.

136 For more on Margaret Croke as businesswoman, see chapter three.

137 *The Stonor Letters and Papers*, ed. by Kingsford, ii, no. 185. Presumably Betson mentioned the Minoresses because Margaret’s granddaughter was a nun there: see chapter three.

‘she made me right sulley chere with hir countenance whyles I was with hir: me thought it longe till I was departid... I had no joye to tary with hir. She is a ffyn mery woman, but ye shall know it not yit ffynd it.’¹³⁸

It is possible that Margaret simply disliked Thomas Betson, and the phrase ‘old sekenes’ seems to refer to some recurring physical or mental health issue, but Kay Lacey attributes Margaret’s ‘sulley chere’ to bereavement at her husband’s death. This chimes with Anne Herbert’s ‘fiercely grieving’: although many marriages were motivated by political interest or mutual advantage, that does not indicate that they could not be affectionate. Bereavement would have been a genuine burden for some women who vowed.

The death of a husband was profoundly life-altering: even if a couple were not particularly emotionally attached to one another, the transition to widowhood changed not only daily routine and administrative responsibilities, but a woman’s place in society.¹³⁹ Such a moment of transition for vowess Agnes Salman is recorded in the Southampton mayor’s accounts. In 1495, shortly after Massias Salman died in post as mayor, to be replaced by John Walsh, an entry reads: ‘Item brought in to the audite hous bi the saide Massie is wife of perqisites in the said Massie is tyme and delyvered to the same John walssh 24s. 1d.’¹⁴⁰ Agnes, then, personally brought the money, possibly along with her husband’s mayoral accessories, and handed the bundle over to his successor. This was a symbolic act for herself as much as for the town. Like Anne Herbert, she took personal responsibility for her husband’s affairs, and she was bequeathed almost all of her husband’s property as well as being appointed his sole executor.¹⁴¹ In a sense, her

138 *Ibid.*, no. 224.

139 Steuer, ‘Widows and Religious Vocation’, pp. 203-5.

140 *The Book of Fines: The Annual Accounts of the Mayors of Southampton*, ed. by Cheryl Butler, 3 vols (Southampton: Southampton University Press, 2007-10), i, p. 40. With regard to his Jewish name, Massias Salman was probably born of a Jewish family who had converted to Christianity: it is unlikely that a Jew would have been appointed mayor of Southampton.

141 Massias Salman’s will is summarised in his probate inventory: *Southampton Probate Inventories, 1447-1575*, ed. by Edward Roberts and Karen Parker, 2 vols (Southampton: Southampton University Press, 1992), i, pp. 10-11.

wifely responsibilities may even have increased after she was widowed and vowed.

To gain a more complete perspective of vowesses, it is necessary to consider the context of their whole lives. They were not born vowesses: their marriages and histories informed their vowed lives and how they interpreted the vowess vocation. Lady Margaret Beaufort and Anne Herbert provide two examples of this, which, although extraordinary, can colour our insights into the lives of lesser women. They lead us to consider factors such as bereavement, administrative work, religious practice, family allegiance, public identity, and political machination, on whatever scale, which were crucial aspects of many vowesses' lives. Above all, although the vowess had embraced chastity and a half-way religious state, and was a 'bride of Christ', she maintained her place in the world and the responsibilities it demanded.

'They Were Troubled by Holy Church': Failed Vowesses

To close this chapter on spiritual and physical marriage, it seems fitting to consider the cases of the women who revoked their vows and remarried, rejecting their heavenly spouse in favour of another earthly one. In these cases, the life-cycle of maiden, wife, widow (and vowess) was disrupted. The failed vowess had broken a sacred pledge, made before God and her community, and there was always trouble of some sort as a result. A London chronicle reports the case of Joan Large, who married John Gedney a couple of years after vowing in the early 1440s, that she:

‘had take the mantel and the ring and should have kept her a godly widow time of her life. And anon after he marriage done they were troubled by holy church because of breaking of her oath and were put to penance both he and she.’¹⁴²

¹⁴² Oxford, Bodleian Library, Digby Roll 2, discussed by Erler: ‘Three Fifteenth-Century Vowesses’, in *Medieval London Widows*, ed. by Barron and Sutton, pp. 171-5.

The chronicle does not elaborate further, but this section will present some examples of ways in which former vowesses and their new husbands were ‘troubled’ as a consequence of breaking a vow as well as some motives for doing so. After all, the vowed state, whilst advantageous for many women, was not without its difficulties. Whilst reflecting on the phenomenon of the failed vowess, this section will present further examples of women who broke their vows and the trouble that occurred subsequently, not only for the women personally but for her community.

The only failed vowess who is even remotely well-known falls well outside the chronological scope of this study. Eleanor, sister of Henry III, was married to William Marshal on 23 April 1224, when he was thirty-four and she only nine. He died seven years later and Eleanor vowed chastity with her governess, Cecily de Sandford. According to Matthew Paris, she fell in love with Simon de Montfort and the pair married secretly on 7 January 1238. In the controversy that ensued, the king claimed that he had only allowed the marriage because de Montfort had already seduced his sister. It is worth noting that there are no known cases of vowesses who are penalised for breaking their vow by having extramarital intercourse. It is always remarriage, in these cases, never the implied act of intercourse, which is the focus. Theoretically, if no pregnancy occurred as a result of a lapse, it could be easily concealed, and, if a vowess did fall pregnant, marriage would be expected. In the situation of Eleanor and Simon de Montfort, he rectified things by making a pilgrimage to Rome to seek papal approval. It is interesting that this was his responsibility, not hers. She had made and broken the vow, but, as the marriage had taken place, they were legally one entity.¹⁴³

Other examples of failed vowesses before 1450 have been listed by Susan Steuer: Elizabeth of Juliers, widow of John, Earl of Kent, abandoned her vow in 1360 and married Eustace Dabridgecourt. The couple’s penance included daily masses and psalms, an annual pilgrimage to Beckett’s shrine, weekly fasts for

¹⁴³ Louise J. Wilkinson, *Eleanor de Montfort: A Rebel Countess in Medieval England* (London: Bloomsbury, 2012).

Elizabeth, and that Eustace abstain from the food he most desired the day after marital intercourse. Alesya de Lascy, Countess of Lincoln, in 1338, was ‘ravished by Hugh Freyn, knight, and... consented to live with him in matrimony until his death.’ Alice Hoton excused herself from her vow on the grounds that she had vowed young and feared that she might not be able to resist any attempts to ravish her. Edeynna Clerck in 1419 claimed that she had vowed at her husband’s deathbed so as not to grieve him, but that she was young and wished to be a mother.¹⁴⁴ These examples substantiate Marjo Buitelaar’s claim that the widow’s chastity was ‘less complete and more precarious’ than that of the virgin: previous sexual experience may have been seen to render the widowed vowess more prone to ravishment and to reconsidering her vow.¹⁴⁵

Later examples of failed vows, and further justifications of remarriage, can be found in the *Supplications from England and Wales in the Registers of the Apostolic Penitentiary, 1410-1503*, published by the Canterbury and York Society between 2013 and 2015.¹⁴⁶ These volumes have shed light on a surprising number of previously unknown failed vowesses in this period, particularly since the original documents are kept at the Vatican Archives and so not easily accessible. The Apostolic Penitentiary was (and is) the highest office in the Catholic Church concerned with sin, for crimes which can only be absolved by the cardinal penitentiary on behalf of the Pope himself. This demonstrates how seriously the church took broken vows of chastity. All the supplicants in these printed volumes regarding such cases are female, the failed vowesses and not their new husbands. Unlike Eleanor de Montfort, these women were still responsible for their broken vow after their marriage had taken place. This is may have been because they were of lesser social status and so the matter was considered less important.

The volumes record the case of Catherine Lytleten of London, who, in March 1467, sought absolution for breaking her vow and dispensation to stay

144 Steuer, 'Widows and Religious Vocation', pp. 63-4. Further examples are mentioned in Alamichel, *Widows in Anglo-Saxon and Medieval Britain*, p. 195.

145 Marjo Buitelaar, 'Widows' Worlds: Representations and Realities', in *Between Poverty and the Pyre: Moments in the History of Widowhood*, ed. by Jan Bremmer and Lourens van der Bosch (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), pp. 1-18 (p. 10).

146 *Supplications*, ed. by Clarke and Zutshi.

married.¹⁴⁷ Tantalisingly, no more detail is given. Equally frustrating is the appearance of Alice Cotton, seeking absolution and dispensation for the same reason in 1498.¹⁴⁸ The will of a Dame Alice Cotton, proved 1543, survives at the National Archives; the two initially appeared to match, despite the second's having died more than forty years after the first remarried, but a monument in All Saints', Braybrook, Northamptonshire, testifies that the second Alice was not widowed for the first time until 1509.¹⁴⁹ Nonetheless, more is recorded in the *Supplications* for Alice Cotton than for Catherine Lytleten: her plea was that she vowed in her grief (*dolore*) less than thirty days after the death of her husband, implying that her judgement was clouded by grief and she was unfit to make the decision.¹⁵⁰ It is possible that the same was true of Alice Cotton and she then received the attentions of a wealthier man, or indeed that, possibly like Anne Herbert and Margaret Croke, her bereavement was, for a time, all-consuming.

The *Supplications* also provide details of one particularly intriguing case. Rogeria Roper, widow of John, requested to be absolved of her vow and declared free to marry in 1492, on the grounds that that she had only vowed to escape overwhelming pressure to remarry. She claimed that certain magnates were endeavouring to persuade her with 'plots, evil persuasions and threats' (*insidias, persuasiones malas et minas*) and that they were 'unceasingly pursuing her' (*incessanter ad hoc insistendo*) so that she was 'in spirit greatly disturbed' (*animo maxime turbata*) and feared for her life. She presented her decision to vow as a means to ensure her safety.¹⁵¹ Strangely, the following year an almost identical case appears with a Margery Rooper, also apparently widow of John and also vowed in London, citing the same case in very similar language.¹⁵² It is likely that a mistranscription has occurred somewhere along the line and both women are, in fact, the same widow of John Roper of London, Margery, who went on to marry

147 *Ibid.*, ii (2014), no. 1377.

148 *Ibid.*, iii, no. 3611.

149 TNA, PCC Prob. 11/29/329; Thomas Moule, *The English Counties Delineated: A Topographical Description of England*, 2 vols (London: George Virtue, 1837), ii, p. 230.

150 *Supplications*, ed. by Clarke and Zutshi, ii, 1377.

151 *Supplications*, ed. by Clarke and Zutshi, ii, 3115.

152 *Ibid.*, iii, 3964.

John Pole.¹⁵³ It is odd that she should petition a second time with no reference to the first petition. Perhaps she had been refused initially and felt her chances were improved by not mentioning this on the second attempt. In any case, this confirms the speculation that women may have vowed in order to escape pressure to remarry, though this was not a good strategy if one merely wanted to delay marriage or to marry on one's own terms, as it seems that Margery Roper struggled to be absolved of her vow.

Elizabeth Talbot, widow of John, Earl of Shrewsbury, managed a similarly difficult situation with more success. Like Anne Herbert and Lady Margaret Beaufort, she was an aristocratic woman whose fortunes were inextricably tied into the turbulence and uncertainty of the Wars of the Roses. She appears in the *Supplications*, seeking dispensation in 1469 to marry Lawrence Aynsworth in spite of third and fourth degree consanguinity.¹⁵⁴ The marriage never went ahead and she may not have ever intended for it to do so. Elizabeth's husband had been killed fighting on the Lancastrian side at the Battle of Northampton on 10 July 1460.¹⁵⁵ Elizabeth was commissioned to vow just nine days later but it is unlikely that the vow ever went ahead.¹⁵⁶ This serves as a reminder that commissions do not guarantee vows, which is a methodological difficulty in the study of vowesses when the surviving bishops' registers record so many commissions without corresponding vows.¹⁵⁷ Elizabeth's commission may have been an emergency measure, an attempt to strengthen her position and protect her lands but, if so, vowing may have prevented her being forced into marriage but would not have prevented her property being seized. She may have realised this fact or simply changed her mind. Two years later she petitioned the Pope, claiming that her vulnerability as a wealthy and unprotected woman in times of civil war had led her to feign espousals to Walter Blount, socially her inferior, in order to protect

153 *Calendar of Close Rolls, Henry VII: Volume 2*, ed. by R. A. Latham (London: Stationery Office, 1963), online edn <<http://www.british-history.ac.uk/cal-close-rolls/hen7/vol2>> [accessed 22 December 2016].

154 *Ibid.*, ii, 1314.

155 *The Complete Peerage*, ed. by Cockayne et al., xi (1949), pp. 704-5.

156 *Testamenta Eboracensia*, ed. by Raine, iii, p. 335.

157 This issue is discussed further in the Introduction.

her property. She requested that these espousals be annulled so that she could marry another. A papal mandate was sent on 15 June 1462 and Elizabeth secured a royal license to marry whomever she chose on 6 February 1464.¹⁵⁸ She evidently considered Lawrence Aynesworth, or needed to be seen to do so, but she died unmarried on 8 September 1473 and was buried at Shrewsbury Abbey. If she had wished to vow, it was a luxury she could not afford in such dangerous times. If she had considered vowing as a means of protecting her property, it would have been unlikely to suffice. Feigning espousals seems to have been more effective and there were apparently no repercussions after the commission as the vow itself had not gone ahead.

Another perplexing case is that of Margaret Singleton.¹⁵⁹ She is described in a papal letter of 1482:

‘after the death of Robert Bothe, her first husband, the said Margaret, with a woman’s levity took before her bishop a vow of perpetual chastity or continence, that the said bishop gave her, after the manner of that country, a certain habit and a ring, in token of perpetual chastity, and that for sometime she wore, as she still does, the habit which is wont to be given to widows and those who take a vow of chastity, but afterwards, seeing herself to be unable to remain in the said widowhood without peril of her soul, and to observe her vow of chastity, and fearing also lest under the stimulus of the flesh she might give way to temptation, for the lesser peril of her soul she contracted marriage *per verba de presenti* with the said Robert Singleton, consummated it and has had offspring, always, however, wearing the said habit of a widow: and that in the meantime the said Robert Singleton, her husband, overcome by the weakness of the flesh, has, at the instigation of the author of all

158 *CPL*, ed. by Haren, xii (1933), pp. 150-1.

159 Further thoughts on the Singleton case can be found in 'The Stimulus of the Flesh and Margaret Singleton's Broken Vow', my blog post for *Notches: (re)marks on the history of sexuality*, 11 October 2016 (<http://notchesblog.com/2016/10/11/the-stimulus-of-the-flesh-and-margaret-singletons-broken-vow/>).

evil, carnally known a certain girl, Margaret's daughter by her first husband and the said Robert Singleton's step-daughter. The said petition adding that the said Robert and Margaret deeply grieve for the said excesses, and that the incest of adultery committed by the former is secret, the Pope hereby orders the above archbishop to absolve the said Robert from the said crime of adultery and incest, and to absolve him and the said Margaret from the said other excesses, enjoining upon each of them a salutary penance.¹⁶⁰

Robert Bothe was not, in fact, Margaret's first husband nor was he the father of her daughters. Margaret had previously been married to William Balderston, by whom she had had Joan and Isabel, but it is unclear which of these was 'carnally known' by Robert Singleton. Both were almost certainly adults by 1482. Joan herself was widowed by 1462 and was to be widowed again and vowed herself in 1488.¹⁶¹ It is possible that the 'girl' in question was neither Joan nor Isabel but was indeed an underage daughter of Margaret and Robert Bothe of whom no record survives. It is also unclear, and, for ecclesiastical purposes, irrelevant whether the sex was consensual, though there is no mention of penance for the daughter. Additionally, there is no way of deducing what was behind the united front presented by the Singletons or how Margaret felt about what had occurred. The claim that the incest and adultery was a secret is odd since it would not have been so after going through the ecclesiastical courts. Furthermore, there is no explanation for why the Singletons sought absolution and jeopardised secrecy if they were not under pressure because the secret were already out. Neither was any explanation offered for the fact that, after marrying Robert Singleton and bearing his child, Margaret continued to wear her vowess' habit. The fact that the wedding was conducted 'per verba de presenti' – a verbal contract with no official solemnisation – suggests that the sex, and the pregnancy,

160 *Calendar of Entries in the Papal Registers Relating to Great Britain and Ireland: Papal Letters*, ed. by W. H. Bliss et al., 17 vols (London: 1893-1986), xiii.ii (1955), pp. 835-6.

161 W. Farrer and J. Brownhill, 'Blackburn Hundred – Balderston', in *The Victoria History of the Counties of England: A History of Lancashire*, ed. by William Page, 8 vols (London: Contable, 1906-14, vi (1911), pp. 313-7 (p. 316). Vowess Joan Pilkington lived in the York see: Steuer, 'Widows and Religious Vocation', p. 172.

probably predated the marriage. Another possibility is that there was no priest available who was ignorant of Margaret's vow and so could be fooled into conducting an unlawful wedding.

Margaret argued that remarriage after vowing was a lesser sin than extramarital intercourse with the implication that she was powerless to resist 'the stimulus of the flesh.' This is a world away from Margery Kempe's picture of sexual intercourse as a duty joyfully relinquished once childbearing is done.¹⁶² Perhaps Margaret found abstinence was more difficult than she anticipated: a mystical union with Christ was not going to warm her toes in bed. The transition from wedded wife to sexless widow could not have been an easy or natural one for every vowess. Of course, Margaret may have been lying about this: she may have been coerced by her husband, who appears to have been rather an unsavoury character to say the least, to cover further crimes on his part.

A different kind of controversy embroiled failed vowess Jane Pole.¹⁶³ She had been the wife of Arthur Pole, son of Margaret Plantagenet, Countess of Salisbury. The last mention of Arthur, living, is dated 20 March 1527: in a list of those assessed for the subsidy of 1524 he appears as one of those who could not be distrained for payment.¹⁶⁴ Hazel Pierce believes he died in a sweating sickness outbreak in 1528.¹⁶⁵ Arthur's death left his son, Henry, heir to a large share of the family's lands as well as the bulk of Jane's father's considerable wealth. In order to keep these assets within the family, it was desirable that Jane did not have more children. Margaret and another of her sons, Henry Neville, Lord Montague, therefore kept the death a secret for a month whilst they decided how to ensure this. Montague broke the news to Jane on a Friday; Arthur was buried at Bisham

162 *The Book of Margery Kempe*, ed. by Staley, i, 256-9: after hearing the music of Heaven, 'sche had nevyr desyr to komown fleschly wyth hyre husbonde, for the dette of matrimony was so abhominabyl to hir that sche had levar, hir thowt, etyn or drynkyn the wose, the mukke in the chanel, than to consentyn to any fleschly comownyng saf only for obedyens.'

163 Hazel Pierce gives a full account in *Margaret Pole, Countess of Salisbury 1473-1541* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2003), pp. 69-91.

164 Frank Ward, 'The Divorce of Sir William Barentyne', *Sussex Archaeological Collections*, 68 (1927), 279-81.

165 Pierce, *Margaret Pole*, p. 91.

Priory on the Saturday; and Jane was vowed to perpetual chastity on the Sunday. The Poles evidently did not waste time.

This was another vow rushed and then broken. Jane married William Barentyne in 1539, timed rather well as Montague had been executed and Margaret arrested. Nonetheless, there was a backlash: Henry Knyvett, second husband of Anne, Jane's daughter by her first husband Christopher Pickering, claimed that the Barentyne marriage was invalid because Jane was vowed to chastity. The case was brought before the consistory court of London, where sentence was pronounced on 15 December 1540. It declared Jane's current marriage invalid and her son, Drew Barentyne, illegitimate.¹⁶⁶ Knyvett hoped his wife would thus inherit the fortune belonging to Jane's father, Roger Lewknor. Lewknor himself had settled his property on Jane and her children by Barentyne, though he had by then remarried and had three more daughters who would also share it.

The Barentynes fought back. Like others before her, Jane claimed that she took the vow whilst overcome with grief and that she didn't fully know what she was doing, 'in exceeding great heaviness and sorrow and almost besides herself.'¹⁶⁷ It seems odd that, if she and Arthur were so intimate, she had not noticed that she had heard nothing from him for a month but it is possible that Montague and Margaret had machinated their way around this. Jane also claimed that they had pressured her into it, taking advantage of her vulnerability, that Montague 'did earnestly instigate, persuade and procure' her, even endeavouring to frighten her into it by telling her that she must vow 'for a time to avoid suitors and other dangers.'¹⁶⁸ She emphasised that she had been told that she could vow temporarily, just as nuns had novices: 'for all religious persons have a time of probation... ye shall be used as a novice and to leave your weed at your pleasure.' She claimed that, a few days after vowing, she removed the barb she had been given at the ceremony and wore 'a black frock and white hood, like a mourner.'¹⁶⁹

166 Ward, 'The Divorce of Sir William Barentyne', p. 279.

167 Pierce, *Margaret Pole*, p. 69.

168 *Ibid.*

169 Hayward, *Rich Apparel*, pp. 248-9.

The case was eventually solved at the intervention of the king by an act of Parliament in 1543/4, which ruled in Jane's favour. However, the legal wrangling continued even after Jane's death, and the legitimacy of Drew Barentyne's birth was questioned as late as 1563.¹⁷⁰

The case of Jane Pole serves as a reminder of the power of other family members to interfere with and influence women's marriages: relatives often had a vested financial interest. In terms of the successful union of families, the case of the Lewknor-Pole alliance could not have been more unlike the loyalty between the Herbert and the Devereux families discussed in the previous section. Hostilities continued after the furore around Jane's remarriage died down. A separate case survives, in the Star Chamber records, which demonstrates that Anne Knyvett was unhappy about the Barentyne marriage into the mid sixteenth century. She claimed that her now elderly mother was afraid of William Barentyne and that she had complained of being 'very evill kepte.'¹⁷¹ Anne recounted that she went to Bramley, in Surrey, to visit Jane, only to find the outer door locked so she had her servant force it open. Anne went in, asked for Jane's blessing and then asked her to send for one of her waiting women, Philippa Turke, so that Anne might rebuke her for the 'many obprobriouse words' Philippa had used against Anne. Philippa was brought and Anne slapped her. Jane, however, claimed that Anne generally neglected her and, on this occasion, had broken down seven successive doors to get into the house. Jane said that Anne chased her and her servants from room to room, then beat Philippa severely whilst two servants held her down, so that Jane and her servants were 'in grete danger and perill of ther lyffes.' No decision in the case is given, but it is clear that the unpleasant repercussions of Jane's remarriage to Barentyne, and the interference of other family members in the marital relationship, continued for over a decade.

170 Alan Harding, 'BARENTYNE (BARRINGTON), Sir William (1481-1549), of Little Haseley, Oxon. and London,' in *The History of Parliament Online* <[http://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1509-1558/member/barentyne-\(barrington\)-sir-william-1481-1549](http://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1509-1558/member/barentyne-(barrington)-sir-william-1481-1549)> [accessed 19 December 2015].

171 TNA, Court of Star Chamber 3/1/82; Jennifer Ann Rowley-Williams, 'Image and Reality: the Lives of Aristocratic Women in Early Tudor England' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Prifysgol Bangor University, 1998), pp. 101-4.

A further complicating factor in Jane's case was the ambiguity and controversy around the vowess vocation in the 1530s and 40s. As mentioned in the introduction to this thesis, the latest known vow of chastity for a laywoman was that of Agnes Wyggeston, widow of the mayor of Leicester, in 1536.¹⁷² No specific edict concerning the termination of the practice of vowing laywomen survives but chastity vows, particularly for priests, were hotly debated in the 1530s, as indeed was the Dissolution of the Monasteries. However, the Act of the Six Articles, passed in 1539, stated 'that vows of chastity or widowhood, by man or woman made to God advisedly ought to be observed by the law of God; and that it exempteth them from other liberties of Christian people, which, without that, they might enjoy.'¹⁷³ This fourth article effectively made it a felony for any person who had taken a vow of chastity to marry, and it was because of this that Jane and William Barentyne had to procure an act of Parliament to confirm the legitimacy of their children. With Henry VIII as head of the English church and papal involvement terminated, such matters now fell to regal authority. The fact that the Act needed to be passed indicates the ambiguity around such vows at the time, as does Jane's claim that she believed she could vow temporarily. By misinterpreting the definition of the vowess vocation, deliberately or otherwise, Jane reflects the fact that it was already being undermined. By the 1530s and 40s, the vow was not as clear-cut nor as sacrosanct as it had been, though neither was it utterly disregarded.

Even as late as the 1530s or 1540s, to break a vow of chastity was transgressive. The ways in which women defended themselves amidst the resulting trouble reveal a great deal about the difficulties both of marriage and of the vowess vocation. Family members interfered because they had a financial and an emotional interest: they applied pressure either to vow or to marry, depending on which suited them. Potential suitors could also apply pressure to be accepted. This could complicate women's decision-making, as could bereavement and sexual desire. These provided possible excuses when seeking release from a vow,

¹⁷² *Lincoln Diocese Documents*, ed. by Clark, pp. 209-10.

¹⁷³ *The Acts and Monuments of John Foxe*, ed. by Stephen Reed Cattley, 8 vols (London: R. B. Seeley and W. Burnside, 1837-9), v (1838), p. 262.

which could be rendered invalid by coercion or irrationality; such justifications could be genuine or simply convenient. Nonetheless, they did not render release or absolution easy, even after vowing had been discontinued.

Conclusion

The vowess vocation is defined by worldly piety: the state of being both lay and religious, devoted to Christ but living amongst the laity. As such, when the vowess wed Christ, she now had two husbands. She was, in spiritual terms, a celestial bride, but her community would have known her as the widow of her deceased husband and she may still have felt a strong allegiance to him personally.

Although the Continental mystics were responsible for the teaching that a widow could wed Christ and they would have been inspirational figures, they did tend to present the death of or separation from the husband as the solution to this dilemma of bigamy. In reality, for vowesses, it was more complicated. The vowess did not leave behind her old life and identity and could not divorce herself from her past. This tension is perhaps partly responsible for the number of failed vowesses and different women resolved it in different ways, hence the variation in their public identification, for example, on monumental brasses. Lady Margaret Beaufort identified as Henry's mother rather than any man's wife. Anne Herbert seems to have interpreted her vow as an expression of loyalty to William. These were resourceful women, women of initiative, who seized upon the advantages of vowing within the world and were more than capable of navigating its difficulties.

Chapter Three:

‘I Doo Unfaynedly Loue You’: Vowesses’ Worldly Ties

Most vowesses, far from being the holy recluses imagined by some scholars, were active participants in their communities. Just as they balanced worldly and spiritual spouses, they devoted as much time and energy to relationships with people around them as to communing with God. This was in keeping with the piety of the *Devotio Moderna*, in which worldly pursuits and interaction with one's kin and one's neighbours could be religious acts.¹ This chapter will explore vowesses' interpersonal relationships in more detail, first by extending the previous discussions on husbands and friars to a more rounded consideration of these women's relationships with men generally. It will endeavour to ascertain whether vowesses were limited or oppressed by a patriarchal system, whether they were undermined or supported by their male family members and by the clergy. The second part of this chapter will discuss vowesses in relationship with one another, taking London as a case study, to consider how the ties of shared vocation were manifest. Having established the active and interactive nature of the vowess' position in her community, more can be learnt from examining the complexities of these relationships.

A Man's World?

As Patricia Cullum and Katherine Lewis noted in their introduction to *Religious Men and Masculine Identity in the Middle Ages*, there has been a great deal of recent scholarship on medieval feminine piety without a corresponding body of work on masculine piety.² The danger of this, and indeed the danger of

¹ See the previous chapter for a fuller discussion of this.

² P. H. Cullum and Katherine J. Lewis, 'Introduction', in *Religious Men and Masculine Identity in the Middle Ages*, ed. by P. H. Cullum and Katherine J. Lewis (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2013), pp. 1-15.

viewing piety through the lens of gender in the first place, is that it can fail to accommodate the fact that men and women were not segregated. Even in convents, men played a supervisory role, and, outside the cloister, much devotional practice was household or communal in nature.³ Men and women existed in relationship and influenced one another's piety, which was then both gendered and non-gendered. Gender identification could be complex: although many women specifically identified with female saints, such as the Virgin Mary, equally people emulated saints of both genders. Margery Kempe, for example, was a committed follower of St John of Bridlington.⁴

This merits a closer look at the men in vowesses' lives. Friars and husbands were both discussed in the previous chapter, but these women also had fathers, brothers, sons, fathers-in-law, brothers-in-law, sons-in-law, uncles, nephews, grandsons, churchwardens, parish priests, personal chaplains and confessors, business associates, apprentices, and male friends.⁵ The potential significance of these relationships is demonstrated by the life of Lady Margaret Beaufort, whose career was shaped by her close bond with her son, Henry VII, and whose patronage was influenced by her chaplain, John Fisher.⁶ Further analysis of the relationships between vowesses and their male family members, friends, and acquaintances sheds new light on vowess piety as well as on the domestic, social, and family lives of vowed women.

Family in the late medieval period marked one's status and place in society. Though biblically in marriage a woman left her own family to join her husband's, in reality many married and widowed women identified simultaneously with their natal families. Margery Kempe's father had been five times mayor of

3 P. H. Cullum, 'Feasting Not Fasting: Men's Devotion to the Eucharist in the Later Middle Ages', in *Religious Men and Masculine Identity in the Middle Ages*, ed. by P. H. Cullum and Katherine J. Lewis (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2013), pp. 184-200 (p. 199).

4 Catherine Sanok, 'John of Bridlington, Mitred Prior and Model of the Mixed Life', in *Religious Men and Masculine Identity in the Middle Ages*, ed. by P. H. Cullum and Katherine J. Lewis (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2013), pp. 143-59 (pp. 157-9).

5 Susan Steuer has briefly outlined scholarly views of the relationship between medieval widows and their sons, and the consensus is that these probably varied and are almost entirely obscured by lack of evidence: 'Widows and Religious Vocation', pp. 101-2.

6 See chapters two and five of this thesis for more on Lady Margaret's relationships with Henry VII and John Fisher.

Lynn, a fact which she used to justify her proud behaviour.⁷ London vowess Elizabeth Willford began her will by identifying herself as ‘wydowe late the wife of thomas wilford Somtyme Cytezeyn and ffissmonger of the Cite of london the doughter late of william whetele Cytezeyn while he lyved and wolman of the seid Cytee of london.’⁸ Similarly, Alice Hampton's uncle, William Hampton, served as mayor of London, and she was known at Dartford Priory as ‘cousin and heir of Sir William Hampton, knight, late citizen and alderman of London.’⁹ The connection offered Alice not only elevated status at Dartford, but also financial benefits. Indentures from Thomas Percy, prior of the convent of Holy Trinity, London, to John Bamme, dated 1483, refer to an enfeoffment of the manor of Charles in Dartford which involved the payment of an annuity of fifteen pounds granted by the convent at Bamme's request to Alice.¹⁰ Documents relating to this arrangement and to the lands involved were to be locked in a chest at the convent and Bamme was given a key, should he need it during Alice's lifetime.¹¹ It was probably this arrangement which enabled Alice to live as a vowess at Dartford prior to her uncle's death, at which she inherited the family's estates. It seems likely that William Hampton was in favour of his niece's religious fervour and actively supported her in pursuing these inclinations.¹²

There is evidence of a more profound pious affinity between vowess Susan Kyngeston and one of her male family members. Her stepbrother, Thomas Elyot, translated a sermon by St Cyprian, the *Swete and Deuoute Sermon of Mortalitie*, mentioned in the first chapter of this thesis, and he addressed Susan directly in the prologue:

‘which I haue dedycate and sente vnto you for a token: that ye shall perceyue, that I doo not forgeat you: and that I doo vnfaynedly loue you, not onelye for our allyaunce, but also moche more for your perseuerance in vertu & warkes of true faith, praieng you to

7 *The Book of Margery Kempe*, ed. by Lynn Staley, i, 190-200.

8 BL, Harley Charter, 55 H 16.

9 TNA, E 41/479.

10 TNA, E 41/479; E 40/5815; and E 40/5939.

11 TNA, E 40/5939.

12 For more on Alice at Dartford, see the next chapter.

communicate it with our two susters religiose Dorothe & Alianour, and to ioyne in your praiers to god for me.’¹³

Thomas and Susan's ‘allyaunce’ of kinship was strengthened and enhanced by the ‘perseuerance in vertu & warkes of true faith’ which they shared, admired in one another, and encouraged one another to pursue. This double kinship of blood and spiritual affinity naturally ensured a bond of strong affection and Thomas took it for granted that Susan was praying for him. Their ‘susters religiose’ were both literally their sisters and were religious sisters, nuns, at Syon Abbey where Susan spent much of her time. Yet Thomas addressed his words not to Dorothy or Eleanor who, having taken the three monastic vows, could be argued to have had greater spiritual credentials, but to Susan, suggesting that the two were close and already corresponded on religious matters.

Vowesses were by no means limited to their own family when it came to interacting with men and operated within mixed gender communities. Many of their wills contain bequests to men who do not seem to have been family members, though admittedly there is often a lack of genealogical records. Nicholas Lathell, who served as Clerk of the Pipe for Richard III, oversaw the will of Jane Chamberlayne in 1492 and was one of the executors for Katherine Rippelingham in 1473. Katherine named him as her ‘brother’, which may have meant through marriage or blood, and Jane did not specify how she knew him.¹⁴ Even if such male acquaintances were originally the associates of vowesses’ deceased husbands, these women evidently sometimes maintained links with their husbands’ associates after being widowed. Margaret Sutton left in her will ‘To Sir John Husey doghter, that I cristened, a golde ryng with a ruby.’¹⁵ This probably means that she acted as the child’s godmother. This was a considerable honour and yet Hussey does not seem to have been related to Margaret. Even the strictly

13 Erler, *Women, Reading and Piety*, p. 87.

14 *Calendar of Patent Rolls: Edward IV, Edward V, Richard III, 1476-85*, ed. by Henry C. Maxwell-Lyte (London: Stationery Office, 1901), p. 406. The wills are TNA, PCC Prob. 11/9/115 and 11/6/240.

15 *Lincoln Wills*, ed. by Foster, ii, pp. 17-9. Margaret Sutton’s date of death is unknown but she was dead by 1530: see TNA, C 1/519/23.

devout Alice Hampton had male friends, such as friar Edmund Bellond discussed in the previous chapter. The feoffees in whose hands she temporarily placed her estates when transferring them to Syon Abbey included Richard Whitford, the religious author who signed himself 'the Wretch of Syon'.¹⁶ It is entirely plausible that the two conversed on religious matters.

Wills provide numerous examples of acquaintance between vowesses and men who held ecclesiastical positions. Margaret Purdans of Norwich (d. 1483) has so far been excluded from this study as there is no conclusive proof that she took a formal vow of chastity. However, as Carole Hill argues, Margaret was likely to have been a vowess.¹⁷ Her husband, Richard, predeceased her by half a century and had been mayor. She never remarried, was deeply pious and owned St Bridget's *Liber Celestis*.¹⁸ She appears in the will of her mentor and priest, Richard Fernys, alongside Katherine Kerre, another pious woman of Norwich who bequeathed 6s 8d, a kirtle, and a smock to a vowess named Margaret at Crabhouse Priory.¹⁹ Amongst the many bequests, mostly to women, in Margaret Purdans' own will, she left an English psalter to Thomas Carman, vicar of Yaxley, and a reliquary engraved with the Passion to John Steyke, bibliophile rector of St Lawrence's, Norwich.²⁰ The will of Jane Harby similarly has two bequests to Simon Stalworth, subdean of Lincoln, including 'a pair of gret beide of Corell wyth gawdes of gold' which are likely to have been used as rosary beads.²¹ These gifts had obvious spiritual significance and were evidently chosen with care.

Somewhat mysteriously, the will of vowess Katherine Langley of London is peppered with references to a William Chubbes.²² She appointed a priest

16 TNA, E 211/375. For more about Whitford, see: J. T. Rhodes, 'Whitford, Richard (d. 1543?)', in *ODNB*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn Jan 2008 <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/29308>> [accessed 10 Sept 2016].

17 Hill, *Women and Religion in Late Medieval Norwich*: references to Margaret are scattered throughout the book. Carole kindly shared with me some of her thoughts about the possibility that Margaret was vowed. See also Erler, *Women, Reading and Piety*, chapter three.

18 *Ibid.*, p. 113; p. 36.

19 NRO, NCC, Jekkys, fol. 15; Multon, fols 90-1.

20 NRO, NCC, Caston, fols 163v-165r. See also: Hill, *Women and Religion in Late Medieval Norwich*, p. 114.

21 *Lincoln Wills*, ed. by Foster, i, p. 44. For further discussion of these beads, see chapter five.

22 LMA, MS 9531/9, fols viii to x (3d ser.), fol. 30v.

specifically to sing masses for his soul, then later specified that some of her possessions were to be sold to pay for a second priest to do the same, and she provided for an extra 'trental' of thirty masses for him a year after her own decease. She was likewise named as an executor in his will.²³ Yet the connection between them remains obscure. Katherine held several papal indulgences and licenses, allowing her to choose her own confessor, yet her will indicates that this position was more probably held by Richard Consett, 'which was my preste.'²⁴ Chubbes had died in 1505/6; he was a doctor of theology who produced an exposition of the *Quaestiones Quodlibetales* of John Duns Scotus (1266-1308) and was master first of Pembroke College, then Jesus College, Cambridge. His influence on Katherine can possibly be traced in the preamble to her will, in which she bequeathed her soul to God whilst 'tenderly besuhyng him for his infinite mercy that it may be on of the chaste soulis to rayne with hym in everlastyng Joy.'²⁵ Scotus' work was contributed significantly to the debates concerning predestination and free will which continued throughout the later Middle Ages: he taught predestination *ante praevia merita*, attaining Heaven through divine grace rather than good works.²⁶ Katherine's opinions on the topic are likely to have been influenced by Chubbes.

Chubbes was also known to Lady Margaret Beaufort: she paid for a scribe to write out his works in 1499, he received money and livery from her in 1498 and 1502, and he was present in late November 1503 when she visited Liddington, Rutland.²⁷ She was another of his executors.²⁸ She also made gifts to him totalling £33 6s. 8d. towards the building of Jesus College.²⁹ Yet, whilst Lady Margaret is known to have been closely connected with Cambridge, the only potential evidence of Katherine Langley's interest in the university is that she specified in

23 TNA, PCC Prob. 11/15/43.

24 LMA, MS 9531/9, fols viii to x (3d ser.), fol. 30v.; TNA, C 270/32/12; C 270/32/13; C 270/32/14; E 135/6/66.

25 LMA, MS 9531/9, fols viii to x (3d ser.), fol. 30v.

26 Oakley, *The Western Church in the Later Middle Ages*, pp. 133-48 (pp. 141-2).

27 Malcolm G. Underwood, 'Chubbes, William (c.1444-1505/6)', in *ODNB*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn Jan 2008 <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/5379>> [accessed 13 Feb 2016].

28 TNA, PCC Prob. 11/15/43.

29 Underwood, 'Chubbes, William (c.1444-1505/6)', in *ODNB*.

her will that the five priests chosen to sing for herself, her husband, her parents, and William Chubbes were ‘to be chosyn and takyn of such as be of goode name and lyke to profitt in divinite within the universite of Cambrege and Oxford.’³⁰ This was fairly conventional and only really demonstrates that she wished the priests to be well-educated.

Richard Consett, to whom Katherine's will refers, is also listed as a witness in the will of William Chubbes, and so is an identifiable link between the two and presumably a mutual acquaintance.³¹ Somewhat surprisingly, Consett received his degree from Oxford rather than Cambridge, not until until 1509, around three years after Chubbes had died. Consett was then awarded an MA in 1514.³² As Katherine herself died in 1511, Consett must have served as her priest either for only a short time or before he received his first degree. In addition to this, Richard Hastings, Lord Welles and Willoughby, who is mentioned in Katherine's will, was a benefactor of Jesus College, Cambridge, and, after his death, his widow gave lands to Pembroke College.³³ It seems unlikely to be coincidence that the Willoughbys supported the two colleges at which Chubbes was appointed Master. Chubbes' will was also witnessed by Robert Ridley, uncle of Nicholas, later bishop of London: as a prominent conservative, Robert Ridley was arrested by Henry VIII in 1534 and died shortly afterwards.³⁴ The overall impression is tantalising: if Katherine Langley were part of an intellectual and religious circle

30 LMA, MS 9531/9, fols viii to x (3d ser.), fol. 30v.

31 TNA, PCC Prob. 11/15/43.

32 *The Register of the University of Oxford*, ed. by C. W. Boase, 5 vols (Oxford: Clarendon, 1885), i, p. 66.

33 Charles Henry Cooper. *Memorials of Cambridge*, 3 vols (Cambridge: W. Metcalfe and son, 1860-66), i (1860), p. 367; Aubrey Attwater and S. C. Roberts, *Pembroke College Cambridge: A Short History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 26. It is unclear whether Katherine's association with Willoughby, who died in 1503 and was a prominent and active political figure of the time, was a genuine acquaintance or even friendship, or if she simply referred to his tomb to illustrate the spot she had in mind: ‘If that I decease and dy in london or at Stepney or within iii myle of London then I will that my body be Buried in the Gray ffriars in london in the same Chapell wher my lorde Willoby and his wif is buried’ (LMA, MS 9531/9, fols viii to x (3d ser.), fol. 30v.). For more on Willoughby, see *The Complete Peerage*, ed. by Cockayne et al., xii (ii) (1959), 445, 666-7. His mother-in-law was probably also a vowess: *Testamenta Eboracensia*, ed. Raine, iii (1864), p. 343.

34 TNA, PCC Prob. 11/15/43. Richard Rex, ‘Ridley, Robert (d. 1536?)’, *ODNB*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn Jan 2008 <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/68881/>> [accessed 10 March 2016].

involving Chubbes, Consett, Lady Margaret Beaufort, Ridley, and Willoughby, it would be fascinating to know more about this, but further evidence is elusive. Katherine's elaborate provision for the soul of William Chubbes remains largely unexplained but it is clear that she owed him some debt or was deeply fond of him. This further suggests that vowesses, far from being oppressed, were upheld and supported by the religious men with whom they associated.

Some of these men, like Richard Consett, would have been the vowesses' own priests or chaplains. Most moderately well-off medieval families or individuals would have a private chapel, staffed with its own priest. He would order the religious life of the household, hold services, offer spiritual counsel if desired, and might also do secretarial work such as writing letters and record-keeping as well as helping to educate the children of the household.³⁵ The *Northumberland Household Book*, describing the household regulations of Henry Percy, the grandson of vowess Anne Herbert, also lists surveying the employer's lands and acting as both clerk of the closet and riding chaplain as duties expected of a domestic priest serving the aristocracy.³⁶ While the primary role of the domestic priest was obviously a religious one, he was expected to make his more general learning available in whatever way his employer deemed useful. He could also serve as a chantry priest, singing divine services for those dear to his employers or for the employers themselves after their decease.³⁷ This blurring of pastoral and domestic duties with commemoration is nowhere more apparent than in the will of Alice Brice:

‘I will that myn executor ordeyne and provide of my goods that I have an honest preest to syng and say his masse and other divyne servyce comonly in the said church of Saynt Nicholas by the space of thre yeres after my decesse praying for my soule the soules of

35 Anthony Emery, *Greater Medieval Houses of England and Wales*, 3 vols (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), iii, p. 29.

36 Kent Rawlinson, 'The English Household Chapel, c.1100-c.1500 : An Institutional Study' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Durham, 2008), p. 264-5.

37 Peter Heath, 'Urban Piety in the Later Middle Ages: the Evidence of Hull Wills', in *The Church, Politics and Patronage in the Fifteenth Century*, ed. by Barrie Dobson (Gloucester: Sutton, 1984), pp. 209-29 (pp. 225-6).

my husbonds Roger Eley nor John Crichefeld and Henry Brice my frendes benefactors and all cristen soules the same preest havynge yerely for his salary x marks. And I will that the said preest shalbe attendyng upon my sone in lawe Henry Kebell and my doughter Johane his wif upon there reasonable desire whan they ryde or goo on pilgrimage or into the countrey upon their sportyng or my doughter lying in childe bedde and other tymes convenyent thesame preest alwey praying for my soule and other soules aforsaid.³⁸

If such a priest or chaplain did his job well, he could become indispensable and, over time, come to be regarded as another member of the family. Many vowesses' wills suggest a close relationship with their priests. This is not necessarily because the priest was named, as he often was: specificity was useful in a will. Rather, it is that, for example, Agnes Burton not only bequeathed to hers 'a cupp and a fetherbede' but also 'to hys moder a girdell'; Joan Pernaunt appointed hers overseer of her will; Maud Baker mentioned that she had lent her chaplain money, and he evidently kept in touch with the family after her death as her son later bequeathed him 6s. 8d.; Jane Armstrong ensured that hers had new clothes every year as well as his cash payment; and Margery Middlemore stipulated that her priest was to be provided with 'meate and drinke and lodging yf he be so contentid', again, on top of his 40s.³⁹ These wills suggest a relationship of reciprocity between a vowess and her priest: in exchange for his services, she paid cash but also had an interest in his welfare. This could naturally extend to genuine friendship.

As such, a priest could exercise influence over the vowess who employed him, and indeed vice versa. The relationship between Lady Margaret Beaufort and John Fisher, about which more is said in the final chapter of this thesis, is a case in

38 TNA, PCC Prob. 11/11/576.

39 TNA, PCC Prob. 11/14/120; *The Pre-Reformation Records of All Saints' Church, Bristol*, ed. by Burgess, iii, pp. 51-4, 33-9; *Lincoln Wills* ed. by Foster. ii, p. 143; TNA, PCC Prob. 11/24/14.

point. As her chaplain and confessor, Fisher was intimately involved in Lady Margaret's spiritual and devotional life, which extended to her charitable giving. This afforded him some degree of access to the purse of one of the wealthiest women in England and lent him considerable power. A different kind of power was held by Robert Spryngolde, who served as Margery Kempe's parish priest and also acted as her chief confessor. She referred to him as a friend and a source of spiritual comfort.⁴⁰ His profound influence over her mysticism and her complete faith in him are apparent in Christ's words to her:

‘Also, dowtyr, I telle the that Maistyr Robert, thi gostly fadyr, plesyth me ful meche whan he byddyth the belevyn that I love the. And I knowe wel that thu hast gret feyth in hys wordys, and so thu maist ryth wel, for he wil not flatyr the. And also, dowtyr, I am hyly plesyd wyth hym, for he biddith the that thu schuldist sittyn stille and gevyn thyn hert to meditacyon and thynkyn swech holy thowtys as God wyl puttyn in thi mende.’⁴¹

When Christ counsels Margery about her relationship with Robert, his words reveal an intense emotional as well as spiritual intimacy between the pair: ‘he schal trewly be rewardyd for thy wepyng as thow he had wept hymselfe... ye schal be ful mery in hevyn togedyr at the last and schal blyssyn the tyme that evyr yowr on knew yowr other.’⁴² Margery Kempe's piety was more rooted in mystical experience than most of her contemporaries but nonetheless mysticism was an important element of pious practice for many late medieval Christians, for whom the devotional and the emotional were deeply entwined. When vowesses confessed to priests, or prayed with them, or discussed spiritual matters, emotional intimacy could easily be an inevitable consequence. Such intimacy only served to enhance the influence which came with a priest's theological credentials.

Priests, then, could directly influence a vowess' theological beliefs, devotional practice, and charitable giving. They could be a vowess' close friend

40 *The Book of Margery Kempe*, ed. by Lynn Staley, i, 1392-3; 3998-4001.

41 *Ibid.*, i, 5179-84.

42 *Ibid.*, i, 5154-7.

and supporter. They provided spiritual direction, comfort, counsel, and validation. Although they were paid to be on hand for such things, some went beyond their remit and forged emotional connections with the vowesses who employed them. Equally, vowesses reciprocated beyond financial remuneration with a genuine interest in the welfare, careers, and families of their priests, as evidenced in the wills. A similar relationship seems to have existed between vowesses and friars, as discussed in the previous chapter.

Vowesses also came into contact with men on business or professional matters. As wealthy widows, most had property to manage and this necessitated interaction with the world outside their homes. In fact, vowesses are ubiquitous in the records of the Chancery and Exchequer courts, despite the fact that the law was a male-dominated sphere. Barbara Hanawalt writes that women's competence in bringing legal cases suggests that they were comfortable in public life and well informed about their legal rights and about court procedures.⁴³ They also may have had help, as some brought cases alongside a male relative.⁴⁴ As the 1486 act of Parliament, giving Lady Margaret Beaufort the legal rights of a widow indicates, women were only permitted to sue others in court, or to buy, sell or lease property in their own name, if they were widowed or single.⁴⁵ As most vowesses were widows, they held many of the same legal powers as their male peers. Furthermore, their patronage of schools, colleges, and churches caused them to be intimately involved in the foundation and sometimes the running of these institutions, in which they worked closely with men.⁴⁶ These relationships were far from the intimate and spiritual connections that vowesses sometimes formed with clergy, and indeed, as the Chancery records show, there could be conflict and hostility, but these interactions are nonetheless important as they demonstrate that vowesses actively participated in civic life.

As widows, some vowesses took over running the family business. These women are absent from records of the London livery companies or trade guilds,

43 Hanawalt, *The Wealth of Wives*, p. 98.

44 An example of this is Anne Meryng and Thomas Babington, discussed below.

45 See chapter two of this thesis.

46 This will be explored in detail in chapter five.

and seem to have been more active or more welcome in parish fraternities, but nonetheless they continued to trade on behalf of their husbands.⁴⁷ Mary Erler has discussed Alice Lynne of London who was widowed in 1421: her husband had been a wool merchant and grocer, and he left her his quay and messuage called Wool Wharf, along with lands and tenements in three parishes, on the condition that she did not remarry. Despite having five underage children, she continued to trade at the Staple at Calais on her husband's behalf, as did several other staplers' widows.⁴⁸ Similarly, Maud Baker of Bristol, whose husband, Thomas, had been a grocer and who became a vowess after being widowed in 1493, kept the family business going, which included keeping on her husband's apprentice, Thomas Pacy.⁴⁹

Thomas Baker's will specifies that his children 'to be kept, governed, shaped, managed and married according to the disposition, advice and counsel of Maud, my wife, and John Stevyns of Bristol, merchant.'⁵⁰ Maud, then, must have approved the marriage between Pacy and the Bakers' daughter, Joan. At Maud's death, she appointed Pacy executor of her estate and guardian to her underage son, Thomas.⁵¹ This effectively left the Bakers' wealth and their business entirely in Pacy's care and is evidence of her great trust in him. Pacy went on to become a prominent member of the local community, serving as churchwarden at All Saints' in 1505-6 and again in 1512-3. In the 1520s, he was described as a 'master' of the parish, leading an initiative to acquire substantial property for the parish in 1524-5. He acted as executor of the will of another Bristol vowess, Joan Pernaunt, in 1534.⁵² He also served as bailiff for the town in 1505-6, 1512-3 and 1523-4, was sheriff of Bristol in 1516-7, and rose to mayor in 1531-2 and again in 1543-4.⁵³

47 Vowesses' involvement in fraternities will be explored in the next chapter.

48 Erler, 'Three Fifteenth-Century Vowesses', in *Medieval London Widows*, ed. by Barron and Sutton, pp. 165-184.

49 Clive Burgess, 'Time and Place: The Late Medieval English Parish in Perspective', in *The Parish in Late Medieval England*, ed. by Clive Burgess and Eamon Duffy (Donington: Shaun Tyas, 2006), pp. 1-28 (pp. 14-5).

50 *The Pre-Reformation Records of All Saints' Church, Bristol*, ed. by Burgess, iii, pp. 30-3.

51 *Ibid.*, pp. 33-9.

52 *Ibid.*, pp. 51-4.

53 Burgess, 'Time and Place', in *The Parish in Late Medieval England*, ed. by Burgess and Duffy pp. 14-5.

His own will, composed in 1560 when Elizabeth I was on the throne, has a distinctively Catholic and traditionalist quality to it: it is almost indistinguishable from wills sixty years earlier.⁵⁴ His success was evidently partly due to the Bakers' influence at the start of his career, and to Maud's willingness to include him in her business and her family. The impression made upon Pacy, spending his youth in the Bakers' pious, parish-focussed, and, of course, Catholic household, seems to have stayed with him throughout his life. Thus vowesses could contribute indirectly to civic life through their relationships with men.

There are dozens of instances in which vowesses appear alongside men in the Chancery Court records and those of the Court of the Exchequer. Approximately 50% of the vowesses in this study appear in at least one such document and many appear in several. In some of these cases, the vowess is acting as her husband's executrix. For example, at some point between 1493 and 1500, Agnes Burton of Taunton sued the widow and son of John Tychebourne on her dead husband's behalf. She wrote that Tychebourne had owed her husband £8 6s. 8d. as well as money for a horse, that Tychebourne never paid his debt and had since died, and that she, Agnes, had requested the money of Margaret and Henry Tychebourne 'dyvers tymes.' Thus Agnes requested that both be summoned to appear before the king.⁵⁵ Margaret Croke of London also initiated numerous actions for debt in the court of Common Pleas. In 1480, she successfully sued a Southampton merchant, John Walker, for a debt of £16 17s. 9½d., and in the following couple of years, she started debt cases in her own name against several men, probably tenants, in Edmonton and Tottenham.⁵⁶ Likewise, Alice Brice, in the late 1470s or early 1480s, sued tailor Laurence Howlet and brewer John Aleyn, who had agreed to purchase three pieces of broad cloth from her for £21, through the 'acquyntance' of a Hugh Montague, who had since fled the country.⁵⁷ Legal records are a much underutilised resource in the study of vowesses, where one might not expect to find them because of their gender or their supposed

54 *The Pre-Reformation Records of All Saints' Church, Bristol*, ed. by Burgess, iii, pp. 65-7.

55 TNA, C 1/191/35.

56 Lacey, 'Margaret Croke (d. 1491)', in *Medieval London Widows*, ed. by Barron and Sutton, pp. 158-9.

57 TNA, C 1/64/962.

reclusive piety, but which demonstrate just how active many of them were in the worlds of business and finance.

These records have even shed light upon a previously unidentified vowess. Typically, vowesses are identified as ‘widow’ rather than ‘vowess’ in these documents and so it is necessary to search for them individually by name in online catalogues. A search for ‘vowess’ in The National Archives’ catalogue does, however, bring up a deed conveying a manor in Hertfordshire in which ‘Dame Anne Meryng, vowess’ is named as a grantor.⁵⁸ Anne Meryng does not appear in Mary Erler’s 1995 list of known vowesses, nor has she been written about as such elsewhere.⁵⁹ She is mentioned as having held the manor of Drayton along with her sister and nephew, and as one of the last patrons of Beauchief Abbey in Sheffield.⁶⁰ Despite the considerable distance between these two locations, the records evidently describe the same woman. Anne Meryng appears at least six times in the Chancery records in the first half of the sixteenth century and once in the Star Chamber, usually alongside her nephew, Thomas Babington, with whom she shared her parents’ estates.⁶¹ It is evident that she and Babington worked closely together in managing their property and as co-patrons of Beauchief Abbey at the Dissolution.

The legal records reveal that vowesses were not generally reluctant to fight for what they believed to be their due, nor were they inclined to relinquish it out of disdain for worldly wealth, and they sometimes fell into conflict with the men around them. Nonetheless, the overall impression is that, far from a battle of the sexes, vowesses were mostly upheld and supported by the men closest to them. William Hampton provided his niece, Alice, with financial support whilst Thomas Elyot provided his stepsister, Susan Kyngeston, with emotional and spiritual support. There are numerous examples of similar intimacy between vowesses and

58 TNA, C 147/169.

59 Erler, ‘English Vowed Women’, 155-203.

60 Dorothy M. Jennings, ‘Parishes: Drayton Beauchamp’, in *VCH: Buckingham*, ed. by William Page, 4 vols (London: St Catherine Press, 1905-27), iii (1925), pp. 341-5; Samuel Pegge, *An Historical Account of Beauchief Abbey* (London: J. Nicols, 1801), pp. 57-8.

61 TNA, C 147/169; C 1/428/4; C 1/918/3; C 1/1060/1; C 1/1517/4; C 1/1156/30-31; STAC 2/27/41.

male religious, both domestic priests in the vowess' employment and those working locally. Far from being viewed as transgressive, vowesses were generally seen by their male contemporaries as sanctioned by the church, worthy of notice because of their vow and also because of their wealth. Thus, when studying vowesses as a phenomenon and as individuals, it is essential that we do not view them in isolation or simply as religious women, but in the context of a variety of mixed gender communities.

Social Networks: The Capital and Beyond

Anything more than a cursory glance at the lives of these vowed women reveals obvious connections between them, both direct links and ones of mutual acquaintance. Vowesses shared ties of family, church, and business: just as they lived in community with the people around them, they were in community with one another. Thus a survey of known vowed women in the southern province in this ninety year period reveals 'clusters' of vowesses, like the one in Norfolk described in the next chapter. Such 'clusters' and connections naturally invite questions of how these women influenced one another's piety, whether they shared books, whether women were encouraged to vow by vowesses they knew. This section of the chapter will explore to what extent such questions can be answered by examining relationships between vowesses. It will focus primarily upon the merchant class widows of London, before expanding both outward geographically and upward in terms of status: although these women were part of a tight-knit community, they interacted regularly with others outside the metropolis and with their social superiors. The merchant class in London in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries has received significant scholarly attention, first by Sylvia Thrupp in 1948, and later on by others such as Caroline Barron, Anne Sutton, and Alison Hanham.⁶² The late rediscovery of vowesses by Mary Erler necessitates

62 See: Sylvia L. Thrupp, *The Merchant Class of Medieval London, 1300-1500* (Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press, 1948); *Medieval London Widows*, ed. by Barron and Sutton; Anne F. Sutton, *The Mercery of London: Trade, Goods and People, 1130-1578* (Hampshire, England and Vermont, USA: Ashgate, 2005); Hanham, *The Celys and their World*.

that we reinsert them into our understanding of London, and, of society in general, at that time.

Tracking connections between vowesses is not a simple task, however. Although many were simple family links - Margaret Davey and Dorothy Curson were probably cousins, Margaret and Agnes Browne both sisters and sisters-in-law, Alice Beselles was Susan Kyngeston's grandmother - it can still be difficult to ascertain the level of intimacy.⁶³ Some families are more tightly-knit than others and the exact nature of kinship can be unclear. For example, Agnes, widow of John Sacheverell of Darley, Derbyshire and Elizabeth Leche of nearby Baslow were commissioned at the same time to be vowed by the Abbot of Rochester in 1458, and Burke's genealogy notes that a John Sacheverell had married the 'co-heiress of Leche' at some point in the fifteenth century.⁶⁴ The two vowesses, then, may have been sisters, but it is not clear whether Burke's John Sacheverell was Agnes' husband or another John in the family. Some connections are still less concrete: the will of Joan Marler's husband mentions a Christian Marler, the wife of his grandson, whilst Agnes Wyggeston's will bequeaths 'to Chrystyan Merlar a great Rynge with a safure'.⁶⁵ Since Richard Marler was a grocer and alderman of Coventry and Agnes Wyggeston the daughter of a Coventry merchant, it is likely that the two Christians were either the same woman or were closely related.⁶⁶ Further connections are more speculative: vowesses Margaret Sutton and Jane Harby both bequeath a mantle in their wills, perhaps the profession mantle, to St

63 Susan Steuer has tracked similar family links between vowesses in the northern province: 'Widows and Religious Vocation', pp. 155-61. Margaret Davey was the niece of John Clopton of Long Melford, whom she appointed her executor (see TNA, PCC Prob. 11/8/289), and Dorothy Curson, immortalised in stained glass at Holy Trinity church, Long Melford, is likely to have been Clopton's daughter: see chapter four. Lady Margaret Beaufort was the granddaughter of another vowess, Margaret Holland, Duchess of Clarence: see Ann M. Hutchinson, 'Devotional Reading in the Monastery and in the Late Medieval Household', in *De Cella in Seculum: Religious and Secular Life and Devotion in Late Medieval England*, ed. by Michael G. Sargent (Cambridge: Brewer, 1989), pp. 215-27. For the other family links described, see chapter one.

64 Lichfield Record Office, Register of Bishop's Close and Boulers, B/A/1/11, fol. 94; John Burke, *A Genealogical and Heraldic History of the Landed Gentry*, 4 vols (London: Henry Colburn, 1833-39), iv (1839), p. 269.

65 TNA, PCC Prob. 11/22/353; *A Calendar of Charters...*, ed. by Thompson, pp. 46-9.

66 T. Y. Cocks, 'Wyggeston, William (c.1467-1536)', in *ODNB*, Oxford University Press, Oct 2006 <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/94979/>> [accessed 2 July 2016].

Anne's guild in Lincoln, and within fifteen years of one another, but the level of their involvement with the guild and whether they actually knew one another remains uncertain.⁶⁷ As previously discussed, much of our evidence for vowesses is testamentary, and wills can be misleading.⁶⁸ In this context, the difficulty of differentiating between an intimate acquaintance and a distant one is exacerbated when an individual is named in a will but his or her relation to the testator not specified.

In London, this strain is eased by the comparative abundance of surviving records, which often provide further information about links between individuals, and by the work of scholars such as those named above, who have already tracked some of these links. Five vowesses in particular stand out as having been mentioned, and sometimes described in detail, in recently published work on the merchant class of late medieval London, but the close links between these women have yet to be explored. These five 'key players' were wealthy, influential, and well-connected; they also knew one another and lived, worked, and prayed in close proximity. Alice Lynne, the stapler's widow described in detail by Mary Erler, was vowed in 1421 and her will was proved in 1480.⁶⁹ She was named as London's fourth richest widow in the lay subsidy roll of 1436, and for over fifty years she continued her husband's trade in wool and was a prominent parishoner at St Dunstan-in-the-East.⁷⁰ She appears to have been the eldest of these women and may have been a leader or role model to the others: to vow so young was unusual, and suggests either a strong religious motivation or desire for autonomy. Joan Byfeld also worshipped at St Dunstan's and traded wool at the Calais Staple after the death of her husband. Robert Byfeld had been imprisoned for contempt on several occasions and was described as 'beyng some deal rude for lacke of

67 *Lincoln Wills*, i, 44; ii, pp. 17-9.

68 Burgess, 'Late Medieval Wills and Pious Convention', in *Profit, Piety and the Professions*, ed. by Hicks, pp. 15-33, discussed in chapter one.

69 Erler, 'Three Fifteenth-Century Vowesses', in *Medieval London Widows*, ed. by Barron and Sutton, pp. 165-84. The vow, reproduced on p. 168, is at LMA: register of Henry Chichele, Archbishop of Canterbury, fol. 343v. Alice Lynne was still living in 1470: p. 169.

70 Thrupp, *The Merchant Class of Medieval London*, p 382.

conynge'.⁷¹ This image contrasts with the other four women's husbands, all of whom held prominent public offices. Margaret Croke, whose biography by Kay Lacey is also in *Medieval London Widows* and whose life and commemoration is further discussed in the first chapter of this thesis, was the widow of John, skinner, alderman, tax collector, and royal official in the Exchequer. He was also a stapler and she, too, continued his wool trade after his death, as well as settling his debts and collecting sums owed in London and Calais, alongside being something of a family matriarch.⁷² Alice Brice was the widow of another skinner, Henry Brice, who was also Sheriff of London.⁷³ Finally, Alice Chester, not to be confused with contemporary pious widow of Bristol of the same name, was the widow of yet another prominent skinner and alderman, and worshipped at St. Botolph's without Aldersgate.⁷⁴ Wills survive for each of these women, serving as a starting-point for exploring their circles of acquaintance. Alongside other records, they allow us to build on previous research into the London merchant class community and reveal just how closely connected these vowesses were.

Although Alice Lynne and Joan Byfeld were of the same parish, worldly interests did more to bring the above five vowesses together than pious ones. Three of them had merchant husbands who sold wool through the Calais Staple and each continued the business after being widowed. In 1423, two years after William Lynne died, Alice received the house, situated on 'le Newe Wool Wharf' off present Lower Thames Street, which the couple had purchased together. It was known as 'le Wollewharf' or 'le Weyngehous', and was where the weighing of wool for compulsory duty assessment took place. Alice was still using the building in 1462.⁷⁵ Similarly, Joan Byfeld appears in the customs records as a substantial shipper of wool to Calais and her name is on a list of staplers dated

71 Penny Tucker, *Law Courts and Lawyers in the City of London, 1300-1550* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 221.

72 Lacey, 'Margaret Croke (d. 1491)', in *Medieval London Widows*, ed. by Barron and Sutton, pp. 143-64.

73 Alfred Beaven, *The Aldermen of the City of London*, 2 vols (London: Eden Fisher, 1908-13), ii, p. 39.

74 Thrupp, *The Merchant Class of Medieval London*, p. 330. Beaven, *The Aldermen of the City of London*, ii, p. 17.

75 Erler, 'Three Fifteenth-Century Vowesses', in *Medieval London Widows*, ed. by Barron and Sutton, p. 169.

July 1472.⁷⁶ Margaret Croke is named in the customs accounts for July 1478 to October 1479, shipping woolfells in the right of her husband.⁷⁷

It is to be expected, then, that Joan Byfeld and Margaret Croke had various mutual acquaintances, but the two women were linked more closely than is initially apparent. Joan Byfeld's will was witnessed by John and Thomas Croke, John Tate the younger, and John Dunwich.⁷⁸ John and Thomas Croke were Margaret's sons, John Tate was one of her executors, and her own will bequeathed John Dunwich 20s.⁷⁹ John Dunwich is more obscure but the Tates are a well-known family.⁸⁰ John Tate the younger was a merchant of the Staple, and an alderman between 1485 and 1515, knighted in 1497.⁸¹ His first wife was Margaret Croke's daughter, he was a near neighbour of the family, and he was one of the executors of John Croke's will in 1477.⁸² The Crokes and the Tates were parishoners and benefactors of All Hallows', Barking, where the Croke tomb still stands, having been destroyed in an air raid and restored, along with a painted panel bearing the Tate arms. The Tates were also worked closely with another prominent mercer, Henry Colet, who was mayor of London in 1486 and again in 1495. Henry Colet married Alice Lynne's granddaughter, Christian Knyvett, and fathered John Colet, the famous dean of St Paul's.⁸³ The Crokes and Byfelds were also connected by William Welbeck, another merchant of the Staple and alderman between 1492 and 1504.⁸⁴ He first married Joan Byfeld's daughter, also Joan, and

76 Hanham, *The Celys and their World*, p. 247 and 242 respectively.

77 Lacey, 'Margaret Croke (d. 1491)', in *Medieval London Widows*, ed. by Barron and Sutton, p. 156.

78 TNA, PCC Prob. 11/9/253.

79 TNA, PCC Prob. 11/9/12.

80 See Anne F. Sutton, *A Merchant Family of Coventry, London and Calais: The Tates, c. 1450-1515* (London: The Mercer's Company, 1998).

81 Thrupp, *The Merchant Class of Medieval London*, p. 369; Beaven, *The Aldermen of the City of London*, ii, p. 12.

82 Lacey, 'Margaret Croke (d. 1491)', in *Medieval London Widows*, ed. by Barron and Sutton, p. 156; TNA PCC Prob. 11/7/80.

83 For more on Colet and these connections, see Sutton, *The Mercery of London*, p. 171, 270, 612; Thrupp, *The Merchant Class of Medieval London*, p. 332 and Beaven, *The Aldermen of the City of London*, ii, p. 15. Christian was the daughter of Alice Lynne's daughter, Alice, and Henry Knyvett: Erler, 'Three Fifteenth-Century Vowesses', in *Medieval London Widows*, ed. by Barron and Sutton, p. 170.

84 Thrupp, *The Merchant Class of Medieval London*, p. 373; Beaven, *The Aldermen of the City of London*, ii, p. 19.

then Margaret Croke's granddaughter, Katherine, daughter of Elizabeth Stonor and widow of Thomas Betson.⁸⁵ Joan Byfeld and Margaret Croke, then, were connected by particularly close ties of business and of family, as well as by their vowed state.

Similar ties existed between the other London vowesses aforementioned. Margaret Croke and Alice Brice were both closely acquainted with Henry Woodcock: he was the overseer of Alice Brice's will and one of Margaret Croke's executors.⁸⁶ Margaret also bequeathed him 'a standing cup of silver and gilt cornered', a valuable gift. Henry Woodcock was not a prominent public figure but may have been a descendent of John Woodcock, mercer and alderman between 1397 and 1408.⁸⁷ He was described as a scrivener in the will of Hugh Brice and that of his widow Elizabeth, indicating that he was also known to the Brice family. Hugh Brice was almost certainly a relative of Henry Brice, Alice's husband, and he was the supervisor of his will.⁸⁸ The Brices were related to the Chesters through the marriage of Elizabeth Chester, Alice Chester's niece, to James, the son of Hugh Brice.⁸⁹ Alice Chester, in her will, bequeathed 20s. to Hugh Brice, 'beside a maser I have given unto him.'⁹⁰ Her husband, Richard, was another merchant of the Staple and a skinner, like John Croke and Henry Brice.⁹¹ John Croke had, in fact, been Master of the Skinners' Company in 1469 and he worked closely with Richard Chester.⁹² Again, here, business ties overlap with family ties: Margaret Croke's daughter, Elizabeth, married Thomas Ryche, and their daughter, Joan, was a nun at the Minoresses without Aldgate: she is mentioned in both Margaret

85 TNA, PCC Prob. 11/9/253 and 11/9/12.

86 TNA, PCC Prob. 11/11/576 and 11/9/12.

87 Thrupp, *The Merchant Class of Medieval London*, p. 374-5.

88 *Ibid.*, p. 326.

89 Robert Edmond Chester Waters, *Genealogical Memoirs of the Extinct Family of Chester of Chicheley*, 2 vols (London: Robson and Son, 1878), i, pp. 17-20.

90 TNA, PCC Prob. 11/14/662. A maser was a wooden drinking vessel, and a nut was one made from a coconut shell mounted in metal, or one made to resemble this (*Oxford English Dictionary*).

91 Thrupp, *The Merchant Class of Medieval London*, p. 330; Beaven, *The Aldermen of the City of London*, ii, p. 17.

92 Lacey, 'Margaret Croke (d. 1491)', in *Medieval London Widows*, ed. by Barron and Sutton, pp. 148-9.

Croke's and Alice Chester's wills.⁹³ Thomas Ryche's sister, Isabel, was also the mother of another London vowess, Katherine Langley.⁹⁴

Since each of these women was vowed, one would expect to view their relationships with one another through the lens of devotional or religious interests. However, there is insufficient evidence to support this approach. In fact, the picture that emerges is one of women closely linked by family and by business rather than by a shared vowed state. This confirms the picture of vowesses as more aligned with the active piety of the *Devotio Moderna*, pursued whilst firmly planted in the world of the laity, than with the contemplative, reclusive piety of professed female religious. As mentioned in the Introduction, for many women the motivation for vowing was practical and pragmatic – worldly – rather than primarily religious. This does not detract from the fact that these women were closely aligned to their parish churches, to which they were often very generous, or that many were devout. Equally, Alice Hampton, for example, the somewhat esoteric figure who spent much of her life semi-enclosed at convents, was an entirely different sort of vowess. The beauty, and perhaps the attraction, of the vowess vocation was that it accommodated a range of personalities and lifestyles.

Alice Hampton could be considered another London vowess, as she spent much of her life at Halliwell Priory. There are, in fact, links between her and the merchant widows discussed above. Alice Brice's will refers to a daughter who was a nun at Halliwell and would almost certainly have been known to Alice Hampton: the will is dated 1498 while Alice Hampton's indenture at Halliwell is dated 1492 and she appears to have remained there until her death in 1516.⁹⁵ Also, Margaret Croke's son-in-law, William Stokker, to whom she lent considerable sums of money, served as alderman at the same time as Alice Hampton's uncle, William Hampton.⁹⁶ Both men were knighted together in 1470 after the Bastard of Fauconberg, recently defeated at Tewksbury by Edward IV, attempted an attack on

93 *Ibid.*, p. 152; TNA, PCC Prob. 11/9/12 and 11/14/662.

94 Summerson, 'Urswick, Sir Thomas (c.1415–1479)', in *ODNB*; Avril H. Powell, 'Dagenham: Introduction and manors', in *VCH: Essex*, ed. W. R. Powell, 11 vols (London: Institute of Historical Research, 1903-2012), v (1966), pp. 267-281.

95 The will is TNA, PCC Prob. 11/11/576. See chapter four for details of Alice Hampton's time at Halliwell.

London but was held off by the aldermen. Katherine Langley's father, Thomas Urswick, was knighted at the same time for his part in resisting Fauconberg's assault.⁹⁷ Both Hampton and Stokker later became mayors of London, whilst Urswick served as chief baron of the Exchequer and as Recorder of London.

This reflects the fact that, although the community of London aldermanic merchant families in this period was tight-knit, it was not insular. Many vowesses, indeed many people, had strong connections to London without living there: Agnes Wyggeston, for example, was the widow of the mayor of Leicester, who was another Calais stapler, and her daughter married Londoner Henry Barnes.⁹⁸ Equally, vowesses resident in London had links to other vowesses elsewhere. The husband of failed vowess Joan Gedney twice served as mayor of London and also appears in stained glass of Long Melford church, Suffolk. His first wife, Elizabeth, had been the sister of John Clopton of Long Melford, linking Joan to both London vowess, Margaret Davey, who was his niece, and Dorothy Curson, the aforementioned Norfolk vowess who was probably his daughter.⁹⁹ Most noble and gentry families had a London residence as well as a country estate, spending time in London for shopping, socialising, business, and addressing court and legal matters.¹⁰⁰ This helped to establish and cement networks which spread beyond the Capital.

These London merchant class vowesses also connected, and sometimes associated, with vowesses who were their social superiors. As wealthy women and widows of mayors and aldermen, they were not far below the gentry in status. In

96 For more on the Stokker family, see David Stocker, 'Wool, Cloth and Politics 1430-1485: the Merchant Stockers of Wyboston and London', in *The Medieval Merchant: Proceedings of the 2012 Harlaxton Symposium*, ed. by Caroline M. Barron and Anne F. Sutton (Donington: Shaun Tyas, 2014), pp. 127-145. For more about William Stokker, see Thrupp, *The Merchant Class of Medieval London*, p. 367; Beaven, *The Aldermen of the City of London*, ii, p. 14. For his relationship with Margaret Croke, see: TNA, PCC Prob. 11/9/12; Lacey, 'Margaret Croke (d. 1491)', in *Medieval London Widows*, ed. by Barron and Sutton, p. 160.

97 Summerson, 'Urswick, Sir Thomas (c.1415-1479)', in *ODNB*.

98 *A Calendar of Charters...*, ed. by Thompson, p. xvii.

99 TNA, PCC Prob. 11/8/289; NRO, Hare 5955 227xl, cited in Erler, 'English Vowed Women', 201.

100 Hanawalt, *The Wealth of Wives*, p. 138; Jennifer C. Ward, 'English Noblewomen and the Local Community in the Later Middle Ages', in *Medieval Women in their Communities*, ed. by Diane Watt (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1997), pp. 186-203.

fact, the two classes often blurred and overlapped, and the purchase of land elevated many mercantile families to become gentry. Equally, Alice Hampton, for example, came from Gloucestershire gentry stock and yet her uncle, as alderman and mayor, was fully integrated into London's mercantile community. Nor were the aldermanic and mercantile elite necessarily below the notice of the aristocracy, to whom they could supply goods and with whom some had family connections. Failed vowess Jane Pole had been the daughter-in-law of Margaret Plantagenet, Countess of Salisbury, and her own daughter married Henry Knyvett, a likely relative of the John Knyvett who had married Alice Lynne's daughter.¹⁰¹ Katherine Rippelingham, in her will, named Elizabeth Brandon, whose daughter-in-law, one of the prominent Devon landowners as the sister and coheir of John, Lord Dynham and widow successively of Fulk Bouchier, Lord Fitzwarine and John Sapcotes, went on to become a vowess as well.¹⁰² Links between vowesses transcend barriers of class, which could be very fluid and flexible anyway.

Lady Margaret Beaufort appears to have been a direct influence upon vowesses who were her social inferiors. Her funeral sermon, quoted in the previous chapter, specifically references her vow:

‘As for chastyte thoughe she always contynued not in her vyrgynyte yet in her husbandes dayes longe tyme before that he deyede she opteyned of hym lycence & promysed to lyue chast, in the handes of the reuerende fade my lorde of London, whiche promyse she renewed after her husbandes dethe in to my handes agayne, wherby it may appere the dyscyplyne of her body.’¹⁰³

This, along with the account of Lady Margaret's other virtues, would have been heard by many. Furthermore, Lady Margaret had employed vowess Cecily

101 Ward, 'The Divorce of Sir William Barentyne', 279; Erler, 'Three Fifteenth-Century Vowesses', in *Medieval London Widows*, ed. by Barron and Sutton, pp. 169-71.

102 S. J. Gunn, 'Brandon, Sir Thomas (d. 1510)', in *ODNB*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn Jan 2008 <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/3268/>> [accessed 23 April 2016]; Michael Hicks, 'Dynham, John, Baron Dynham (c.1433–1501)', in *ODNB*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn Jan 2008 <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/50234/>> [accessed 5 April 2016].

103 *The English Works of John Fisher*, ed. by Mayor, pp. 289-310 (p. 294).

Bedell's husband, William. In his will, he appointed a priest to sing at Westminster Abbey 'for my soule and for the soules of my lady Margaret Countesse of Richemount my fader and moder my wyfs and all those soules that I am most specially bounde to pray for' and stipulated almsgiving 'for the soule of my most singuler good lady Margarete Countes of Richemount by whom I had all that I have'.¹⁰⁴ This will dates from approximately a decade after Lady Margaret's death, when Bedell had gone on to work for first her stepson, the Duke of Buckingham, and then Archbishop Thomas Wolsey.¹⁰⁵ Bedell's remembrance of Lady Margaret after his life had moved on testifies to the great impression that she made upon him. He was, in fact, her receiver and treasurer and, apart from Reginald Bray, her longest-serving major officer.¹⁰⁶ She also appointed him bailiff of Cheshunt, Hertfordshire, which she received in the Great Grant of 1497.¹⁰⁷ Cecily inherited from her brother the neighbouring lands, which is presumably how the couple met.¹⁰⁸

Lady Margaret clearly knew Cecily personally by late 1508. Lady Margaret's household accounts for that time record 40s. 'yeven in rewarde to mastres Bedell for the occupying of hir howse called Tonges at my ladyes grace beyng there and hir servauntes by vi wekes'.¹⁰⁹ Tongs was a property on Cecily's Hertfordshire estate.¹¹⁰ It is unclear whether Cecily was at Tongs as hostess for the duration of the visit, as she seems to have divided her time between there and her other home in the precincts of Westminster Abbey.¹¹¹ She may have simply given Lady Margaret use of the house for her convenience. Tongs was a couple of miles from Waltham Cross, and Lady Margaret's accounts also record, that year, various payments for one of her men to ride between her home at Hatfield and the king at

104 TNA, PCC Prob. 11/19/8.

105 A biography of Bedell is scheduled to appear in the 2017 update of the *ODNB*.

106 Jones and Underwood, *The King's Mother*, p. 105.

107 Prof. Susan Powell kindly shared with me some extracts from her transcription of the household accounts: Cambridge, St John's College Archives, D91.17.

108 Eleanor J. B. Reid and S. C. Kaines-Smith, 'Parishes: Cheshunt', in *VCH: Hertfordshire*, ed. William Page, 4 vols (London: Dawson, 1902-14), iii (1912), pp. 441-58.

109 St John's College Archives, D91.17, p. 101.

110 Reid and Kaines-Smith, 'Parishes: Cheshunt', in *VCH: Hertfordshire*, ed. by Page, iii, pp. 441-58.

111 The latter residence is discussed in the next chapter.

Waltham, Havering, Eltham, Greenwich, and Hanworth.¹¹² It is possible that Lady Margaret stayed at Tongs in order to be nearer to her son as he moved around near London, although she had her own London residence of Coldharbour, where she lived at his death. As Henry VII was in very poor health and regularly expected to die from 1507 onwards, Lady Margaret probably spent time at Tongs to be near him before she decided to move from Hatfield to Coldharbour on a more settled basis.¹¹³ It is evident that Cecily and Lady Margaret knew one another well, and this may have influenced Cecily's decision to vow upon her husband's death in 1518.

Lady Margaret was also connected to other vowesses of the gentry and merchant classes. She acted as patron of the printer William Caxton, who had been an apprentice of failed vowess Joan Gedney's previous husband, Robert Large.¹¹⁴ As previously detailed, Lady Margaret was connected to Katherine Langley by William Chubbes. Another of Lady Margaret's protégées was William Smyth, bishop of Coventry and Lichfield, then of Lincoln, whose great-niece was Joan Marler, another vowess.¹¹⁵ Lady Margaret also appointed Smyth rector of Cheshunt in 1492, where he would have known Cecily Bedell.¹¹⁶ Lady Margaret's influence spread far and wide: other women may have vowed in imitation of her.

It may be tempting to interpret the abundance of connections between vowesses, even those separated by geography or social status, as indicative of a movement, a network specific to women who lived this half-lay, half-religious life. However, as the study of London demonstrates, the connections are not primarily of a devotional or spiritual nature: they are ties of business and family between often quite conventional late medieval widows. London is not

112 St. John's, D91.17, p. 100.

113 Jones and Underwood, *The King's Mother*, pp. 91-2.

114 Joan Gedney's remarriage is discussed in chapter two. For more on Lady Margaret Beaufort and Caxton, see chapter five. Robert Large left Caxton 20 marks in his will: TNA, PCC PROB 11/1, fols 120v-121v and 145. For more on Caxton's apprenticeship, see N. F. Blake, *William Caxton and English Literary Culture* (London: Hambledon, 1991), pp. 37-44.

115 Agnes Smyth, nun of Syon, is named as the bishop's great-niece: Edward Alexander Jones and Alexandra Walsham, *Syon Abbey and its Books: Reading, Writing and Religion, c. 1400-1700* (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2010), p. 90. Agnes was Joan's sister: see TNA, unregistered PCC will of Joan Marler.

116 Charles Poole, *Old Widnes and its Neighbourhood* (Widnes: Swale, 1906), p. 25.

representative of the whole country: as the Capital, it had its own peculiarities, but it was extremely influential. Other towns and cities had similar mercantile communities which had close links to those in London, and many merchants and their wives visited the Capital regularly. It is more difficult to track connections between vowesses in rural areas as the records are more sparse, but wealthy women living in the countryside also often spent part of the year in London for shopping, business, and socialising. This perhaps explains why London vowesses' connections to one another did not differ greatly to their connections to vowesses elsewhere: these women were not linked so much by their unique religious status or their sanctity, but more by their worldliness. Although they may have bonded on a personal level because of their shared vow, that vow did not set them apart or separate them from their families or their business or political interests. Thus their connections with one another originated and flourished in the context of their place in their communities outside the cloister or any religious space. In fact, while these ubiquitous links between vowesses do suggest that women may have been influenced by vowed acquaintances, if only because it is human nature to imitate our peers, they also further substantiate Susan Steuer's theory that the vowesses we know of are the 'tip of the iceberg'.¹¹⁷

Conclusion

Whilst this thesis focuses upon vowesses as a specific group of women, this is complicated by the fact that they did not operate as such in society in the way that nuns did. It is essential to avoid discussing them in isolation, either as vowesses or as women, because the vocation itself was defined by chastity and piety pursued whilst maintaining one's place in society. Closer study of vowed women's relationships with their male contemporaries reveals that vowing was far from an act of female resistance or a rejection of male company: men influenced, informed, supported, and sometimes even enabled vowesses, both individually and in terms of the vocation more generally. Examination of these women's

¹¹⁷ See the Introduction for further discussion of this theory.

relationships with one another confirms that their vowed state did not define or limit their identity, their place in the world, or how they related to those around them.

Chapter Four:

‘A Lady Most Devout and Charitable’: Vowesses and Church Institutions

Two forms of religious institution are particularly pertinent to the discussion of vowesses: parish churches and convents. Most vowed women were involved with both in some way. The parish church can be said to embody active piety, and the pursuit of God within the world, whilst the monastic house is suggestive of contemplative piety, and withdrawing from the world in order to seek God. Thus the two institutions mirror some of the tensions at the core of the vowess ethic. However, such descriptions of parish churches and nunneries are an oversimplification: larger parish churches effectively became colleges, and prosperous religious houses interacted intellectually, spiritually, financially, and socially with communities around them so that the nuns were sometimes said to be less enclosed than was seemly.¹ Furthermore, other institutions, such as hospitals and almshouses, were also a vital part of the world in which vowesses lived. This chapter will consider these, and the nature of fraternities and confraternities as a means of participating in the life of an institution. It will then go on to examine the different roles that parish churches and nunneries played in vowesses' lives, and the roles that the women themselves played in the lives of the institutions. The nature of these relationships sheds new light on the extent to which vowesses were 'in the world' and the extent to which their formally recognised purity necessitated seclusion.

Hospitals and Almshouses

Of course, monastic houses and parish churches were far from being the only religious institutions in late medieval England. In fact, religion permeated

¹ Eileen Power, *Medieval English Nunneries, c. 1275 to 1535* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1922), chapters nine and ten. For more on the larger parish churches, see Clive Burgess' forthcoming book.

every kind of institution, including those with a primarily financial or domestic function. Furthermore, there were friaries, anchorholds, universities, schools, colleges, hospitals, chantries, and many others. These are discussed elsewhere in the thesis, as they feature heavily in vowesses' commemorative arrangements and philanthropic endeavours, but hospitals and almshouses merit further examination here. Indeed, the words 'hospital' and 'almshouse' were used loosely and often interchangeably. Hospitals tended to be larger and wealthier, staffed by monks and offering hospitality to travellers, while almshouses usually housed a dozen or so almsmen or almswomen, who were often elderly or infirm, and a few staff to care for them. Both hospitals and almshouses were primarily religious institutions, rather than medical ones: there was a strong emphasis on worship, and all residents and visitors were expected to participate in daily services. Charity to the poor and care of the sick were central to the ethos of both hospitals and almshouses, and some hospitals also supported education and study.²

Two vowesses are known to have been involved in founding these institutions. Margaret Browne established Browne's Hospital, an almshouse at Stamford, Lincolnshire, with her husband in 1475, and, upon his death in 1489, it is likely that she continued to supervise the project as building work was still ongoing.³ Likewise, Agnes Wyggeston's husband established Wyggeston's Hospital in Leicester in 1513, and she appears to have been involved to some degree in its management after his death in 1536. Her will specifies plans for a 60-year lease of the tithes of the South Field in Leicester to transfer to the hospital chaplains.⁴ Also, Massias Salman of Southampton, whose wife, Agnes, became a vowess upon his death in 1495, held property from God's House hospital, which Agnes would have then managed as his executor.⁵ These connections are somewhat distanced: rather than vowesses' being directly involved with hospitals,

2 Nicholas Orme and Margaret Webster, *The English Hospital, 1070-1570* (London and New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), pp. 35-7, 49-66.

3 *The Wardens: Managing a Late Medieval Hospital*, ed. by Alan Rogers (Suffolk: Abramis, 2013), p. 7.

4 *A Calendar of Charters...*, ed. by Thompson, pp. 46-9.

5 *The Cartulary of God's House, Southampton*, ed. by J. M. Kaye, 2 vols (Southampton: Southampton University Press, 1976), ii, pp. 273-6; *Southampton Probate Inventories*, ed. by Roberts and Parker, i, pp. 10-11.

they seem to have acted on behalf of their husbands and in a supervisory or business capacity.

However, a far more intimate, and interesting, potential link between vowesses and hospitals can be traced at St John's, the hospital affiliated with Reading Abbey. When Edward IV visited Reading in 1479, he heard complaints about neglect of the Abbey and the result was an official enquiry. The subsequent report states:

'Also there was without thabbey-gate a place called Seynt Johnys Howse wher in were founde and kepte certeyne relygyous women wydowes in chast lyvyng in Goddes servyce praying nyght and day for the Kyng's estate, and for the sowles of their founders and benefactors, wherin was a feyr chapell of Seynt John Baptyst, for the seyd women to sey their prayers in certain seasons of the day and nyght, and wher also massys were seyd many tymes in the yere, and other devyne servyce also; whyche women wont to have out of thabbey every weke certeyn of bred and ale and also money; and as yt ys seyd oons in the yere, a certeyne clothyng; and thys was ordeyred for such women as had been onest mennys wyvys that had borne offyce in the towne before, and in age were fall in poverti, or that purposed no more to marye. And now ther ys nother Goddservyce nor prayour, nor creature alyve to kepe hyt. But thabbot takethe the profytts ther of and dothe no suche almes nor good deds ther wyth.'⁶

These chaste widows appear to fit the definition of a vowess, though equally St John's sounds not unlike the beguinages on the Continent.⁷ Although it was founded as a hospital c. 1190, it does not appear to have functioned as one by

6 BL, Add. MS 6214, fol. 14, described in J. C. Cox, 'Hospital of St. John, Reading', in *VCH: Berkshire*, ed. by P. H. Ditchfield, and William Page, 4 vols (London: Archibald Constable, 1906-24), ii (1907), p. 97.

7 Norman Tanner has argued for beguinages or beguinage-like houses in Norwich: see the Introduction for more on this.

1479. It is not clear what the role of these women at St John's was besides their religious observances, and information about the hospital, or almshouse, at that time is sparse. The Almoner's cartulary tails off around 1450 and contains little of relevance: it describes an institution very unlike the one of 1479, suggesting that St John's adapted quite rapidly in response to the needs of the community. The cartulary does stipulate that sisters admitted there were professed in the adjoining church. Each was sprinkled with holy water and received a veil and a kiss of charity from the rest of the household.⁸ This practice may have continued. The sixteenth-century antiquarian John Leland reported that, in 1486:

‘The king desired the abbot to convert the hospital, which had been suppressed several years previously, to some pious uses; and the abbot desiring that it might be made a grammar school, the king assented to his wishes.’⁹

The school was duly established, and no more was said of the chaste widows at St John's. They may have been hospital sisters, as described by Susan Steuer. Alongside daily prayer, these women did domestic work and cared for the sick and infirm.¹⁰ Such a life typified active, service-based piety. Alternatively, what had originated as a hospital may have become an informal convent, more like a beguinage, and the women may have devoted all their time to prayer without taking in any dependants. Although Henrietta Leyser writes that these women ‘staffed’ St John's, they may, in fact, have been resident and looked after by others.¹¹ Hospitals did house and provide nursing care for the elderly, particularly those who had previously bought into a corrody scheme as a retirement plan, and some hospitals identified poor widows as part of their mission in their foundation charters.¹² In 1368, a widow named Joan Derby rented

8 BL, Cotton MS Vespasian E V; Rotha Mary Clay, *The Mediaeval Hospitals of England* (London: Methuen, 1909), p. 128.

9 John Leland, *The Itinerary of John Leland the Antiquary*, 9 vols (Oxford: Thomas Hearne, 1770), ii, pp. 4-5.

10 Steuer, ‘Widows and Religious Vocation’, pp. 46-9.

11 Leyser, *Medieval Women*, p. 179.

12 Steuer, ‘Widows and Religious Vocation’, pp. 43-6. See also Mary Erler, ‘Widows in Retirement: Region, Patronage, Spirituality, Reading at the Gaunts, Bristol’, *Religion and Literature*, 37.2 (2005), 51-75.

a chamber at St John's from the almoner: perhaps others did likewise and the community was formed that way.¹³ Whatever the case, the hospital served as a means for vowesses to pursue their vocation corporately and to live in community in a manner previously unrecognised.

Fraternities and Confraternities

Vowesses engaged with religious institutions of varying kinds through fraternities, also known as guilds, and confraternities. Just as a vowess occupied marginal space between the professed religious and the laity, to be a member of a fraternity or confraternity was to be linked to a religious institution but still in the world. Guilds were usually most prominent in towns dominated by an institution, such as York or Coventry, perhaps a reaction to the propensity of the clergy to become overbearing.¹⁴ These fraternities were not only a manifestation of collective piety; they were also a vehicle for the laity to assert themselves in a religious context. Most vowesses, although they had taken one of the three monastic vows, lived and identified as laypeople, and many were prominent figures in their communities and their parish churches. As such, one can deduce that they would have gravitated towards, participated in, and perhaps even dominated their parish fraternities. Merchant widows who carried on their husbands' business interests may even have unofficially played a part in craft guilds, especially where the spiritual and secular overlapped. Similarly, a woman who had taken a vow of chastity might be more inclined to fund and associate herself with monasteries, convents, friaries, and other institutions of professed religious as a *confrater*. In spite of all this, the involvement of vowesses in guilds and confraternities has yet to receive any critical attention. In part, this results from the fact that vowesses are as yet a much understudied phenomenon, but is also a result of the scant and patchy surviving evidence for their participation in guild activity. It is timely, then, to both examine what evidence can be found, and speculate on what is likely to be missing.

13 BL, Cotton MS Vespasian E V, fol. 6a.

14 Clive Burgess: personal communication.

While the words 'guild' and 'fraternity' may be used interchangeably, a confraternity was a different phenomenon, at least in theory. In reality, the distinction does seem to have sometimes blurred. Although membership of a fraternity or guild required a financial contribution, it also implied some physical or social participation, and the guild was an institution of sorts in its own right. Confraternity, on the other hand, was the exchange of money or property for association with an institution, often a religious house, for certain privileges and the prayers of its members.¹⁵ The institution might also distribute alms and perform liturgical commemoration on the donor's behalf. Letters of confraternity imply that the donor's material gifts are directly transmuted into what Nicole Rice terms 'spiritual capital' against the debt of sin, useful for speeding one's soul through Purgatory.¹⁶ They were often sold by proctors, employed by the institutions, who toured selling such spiritual benefits to raise funds.

Several such letters exist for Katherine Langley, alongside other indulgences.¹⁷ She was granted confraternity by the guild of St Mary the Virgin, in Boston, Lincolnshire, some time between 1500 and 1511, at which point she was already a widow.¹⁸ St Mary's fraternity, whose Guildhall still stands, was an extremely large, successful and influential town guild. The guild may have offered confraternity as an alternative to full guild membership, or perhaps the word was used simply because the guild had so many members, few of whom participated in any way other than financially. Katherine was also granted confraternity by William Thornburgh, warden of the chapel of St Mary in the Sea, at Newton near Ely, Cambridgeshire, shortly before her death in 1510.¹⁹ The chapel, originally the sole remnant of a village destroyed by floods, was appropriated to St Mary's

15 Caroline Barron, 'The Parish Fraternities of Medieval London', in *The Church in Pre-Reformation Society: Essays in Honour of F. R. H. Du Boulay*, ed. by Caroline M. Barron and Christopher Harper-Bill (Suffolk: Boydell, 1985), pp. 13-37 (pp. 17-8).

16 Nicole R. Rice, *Lay Piety and Religious Discipline in Middle English Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp. 7-11. This is discussed further in the next chapter.

17 Other indulgences include TNA, C 270/32/12 and C 270/32/13, both granting the right to have a private confessor. For more on such documents see: R. N Swanson, *Indulgences in Late Medieval England: Passports to Paradise?* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), particularly chapters eight and nine.

18 TNA, C 270/32/18. TNA's catalogue dates the document to between 1500 and 1517, but Katherine died in 1511.

19 TNA, C 270/32/17.

college nearby and was a popular site of pilgrimage. It had a guild in the early fifteenth century, which may be the same one Katherine joined. More likely, pilgrims could purchase confraternity as a sort of spiritual souvenir to enhance the benefits they earned by making the pilgrimage.²⁰ Seven such letters survive for this chapel, dated between 1448 and 1512.²¹ Another confraternity letter was issued to Katherine and her husband by John Payne, provincial of the Dominicans, in 1485.²² It is less clear, in this letter, what ‘confraternity’ meant in this context. The letter states that the couple would be remembered in the Dominicans’ prayers and services but is no more specific than that. It does suggest that the Langleys would be prayed for by all the Dominicans in the province, but that would necessitate a central notification disseminated to all friaries, which would require an enormous amount of administrative work and seems unlikely.

Katherines's letters of confraternity are, unfortunately, not personalised in any way. Had they been, it might reveal more about her connection with or contribution to the institutions to which she became affiliated. The documents were evidently written up beforehand and a supply was kept with blank spaces for names of donors. In each, Katherine's name is scrawled rather hastily in a different hand to the rest of the letter. The Newton one is, intriguingly, far scruffier than the other two. These appear to have been designed as keepsakes, perhaps on display, as well as to confer religious benefits. The letter from the Dominicans is decorated with coloured ink and a lombard.²³ The date on this one is prewritten with the Langleys’ name added later, suggesting that these documents were issued in batches. It is unusual for so many such documents to have survived in relation to one woman. They are scattered amongst ‘Ecclesiastical Miscellanea’ in the Chancery records at the National Archives, with one in ‘Indulgences’ in the

20 There is very little evidence of vowesses going on pilgrimage, but the popularity of pilgrimage at the time is well-documented: see Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars*, pp. 190-205. The Langleys also held an indulgence granted by the turcopolier of Rhodes, which may have been purchased from a travelling proctor or on pilgrimage: TNA, C 270/32/13.

21 Dorothy M. B. Ellis and L. F. Salzman, ‘College of St Mary-on-the-Sea, Newton’, in *VCH: Cambridge*, ed. by L. F. Salzman, 4 vols (London: Institute of Historical Research, 1938-59), ii (1948), pp. 312-4.

22 TNA, C270/32/15.

23 A lombard is a large, decorated initial in a manuscript.

Exchequer, and no indication that they formed part of a family or individual collection. The impression is simultaneously that Katherine Langley may have been something of a collector of such religious benefits, and that very many of these letters have been lost, including those belonging to other vowesses.

The distinction between fraternity and confraternity is perhaps nowhere more blurred than in the case of the London parish clerks' guild, dedicated to St Nicholas. The parish clerks were lay singers who sang at Masses, processions, and other church services and events. Their fraternity originally set out to fix wage rates for these, but by the mid-fifteenth century, it had established two chantry chaplains at Guildhall Chapel and an altar to St Nicholas as well as provision for seven almsfolk to pray for the monarch and the guild's members. The guild had a common seal, and was able collectively to hold land or property in London up to the value of forty pounds per annum. It also put on increasingly elaborate mystery plays. The *bede roll* mentions seven thousand individuals, nine hundred of whom have been identified as clerks and three hundred as clerks' wives. The attraction of joining for those who were not parish clerks was that, for the price of their entrance fee and quarterage, they could expect to be given a superior funeral to that offered by their local parish fraternity. For them, membership was not about participation: the guild was primarily a funeral scheme. The clerks' singing at one's funeral was much desired, both for worldly prestige and spiritual potency.²⁴ Several vowesses are listed in the parish clerks' *bede roll*. These include Alice Hampton, who probably joined because of the fraternity's connection with Halliwell convent, where she spent her latter years.²⁵ Other contemporary vowesses in London who were members include Joan Byfeld, Jane Chamberlayne, Margaret Croke, and Alice Brice.²⁶

24 Catherine Paxton, 'The Nunneries of London and its Environs in the Later Middle Ages' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Oxford University, Lincoln College, 1992), p. 155.

25 *The Bede Roll of the Fraternity of St. Nicholas*, ed. by N. W. and V. A. James, 2 vols (London: London Record Society, 2004), i, p. 159 and 161, no. 330. The editors reference Alice as the 'widow of William Hampton', but this is an error. For the fraternity's link with Halliwell, see: *The Religious Houses of London and Middlesex*, ed. by Caroline Barron and Matthew Davies (London: Institute of Historical Research, 2007) p. 26, 273. Four prioresses of Halliwell in succession were members between c. 1456 and 1516.

26 *The Bede Roll of the Fraternity of St. Nicholas*, ed. by James. and James, i, p. 115 and 160; p. 150 and 158; p. 99; p. 63 and 65. Margaret Croke is intriguingly titled 'magistra' rather than

The bede roll contrasts sharply with the register of the fraternity of SS. Fabian and Sebastian in the parish of St. Botolph without Aldersgate, which contains no known vowesses and in which women are barely mentioned at all.²⁷ Yet the men closest to some of the vowesses in this study do appear: Richard Chocke, whose wife, Margaret, who would vow at his death, is mentioned as an arbitrator in a dispute, along with 'the brothers and sisters' of the fraternity.²⁸ Similarly, Thomas Willford, whose wife, Elizabeth, also later vowed, is described as a witness of the transfer of two tenements in 1397.²⁹ The phrase 'brothers and sisters of the fraternity' suggests that women were not excluded from participating in the guild, though they were clearly excluded from the records. It is possible that any credit for their contribution was simply given to the closest male relative. While the women are apparently absent in these guild records, there are clues which indicate their involvement.

Most parish guilds probably encouraged or required much more in the way of participation from all members, male and female, than the parish clerks' fraternity. Although parish fraternities functioned as communal chantries, by the latter half of the fifteenth century, the focus had shifted from burial and intercession onto communal religious observance. The parochial system came to depend upon this voluntary involvement from its lay members for finance and the day-to-day running of the parish church. Guild members not only commemorated one another after death, they assisted one another in life, providing charitable aid in poverty and sickness and an independent forum for resolving disputes without the need for engaging with inconvenient and costly legal courts. Such guilds demanded regular attendance of all members, except occasional honorary ones.³⁰

'domina'.

27 *Parish Fraternity Register: Fraternity of the Holy Trinity and SS. Fabian and Sebastian in the Parish of St. Botolph without Aldersgate*, ed. by Patricia Basing (London: London Record Society, 1982).

28 *Ibid.*, p. 47.

29 *Ibid.*, p. 44.

30 See Barron, 'The Parish Fraternities of Medieval London', in *The Church in Pre-Reformation Society*, ed. by Barron and Harper-Bill, pp. 23-37; Gervase Rosser, 'Communities of Parish and Guild in the Late Middle Ages', in *Parish, Church and People: Local Studies in Lay Religion, 1350-1750*, ed. by S. J. Wright (London: Hutchinson, 1988), pp. 29-55 (pp. 31-2, 37). For a more developed version of the latter, see Rosser's new book *The Art of Solidarity in the Middle Ages: Guilds in England 1250-1550* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

Membership of these parish fraternities in London, Caroline Barron notes, was 'markedly feminine.'³¹ The parish fraternity offered women an arena for social and religious participation, engagement, visibility, and influence in a patriarchal church and society. It is likely that vowesses, with their quasi-religious status and freedom from domestic responsibilities, were key players, although little evidence of this survives.

Some bequests to guilds in vowesses' wills are far more indicative of personal and spiritual commitment than of an afterthought. Margaret Sutton and Joan Harby both left a mantle to Lincoln's principal guild, dedicated to St Anne.³² This may well have been the mantle received at their profession, just as another Lincolnshire vowess, Margaret Browne, bequeathed to the sub-prioress of St. Michael's convent in Stamford 'my mantell that I was professed in.'³³ Such an object, blessed by a bishop, was a powerful religious symbol. Joan Pernaunt bequeathed in her will of 1532 'to the fellowship of tailors and brotherhood of St John Baptist in Bristol, 3 laten candlesticks, 2 cloths painted with drops of gold, having on one of them a picture of a dove [culver] signifying the Holy Ghost, with an image of the Trinity, and another image of St Gregory's pity in alabaster.'³⁴ Such gifts would have been expensive in material terms and of significant religious, and perhaps sentimental, value.

In Joan's parish of All Saints', there is little to piece together about guild activity, and yet what there is demonstrates the importance of vowesses in guild affairs. Local vintner Richard Haddon had rebuilt the north aisle of the church, known as the Lady aisle, and established a chantry for his parents there. When he fell from grace financially and, as a consequence, socially in 1473, the chantry endowment appears to have been sold off to pay his debts. Alice Chester, a pious widow and probable vowess, later devised a tenement nearby to the parish

31 Barron, 'The Parish Fraternities of Medieval London', in *The Church in Pre-Reformation Society*, ed. by Barron and Harper-Bill, p. 30.

32 *Lincoln Wills*, ed. by Foster, ii, pp. 17-9; i, p. 44. For more on the guild and women's participation, see Pamela Allen Brown and Peter Parolin, *Women Players in England 1500-1660: Beyond the All-Mail Stage* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), pp. 31-2.

33 TNA, PCC Prob. 11/8/525.

34 *The Pre-Reformation Records of All Saints' Church, Bristol*, ed. by Burgess, iii, pp. 51-4.

feoffees, so that 'all outgoings and profits' from it might fund a perpetual anniversary in the church and a Jesus Mass to be celebrated in the Lady aisle every week on Fridays.³⁵ In the 1470s, devotion to the Holy Name of Jesus as a distinctive cult was 'cutting edge', a new pious trend, which Alice was instrumental in bringing to the parish.³⁶ Lady Margaret Beaufort was also known for her devotion to this cult: she was acknowledged as a promoter of the feast of the Holy Name by the Pope in 1494, the Name was celebrated in her chapel liturgy, and some of her belongings were inscribed IHS for 'Jesus'.³⁷ The Lady aisle at All Saints' went on to be renamed as the Jesus aisle, and the churchwarden's accounts reveal that, by 1519, this had evolved into 'the Jesus brotherhood', a parish fraternity which Alice may have effectively founded.³⁸ It was enhanced by vowess Maud Baker, who provided three tapers to burn at the Mass and facilitated regular celebration of a Jesus anthem.³⁹

At All Saints', then, vowesses took a leading role in guild and parish affairs. This is likely to have been replicated elsewhere: the will of Agnes Burton of Taunton, for example, is suggestive of emotional and financial investment in her parish church of St Mary Magdalene in a way reminiscent of Maud Baker's will and All Saints'.⁴⁰ Vowesses had the financial resources, status and religious credentials as vowed women to take a leading role in parish and guild affairs.

Parish Churches

Discussion of vowesses' role in parish fraternities naturally expands to consideration of their contribution to the life of the parish church more generally.

D. M. Palliser described the late medieval parish as 'the basic secular and

³⁵ *Ibid.*, iii, p. 416. I am indebted to Dr Clive Burgess for permission to include this material on All Saints', to be published in his forthcoming book. This Alice is not to be confused with her London vowess namesake. Alice Chester of Bristol was a generous church benefactor during her long widowhood and is indistinguishable from the known vowesses there, but no record of a vow or concrete evidence of one survives.

³⁶ Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars*, pp. 115-6.

³⁷ Jones and Underwood, *The King's Mother*, p. 183.

³⁸ *The Pre-Reformation Records of All Saints' Church, Bristol*, ed. by Burgess, ii, p. 243.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, iii, pp. 33-9 (p.34).

⁴⁰ TNA, PCC Prob. 11/14/120, and *The Pre-Reformation Records of All Saints' Church, Bristol*, ed. by Burgess, iii, pp. 33-9.

ecclesiastical unit' of society, a focus of local government, worship and loyalty, with the parish church at its centre.⁴¹ Parish churches flourished as arenas for communal devotion and social cohesion, and were magnets for the generosity and self-promotion of wealthy parishioners, as shown by the high proportion of medieval churches rebuilt and enlarged in this period.⁴² Fraternities, chantries, pageants, plays, and administrative opportunities enabled the laity to take initiative in owning and running their parish churches to suit their own needs.⁴³ This included the need for commemoration: late medieval wills often contain bequests to parish churches for this reason. Thus it can be tempting to make testamentary evidence the focus of an exploration of the topic, especially since surviving church records are so scant. However, it is important to move beyond wills wherever possible to what gain a more complete picture in the role that participation in the parish affairs played in the lives of vowesses as well as in their deaths.

Katherine French has highlighted the unique role that women played in their parish churches.⁴⁴ In spite of the patriarchal theology of the late medieval English Church and the fact that women were excluded from clerical office, the parish church offered them opportunities for visibility and participation. Women could purchase seating for attending Mass, and there were a number of all-women's parish stocks, guilds and groups, as well as Hocktide, a holiday in which gender roles were reversed. Churchwardens' wives had a specific role, assisting their husbands but also carrying out their own official and unofficial duties, and there were even a small number of female churchwardens.⁴⁵ Poorer women cleaned and cared for their parish churches as they did for their own homes,

41 D. M. Palliser, 'Introduction: The Parish in Perspective', in *Parish, Church and People: Local Studies in Lay Religion, 1350-1750*, ed. by S. J. Wright (London: Hutchinson, 1988), pp. 5-28 (p. 6).

42 *Ibid.*, p. 11.

43 *Ibid.*, pp. 16-7.

44 Katherine L. French, 'Women in the Late Medieval English Parish', in *Gendering the Master Narrative: Women and Power in the Middle Ages*, ed. by Mary C. Erler and Maryanne Kowaleski (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2003), pp. 18-28.

45 Katherine L. French, 'Women Churchwardens in Late Medieval England', in *The Parish in Late Medieval England*, ed. by Clive Burgess and Eamon Duffy (Donington: Shaun Tyas, 2006), pp. 302-21 (p. 319).

fostering a 'proprietary attitude' toward the church building and the thus toward the community it contained.⁴⁶ Women's wills frequently contain allusions to material goods and household possessions, with the specification that they be used to adorn the parish church and enhance the liturgy.⁴⁷ Thus, French writes, women 'posthumously involved themselves in parish decision making' and, through their belongings, integrated themselves into the church.⁴⁸

Vowesses' wills substantiate French's claims. Joan Byfeld bequeathed 'ii basyns of silver gilt weighing of troy weight lxxiii unces' to her parish church of St Dunstan in the East 'to stand upon the high ault(er) ther in principall festes and other festes.'⁴⁹ Similarly, Joan Pernaunt specified:

'I will that the sheet that shall lie upon me when I shall be brought to church be divided into 2 parts, the one part thereof to be made into an altar cloth for the high altar, and the other part thereof to make an altar cloth for the Jesus altar in the same church... I bequeath to the same church of All Hallows' my carpet wrought with flowers and birds, to the intent that it shall lie continually there upon the high altar.'⁵⁰

Margaret Chocke bequeathed to her parish church in Long Ashton, Somerset 'a coverlett of tapstry weke with eglis to lay befor the hyghe auter in principall feste and in other tymes to be canpyed on a bedde in the chantry house to kepe yt from mothes.'⁵¹ Her care for her material belongings, both in life and posthumously, became an essential aspect of her care for parish worship.

46 French, 'Women in the Late Medieval English Parish', in *Gendering the Master Narrative*, ed. by Erler and Kowaleski, pp. 18-28.

47 See also: Nicola A. Lowe, 'Women's Devotional Bequests of Textiles in the Late Medieval English Parish Church, c. 1350-1550', *Gender and History*, 22.2 (2010), 407-429. For further discussion of vowesses' material possessions, see the next chapter.

48 Katherine L. French, *The Good Women of the Parish: Gender and Religion After the Black Death* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), pp. 42-3, 49.

49 TNA, PCC Prob. 11/9/253.

50 *The Pre-Reformation Records of All Saints' Church, Bristol*, ed. by Burgess, iii, pp. 51-4.

51 TNA, PCC Prob. 11/7/156.

Such donations of household items to be used as religious or liturgical objects also demonstrate these vowesses' eagerness to remain connected to the parish church in personal and visible ways after their deaths.⁵² Agnes Wyggeston of Leicester bequeathed to every altar in St Martin's church 'a shete for a awter cloth & a kercheu for a corporas.'⁵³ The kerchief was worn on a woman's head and corporal cloths were where the consecrated Host was placed during Mass. Agnes thus aimed to participate in the celebration of the Eucharist even after her death. In seeking to place their intimate possessions on the altar where the Host was also placed, even touching the consecrated elements, these women endeavoured to sanctify not only their possessions but also themselves. The parish church served as a vehicle for this, a means of enhancing individual spiritual status.

Returning to Bristol vowesses, the unusual number of surviving records from the parish churches of All Saints' and, to a lesser extent, St Ewen's allow us to extend a study of vowess guild participation to consideration of their activity in the larger parish church. As Clive Burgess' work on All Saints' reveals, Alice Chester's foundation of the regular Mass which led to the Jesus fraternity, when placed in the context of her other contributions to the church, demonstrates devotion to Christ coupled with devotion to the Virgin Mary.⁵⁴ Among many other gifts to the church, Alice funded a carved tabernacle with 'a Trinity in the middle over the image of Jesus' and also 'let gild at her own cost Our Lady altar adjoining the said image of Jesus.'⁵⁵ Similarly, she provided an altar cloth for the altar of Our Lady with 'a picture of Our Lord rising out of the sepulcre.'⁵⁶ Rather than a process of Christocentric devotion succeeding previous Marian devotion, as some scholars have imagined, Alice's gifts reveal that the two complemented, and indeed completed, one another: the necessity of Mary's intercessory role was

52 See French, *The Good Women of the Parish*, p. 38 and 41.

53 *A Calendar of Charters...*, ed. by Thompson, pp. 46-9.

54 Again, I am indebted to Dr Clive Burgess for access to material which will be expanded in his forthcoming book.

55 *The Pre-Reformation Records of All Saints' Church, Bristol*, ed. by Burgess, i, pp. 15-7 and 28-9.

56 *Ibid.*, p. 16.

enhanced by the intensity of Christ's suffering, which exceeded the believer's capacity for adequate comprehension or response.⁵⁷

Although Alice is only likely, and not proven, to be a vowess, her gifts to All Saints' demonstrate how she directly influenced worship, and the religious experience of her fellow parishioners, there, through her financial and material contributions. Clive Burgess terms this 'spiritual leadership by material means' and it is replicated with proven vowesses. Maud Baker was equally generous to All Saints': her will and the church's own records record that she provided an abundance of church plate and vestments; decoration of the pillars of the church with paintings (the images would likely have been of her own choosing); gilding for the rood loft; expensive blue satin altar cloths for the high altar; a Mass book; a table of the Transfiguration; and an eagle lectern.⁵⁸ She was listed in the church book under the heading 'good doers' as 'a lady most devout and charitable.'⁵⁹ Her wealth, and her willingness to part with it, lent her a respected and influential position in the parish.

At first glance, Joan Pernaunt seems not to have been so involved at All Saints', nor so generous. Her son, John Pernaunt, was the rector or 'parson' at St Ewen's, and her will was witnessed by his successor, Edward Waterhouse, yet neither does the church book there record gifts anywhere near as lavish and extensive as Maud Baker's at All Saints'.⁶⁰ There is only 'a gret matens boke wrytt with gret hand off parchment.'⁶¹ Her will, however, bequeaths the aforementioned '3 laten candlesticks, 2 cloths painted with drops of gold, having on one of them a picture of a dove [culver] signifying the Holy Ghost, with an image of the Trinity, and another image of St Gregory's pity in alabaster' to the

57 Christine Peters, *Patterns of Piety: Women, Gender and Religion in Late Medieval and Reformation England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 60-96.

58 Clive Burgess, 'By Quick and by Dead': Wills and Pious Provision in Late Medieval Bristol', *The English Historical Review*, 102 (1987), 837-58 (especially p. 842 and 852). Also *The Pre-Reformation Records of All Saints' Church, Bristol*, ed. by Burgess, i, p. 20; iii, pp. 33-9.

59 *The Pre-Reformation Records of All Saints' Church, Bristol*, ed. by Burgess, i, p. 19.

60 *The Church Book of St Ewen's Bristol, 1454-1584*, ed and trans. by Betty R. Masters and Elizabeth Ralph (London: Headley Brothers Ltd, 1967), p. xxxiii.

61 *Ibid.*, p. 9.

fraternity of John the Baptist at St Ewen's.⁶² The same will leaves All Saints' a tenement in Broad Street to provide regular income, as well as the aforementioned sheet and carpet, plus: 'a cup of silver whole gilt, weighing 18oz. towards the maintenance and repair of the same tenement'; a black velvet pall; a tawny velvet cross, embroidered in gold with eight pictures of angels and five shields of Christ's wounds; and more bequests specifically for the vicar.⁶³ Joan may have preferred that the majority of her gifts to the church should arrive after her death, rather than in her lifetime, to attract more intercession. However, she died in the early 1530s, by which time All Saints' records had become so scant as to no longer be of much use. It is likely that, like her vowed predecessors, she intended her posthumous bequests to merely echo earlier lavish gifts and was a regular contributor to the worship at All Saints' throughout her widowhood.

This phenomenon of vowesses participating in community and influencing worship at their parish churches through generous and considered material gifts does not seem to have been limited to Bristol. However, the scant survival of church records, and the fact that many of these gifts were destroyed, stolen, or hidden at the Reformation, often necessitates a reliance on wills. Although we cannot be definitively sure that the pattern of giving to parish churches in this way in life as well as in death was common for vowesses beyond these few at All Saints', wills suggest that it was. Elsewhere in Somerset, Elizabeth Biccomb bequeathed a stone image of the Trinity to the nearby parish church of St Mary, Stogumber, while Margaret Chocke commissioned a stained glass window of St Sunday and St Gregory at Long Ashton.⁶⁴ Not only are these tangible and visible gifts reminiscent of those made by vowesses at All Saints', Bristol, but when few could read, such images were an essential aspect of parishioners' religious understanding. Agnes Burton of Taunton left highly detailed and specific will, which highlights her generosity to her parish church, and it is a shame that there are now no records for the church before 1558 to supplement this.⁶⁵

62 *The Pre-Reformation Records of All Saints' Church, Bristol*, ed. by Burgess, iii, pp. 51-4.

63 *Ibid.*

64 *Somerset Medieval Wills, 1501-30* ed. by F. W. Weaver (London: Harrison and Sons, 1903), p. 83; TNA, PCC Prob. 11/7/156.

65 TNA, PCC Prob. 11/14/120.

Agnes bequeathed her 'rede damaske mantell' for use at the sepulchre service and 'my mantell lyned with silke that I was professid yn' to be used 'to thentent of mary magdaleyn play.' These gifts reveal her personal attachment to the church, as well as her familiarity with its liturgy and customs and her desire to participate in them, even posthumously. She also bequeathed to the church a detailed and lengthy catalogue of other gifts, including a pax, a pax-board, a Mass book, a chalice, a bell, a censer, a rochet, woad, a glass window, and vestments. She specified that she desired 'in every thing worought and sett my name and myn husbnde.' The presence of the Burtons' names even on the vestments serves to link the objects with themselves, allowing them to symbolically be present and participate in the life and liturgy from beyond the grave. Although not universal, such a specification was far from unusual: donors' names, initials, arms, and images were ubiquitous in the late medieval parish church, intended to attract both prayer and prestige. It would not be much of an exaggeration, to quote Eamon Duffy, to say that 'the dead staffed, furnished, decorated and dominated the liturgical round.'⁶⁶ The records of All Saints', Bristol and the familiarity and affection implied in the will of Agnes Burton suggest that, for vowesses, this was not limited to the deceased.

The fact that vowesses owned items like paxes, pax-boards, Mass books, chalices, censers, corporasses, and vestments strongly suggests that they had their own private chapels.⁶⁷ Colin Richmond has argued that the acquisition of a private chapel would have distanced the gentry – and, by extension, wealthier people in general - from their parish churches, which they used only as a space to display their power with elaborate chantries and commemorations.⁶⁸ It is apparent that, for vowesses, this was not the case. Alice Hampton was of gentry stock and lived

66 Eamon Duffy, 'The End of It All: The Material Culture of the Medieval English Parish and the 1552 Inventories of Church Goods', in *The Parish in Late Medieval England*, ed. by Clive Burgess and Eamon Duffy (Donington: Shaun Tyas, 2006), pp. 381-99 (p. 381).

67 Katherine Langley's will (LMA, MS 9531/9, fols viii to x (3d ser.), fol. 30v) also bequeaths many such items to the parish church at her husband's family seat in Rickling, Essex. It is more common for vowesses' wills to mention one or two items, but it is likely that arrangements were made for others outside of the will.

68 Colin Richmond, 'Religion and the Fifteenth-Century English Gentleman', in *The Church, Politics and Patronage in the Fifteenth Century*, ed. by Barrie Dobson (Gloucester: Sutton, 1984), pp. 193-208.

away from her home of Minchinhampton, Gloucestershire much of her life, yet she maintained her links with the parish church there. She donated a bell, which now hangs in the south transept and is inscribed around the shoulder with her name, yet this would hardly have been visible to parishioners and so cannot be dismissed as merely ostentatious display.⁶⁹ Her will bequeathed to the church the ring by which she became a vowess, of greater sentimental than material value.⁷⁰ The presence of her family's monumental brass at the church indicates that she made commemorative arrangements there outside of her will, and the bell may have been part of that, but the gift of her vowing ring strongly suggests a personal loyalty which might have been more expected for her conventual residences at Dartford or Halliwell.

69 It may have originally been a sanctus bell in a chantry as around the time of their Dissolution it was transferred to the second of the three market houses in the town. It was bought by William Playne in 1806, when the market house was demolished, and returned to the church by the Playne family c. 1920. I am indebted to Prof. Caroline Barron for these notes about the bell. It is also described in detail in Arthur Twisden Playne's *A History of the Parishes of Minchinhampton and Avening*, p. 70.

70 LMA, CC 9171/9, fol. 5v-6.

This image
has been
removed
for copyright
reasons

14. The bell donated by Alice Hampton to Holy Trinity Church, Minchinhampton. Image reproduced from Playne, A History of the Parishes of Minchinhampton and Avening, pp. 70-1.

Additionally, Agnes Burton and Maud Baker had private chaplains - the former's will named hers as Richard Spunell, whilst the latter's strongly suggested that hers was John Wile - but the emotional and financial investment of either woman in her parish church cannot be doubted. The parish church provided an arena for these women to participate in, and thereby to influence, a spiritual community, usually through funding services or providing material to furnish and decorate the liturgical environment. These dictated devotional activity, earned the respect of fellow parishioners, and embodied the symbolic presence of the woman herself at the very heart of the church's worship to God. Convents

As vowesses had taken one of the three monastic vows, it is useful to consider them not just amongst the laity but amongst the professed religious also. Susan Steuer suggests a spectrum of piety, with active at one end and contemplative at the other, or immersion in society versus withdrawal from it: vowesses chose their own position on this continuum.⁷¹ Most vowesses had some link to a religious house, and some chose to align themselves closely. Such a vowess was Alice Hampton, of whom a brief biography appears in the first chapter, along with her monumental brass, and who has surfaced regularly in discussion since. She was a remarkable and unusual vowess. Not only is she known never to have married, but she was closely linked to three convents and much of her life was spent semi-enclosed. Closer examination of her involvement with nunneries reveals just how closely tied to these institutions a vowess could be. This section will discuss those vowesses who did choose more cloistered lives, as well as considering how vowesses in general - if indeed generalisations can be made - related to female religious houses.

A vowess, unlike a nun, did not have to be enclosed in a convent: she was free to choose her own dwelling. Some vowesses, however, did opt to live in nunneries, although this did not necessarily mean that they lived with the nuns in the cloister. Marilyn Oliva and Roberta Gilchrist have identified from archaeological evidence that convents typically comprised multiple buildings

71 Steuer, 'Widows and Religious Vocation', pp. 69-71.

which were intended as living space, and not all of these were inhabited by nuns or even professed religious.⁷² Nicole Rice explains the practice of corrody: a sort of retirement package which could include residence at a religious house, a pension given for cash or land and a 'bundle of privileges.' Thus the laity, in their declining years, might accrue 'spiritual capital while organising their religious lives in terms of ritual regulation and ordered contemplation.'⁷³ Of course, for a nunnery, corrodians were a gamble: if they lived too long, they became a drain on finances and resources. In 1527, the Prioress of Dartford was granted leave to receive 'any well-born matron widow, of good repute, to dwell perpetually in the monastery without a habit according to the custom of the monastery.'⁷⁴ The fact that permission was required demonstrates that it was potentially transgressive. Eileen Power, in her pioneering work on nunneries, notes that widows as secular boarders were discouraged by the Church 'because it brought too much of the world within cloister walls.'⁷⁵ Those widows who were vowesses, having taken one of the three monastic vows, would have been less objectionable company for the enclosed sisters of the convent. In fact, study of the lives of vowesses suggests that they held a privileged position of access to and intimacy with the inner cloister. As Felicity Riddy writes, 'Feminine cultural space is given official sanction by the ideology of virginity: it is inhabited above all by recluses, nuns, vowesses.'⁷⁶ This 'feminine cultural space' was embodied in the literal space of a convent like Syon Abbey, which was a centre of female learning and spirituality. By living within that space, vowess could plant themselves firmly in a female religious community.

No vowess was more determined to do this than Alice Hampton. In 1484, Alice was living at Dartford Priory. Dartford was England's only house of Dominican nuns: the majority of Dominican houses at that time were in Germany,

72 For a more detailed examination of female monastic space, see Gilchrist and Oliva, *Religious Women in Medieval East Anglia*, chapter two.

73 Rice, *Lay Piety and Religious Discipline*, p. 7.

74 Snell, *The Customs of Old England*, p. 13.

75 Power, *Medieval English Nunneries*, pp. 38-9.

76 Felicity Riddy, "Women Talking About the Things of God': A Late Medieval Sub-Culture", in *Women and Literature in Britain, 1150-1500*, ed. by Carol M. Meale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 104-27 (p. 112).

and so Dominican thought was saturated with Rhineland mysticism.⁷⁷ Continental Dominican traditions in reading, spirituality, and learning were transmitted to England by Dartford's friars, so that Dartford Priory, like Syon Abbey, was a prominent location of English mystical and spiritual writings.⁷⁸ It was also noted as a place of education: in 1481, a preceptor in grammar and Latin was permitted to enter the common parlour to instruct the nuns, novices, and daughters of nobles and gentry who were sent there to be educated. Furthermore, Dartford Priory was very wealthy, holding extensive endowments and property.⁷⁹ It was favoured by women of noble birth, and Princess Bridget Plantagenet, daughter of Edward IV, was a nun at Dartford between 1492 and 1517.⁸⁰

A papal letter, dated 14 October 1484, refers to a petition, made by Alice, which stated:

‘that she, who is of noble family, took a vow of perpetual chastity before the local ordinary, in accordance with a certain custom still observed in the kingdom of England, and so that she might more conveniently hear and approach to hear divine offices from there, at her own expense built a certain oratory near the monastery of Dartford... at which oratory she lives at present... on account of the fasts and various abstinences which she has so far observed, she has incurred various physical infirmities, due to which she can no longer safely observe the fasts to which she has bound herself, nor attend in person at masses and other offices in the church of the said friars.’⁸¹

The letter goes on to grant that ‘for the duration of her infirmity, she may have mass and other divine offices celebrated in the said oratory... by her own or

77 ‘Dartford Priory’, *Dartford Town Archive* <http://www.dartfordarchive.org.uk/medieval/religion_pr.shtml/> [accessed 15 July 2010].

78 Paul Lee, *Nunneries, Learning and Spirituality in Late Medieval Society: The Dominican Priory of Dartford* (York: York Medieval Press, 2001), p. 159 and 141 respectively.

79 A. G. Little, ‘The Dominican Nuns at Dartford’, in *VCH: Kent*, ed. by William Page, 3 vols (London: St. Catherine Press, 1908-32), ii (1926), pp. 181-90.

80 ‘Dartford Priory’, *Dartford Town Archive*.

81 *CPL*, ed. by Haren, xv, pp. 32-3, no. 60.

another suitable priest'; that 'she may choose any suitable priest, secular or religious, as her confessor, who may commute her vows, fasts and abstinences into other works of piety'; and that 'for one year from the time when the present grant comes to her notice, she shall fast every sixth weekday.'

The only other known papal dispensation regarding a vowess' fasting is recorded in the *Supplications to the Penitentiary*. Margaret Chocke requested dispensation not to fast on account of her ill health and, in 1474, it was recorded that the matter was left to her conscience.⁸² Unlike in Alice Hampton's dispensation, there was no suggestion that her illness was brought on by overzealous fasting initially, and Margaret Chocke wished to cease fasting all together rather than to reduce it. This highlights Alice's extremism, which was in key with the severe austerity of the Dartford nuns, and it suggests that she adopted their ethos, if not their practices. They fasted often and, even when not fasting, ate one meagre meal a day and abstained from meat altogether. They also wore a habit of unfinished wool and kept a rule of silence.⁸³ Ordinary Christians at that time fasted only on Fridays and in Lent.⁸⁴ Alice's determination to far exceed her fasting obligations, to the detriment of her health, demonstrates her fervent piety and an asceticism which contrasts with the more pragmatic piety of many other vowesses.

In fact, many religious writings counselling moderation circulated at that time. Even the *Ancrene Wisse*, an early rule for anchoresses, emphasises moderation on the grounds that great asceticism leads to pride.⁸⁵ Nonetheless, Caroline Walker Bynum writes that some Christians, perhaps like Alice Hampton, were characterised by 'extravagant asceticism, a haunting sense of human evil, and a theology of sacrifice and self-sacrifice.'⁸⁶ Bynum describes self-starvation,

82 *Supplications*, ed. by Clarke and Zutshi, ii, 2108.

83 Lee, *Nunneries, Learning and Spirituality in Late Medieval Society*, p. 29, 28, 31 respectively.

84 Helen M. Jewell, *Women in Medieval England* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1996), p. 165.

85 Warren, *Anchorites and their Patrons*, p. 107.

86 Caroline Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA and London: University of California Press, 1987), p. 47, 238.

particularly amongst women, as the most basic, and thus essential, asceticism, requiring more discipline than the shedding of less frequent and essential gratifications such as sex and money. Gluttony was often seen as the major form of lust and fasting as the most painful, and thus most effective, renunciation. Food was even believed to excite lust, and fasting to control sexuality, so that chastity and fasting were seen as inextricably linked. Alice may have seen her fasting as an essential component of her vow of chastity. The suffering and illness which resulted from fasting were thus to be embraced as products of self-control, and furthermore they were viewed as extensions of Christ's suffering. Only through pain and suffering could one merge oneself with the crucified Christ.⁸⁷ These ideas, which would have been known at Dartford as a centre of learning, and practised, at least to a degree, by the nuns, go some way towards explaining what may have led Alice Hampton to starve herself into illness.

The papal dispensation, not only to hear Mass in her oratory, but to choose her priest and confessor demonstrates that Alice was a woman of influence, both at Dartford and in the Church more generally. This was facilitated by her family connections but seems to have been more a result of her reputation for piety and asceticism. Dyan Elliott writes that confession was both central to medieval female spirituality and was 'one of the most basic ways of affirming a holy woman's orthodoxy.'⁸⁸ A woman's confessor was naturally a powerful authority over her, and Alice's permission to choose her confessor indicates that she was trusted to reclaim some of that power.

Alice later lived at Halliwell Priory in Shoreditch. An indenture, dated 1492, survives between Alice and Halliwell's then prioress, Elizabeth Prudde.⁸⁹ It was to last ninety-nine years, though, since it was impossible that Alice would live to be resident at Halliwell a further ninety-nine years, it stipulated that 'if it happen the seid Dame Alice at eny tyme within the seid terme to deceasse that

87 *Ibid.*, p. 2, 214, 120, 211-2 respectively.

88 Dyan Elliott, 'Women and Confession: From Empowerment to Pathology', in *Gendering the Master Narrative: Women and Power in the Middle Ages*, ed. by Mary C. Erler and Maryanne Kowaleski (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2003), pp. 31-51 (p. 31).

89 TNA, LR 14/813.

then aftr an hole yere immediatly folowing her deceasse the said terme to ceasse.’ Within this indenture, which stated that Alice Hampton was already ‘abyding within the same monastery,’ the prioress granted that Alice might build an ‘entree or tresauce’ twenty-one feet and three inches long, at the west end of the convent, which would go along the common entrance leading into the hall. Alice was also granted two parcels of empty ground, one twelve feet wide and passing from the common entrance to the side of the church, and another twenty-eight feet and ten inches by twenty three feet on the west side of the common entrance. In addition to this, she was to have a storehouse, measuring twenty-three feet and eight inches by eleven feet and three inches, adjoining her ‘entree or tresauce’, and two chambers ‘over and above’ the storehouse. She was also granted permission to make a window in the wall at the west end of the church, which divided the church from one of her chambers, thus enabling her to hear Mass and see the Eucharist at the altar without leaving her chamber. This may have been because she chose to include some element of secluded prayer in her routine or in order that she should not disturb the seclusion of the nuns, or perhaps she was permanently weakened by the illness at Dartford and could not always travel easily.

Whatever the case, she is unlikely to have been an invalid. The indenture also grants Alice ‘free entre and issue comyng and goyng... into and from our lady chapell’ from seven in the morning until eight in the evening and permits her to ‘make and sette by’ a pew there from which to perform her devotions. Her own seat in the Lady Chapel would have marked her out as one in a privileged position. Alice’s elevated place within Halliwell’s community is also evident because the indenture stipulates her right to use the prioress’ well and washing house, and to construct a locked door, to which she would keep the key, in the garden beside the convent’s entrance, so that she and her servants might ‘walke and take their pleasure.’ For these privileges, Alice was to pay the prioress four pounds of pepper, twice a year, ‘atte feest of our lord god and the nativitee of saint John Baptist by even portons.’

This image
has been
removed
for copyright
reasons

15. Plan of the precincts of Halliwell nunnery. Image reproduced from Erler, 'Syon's "Special Benefactors and Friends"', 21.

The indenture provides fascinating detail of one vowess' place within a convent community. She was not enclosed but free to come and go as she pleased. She was separated from the nuns by the walls of her dwelling, yet she was free to use the facilities and participate in the spiritual life of the convent. The affluent laity, male or female, could also dwell in the nunnery's precinct, as did Thomas

Manners, Earl of Rutland.⁹⁰ Alice, however, lived not in the precinct but right at the threshold of the inner sanctum of the nuns' cloister, which symbolised her vowess status. Her will, dated 13 May 1514, requests burial within the church at Halliwell Priory, 'without pompe or pryde of the worlde.'⁹¹ The phrase is suggestive of the self-denial and rejection of all things worldly which she displayed at Dartford thirty years before. Both of Alice's executors were based at Halliwell, the prioress Joan Lynde and prior and procurator friar Edmund Bellond, and the will focuses on Halliwell Priory almost exclusively.⁹² The impression is that she enjoyed a position of privilege at Halliwell and was entrenched in the community there, considering it her home.

Alice Hampton's relationship with Syon Abbey was of a different nature altogether. In the 1480s, Alice had unexpectedly inherited her family's Minchinhampton estates and her uncle's wealth, after the deaths of her father and brothers.⁹³ Thus she may have become a vowess at Dartford rather than a nun to keep this property in the family. In the year 1507-8, however, Alice began the process of handing over her estate to Syon.⁹⁴ She placed it in the hands of feoffees for fifty year period. If the king's licence, under mortmain, could be obtained, the property was to pass to Syon. If not, it was to remain to the feoffees and their heirs. The king's licence was indeed obtained and the estate was handed over to Syon: Syon's valuation of 1534 includes 'rents of lands and tenements lately of the Lady Alicia Hampton' worth £9 4s. 5d.⁹⁵ This is a surprisingly small sum, and leaves much of Alice's wealth unaccounted for. Syon may have sold some of it, or Alice may have decided to break up her estate to benefit more recipients. Either way, she is listed, at the front of Syon's 'Martyrlogue', in an obituary list of 'Special Benefactors and Friends' for whom the nuns at Syon prayed.⁹⁶

90 Paxton, 'The Nunneries of London and its Environs in the Later Middle Ages', pp. 161, 162, 165.

91 LMA, CC 9171/9, fol. 5v-6.

92 See TNA, LR 14/129, and LR 14/491 for examples of Bellond's role at Halliwell.

93 The specifics here are complex. See my MA dissertation: 'Alice Hampton, d. 1516: The Life of a Late Medieval Vowess' (Royal Holloway, University of London, 2010).

94 TNA, E 211/375.

95 Aungier, *The History and Antiquities of Syon Monastery*, p. 444.

96 EUL, Canon Fletcher's MS, vol. 10.

Syon was the largest and richest nunnery in England at that time, founded at Twickenham Park, Isleworth, in 1415 and relocated nearby in 1431. The twin Carthusian monastery was over the river at Sheen. While Syon's nuns and brethren were enclosed, Syon as an institution played an active part, intellectually and socially, within the wider community. An inventory taken at the Dissolution lists its guest chambers, including one for the king.⁹⁷ Mary Erler describes Syon as 'rigorous, intellectual, deeply engaged with the definition of religious life... a beacon to spiritual aspirants and... responsible for the dissemination of much late medieval spiritual writing.'⁹⁸ Its library was famous and the brethren were often Cambridge graduates. Like Dartford Priory, it was one of a kind in terms of the rule observed, as it was the only Bridgettine house in England. The nuns and brethren lived an austere existence: they used wool instead of linen, and Syon attracted converts from other orders who sought a stricter observance.⁹⁹ Syon, then, had much in common with Dartford Priory. Alice seems to have gravitated toward convents which were known for asceticism, literature, and learning, as well as wealth and prestige. Alice's family connections and wealth gave her access to them, but it is also probable that she gained influence from being associated with them. Her link with Syon was, however, essentially an institutional one: there is no evidence of the intimacy which Alice shared with Dartford and, later, with Halliwell.

Alice Hampton was far from the only vowess to be linked with Syon. The will of Joan Marler, whose son and sister were at Syon, focuses almost exclusively upon the convent in a similar way to Alice's will with Halliwell Priory. Joan's will reads:

'my body to be buried in the southerne side within the monastery of
Syon in such place as it shall please as it shall please the father

97 F. R. Johnston, 'House of Bridgettines: Syon Abbey', in *The Religious Houses of London and Middlesex*, ed. by Caroline M. Barron and Matthew Davies (London: Institute of Historical Research, 2007), pp. 279-90 (p. 288, 279 and 282 respectively).

98 Erler, *Women, Reading, and Piety in Late Medieval England*, p. 85.

99 Johnston, 'House of Bridgettines: Syon Abbey', in *The Religious Houses of London and Middlesex*, ed. by Barron and Davies, pp. 279-90 (p. 285-6, 280 respectively); Lee, *Nunneries, Learning and Spirituality in Late Medieval Society*, p. 91.

general confessor and his devout brethren to assign. Item I will that £10 of good land there and above all charges be bought and given to the monastery of Syon to this use following, that is that the abbess of the said monastery for the time being shall pay yearly to one honest priest singing in Saint Bridget's chapel within the church of the said monastery for my soul.... And I would that priest were one of them that be admitted unto the religion.... in Syon if such one will take it.... And the other £3 to be given to the finding of one poor maiden admitted to the religion kept in Syon if any such be admitted or else to be distributed in deeds of charity after the discretion of the abbess and general confessor of the said Syon...'¹⁰⁰

Joan Marler's connection with Syon was clearly a close one. Examination of Syon's cellaress' foreign accounts reveals Joan was resident there. Her husband died in 1527 and she died in 1530/1: between those dates, Joan Marler appears in the cellaress' foreign accounts as 'my lady marlow', paying sums for boarding and, among other things, bread and ale.¹⁰¹

Alice Beselles of Besselsleigh, Berkshire and her granddaughter, Susan Kyngeston, were also vowesses resident at Syon. Alice Beselles is first recorded in Syon's cellaress' foreign accounts in 1520-1 as 'My lady kyngeston her Graunt dame'. She returned in 1523-4 and continued in the accounts for two subsequent years, accompanied by two servants.¹⁰² Susan Kyngeston, whose sister was a nun at Syon, appears in the accounts from her husband's death in 1514 until 1537, two years before the monastery was dissolved, though the varying amounts entered for board suggest her presence there was not continuous.¹⁰³ 'Lady

¹⁰⁰ TNA, unregistered PCC will.

¹⁰¹ TNA, SC 6/HENVIII/2235-7. The death of Richard Marler of Coventry in 1527 is confirmed by his will: TNA, PCC Prob. 11/22/353.

¹⁰² Erler, *Women, Reading and Piety*, pp. 86-7, 179. TNA, SC 6/HENVIII/2224 (1520-1); SC 6/HENVIII/2227 and 2228 (1523-4); SC 6/HENVIII/2229 and 2230 (1524-5); SC 6/HENVIII/2231 and 2232 (1525-6).

¹⁰³ Syon cellaress' foreign accounts TNA, SC 6/Hen 8/2214-5 (1514-5) through to SC 6/Hen 8/2244-5 (1536-7) show yearly board amounts for Susan ranging from 55s. (1536-7) to £33 18s. 3d. She occasionally paid for others' board.

Kyngeston's chamber' was mentioned in a post-Dissolution inventory, suggesting that she was an established presence at the convent.¹⁰⁴ Alice Beselles was also one of seven women whom the catalogue of Syon brothers' library records as book donors: she gave a folio edition of Italian lexicographer Ambrogio Calepino's Latin dictionary.¹⁰⁵ This would have been an expensive gift and substantiates Felicity Riddy's assertion that nuns and vowesses such as Alice Beselles, in sharing and in giving books, formed a 'textual community.'¹⁰⁶

Syon evidently housed a number of vowesses and this was not unique, nor was it a phenomenon exclusive to the larger, wealthier convents. Blackborough Priory, the Benedictine convent founded in the western fens of Norfolk c. 1150, was comparatively small and poor: it does not appear on the 1535 list of nunneries with an annual income of more than £200.¹⁰⁷ Yet it was clearly a prominent centre of female spirituality in the county, with several vowesses resident in the mid to late fifteenth century. Our knowledge of Blackborough is limited, as source material is far more sparse than for Syon and the surviving cartulary contains no records dating from after the late fourteenth century.¹⁰⁸ Most of what is known of the female community at Blackborough originates in women's wills.

These wills are often rather ambiguous, as the testator frequently identified a woman as living at Blackborough and implied that she was not a nun but did not specifically mention that she had taken a vow of chastity. For example, the will of Joan Bardolf, dated 1447, includes Joan Bumsptead 'comoranti in abathia de Blakborough' ('remaining in the abbey of Blackborough'); the will of Katherine Brasyer (1457) leaves 6s. 8d. to the prioress of Blackborough, followed by 'Item lego domina Alicia Branger ibm expectans iis.' (Item: I bequeath to Dame Alice Branger remaining there 2s. '); and the will of Katherine Goodrede (1464) includes

104 The inventory is TNA, LR 1/112. See Erler, *Women, Reading and Piety*, p. 86, 179.

105 Erler, *Women, Reading and Piety*, p. 87.

106 Riddy, 'Women Talking About the Things of God', in *Women and Literature in Britain*, ed. by Meale, p. 111.

107 Power, *Medieval English Nunneries*, p. 685; Kathleen Cooke, 'The English Nuns and the Dissolution', in *The Cloister and the World: Essays in Medieval History in Honour of Barbara Harvey*, ed. by John Blair and Brian Golding (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), pp. 287-301 (p. 289).

108 BL, Egerton 3137.

a 'vidua domina Emma' ('widow Dame Emma') amongst her Blackborough bequests.¹⁰⁹ Marilyn Oliva cites these three as examples of vowesses and yet there is no conclusive indication that they had taken vows. Although it is frequently difficult to ascertain which pious widows had taken vows of chastity, as explain in the Introduction, boundaries seem to have been particularly blurred in Norwich and the surrounding area. Roberta Gilchrist and Marilyn Oliva found that this was true of many religious women in the Norwich diocese, noted for their 'informality and ambiguity.'¹¹⁰

Wills of Norfolk women reveal a close-knit community of vowesses and possible vowesses. Katherine Goodrede also bequeathed to Alice Branger a black dress and £13 6s. 8d. Joan Bardolf was described in her own will as 'in mea pura viduetato', which was often, but not always, a term used by vowesses, as discussed in the Introduction. Katherine Brasyer was described in the same way in her own will, and her bequest to Alice Branger was followed by one to 'domina Emma ibem inter moniales comoranti' ('dame Emma remaining remaining there amongst the nuns'): presumably the same Dame Emma as mentioned by Katherine Goodrede. One wonders why Emma's surname was never used and it is also worthy of note that she lived 'amongst' the nuns, presumably in the inner cloister. Katherine Brasyer's will also includes likely vowess Margaret Purdams, discussed in the previous chapter, a Roger Bumsptead and Margaret, the daughter of Robert Aleyn. The 1497 will of Katherine Kerre, the widow of Robert Aleyn, leaves 6s. 8d., a kirtle and a smock to 'Margaret, vowess there' - 'there' being Crabhouse Priory, about ten miles from Blackborough.¹¹¹ Katherine Kerre's will also bequeaths a book to Joan Blakeney, whom Anne Marie Dutton names as a vowess, citing Mary Erler, but there is no further substantiation and Joan Blakeney does not appear in Mary Erler's list of vowesses.¹¹² Katherine Kerre

109 NRO, NCC, Wlybey, fols 130-32; Brosyerd, fols 58-9; Brosyerd, fols 329-30. Abbreviations have been expanded. 'Expectans' in this context means 'remaining', as noted in R. E. Latham, *Revised Medieval Latin Word List from British and Irish Sources* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965; repr. 2008), p. 179.

110 Gilchrist and Oliva, *Religious Women in Medieval East Anglia*, p. 21.

111 NRO, NCC, Multon, fol. 90-1.

112 Anne Marie Dutton, 'Women's Use of Religious Literature in Late Medieval England' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of York, 1995; accessed online at

made a number of further individual bequests to nuns at Carrow Abbey, where another Norfolk vowess, Dorothy Curson, held the farm of the anchorhouse in 1520.¹¹³ These religious women, some of whom had taken a formal vow of chastity whilst others may have not, seem to have congregated around nunneries. Convents provided a sanctioned space for like-minded women in Norfolk to meet and, as Felicity Riddy writes, to ‘talk about the things of God.’

Another vowess who spent at least some of her widowhood living in monastic space was Cecily Bedell, who died at Westminster in 1521. Her links with Westminster Abbey predated her husband's death. In the Lease Book, the couple were recorded in 1517 as having leased a messuage with a garden and some vacant land, the location of which is described as ‘in the monastery.’¹¹⁴ This would almost certainly have been in the precinct, rather than where the monks were living. The following year, Cecily alone, described as a widow, leased a stable with a garden, again ‘in the monastery.’¹¹⁵ In 1521, shortly before she died, she was described as a vowess as she leased another tenement there.¹¹⁶ Similarly, vowess Margaret Rankyn was named as a previous tenant in a lease from St Helen's Bishopsgate, London, at around the same time.¹¹⁷ Cecily Bedell is the only vowess known to have inhabited a male monastery, albeit in the precinct, rather than a nunnery, although it was not unheard of for widows to retire to male religious houses and it presumably made practical sense for her to remain in the home she shared with her husband.¹¹⁸ Her funeral services were held at the Abbey costing 7s., and another 6s. at her year's mind.¹¹⁹ The impression is one of a close association between Cecily and the Abbey, rather than a simple property arrangement.

<http://etheses.whiterose.ac.uk/2470/1/DX211582.pdf> [accessed 31 July 2016]).

113 Erler, 'English Vowed Women', 201; NRO, Hare 5955 227xl. A stained glass window, depicting Dorothy Curson, nee Clopton, widowed in 1512, survives at Long Melford in Suffolk. The two women are likely to be the same.

114 London, Westminster Abbey Muniments, Westminster Abbey Lease Book II, fol. 112v.

115 *Ibid.*, fol. 124.

116 *Ibid.*, fol. 170v.

117 TNA, E 303/8/16.

118 For widows in male religious houses, see Erler, 'Widows in Retirement: Region, Patronage, Spirituality, Reading at the Gaunts, Bristol', 51-75 (p. 52).

119 London, Westminster Archive Centre, Churchwarden's Accounts, E2, no folio numbers.

Some vowesses, then, were keen to embrace the social and devotional opportunities offered by religious houses, and even the potential monastic aspect of the vocation. But what of those more 'worldly' vowesses, who preferred to remain in their homes, maintain the family's social and business interests, and focus their spiritual energies on their parish church? In reality, there was not a simple divide between parish and convent vowesses: just as Alice Hampton demonstrated affection for the parish church at Minchinhampton, many vowesses who were active in the parish and lived at home also had strong links with female religious houses.

These were often the result of ties of family and friendship between vowesses and nuns. As Sylvia Thrupp writes, nunneries were founded for gentlewomen and seldom accepted daughters of lesser tradesmen, but London merchants' daughters were accepted into all the more fashionable houses.¹²⁰ Similarly, as vowesses had to support themselves financially, they too were usually limited to the noble, gentry, and merchant classes. Thrupp adds that a liking for nunneries seemed to run in families, so that vowesses, who were likely to be part of such a family, would very possibly have daughters, sisters, and aunts in nunneries. Having relatives who were nuns was not, of course, limited to vowesses: many women would have found themselves connected to convents in this way, but, again, a vowess' status as having taken one of the three monastic vows allowed her greater access to and greater intimacy with the convent.

Vowess' wills reveal these family relationships. The will of Margaret Sutton included 10s. 'to Dame Mary my doghter, nonne in Bullington Abbay.'¹²¹ Alice Brice bequeathed plate and 40s. in money to her daughter Alice, a nun at Halliwell Priory, as well as lands and tenements to her other daughter, Joan, on the condition that she pay her sister, the nun, an annuity of 53s. 4d. This annuity rested on the condition that Alice, the nun, remain at Halliwell. If she were to leave the convent, the annuity would be substantially reduced. Alice Brice also

¹²⁰ Thrupp, *The Merchant Class of Medieval London*, p. 189.

¹²¹ *Lincoln Wills*, ed. by Foster, ii, 17-9.

bequeathed a basin of silver and parcel gilt to Halliwell itself.¹²² Maud Baker bequeathed to her daughter, Alice, who was to be professed at Shaftesbury Abbey, plate, linen, a feather bed, 10 marks in money, and two sets of rosary beads, to be delivered to her at the day of her profession, and a further 10 marks to pay for her dinner on the day of her profession.¹²³ Maud was evidently keen to participate in her daughter's profession at the prestigious house, even posthumously, and it is likely to have been a source of personal and family pride.

Some vowesses had more intimate and more extensive family connections with convents. Joan Marler, for example, had a sister, Agnes Smythe, who was a nun at Syon and a son, John Wood, who is described in her will as 'father of Syon.'¹²⁴ This is likely to have contributed to Joan's desire to live at the nunnery. Similarly, Susan Kyngeston and Alice Beselles may have been drawn to residence at Syon because Susan's sisters, Dorothy Coddington and Eleanor Fettyplace, were nuns there, along with two of her nieces, Susan Purefoy and Elizabeth Yate.¹²⁵ It appears that links between vowesses and convents were dictated as much by family relationships, and the desire to maintain them after a nun had been professed and enclosed, as by spiritual aspiration.

Similarly, as vowesses participated in convent communities, they were are likely to have been friends with nuns. These friendships may have predated professions and been maintained, like family links, or they may have originated at the convent. The will of Jane Armstrong contains bequests to Joan Tyssyngton, prioress of Haverham, and to the nuns of Sempringham, of which Agnes Rudd was specifically allocated 10d. Agnes Rudd was the prioress of Sempringham and may have been named as a personal friend of Jane Armstrong.¹²⁶ Alice Chester of London bequeathed 3s. 4d. to the abbess of the London Minoresses, before

122 TNA, PCC Prob. 11/9/12.

123 *The Pre-Reformation Records of All Saints' Church, Bristol*, ed. by Burgess, iii, pp. 33-9.

124 TNA, unregistered PCC will. Agnes Smythe is named as 'a sturdy dame and a wilful' in a letter to Cromwell from his commissioner, Thomas Bedyll. The letter claims that Agnes conspired to prevent Bedyll from acquiring Syon's convent seal: Aungier, *The History and Antiquities of Syon Monastery*, p. 87.

125 Erler, *Women, Reading and Piety*, pp. 85-99.

126 Cooke, 'The English Nuns and the Dissolution', in *The Cloister and the World*, ed. by Blair and Golding, p. 289.

adding: 'To the lady Riche there 3s. 4d. To the lady Hobbis 3s. 4d. And to every lady there professed 12d. And unto every novice 8d.'¹²⁷ These bequests combine the usual giving to a monastic house in return for services of remembrance with specific gifts to family and friends within the convent. Alice Chester goes on to bequeath to 'mistress Staland', sister at St Katherine's, her black hood of profession. This hood, by which Alice became a vowess, in her ceremony before the bishop or his suffragan, would have been a treasured possession and a gift of great sentimental value. Similarly, the will of Margaret Browne reads: 'I geve to the supprioresse of the Nonnes my mantell that I was professed in.'¹²⁸ The decision to leave her profession mantle to a nun, who had also taken a vow of chastity, demonstrates the closeness between the vocations of nun and vowess, and the bond the nuns and vowesses sometimes shared.

Much of the surviving evidence about relationships between vowesses and nuns is testamentary in nature. As Clive Burgess has pointed out, one of the difficulties in using wills is the fact that it is never clear what has been omitted.¹²⁹ The relationship between a vowess and a convent could have been much closer than the will of the vowess reveals. The will of Agnes Browne, sister of Margaret, bequeathed the nuns at St Michael by Stamford 13s. 4d.; and Jane Chamberlayne requested burial at Kilburn Priory, listing the prioress as a witness to the will.¹³⁰ All these examples could have simply been a vowess' making provision for her commemoration after death: nuns, after all, were ideal candidates to pray for one's soul. Equally, the presence of convents in a vowess' will could indicate a much closer relationship. Time and the Dissolution have obliterated much, and survival of monastic records is patchy at best. In many cases, the true nature of the relationship between an individual vowess and a convent cannot be ascertained, and many links will have disappeared completely. The scant surviving evidence nevertheless suggests that many vowesses were more involved at religious houses than is now apparent.

¹²⁷ TNA, PCC Prob. 11/14/662.

¹²⁸ TNA, PCC Prob. 11/8/525.

¹²⁹ Burgess, 'Late Medieval Wills and Pious Convention', 15-33.

¹³⁰ Wright, *The History and Antiquities of the County of Rutland* pp. 129-30; TNA, PCC Prob. 11/9/115.

Vowesses, then, enjoyed privileged access to the community, facilities, and intellectual and spiritual opportunities at female religious houses, probably more so than other widows or boarders. This was primarily because they had taken one of the three monastic vows, though, for many, wealth and status also helped. Family ties strengthened the connection between vowesses and convents in many cases, and some vowesses seem to have opted to live within religious houses to be close to professed kin. Alice Hampton's motives, however, seem to have been primarily spiritual. Her case illustrates in detail how a vowess could arrange a home for herself at a nunnery, in which she held a position of influence and maintained her freedom whilst benefiting from the religious life of the convent. Although we lack such detail for other vowesses, those resident at Syon and Blackborough appear to have been accommodated similarly.

Conclusion

The vow of chastity included no other stipulations about religious practice, and so vowesses were free to design their own spiritual lives, engaging with church institutions as much or as little as they saw fit. Although the vowess did not officially align herself with any particular institution, she was not 'branching out alone.' The evidence strongly suggests that vowesses participated enthusiastically in religious communities, and how this was done varied not just according to the type of institution but according to the individual vowess. One way was 'spiritual leadership by material means', and vowesses' use of their wealth and possessions is an emerging theme to be developed in the next chapter. Furthermore, material giving could come with or without emotional investment and active participation, but it is clear that many vowesses interacted regularly with and cared personally about these institutions. They were tied to them as much by family relationships and friendships as by spiritual identification: institutions were, after all, merely groups of people within a framework.

In fact, the distinction between active and contemplative spheres melts away when one considers that parish churches and monastic houses were both

religious communities. Nuns were not hermits or anchorites: they were enclosed from the outside world, not from each other. Whether in convents or parish churches, women are likely to have found God within one another as much as within the Mass, as they shared books, established services, commemorated the departed, and decorated liturgical space. Late medieval piety was corporate, whether one worshipped with one's fellow parishoners or fellow dedicated religious. It is not a question, then, of whether vowess piety was typically active or contemplative: these women worshipped where they most felt at home, where their loved ones were. Their vow seems not to have set them apart as holier than the laity or less holy than the nuns, but assisted them in pursuing God within community with their family, friends, and neighbours, in whatever setting.

Chapter Five:

'The Practical and the Pious': Vowesses and their Wealth

The concept of 'spiritual leadership by material means', recurring throughout the previous chapter, merits further exploration. It is, after all, an apparent contradiction: the spiritual, or heavenly, sphere is traditionally understood to be distinct from the material, or earthly, one. Spirituality is thus often associated with asceticism, renouncing earthly gratifications in order to better receive heavenly ones. Wealth is often perceived to be a corrupting, or distracting, influence. How, then, do we reconcile the wealth, the material comforts, and even the lavish extravagance of many these vowed women, with the voluntarily poor, or at least simple, life that one would expect of someone with a religious vocation? Christ, after all, is reputed to have said, "If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven."¹ Popular saints in the medieval period included those, such as St Alexis and St Roch, who were born to riches and then renounced them to live as beggars.² However, such drastic behaviour was not expected of vowesses or even of professed religious. Although the monks of Cluny were criticised by Bernard of Clairvaux in the twelfth century for their comfortable existence, and the friars by Matthew Paris in the thirteenth for the same reason, these examples were the exception rather than the rule.³ The medieval understanding of the relationship between wealth and spirituality was more nuanced than one might initially expect.

1 Matthew 19.21, KJV.

2 Lester K. Little, *Religious Poverty and the Profit Economy in Late Medieval Europe* (London: Paul Elek, 1978), p. 40; *The Golden Legend, or The Lives of the Saints*, trans. by William Caxton, ed. by F. S. Ellis, 5 vols (London: J. M. Dent, 1900), i, pp. 1-12.

3 Little, *Religious Poverty and the Profit Economy*, p. 95 and 201; See also Geoffrey Chaucer, 'The Canterbury Tales: General Prologue', in *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. by L. D. Benson, 3rd edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 208-69.

For vowesses, it was complicated by the fact that, although it was not a canonical requirement, women only appear to have been permitted to vow if they were able to support themselves financially. The numerous surviving letters of commission suggest that a would-be vowess was assessed for the role by more than one senior clergyman, and the questions put to her probably included financial enquiries.⁴ A vowess needed to be able to feed herself without a husband to provide for her, whether she did so out of income from property or land, or money inherited from her previous husband, or gifts from a family member.⁵ Unlike anchorites, vowesses were not supposed to be charitable institutions in themselves, and vowesses suffering known financial hardship were rare. One such case is that of Isabel Tydde of Wisbech: the Ely diocesan registers record that, in 1404, an indulgence was to be granted to those who assisted her 'on account of her poverty.'⁶ Another is Emma Cheyne, who was allotted 4d. a day from the London petty customs in 1449.⁷ It is likely that these women had unexpectedly fallen upon hard times, and some of the vowesses who broke their vows and remarried may have been in a similar situation, though none cited poverty as an excuse.⁸ The result of the need for self-sufficiency was that vowesses were, almost by definition, women of at least moderate means, and, although many were generous in their charitable giving, they had to keep enough at least to sustain themselves. Study of vowesses' wills, probate inventories, and household accounts reveals that most lived comfortably, and some in luxury.

As asserted by Michael Jones and Malcolm Underwood in their biography of Lady Margaret Beaufort, the tendency simplistically to 'associate piety with austerity and worldliness with magnificence' is a modern one.⁹ Medieval liturgy, even in the more humble parish churches, demanded elaborate setting and

4 These are discussed further in the Introduction.

5 Alice Hampton, for example, was supported financially by her uncle before she inherited: see chapter three.

6 Erler, 'English Vowed Women', 168 and 191: Mary Erler supposes that Isabel was a poor woman who had vowed privately, rather than having been approved for the episcopal ceremony, but in this case the Church may not have acknowledged her vow and provided financial support.

7 *CPR, Henry VI*, ed. by Maxwell-Lyte, v, p. 304.

8 See chapter two for examples.

9 Jones and Underwood, *The King's Mother*, p. 191.

paraphernalia, which was expensive to maintain.¹⁰ This material extravagance was seen as enhancing religious practice and thus increasing the effectiveness of worship and prayer. There was no tension between this and charitable activity, such as almsgiving, because these practices were themselves religious rituals: liturgy and charity were two sides of the same coin.¹¹ This is demonstrated in the inscription of the monumental brass of vowess Joan Clopton (c. 1430):

‘Criste nepos Anne Clopton’ miserere Joh’e
 Que tibi sacrata ciauditur hic vidua
 Milite defuncto sponso pro te ih’u fuit ista
 Larga libens miseris prodiga & hospitibus
 Sic ven’abilius templis sic fudit egenis
 Mutteret vt celis quas sequeretur opes
 Pro tantis meritis sibi dones regna beata
 Nec premat vrna rogi sz beet aula dei’¹²

In this poem, Joan’s generosity to the needy and to sites of worship are praised equally and alongside one another. Her material wealth, used for godly purposes, translates seamlessly to spiritual wealth, beneficial to her after her death. This is what Nicole Rice terms ‘spiritual capital’ against the debt of sin, speeding the soul through Purgatory.¹³ The mercantile spiritual mindset is echoed in late medieval wills: the soul is commonly ‘commended’ or ‘recommended’ to God but, in vowesses’ wills, at least, it is most often ‘bequeathed’, the same word used for the distribution of material goods. Similarly, is usual for the executor to be charged with distributing the vowess’ goods ‘for the wealth of my soul’. One

10 For an example, see: Clive Burgess, ‘London Parishoners in Times of Change: St Andrew Hubbard, Eastcheap, circa 1450-1570’, *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 53 (2002), 38-63.

11 Little, *Religious Poverty and the Profit Economy*, pp. 66-8.

12 Transcription from Davis, *The Monumental Brasses of Gloucestershire*, p. 31. His rather exuberant translation: ‘Vowed to a holy life when ceased her Knightly husband’s breath // Joan Clopton here, Anne’s grandchild dear; implores Thy grace in death // O Christ! - for Thee O Jesu blest, how largely hath she shed // Her bounteous gifts on poor and sick – how hath she garnishèd // Thy stately shrines with splendour meet – how hath she sent before // Her earthly wealth to Thee above, to increase her heavenly store! // For such blest fruits of fath , O grant, in Thine own joy her meed // Light-lies an earthly tomb on those whom Heavenly blessings speed!’

13 Rice, *Lay Piety and Religious Discipline*, pp. 7-11.

could buy one's way through Purgatory figuratively with prayers and literally with alms and gifts to the Church.¹⁴

This explains how wealth and luxury coexisted with ascetic acts such as fasting in the lives of pious noblewomen such as Lady Margaret, with the two perceived as complimentary to one another. Jones and Underwood write that Lady Margaret and her contemporaries held 'the exotic and the austere in close conjunction', and that this ethos of 'magnificent valour and pious discipline' was central to the Crusades, for which enthusiasm revived in the fifteenth century.¹⁵ Lady Margaret's life is described as 'a constant blend of the practical and the pious': she enforced her legal rights meticulously, but at the same time she was charitable to her dependants and indeed to many others.¹⁶ The wealth she so exactly drew from her properties both funded her household and facilitated her patronage and charitable giving.¹⁷ This chapter will explore to what extent this was true of other vowesses: what these women owned, how they used it, and, where possible, the attitudes behind their consumption and their charity.

Self-Indulgence and Self-Denial: Vowesses' Lifestyles

The term 'lifestyles' encompasses how these women lived in a material, day-to-day sense: the clothes and jewellery that they wore; the food that they ate; the furniture and tapestries in their homes; the linen and plate that they used; the objects around which they centred their devotional practice; and their leisure activities. A variety of sources can be used to study vowesses' lifestyles, the most revealing of which are arguably the household accounts, though these only survive for a small number of aristocratic and royal women.¹⁸ Some vowesses, such as Cecily Bedell and Katherine Langley, have surviving inquisitions post

14 For more on this, see Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars*, pp. 346-8.

15 Jones and Underwood, *The King's Mother*, p. 191.

16 *Ibid.*, p. 201, 106, 115.

17 *Ibid.*, p. 115..

18 A considerable number of household accounts survive for Countess Katherine Courtenay (d. 1527), vowess and daughter of Edward IV: see Margaret R. Westcott, 'Katherine, Countess of Devon (1479-1527)', in *ODNB*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn Jan 2008 <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/70277/>> [accessed 15 July 2011]. The accounts of Lady Margaret Beaufort are currently being transcribed by Professor Susan Powell.

mortem, but these primarily listed lands and buildings rather than material goods and so are of limited use in this case.¹⁹ Wills are the most commonly available sources for the study of individual women, but, aside from the difficulties with testamentary documents discussed previously, they vary greatly in the level of detail that they provide. For example, Susan Kyngeston's will disposed of her land but mentioned no material goods, for which she probably made more informal arrangements.²⁰ The same is true of Katherine Courtenay, Countess of Devon.²¹ This contrasts with the will of Katherine Langley, which is lengthy and extremely detailed in its bequests of material items to loved ones.²² Vowesses' wills can fall anywhere on that spectrum. The following is by no means an exhaustive list of material bequests in these wills, but the type of objects named, and how they are described, merits closer examination as an indicator of vowed women's lifestyles.

Items of clothing appear frequently in late medieval women's wills, and vowesses' are no exception: the manufacture of clothing was labour-intensive and clothes were expensive, not to be simply discarded.²³ Vowesses' clothing, and how it was used as an expression of their public identity, was discussed in chapter one, but what a woman was depicted as wearing on her monumental brass was not necessarily what she wore every day. The items of dress listed in these women's wills substantiate Mary Erler's assertion that their dress seems to have been indistinguishable from that of ordinary widows, though equally some clothes that vowesses owned might have been acquired and worn before the vow was taken.²⁴ As Susan Steuer suggests, it is likely that vowesses' clothing, whether more severe religious costume or a fashionable display of wealth, probably varied according to context and individual preference, as flexible as the vocation itself.²⁵

19 TNA, C 142/80/11 and C 142/26/32.

20 TNA, PCC Prob. 11/28/484.

21 Oliver, 'The Will of Katharine, Countess of Devon', 53-8.

22 LMA, MS 9531/9, fols viii to x (3d ser.), fol. 30v.

23 Hanawalt, *The Wealth of Wives*, pp. 152-3.

24 Erler, 'Three Fifteenth-Century Vowesses', in *Medieval London Widows*, ed. by Barron and Sutton, p. 166.

25 Steuer, 'Widows and Religious Vocation', p. 191.

Girdles were a popular bequest to female friends and relatives. These were sometimes regarded as a symbol of faith, in accordance with the legend that the Virgin Mary threw down her girdle to St Thomas as she ascended into Heaven, in order to assuage his doubts about what was happening.²⁶ In the case of Margaret Croke, this passing on of faith symbolically was further personalised: she bequeathed to her granddaughter and god-daughter, Katherine Welbeck, 'a girdle of my weaving.'²⁷ Although finer clothes could date from before the vow was taken, the descriptions of vowesses' girdles do not suggest an austere mode of dress: Margaret Davey bequeathed two 'gilt' girdles; Joan Harby a girdle 'harnest'; Agnes Wyggeston her 'best girdell of stole warke with the harnes' and another 'a demy gyrdell of stole warke of eysses set with peryll'; and Maud Baker her 'best' girdle, as well as two with a green and red 'corse' and two 'of black velvet with adumsent of silver over gilt.'²⁸ The gowns create a similar impression of luxurious and decidedly secular dress. These were sometimes brightly-coloured: Katherine Rippelingham bequeathed one of crimson and Jane Chamberlayne one of violet.²⁹ These would have been expensive to dye and were hardly conducive to a sombre, nun-like appearance. Katherine left her 'old black gown' to a servant. Many of the gowns mentioned in vowesses' wills were furred, probably for warmth. Jane Chamberlayne bequeathed a gown furred with mink; Katherine Colman and Joan Pernaunt gowns furred with shank; and Katherine Rippelingham a gown furred with lambswool.³⁰ These women could evidently afford to be comfortable. Other items of clothing bequeathed to female relatives, friends, or servants include kirtles, hoods, bodices, kerchiefs, wimples, mantles, and mantellets.³¹

26 French, *The Good Women of the Parish*, p. 47.

27 TNA, PCC Prob. 11/9/12.

28 TNA, PCC Prob. 11/8/289; *Lincoln Wills*, ed. by Foster, i, p. 44; *A Calendar of Charters...*, ed. by Thompson, pp. 46-9; *The Pre-Reformation Records of All Saints' Church, Bristol*, ed. by Burgess, iii, pp. 33-9. 'Harnest' means mounted or ornamented with fittings of some precious material (*OED*). A corse was a ribbon or band of silk, or other material, serving as a ground for ornamentation with metalwork or embroidery (*OED*). The 'eysses' on Agnes Wyggeston's girdle were the SS Lancastrian symbol from the Wars of the Roses.

29 TNA, PCC Prob. 11/6/240 and 11/9/115.

30 TNA, PCC Prob. 11/9/115; 11/24/176; *The Pre-Reformation Records of All Saints' Church, Bristol*, ed. by Burgess, iii, pp. 51-4; TNA, PCC Prob. 11/6/240. Shank is a kind of fur obtained from the legs of animals, especially kids, goats, or sheep (*OED*).

31 A mantellet is a short, loose, sleeveless cape, cloak, or mantle covering the shoulders (*OED*).

As mentioned previously, the gift of a mantle, when a woman was vowed, carried added spiritual significance.³² The mantle was part of the vowing ceremony, bestowed on a woman by a bishop, and vowesses were commonly known as widows who had taken ‘the mantle and the ring.’³³ Of six mantles bequeathed by five different vowesses in this study, two are left to St. Anne's guild in Lincoln, one to a goddaughter, one to a parish church, one to a sub-prioress, and one to a friar. These could have been worn by individuals or used to dress statues of saints, and one was specified as intended for use in mystery plays.³⁴ Similarly, Alice Chester bequeathed her ‘black hood of profession’ to a nun.³⁵

Rings were by far the most popular items of jewellery in vowesses' wills. In fact, only four items of jewellery other than rings or rosary beads were encountered in vowesses' wills in this study: Margaret Davey left her daughter a ‘flowre for hyr nek’; Margaret Sutton’s grandson was to receive ‘a vise of golde for a gentill womans nek’; and Agnes Wyggeston bequeathed ‘a broche of golde with the salutation of our lady’ and ‘a flore of gold & Rebes with a perell hengyng at it.’³⁶ Some of the rings in these wills are specified as profession rings: Alice Hampton bequeathed hers to her parish church; Margaret Chocke did likewise; Katherine Ripplingham’s was to go to her granddaughter; Margaret Davey left hers to Our Lady of Walsingham; Alice Chester bequeathed hers to a ‘lady abbess’; and Joan Danvers wished hers to be placed at the image of the Crucifix near the north door of St. Paul's cathedral, London, amongst the other jewels kept there.³⁷ Like the mantles, these rings appear to have been transformed from personal to religious objects, taking on their own sanctity from the vowing ceremony and what it signified. Other rings mentioned had material, rather than

32 Examples are cited in the previous chapter of women bequeathing their profession mantles to a guild and to a convent respectively.

33 See the Introduction for examples.

34 For more on women giving their clothes or household items for liturgical purposes, see chapter three. Agnes Burton wished her mantle to be used in the regular mystery play at St Mary Magdalene, Taunton: TNA, PCC Prob. 11/14/120.

35 TNA, PCC Prob. 11/14/662.

36 TNA, PCC Prob. 11/8/289; *Lincoln Wills*, ed. by Foster, ii, pp. 17-9; *A Calendar of Charters...*, ed. by Thompson, pp. 46-9.

37 LMA, CC 9171/9, fol. 5v-6; TNA, PCC Prob. 11/7/156; 11/6/240; 11/8/289; 11/14/662.11/4/212.

spiritual, value: some were set with diamonds, emeralds, rubies, sapphires, pearls, or sanguine-stones.³⁸ Although a will usually only includes some of an individual's most valued, and by extension often most valuable, possessions, it seems that many vowesses did not reject the trappings of wealth: they prized their belongings with religious significance alongside those which were simply beautiful and expensive.

The aforementioned rosary beads were often simultaneously of spiritual and material value, and were both worn decoratively and used in prayer. Maud Baker's will described 'a pair of coral beads of 6 sets with gawdys of silver overgilt' and 'black beads with 5 ?wounds of gold, a pair of beads of gold with 2 bluestones in every set'; Joan Harby bequeathed 'a pair of gret beide of Corell wyth gawdes of gold'; Katherine Colman listed 'white amber beeds the pater nosters silver and gilt'; and Agnes Wyggeston included two 'pairs' of beads, one black and one silver, each dobill gauded with syluer & gilte.³⁹ Gemstones of which vowesses' beads were made include amber and coral, which were believed to be apotropaic: coral stopped bleeding and promoted fertility, while amber assisted with childbirth.⁴⁰ This corresponds with the fact that these beads were mostly bequeathed to female relatives. As rosary beads, they were of spiritual value, and, as gemstones, they were of material value: both of these also contributed to the practical usefulness of the properties that stones such as amber and coral were believed to have. The fact that the beads were expensive would have been seen only to enhance their religious use, as a means of worshipping God with the best one has. That is not to say, of course, that vanity could not have been a motive for wearing them as well: rosary beads could be admired by one's peers just as much as necklaces or girdles. These women may have wanted to be

38 A sanguine-stone was a kind of jasper from New Spain, dark brown in colour with flicks of red (*OED*). The same will (Agnes Wyggeston of Leicester, 1538: *A Calendar of Charters...*, ed. by Thompson, pp. 46-9) lists 'a litle Rynge with a whyte camme wey' but I have not been able to identify what this was.

39 *The Pre-Reformation Records of All Saints' Church, Bristol*, ed. by Burgess, iii, pp. 33-9; *Lincoln Wills*, ed. by Foster, i, p. 44; TNA PCC Prob. 11/24/176; *A Calendar of Charters...*, ed. by Thompson, p. 46-9. Maud Baker's beads may have been in some way customised for meditative prayer upon the five wounds of Christ, a popular cult at the time. A 'pair' of beads simply means a complete set.

40 French, *The Good Women of the Parish*, p. 47.

seen to spend their money on devotional items if they desired a reputation for piety. The same can be said of other religious paraphernalia.⁴¹

In spite of the established link between wealthy women and devotional reading, references to books in these vowesses' wills are scarce, far more so than Susan Steuer and Patricia Cullum suggest is the case for northern vowesses.⁴² Jane Chamberlayne's will includes two primers and Joan Pernaunt's and Katherine Langley's both mention an unspecified book.⁴³ The fact that most surviving vows were signed with a cross suggests limited literacy amongst these women, but they may have been able to read without being able to write, or they may simply have preferred for someone else read to them. The fact that the books are absent from the wills does not indicate that these women did not own books: as mentioned before, much testamentary provision was made outside of wills, and there is evidence of vowesses owning books elsewhere. Alice Beselles, for example, was named in the catalogue of Syon brothers' library records as having donated a folio edition of Italian lexicographer Ambrogio Calepino's Latin dictionary.⁴⁴ The difficulty in identifying vowed women with certainty necessitates that only a relatively small sample of vowesses' wills are included here, and it is probable that if there were more, and more detailed ones, more books would surface.

Household goods are considerably more prevalent in these wills. These were sometimes referred to generically, as 'goodes of household' and 'trasshe of household', or 'household stuff', or 'parcelles of howseholde'.⁴⁵ They were also, however, often itemised very specifically. They included a huge quantity and variety of plate for eating and drinking: pots, bowls, spoons, salt cellars, spice

41 Much of this was discussed in the previous chapter, as vowesses' wills tended to stipulate that it should be given to their parish church.

42 Mary Erler's *Women, Reading and Piety* is a detailed study of women's devotional reading. Lady Margaret Beaufort's literary interests will be discussed later in this chapter. Susan Steuer's discussion of northern vowesses' books can be found in 'Widows and Religious Vocation', pp. 194-5 and Patricia Cullum's in 'Vowesses and Lay Piety in the Medieval Province of York', 38.

43 TNA, PCC Prob. 11/9/115; *The Pre-Reformation Records of All Saints' Church, Bristol*, ed. by Burgess, iii, pp. 51-4; LMA, MS 9531/9, fols viii to x (3d ser.), fol. 30v.

44 Erler, *Women, Reading and Piety*, p. 87.

45 TNA, PCC Prob. 11/14/120; *The Pre-Reformation Records of All Saints' Church, Bristol*, ed. by Burgess, iii, pp. 33-9; *Lincoln Wills*, ed. by Foster, ii, pp. 17-9.

dishes, cups, goblets, mazers, and nuts.⁴⁶ Alice Beselles bequeathed to her kinsman 'a flat chaffer of brass to set fish in.'⁴⁷ Many such items were made of or embellished with gold, silver, gilt, or some combination of the three, and some were decorated with images. Agnes Burton had 'a standing cup with a cover havynge a birde uppon the knappe'; Katherine Rippelingham a 'pece cornered silver and gilt with white swans'; Maud Baker 'a cup with a cover of silver in parcel gilt standing upon 3 angels graven in silver'; Joan Harby 'a whyte pece with a coveryng wrought with grapes or vynes on it'; Margaret Sutton a gilted bowlle and a cover marked of rowses'; and Joan Cooke 'a dozone sylver sponnes with lyon heddes.'⁴⁸ Such items may have been for display or reserved for special occasions, rather than used daily, but their presence in the wills indicates that vowesses enjoyed the use of luxury items. These objects blended the practical and the ornamental, sometimes also using religious imagery: examples include the angels on Maud Baker's cup, and Agnes Wyggeston's 'dosyn spones the postells.'⁴⁹

Some vowesses' wills seem to almost list everything in the home. This is unsurprising since the death of a widow signified the end of a household and thus the time for distributing of its contents.⁵⁰ This means that a clearer picture of widows', and by extension vowesses', homes can be ascertained from their wills than is the case for men or for wives, the latter of whom seldom left wills anyway. These homes provide a glimpse of the lives that were lived in them. Vowesses' wills mentioned basins, ewers, candlesticks, hair combs, purses, pots and pans, copper kettles, carpets, and cushions, along with furniture, such as chests, closets, cupboards, and beds. The beds sometimes came with a huge range of bedding, and other textiles included tablecloths, towels, napkins, seat covers, and draught-

46 A mazer was a wooden drinking vessel, and a nut was one made from a coconut shell mounted in metal, or one made to resemble this (*OED*).

47 TNA, PCC Prob. 11/22/150.

48 TNA, PCC Prob. 11/14/120; 11/6/240; *The Pre-Reformation Records of All Saints' Church, Bristol*, ed. by Burgess, iii, pp. 33-9; *Lincoln Wills*, ed. by Foster, i, p. 44; pp. 17-9; TNA, PCC Prob. 11/31/182. A standing cup is a cup with a foot or feet, a base, or a stem and base upon which to stand, and a knappe is a small rounded protuberance, a knob, a boss, stud, button, tassel, or the like (*OED*).

49 *A Calendar of Charters...*, ed. by Thompson, pp. 46-9. The handle of each apostle spoon ended in a figure of one of Christ's disciples. These are recorded from the 1530s onward and were a common baptismal gift (*OED*).

50 French, *The Good Women of the Parish*, p. 78.

exclusion measures such as wall tapestries and chimney cloths. Some of these textiles were embroidered with religious and secular imagery, and the overall impression is one of great comfort. Agnes Wygggeston had ‘litle bottells... to caste rose water’ to make her home smell pleasant.⁵¹ This contrasts vividly with the austere existence of the Dartford nuns, described in the previous chapter, and emphasises the worldly nature of many vowed women’s lives. They seem to have had no reservations about possessing luxury items or displaying their wealth to visitors.

Alongside material goods, properties, and lands, vowesses’ wills sometimes included livestock. For example, Margery Middlemore bequeathed a total of six cows, a sheep to each of her godchildren, and two steers; Joan Harby left a mare, a cow, and six ewes; Margaret Chocke mentioned sheep and oxen; and Margaret Sutton had an impressive twenty-six sheep, six swarms of bees, thirty-two ewes, ten lambs, one horse, three cows, and a filly.⁵² Although women of this status would not have cared for the animals themselves, the presence of livestock in these wills reveals how some vowesses financed themselves to maintain their vital independence. They also knew exactly what they owned, suggesting a hands-on approach to estate management which is replicated in wealthier vowesses.⁵³ One such woman was Katherine Courtenay, Countess of Devon, who spent her widowhood running the Devon estates which had belonged to her husband, and rarely left them.⁵⁴ Her will is supplemented by a funeral inventory, a huge catalogue of possessions, which attests to her love of hunting and riding: it lists not only horses, but many items of plate and equipment from her stables.⁵⁵ Despite being a princess by birth, she seems not to have been a distant figure to her tenants, but a physical presence on at least some of the lands that she owned.

51 *A Calendar of Charters...*, ed. by Thompson, pp. 46-9.

52 TNA, PCC Prob. 11/24/14; *Lincoln Wills*, ed. by Foster, i, p. 44; TNA, PCC Prob. 11/7/156; *Lincoln Wills*, ed. by Foster, i, pp. 17-9.

53 See chapter two for a brief biography of Countess Katherine, as well as another example, Anne Herbert.

54 Westcott, ‘Katherine Courtenay, Countess of Devon’, in *Tudor and Stuart Devon*, ed. by Gray, Rowe and Erskine, pp. 22-24. Other examples include Anne Herbert in chapter two and Lady Margaret Beaufort, about whose wealth more will be said later in this chapter.

55 *Ibid.*, pp. 31-4.

One of the limitations of wills and inventories as sources for discerning an individual's lifestyle is that they reveal some of what a person owned, but they do not specify how or how often it was used. Household accounts are more useful in this regard, although few survive. Countess Katherine's account books from the early 1520s onward record huge quantities of extravagant food, wines, and sweets, fine clothes, lavish festivities for Christmas and New Year, as well as horses and stabling 'for my lady's hunting.' Although there are some alms and religious offerings, these are by no means prominent.⁵⁶ For most vowesses, though, it is unclear whether the garments and plate described in the wills were locked in a cupboard or were indicative of clothes worn and meals consumed daily. These items create a luxurious impression, but they are not incompatible with a simpler lifestyle or with ascetic practices.

At Lady Margaret's funeral, her chaplain and confessor, John Fisher, preached a funeral sermon, emphasising her asceticism into old age.⁵⁷ He claimed that she continued to fast on the days prescribed by the Church even though 'for aage and feebleness albeit she were not bounde.' Her one concession appears to have been that she would only wear her penitential hair shirts and girdles during weeks when she felt 'in helthe.' Otherwise, her strict religious observance continued unchanged, and, as a result of hours at prayer, 'her knelynge was to her paynful, and so paynful that many tymes it caused in her backe payne and dysease.'⁵⁸ The piety of the dead was praised as a matter of course, but the behaviour attributed to Lady Margaret was extreme. It suggests that her vow of chastity was not merely a means of gaining autonomy: there was also a strong religious motivation. Of course, in an age in which many believed that the king was appointed by God, one may speculate that Lady Margaret's piety was self-consciously acted to bolster public belief in her son's right to the throne.

The ascetic acts described by John Fisher, in which Lady Margaret reportedly punished her body for the good of her soul, run parallel with Henry

56 *Ibid.*, pp. 26-9.

57 The funeral sermon is reproduced in *The English Works of John Fisher*, ed. by Mayor, pp. 289-310.

58 *Ibid.*, p. 295.

Parker's account of her household, in which he recounted the luxuries she enjoyed and how she liked to entertain on a lavish scale.⁵⁹ Her inventories, likewise, list plentiful and opulent items of dress; she had equally splendid furniture and textiles in her residences; her men wore expensive livery; and one postmortem inventory records an 'extravagant allurements of precious metals', along with relics and religious images.⁶⁰ Few women were as wealthy as Lady Margaret but vowesses' wills suggest that many enjoyed some degree of luxury. If they wore hair shirts as she did, or fasted beyond what the Church prescribed - and both were fairly common practice for those with pious inclinations - they did these things amidst their finery with no sense of discord. Ascetic acts were intended to induce temporary physical discomfort, or even suffering, for spiritual benefit. They were believed to reduce the damage inflicted by sin and thus time to be spent in Purgatory, as well as helping the individual to empathise with the sufferings of Christ. They were not equal to the permanent rejection of wealth and comfort modelled by some popular saints.

Some vowesses may indeed have taken things further and had aspired to emulate a saintly example. The obvious candidate is Alice Hampton, whose excessive fasting was explored in the previous chapter and whose relationship with her wealth merits further discussion here. Alice may have originally intended to have become a nun at Dartford: it would have satisfied her sense of a religious calling, and the Hamptons had close links with the Bamme family, whose daughter, Anne, was a nun there.⁶¹ Profession as a nun, of course, would have entailed surrendering all her property. It is possible that Alice backed out after the death of her father, brothers, and uncle rendered her unexpectedly an heiress to the family estates. Becoming a vowess would have enabled her to remain at Dartford and to continue in a religious vocation, whilst simultaneously keeping the property in the family. She may have been under pressure from her kin to hold on to the family's wealth so that, if she were determined not to marry, she might bequeath it at her death to one of her sisters' children. She may have desired the

59 This account (BL, Add. MS 12060) is further described in chapter two.

60 Jones and Underwood, *The King's Mother*, pp. 188-91.

61 Lee, *Nunneries, Learning and Spirituality in Late Medieval Society*, p. 63.

estates for herself. One can only speculate, but for an unmarried woman to become a vowess was extremely rare.⁶² The picture is further complicated by the fact that Alice went on to give away her Gloucestershire estates, in their entirety, to Syon Abbey. This renders it unlikely that she so ardently wished to keep them earlier in her life, unless she went on to have a change of heart. As she had no children, she may have felt that Syon would make better use of the land than her nieces or nephews, or they may not have survived to adulthood, or she may have come to view her wealth as an encumbrance spiritually, just as St Roch did. Although a fuller picture of Alice's life can be constructed than for many other vowesses, it is still tantalisingly incomplete and it is unlikely that her motivations will ever be known. It does seem, however, that she was exceptional, and not only because she was an unmarried vowess: fasting into illness and giving away whole estates were not typical vowess behaviours.

Evidence of whatever self-denial these women may have practised has been almost entirely lost to time. A possible hint of the ethos behind it survives in the language used when burial preferences were stated in some vowesses' wills. Although the potential distance between the testator and the will, outlined in chapter one, complicates the picture, it is nonetheless pertinent that Joan Byfeld's will described her body as 'wreched', as did that of Katherine Langley, and Alice Chester's described hers as 'poor'. Although there may be a temptation to read Lollard sympathies into such phrasing, K. B. McFarlane has demonstrated that 'Lollard' expressions are to be found in many late medieval wills.⁶³ There is no significant evidence for Lollard belief or practice in the lives of any known vowesses. However, whether the words in the wills quoted above were the vowesses' or the scribes', they are suggestive of disdain for all things earthly and physical and a focus upon all things heavenly and spiritual.⁶⁴ More than this, they indicate religious practice in which the denigration of the body was believed to be beneficial to the soul. The wills also, however, imply that this had its limit: all

62 The only other known example is that of Joan Stretton: see the third appendix to this thesis.

63 K. B. McFarlane, *Lancastrian Kings and Lollard Knights* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1972), pp. 210-1.

64 TNA, PCC Prob. 11/9/253. LMA, MS 9531/9, fols viii to x (3rd ser.), fol. 30v.; TNA, PCC Prob. 11/14/662.

three documents quoted above dispose of items of comfort and luxury, as well as considerable financial wealth.

Vowesses' funeral preferences, as outlined in their wills, are similarly relevant. In spite of the fact that these funeral arrangements are often meticulous and sometimes very lavish, Susan Kyngeston's will stipulated that she wanted no 'pompious busynes' about her funeral, and Katherine Langley likewise desired that 'myne exeques and buriall be not pompos nor sumptuos butt of mene and necessary expensis to thentent that pore pepull may that better be refreshed among heme.'⁶⁵ The emphasis is both upon personal humility and the need for wealth to glorify God in charity as well as, or even instead of, in ecclesiastical lavishness. The soul was believed to be accelerated through Purgatory by Masses and similar ecclesiastical provisions, which had to be paid for, and equally by charitable deeds, in which money was spent on the poor, particularly if the poor then offered up prayers for one's spiritual welfare. The question of whether it was most beneficial to spend one's money on the Church or the poor was traditionally resolved by combining the two. The sentiments expressed in these wills are particularly pertinent at the eve of the Reformation and they raise the question of how widespread such concerns were, whether individuals were beginning to prefer charity as more pleasing to God than elaborate liturgy, which carried a greater risk of glorifying the individual benefactor and therefore of the sin of pride.

'A Verray Patroness'

This leads into vowesses' charitable giving, the aforementioned 'spiritual leadership by material means' and the most pious, even redemptive, use of wealth. Much of vowesses' giving was directed to parish churches, convents, and almshouses, and has been discussed in the previous chapter. What has been so far neglected is the emphasis on education, which Susan Steuer has also noted in the philanthropic efforts of northern religious widows.⁶⁶ The provision of education

65 TNA, PCC Prob. 11/28/484; LMA, MS 9531/9, fols viii to x (3rd ser.), fol. 30v.

66 Susan Steuer, 'Widows and Religious Vocation', p. 200.

was arguably the ultimate 'spiritual leadership': educating individuals meant enhancing liturgy, advancing theology, and generally improving both Church and society on a grand scale. It was expected that those individuals who benefited would both do good as a result of their knowledge and disseminate their learning through preaching or writing. The Church and the State were intertwined: the leading churchmen were also the leading politicians and ministers of the crown, and, from the Leicester parliament of 1414, religion was established and enforced by public authority.⁶⁷ What benefited the Church benefited society, and vice versa. Cultural and intellectual patronage took various forms: establishing colleges at the universities, sponsoring individual scholars, supporting the printing and dissemination of religious literature, and founding schools. Each of these was a means of promoting the improvement, even the reformation, of Church and society through nurturing and educating its individual members.

The famous example of vowess as scholarly patroness is undoubtedly Lady Margaret Beaufort, who founded two Cambridge colleges, Christ's and St John's, and who supported pioneering printer William Caxton. Michael Jones and Malcolm Underwood have described not only the details of Lady Margaret's giving within the context of her life, but also the likely intentions and rationale behind it.⁶⁸ These ideas can be developed when considered alongside the lives of contemporary vowesses. Lady Margaret was not typical, as she had enormous wealth and influence, but other women probably modelled themselves on her, as described in previous chapters. For her, charitable giving to the poor naturally expanded to cultural and intellectual patronage, promoting the spiritual well-being of her fellow man as well as the physical. In her funeral sermon, she was described her as 'a verray patronness' to the learned men of England.⁶⁹ Her interest

67 Jeremy Catto, 'Religious Change under Henry V', in *Henry V: The Practice of Kingship*, ed. by G. L. Harriss (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), pp. 97-116 (p. 102 and 97 respectively).

68 Jones and Underwood, *The King's Mother*, to which a useful supplement here is Susan Powell, 'Lady Margaret Beaufort as Patron of Scholars and Scholarship', in *Patrons and Professionals in the Middle Ages: Proceedings of the 2010 Harlaxton Symposium*, ed. by Paul Binski and Elizabeth A. New (Donington: Shaun Tyas, 2012), pp. 100-21.

69 Reproduced in *The English Works of John Fisher*, ed. by Mayor, pp. 289-310 (p. 301).

in education and the rationale behind it filtered down the social scale and there are parallels between her giving and that of lesser vowesses.

While Lady Margaret founded two great institutions at Cambridge, Underwood and Jones stress that these 'were not the result of abstract schemes developed in isolation from other forms of involvement.'⁷⁰ In fact, her generosity tended to focus upon individuals, both meeting their needs and advancing their prospects. Her household accounts list daily expenditure upon almsfolk which includes personal touches, such as primers for two poor children and arrangements for the boarding and care of children of poor women.⁷¹ That such a great lady gave such attention to the detail of the lives of those whom many would have considered well beneath her notice is rather touching, and it suggests a genuine care for others rather than charity simply for the sake of reputation, duty, or her own afterlife. She took a personal interest in the careers of the men of her household; she funded education and apprenticeships for her almschildren; and she paid the way of the boys who sung in her chapel through Eton, the Charterhouse, Oxford, and Cambridge.⁷² As Susan Powell writes, 'Her promotion of apt young men supplied a source of well-schooled officers to run both her own household and, through her son, the country.'⁷³

Lady Margaret's foundations at Cambridge and her interest in printing were motivated by a similar concern for the individual. Printing made more religious literature more available, and available to more people. It facilitated self-improvement. Jones and Underwood argue that Lady Margaret's patronage of printers was a major factor in the popularisation of devotional literature.⁷⁴ Devotional texts were intended to teach forms of prayer and to stir up love for God, Heaven, and the saints.⁷⁵ Such printed works, produced by Caxton and his

70 Jones and Underwood, *The King's Mother*, p. 167.

71 *Ibid.*, p. 179.

72 *Ibid.*, p. 167.

73 Powell, 'Lady Margaret Beaufort as Patron of Scholars and Scholarship', in *Patrons and Professionals in the Middle Ages*, ed. by Binski and New, pp. 100-21 (p. 100).

74 Jones and Underwood, *The King's Mother*, p. 187.

75 Hutchinson, 'Devotional Reading in the Monastery and in the Late Medieval Household', in *De Cella in Seculum*, ed. by Sargent p. 224.

successor, Wynken de Worde, whom Lady Margaret also supported, were the response to a demand from royal and aristocratic ladies and their households.⁷⁶ In this, the king's mother seems to have been instrumental: along with Elizabeth of York, she gave a copy of Hilton's *Scale of Perfection* to Mary Roos, one of the ladies-in-waiting.⁷⁷ When de Worde printed the *Scale* in 1494, the dedicatory verses state that Lady Margaret had commanded de Worde to print that particular text.⁷⁸ It centres around devotional introspection, the stewarding of one's soul, an emphasis shared by many such texts which Lady Margaret promoted.⁷⁹ One such text was the *Imitatio Christi* of Thomas a Kempis, of which Lady Margaret commissioned the second translation, and the fourth book of which she translated herself from the French version.⁸⁰ Use of these printed devotional books filtered down from the court and aristocratic circles to the gentry and the upper mercantile class. As Lady Margaret promoted the popularity as well as the availability of such texts, she directly influenced the piety of her contemporaries.

The founding and improving of the university colleges were by no means unusual outlets for the pious and philanthropic inclinations of wealthy people at the time. Through the fourteenth, fifteenth, and early sixteenth centuries, endowed colleges gradually superseded the 'halls' which had previously been the focus of scholars' communal living.⁸¹ College scholars prayed for the souls of their benefactors and so colleges doubled as chantries. The universities were a part of the Church: their role was to both explore and uphold doctrine and to produce an educated, efficient clergy.⁸² College foundation thus simultaneously benefited the

76 Jones and Underwood, *The King's Mother*, p. 181.

77 Hutchinson, 'Devotional Reading in the Monastery and in the Late Medieval Household', in *De Cella in Seculum*, ed. by Sargent, p. 226.

78 Jones and Underwood, *The King's Mother*, p. 182.

79 Walter Hilton, *The Scale of Perfection*, ed. by Thomas H. Bestul, *TEAMS Middle English Texts*, 2000 <<http://d.lib.rochester.edu/teams/text/bestul-hilton-scale-of-perfection-introduction/>> [accessed 26 July 2016]; Anne-Marie Dutton, 'Women's Use of Religious Literature in Late Medieval England' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of York, 1995; accessed online at <http://etheses.whiterose.ac.uk/2470/1/DX211582.pdf> [accessed 31 July 2016]), p. 177.

80 Dutton, 'Women's Use of Religious Literature in Late Medieval England', pp. 182-3.

81 L. W. B. Brockliss, *The University of Oxford: A History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), pp. 56-83.

82 Gerald Harriss, *Shaping the Nation: England, 1360-1461* (Oxford: Clarendon, 2005), p. 344.

founder, the scholars, and the wider Church. Lady Margaret's foundations at Cambridge were undoubtedly partly a result of the influence of John Fisher. As well as acting as Lady Margaret's confessor, Fisher was bishop of Rochester and chancellor of the university, and he has received much of the credit for her philanthropic endeavours in her later years. However, the extent to which she acted autonomously is open to interpretation. Maria Dowling wrote that Fisher 'channelled' Lady Margaret's charity.⁸³ Underwood and Jones describe him as the 'catalyst' for her interest in Cambridge.⁸⁴ The two first met in 1495, when Fisher was a senior proctor at Cambridge, sent to Lady Margaret on university business.⁸⁵ As she confirmed her vow of chastity upon being widowed, almost a decade later, she said:

'And also for my more Meryte & quietness of my Soule in doubtful things perteyning to the same I avowe to you my Lord of Rochester to whom I am & have been sence the first time I see you admitted verely determined (as to my chiefe trusty Councillour) to owe my Obedience in all things concerning the weakle and profyte of my Soule.'⁸⁶

This reveals that Fisher made a profound impression upon Lady Margaret from the very first meeting, that she should consider herself 'verely determined' to be under his complete spiritual guidance. Certainly, when Lady Margaret was determined about something, it usually came to pass. Obedience in all spiritual matters was, at least nominally, the position of every woman's confessor, and yet Lady Margaret seems to have taken this particularly seriously. She is the only vowess known to have even mentioned her confessor in her chastity vow.

Indeed, Fisher was integral to much of Lady Margaret's activity at Cambridge. He supervised the endowment and establishment of St John's,

83 Maria Dowling, *Fisher of Men: A Life of John Fisher, 1469-1535* (London: Macmillan, 1999), p. 7.

84 Jones and Underwood, *The King's Mother*, p. 167.

85 Dowling, *Fisher of Men*, p. 10.

86 Cooper, 'The Vow of Widowhood...', 73; St John's College Archives, C7.11, fol. 47.

working closely with Lady Margaret's secretary, Henry Hornby, who was also master of Peterhouse.⁸⁷ She arranged for the president of Queens', Thomas Wilkinson, to resign in order to put Fisher in his place, at the same time providing Queens' with an endowment of land in Essex from her kinsman, the Duke of Buckingham.⁸⁸ Fisher was made Visitor for life at Christ's and was permitted to use Lady Margaret's own rooms in her absence. In 1525, the college arranged an anniversary service for Fisher in which he was credited with urging the foundation upon her and with giving it laws.⁸⁹ Certainly, the beginning of her preference for Cambridge seems to have coincided with her meeting Fisher: prior to this, she had patronised Oxford and Cambridge equally.⁹⁰

However, she was not passively steered by Fisher. The two shared a common goal: that of reforming the church through the education and training of clergy in the colleges. This was in keeping with Lady Margaret's other patronage, which championed improvement of the individual for improvement of society. Also, the colleges of Oxford and Cambridge housed priests and clerks who prayed for their benefactors whilst pursuing religious and secular careers: they embodied the mixed life of active piety in a manner not dissimilar to the vowess Lady Margaret. She was a woman known for her scholarly inclinations as well as for her religious intensity. Jones and Underwood argue that the preference for Cambridge at the end of her life was not due solely to Fisher but a host of others, and that it was as much to do with breaking away from her husband's household and establishing her own public identity as it was to do with patronising her favourites.⁹¹ Lady Margaret was not merely a rich old lady doing as she was told and her relationship with Fisher appears to have been one of genuine friendship. After her death, Fisher wrote: 'I freely admit that once she had adopted me both as her confessor and her moral and spiritual guide, I learned more of what leads to an upright life from her rare virtues than I ever taught her in return.'⁹²

87 Jones and Underwood, *The King's Mother*, p. 167-8, p. 217.

88 *Ibid.*, p. 214.

89 *Ibid.*, p. 227.

90 *Ibid.*, p. 204. She funded a lectureship in Divinity at Oxford in 1502.

91 *Ibid.*, pp. 169-70.

92 *Ibid.*, p. 249.

Neither did Lady Margaret merely provide the funds for Fisher and his colleagues at Cambridge to do there as they saw fit. She oversaw how her money was spent and she was actively involved in the life of her foundations. Christ's College was the transformation of an earlier, smaller institution, God's House, which was floundering. Lady Margaret was granted letters patent by Henry VII to 'augment, establish and finish' God's House which granted her the right to frame new statutes. She oversaw the endowments for the College personally, including Helpston Rectory, Northamptonshire, which was an old possession of God's House: she bought seven acres in Helpston to endow the vicar, improving the new vicarage with two more rooms, new chimneys, doors, and windows.⁹³ This attention to detail was typical of her. She also personally equipped the new college with books, organs, and other liturgical necessities – it inherited images and furniture from her own chapel - and she had four rooms reserved for herself above the master's lodge.⁹⁴ She died in the midst of arranging the transformation of the hospital of St John the Evangelist into her second collegiate foundation, having sworn that if she lived to do so, she would make St John's 'as good and of as good value' as Christ's.⁹⁵ St John's was completed by Fisher and opened in 1511.

Lady Margaret's legacy testifies to how she promoted the spiritual and intellectual health of her fellow Christians. Although the university colleges did serve as 'academic chantries' where she and her family would be commemorated, their scope and their usefulness far exceeded this.⁹⁶ Her contribution to Cambridge was, indeed, immense, but she also furthered the material careers of those in her service and the devotional lives of her contemporaries through reading material. In this way, she elevated individuals for the benefit of all. Most vowesses had neither the finance nor the influence to undertake projects on this scale, but their giving is suggestive of a similar philosophy. Joan Marler's will established a preacher, and several others funded individual scholars through university.⁹⁷ Joan Danvers was instrumental in the foundation of Magdalen College, Oxford: a few

93 *Ibid.*, pp. 215-9.

94 *Ibid.*, pp. 225-8.

95 *Ibid.*, p. 235, quoting the Chancery deposition of John St John at St John's College Archives: D4.10, *Notes*, 244.

96 *Ibid.*, p. 211.

years before her death, she conveyed to William Waynflete, bishop of Winchester, a sizeable portion of her estate, in order that its proceeds would be used to maintain the college. A deed records that ‘the next day the feoffees let it to her for the annual payment of a red rose’, and that services for her, for her husband, and for Matilda de Vere, Countess of Oxford, would be celebrated at the college.⁹⁸

Primarily, however, vowesses’ interest in education seems to have manifested in the founding of schools. There they displayed the same active interest in the institutions they endowed and the same attention to detail characterised by Lady Margaret Beaufort. There were essentially three types of medieval school, with much flexibility and fluidity between them.⁹⁹ Chantry schools were attached to and funded alongside commemorative chantries, with the chantry priest doubling as schoolmaster and the pupils expected to pray for the founder. The curriculum covered basic literacy, grammar, the plainsong used by clergy for reciting psalms and hymns of the divine offices, and sometimes a little Latin.¹⁰⁰ Secular schools covered a similar curriculum but were taught by secular priests or clerks, and, later on, laymen too, and were open to all who could afford to attend.¹⁰¹ Grammar schools were more sophisticated in organisation and generally taught those who had already mastered the basics. The curriculum included more advanced grammar and Latin, sometimes as well as French and the administrative record-keeping and composing of letters and documents which might now be called ‘business studies.’¹⁰²

In the early years of Henry VIII’s reign, chantry schools went out of fashion and people were more inclined to found freestanding schools.¹⁰³ When

97 TNA, unregistered PCC will of Joan Marler, and one example, Margaret Chocke: PCC Prob. 11/7/156.

98 F. N. Macnmara, *Memorials of the Danvers Family (of Dauntsey and Culworth)* (London: Hardy and Page, 1895), p. 50. Matilda de Vere is prominent in Joan Danvers’ will and other records concerning her: it seems likely that the two women were related, but exactly how is unclear.

99 For a more detailed examination of medieval schools, see Nicholas Orme, *English Schools in the Middle Ages* (London: Methuen, 1973)

100 *Ibid.*, pp. 63-9.

101 *Ibid.*, p. 60.

102 *Ibid.*, pp. 68-71.

103 *Ibid.*, p. 196.

Dean Colet refounded the cathedral school at St Paul's (1508-10), he imitated earlier cathedral schools who left the post of schoolmaster open to priests and laymen, and new foundations from that time tended to do likewise. Thus schools began to stand more commonly as institutions in their own right, perhaps as it made better practical sense for the schoolmaster to be free of the obligation to sing divine services.¹⁰⁴ Schools were founded by everyone from the highest ranks of society down to clergy, urban burgesses, and rural yeomen, if they could afford it.¹⁰⁵ Vowesses also founded schools, and Susan Steuer cites as an example Agnes Mellers, who in 1512-13 established what is now Nottingham High School.¹⁰⁶ Although this foundation is outside the scope of the thesis, as Agnes Mellers lived in the northern ecclesiastical province, vowesses were making very similar arrangements in cities all over the country. When placed in parallel, the foundations established by Agnes Wyggeston of Leicester and Joan Cooke of Gloucester, reveal a pattern of urban vowess school-founding conforming to that of Agnes Mellers.

That is not to say that all vowess school foundations conformed to this type. The 1540 will of Susan Kyngeston, who was not an urban mercantile widow but of gentry stock, widowed young and spending much of her life at Syon Abbey, also designates revenue from some of her land 'towardses the findinge of some vetuous preiste at Shalston in the county of Buck[inghamshire] to teche pore childern.'¹⁰⁷ No evidence survives that she made further stipulations or arrangements for this school, in the way that Agnes Mellers and Joan Cooke carefully specified how their foundations were to be managed. Susan Kyngeston's bequest reflects both the educational emphasis at Syon Abbey and a familial tradition of founding schools. Her uncle, William Fettyplace, had founded a family chantry at Childrey, Berkshire, in 1526 which included a school. He, too,

104 Nicholas Orme, *Medieval Schools: From Roman Britain to Renaissance England* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2006), pp. 236-44.

105 *Ibid.*, p. 241.

106 Steuer, 'Widows and Religious Vocation', p. 200. Adrian Henstock, 'Mellers, Agnes (d. 1513/14)', in *ODNB*, Oxford University Press, Oct 2006; online edn, May 2010 [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/95018/>, accessed 2 July 2016].

107 TNA, PCC Prob. 11/28/484.

outlined detailed specifications for how it was to be run. Susan Kyngeston's will suggests that her school was something of an afterthought: other documents relating to it may have been lost, but the absence of any mention of the school at Shalston elsewhere has led Mary Erler to conclude that Susan's plan was 'apparently never implemented.'¹⁰⁸

The schools founded by Agnes Wyggeston and Joan Cooke, on the other hand, survive to this day. The two women had much in common: Agnes was the widow of the mayor of Leicester and took her vow in 1536, while Joan was the widow of the mayor of Gloucester and probably vowed at some time between her husband's death in 1528 and her own in 1545.¹⁰⁹ Amongst mayor William Wyggeston's executors were Agnes and his brother, Thomas.¹¹⁰ William Wyggeston was a wealthy wool merchant and had founded Wyggeston's Hospital in the town. His will made no mention of his desire for a school, but Agnes and Thomas used his wealth to endow and establish Wyggeston's School. The will of John Cooke, on the other hand, was explicit about his plans for a school and his wife's role in fulfilling them. The will repeated the terms of a deed he had drawn up a few days earlier, in which his estates were conveyed to a group of ten eminent men of Gloucester. They were to convey them to Joan for her lifetime, with reversion on her death to a free grammar school that was to be founded in the town.¹¹¹ In his will, he directed his trustees to act 'to such uses purpose and ententes as [Joan] shall declare thereof by hir lerned counsel to the performauce of my wille as she do know my full mynde in these purpose.' He also ordered them to augment the school's endowment by buying lands worth £20 per annum, 'as I have at several tymes before my death declared published and shewed to my said wife.'¹¹² The school was clearly a vision shared by the couple.

As Caroline Litzenberger's biography of the Cookes reveals, Joan worked hard to fulfil the plans she had made with her husband. She acquired the site for

108 Erler, *Women, Reading and Piety*, p. 91.

109 For an explanation of uncertainties around Joan's vow, see the Introduction.

110 *A Calendar of Charters...*, ed. by Thompson, pp. 30-9.

111 Litzenberger, 'Cooke, John (d. 1528)', in *ODNB*.

112 Austin, *The Crypt School*, pp. 140-44.

the new school within the churchyard of St Mary de Crypt at Gloucester and, in 1538, purchased a mortmain licence from the crown enabling the mayor and burgesses of Gloucester to acquire land worth up to £50 to support it. The dissolution of Llanthony Priory, which had previously monopolised education in Gloucester, enabled Joan to purchase some of the lands previously held by the priory for the use of the school at a cost of £266 6s. 8d. If Joan objected to the Dissolution, as one might expect of a vowess, she was pragmatic about it. Shortly afterwards, in 1540, Joan, along with the city of Worcester, and the mayor and burgesses of Gloucester, executed a deed which handed control of the school over to the town of Gloucester, under the condition that the provisions of John Cooke's will were observed. The deed outlines in detail the function and funding of the school, which had already been built, as well as the schoolmaster's stipend and accommodation.¹¹³

Another surviving document, dated 24 August 1550 and entitled 'Depositions in a Cause to Lady Cooks Conveyance', testifies to Joan's spirit and determination as her health declined.¹¹⁴ She was not present as the lands her husband had left to endow the school were transferred to the city because 'she was soche an unwelody wommon for age and unwelodynes that she could not ride nor go herself to soche places oute of the town of Gloucester where the landes and tenementes lay.' When told that, legally, she must go and receive the lands herself, she responded that 'she should never ride till she were borne upon foure mens shoulders.'¹¹⁵ When she was pressed by the Gloucester authorities to hand over the title deeds for the school's endowment, she likewise stood her ground, saying 'that for her tyme she was mystres of the rentes therof, and therefore wold have the kepinge of the evidences and at her death she said she wold delyver them.' For her, the school was testament to the fact 'that her husband and she had lovyd the

113 Litzenberger, 'Cooke, John (d. 1528)', in *ODNB*.

114 The document is described in: Roland Austin, 'John and Joan Cooke's gift to Gloucester', *Transactions of the Bristol and Gloucestershire Archaeological Society*, 65 (1944), 199–219.

115 *Ibid.*, 200.

said towne' and she held control of it until she died.¹¹⁶ It is still a boys' grammar school.

Whilst the idea of the Crypt School in Gloucester had been dear to the hearts of both John and Joan Cooke, it is unclear whether William Wyggeston ever intended to found a school at all. He may have communicated his intentions to Agnes verbally, or perhaps the project was all her own. She had seen her first husband, William Ford of Coventry, successfully establish Greyfriars Hospital (it is also still in operation) as well as William Wyggeston's founding Wyggeston's Hospital. She would thus have been familiar with the process for such philanthropic schemes. She may even have had some involvement or prompted these hospital foundations. Arrangements for the school were made jointly with her brother-in-law, Thomas, with whom she shared responsibility for her husband's will. They entrusted to Walter Browne, master of Wyggeston's Hospital, amongst others, the financial means to maintain a schoolmaster.¹¹⁷ Thomas Wyggeston then died, only a year or two after his brother. In 1539, Leland recorded that Thomas had 'made the fre Grammar Schole.'¹¹⁸ He did not mention Agnes, although she was still living and possibly still involved in the project. She died in 1541 and Browne continued the endowment and improvement of the school, using the money entrusted to him by Agnes and Thomas to buy various lands in 1545, which were then conveyed to the chaplains and the poor in 1557.¹¹⁹ The following year, Browne purchased more property to support a second master.¹²⁰ The school is now a sixth form college.

The founding of these schools by vowesses in Leicester and Gloucester have much in common with Agnes Mellers' endowment of the school in Nottingham. As described by Adrian Henstock, Agnes Mellers secured the

116 *Ibid.*, 201-5.

117 R. A. McKinley, Janet D. Martin and R. M. Gard, 'The Ancient Borough: Hospitals and Almshouses', in *VCH: Leicester*, ed. by R. A. McKinley, 5 vols (London: Dawson, 1907-64), iv (1958), pp. 398-410.

118 Leland's *Itinerary*, cited in Cocks, 'Wyggeston, William (c.1467-1536)', in *ODNB*.

119 McKinley, Martin and Gard, 'The Ancient Borough: Hospitals and Almshouses', in *A History of the County of Leicester*, ed. by McKinley, iv (1958), pp. 398-410.

120 *Ibid.*

assistance of Thomas Lovell, who was at that time the governor of the recently enlarged royal castle in Nottingham.¹²¹ On 22 November 1512, Henry VIII issued letters patent to ‘our beloved councillor, Thomas Lovell, knight, treasurer of our household, and Agnes Mellers, widow’ granting permission for the foundation of a school in Nottingham, ‘ever more to endure’, for the ‘education, teaching and instruction of boys in good manners and literature.’¹²² One is reminded of Agnes Wyggeston's joint venture with her brother-in-law: perhaps such a scheme was better received at the time when associated with a man. Agnes Mellers gave five of her own properties, valued at 26s. 8d., to endow the school. She also actively fundraised, sourcing further gifts of cash and land from eighty six other donors, including the local mayor and her own sons. She drew up detailed ordinances for the running of the school, just as Joan Cooke did in Gloucester. The school in Nottingham was to be governed by the mayor and corporation, with two permanent masters and two annually-appointed ‘guardians’ or schoolwardens. Agnes Mellers found the first two guardians and schoolmaster herself, and persuaded the corporation to enter into a bond to honour her ordinances on pain of forfeiting 40s. per annum. One schoolmaster was to ‘dayly when he kepys scole cause the Scolers every morning in thair scole hows ... to say with an high voice the hole Credo in deum patrem, etc.’¹²³

Agnes Mellers, then, who founded the school at Nottingham with such energy and attention to detail, was evidently not an exceptional case. In fact, she appears to have conformed to a pattern of urban vowesses, widows of mayors and prominent townsmen, who established free grammar schools as acts of philanthropy in the early decades after Dean Colet's famous refounding of St Paul's cathedral school. The precise nature of Agnes Wyggeston's involvement in her foundation have rather been obscured. It is possible that, like Agnes Mellers, she did much of the work for little credit. All three vowesses, to varying extents,

121 Henstock describes the endowment of the school in detail in ‘Mellers, Agnes (*d.* 1513/14)’, in *ODNB*. The following is essentially a summary.

122 Nottingham high school archives, charter of 1512, as quoted by Henstock in ‘Mellers, Agnes (*d.* 1513/14)’, in *ODNB*.

123 Nottingham high school archives, ordinances, c.1512, as quoted by Henstock in ‘Mellers, Agnes (*d.* 1513/14)’, in *ODNB*.

relied upon the association with their husbands to be taken seriously in their schemes, and further male endorsement seems to have been required. Joan Cooke, the only one of the three who did not officially establish the school alongside a prominent male co-founder who was still living, faced much more troublesome interference from the town authorities. The way these schools were founded may or may not have had anything to do with these women's vowed state: a far greater survey of contemporary foundations would be required to establish this, but it is clear that some urban vowesses did view education as worthy channel for their philanthropy. Furthermore, they pursued their aims in this with careful planning, energy, and shrewdness which enabled them to overcome any difficulties presented by their gender.

Conclusion

The picture that emerges is far more complex than the equation of poverty with holiness and wealth with corruption. Lifestyle, and the balance between material comforts and ascetic, self-imposed hardship, probably varied from vowess to vowess, but evidently many of these women had numerous possessions, from basic pots and pans to highly expensive and decorative plate, and from plain gowns to lavish and ornamental garments. Vowesses also owned a range of devotional items, such as beads, books, and images, as well as liturgical paraphernalia and vestments, which they would usually donate to their parish churches. Such items testify to the belief that wealth itself was not considered an evil. In fact, when stewarded well and used to glorify God, it was of spiritual benefit. Although some saints, anchorites, and possibly the aspirationally saintly Alice Hampton, rejected money and property as spiritual hindrances, for most this was just not practical. Even nuns had estates to manage. Active piety, pursuing God within the world, which typified the vowess vocation, led most of these women to actively embrace their necessary financial, proprietary, and legal obligations. Their wealth enabled them not just to live comfortably, but also to

serve God, both by contributing to liturgical worship and by benefiting their fellow Christians individually and corporately.

Conclusion

This study illustrates the variety amongst vowed women, from the near-monastic asceticism of Alice Hampton to the shrewd business acumen of the London staplers' widows. Simultaneously, however, it affirms that these varying traits were seldom mutually exclusive. The worldly and the spiritual did not oppose but rather complemented one another. Vowesses maintained their family relationships, their friendships, and their business contacts, and their status as religious women was enhanced rather than reduced by this. They participated both in monastic and parish communities, and used their wealth to contribute to and even to dictate patterns of liturgical worship. Money and material possessions were not a spiritual hindrance but a spiritual good when used to benefit the Church, the needy, and one's community. Since vowesses' piety was typically conventional but often more intense or more well-informed than that of their contemporaries, some of the conclusions of this thesis can be expanded to apply to late medieval Christians generally. Vowesses were found in almost every sphere of public life: this corroborates the theory that they were more commonplace than previously thought and it emphasises the importance of studying them, particularly in light of their comparative neglect thus far.

The differences amongst these women – their lifestyles, their social class, their ages, their motivations for vowing – do not detract from the value of a prosopographical study. In fact, the differences serve to elucidate the nature of the vocation itself. Its flexibility, derived from the fact that these women vowed chastity without any other specifications, was a necessity: to be a vowess was to be simultaneously lay and religious, almost always the wife of a man and the bride of Christ, continuing one life while embarking upon another.¹ Each woman described in this thesis navigated this dual life in her own unique way. It could be interpreted as a liminal, lonely state: vowesses did not automatically have a

¹ Although vowesses' husbands were usually dead, these women were still known in their communities as the wives of their husbands and were responsible for their commemoration: see chapter two.

community in which they could belong, as nuns did, and the widows' vow, perhaps with its accompanying religious dress, might have set them apart from their fellow laywomen. Yet the impression in this thesis is one of integration: Maud Baker into her parish, Alice Hampton into Halliwell Priory, Katherine Langley with an intellectual circle at Cambridge. The notion of a medieval religious woman often implies a recluse, yet vowesses were generally nothing of the sort: they merely chose their own place to belong.

This study has been a foray into a full-length, dedicated exploration of vowesses, but there is more to be done. Chronological expansion back to the Black Death or even earlier, though source material becomes progressively more sparse, would reveal how the vocation developed over time. A more comprehensive trawl of monumental brass inscriptions, unpublished episcopal registers, and widows' wills would doubtless reveal more vowesses and yield further discoveries. Some women in the study have received more attention than others, resulting from the fact that the survival of relevant source material varies, as does the extent to which work on individual women has already been published, but this might be evened up somewhat if further research were done. As outlined in the Introduction, more thorough exploration of Continental equivalents is also needed to explain how the vocation developed as a uniquely English phenomenon.

Furthermore, the northern vowesses described by Susan Steuer and Patricia Cullum must be reintroduced to provide a complete picture of vowesses across England. This thesis has extended beyond the methodological focus of Steuer's and Cullum's work to a more detailed consideration of vowesses in their communities, and that development of approach could be extended to the women in the York see. The impression is primarily one of uniformity, with no striking differences between northern and southern vowesses. This is in keeping with the fact that many women, particularly those of aristocratic birth, had close links of family and property in both provinces, were socially and politically active in the north and the south, and travelled regularly up and down the country.

Perhaps the most pertinent unanswered question, however, concerns the end of vowing. After the vow of Agnes Wyggeston of Leicester in 1536, no more vows are known to have been recorded.² No royal or episcopal edict specifically concerning the end of the widows' vow has survived, and it is likely that these were halted alongside the Dissolution of the Monasteries, although no proof of a precise date has been found.³ It is perhaps more surprising that no propaganda or pamphlets have been discovered which argue specifically against chastity vows for widows, especially since the high profile case of Jane Pole would have provided ample material.⁴ The controversy around Jane does, however, suggest that the former air of certainty around the vow and what it meant was weakening. The Act of the Six Articles, in 1539, stated that widows who had taken vows must keep them, though it also implied that vowing had been stopped.⁵

Vowesses, then, gradually died off in the 1540s and perhaps in the subsequent decades. Susan Kyngeston died in September 1540, and Agnes Wyggeston in the year following.⁶ Anne Meryng, perhaps stubbornly, was still identifying herself as 'vowess' in 1540, and she was still alive in 1542/3.⁷ Joan Cooke died c.1545.⁸ Whether the last vowess was Joan Cooke or Anne Meryng or another woman, one is reminded of John Betjeman's poem 'Felixstowe' about the nun, 'the last of her order', who muses, 'Now only I am left to keep the rule,' as she stands on the shore whilst 'all the world goes home.'⁹ In a sense, old ladies such as those named above were relics of an old order, and yet that does not necessarily mean that they were resistant to change, or that they passively and mournfully faded away. Joan Cooke, at least, was pragmatic and active to the end

2 *Lincoln Diocese Documents*, ed. by Clark, pp. 209-10. For more on the end of vowing, see chapter two.

3 Vowing may have continued until the abolition of clerical celibacy in 1549, but, if so, no evidence of this survives.

4 See chapter two.

5 *The Acts and Monuments of John Foxe*, ed. by Cattle, v, p. 262. Quoted in chapter two.

6 Brass of Susan Kyngeston at the church of St Edward the Confessor, Shalstone, Buckinghamshire; *A Calendar of Charters... Belonging to the Hospital of William Wyggeston*, ed. by Thompson, p. 46-9.

7 TNA, C 147/169; S. O. Addy, 'A Contribution Towards a History of Norton, in Derbyshire', *Journal of the Derbyshire Archaeological and Natural History Society*, 2 (1880), 2-27 (p. 3).

8 TNA, PCC Prob. 11/31/182.

9 John Betjeman, 'Felixstowe', in *Collected Poems* (London: John Murray, 1975), p. 276.

of her life, purchasing the property of the newly dissolved Llanthony Priory to fund her new grammar school.¹⁰ Recent scholarship has focused upon monks and nuns at the Dissolution, but its impact upon the laity, upon the communities around the religious houses, and indeed upon vowesses, has yet to be assessed.

How did the loss of the chastity vow affect the place of widows in the English Church? As described in the Introduction, these vows date back to at least the seventh century, and widows had a unique role from the Early Church onwards. Were they sidelined in the decades after the Dissolution? Studies of early modern widows have so far lacked the context of the recently-abolished chastity vow and the use of sources which would reveal the place of these women in the rapidly evolving English Church.¹¹ The thesis has highlighted the contribution of vowed widows to both Church and society before 1540: a survey of widows' wills and episcopal and parish records, where they survive, might reveal in what ways this was altered when widows' chastity was no longer formally and publicly acknowledged. The printed registers of Bishop Stephen Gardiner at Winchester (1531-51 and 1553-55) and the bishops of Bath and Wells 1518-59, for example, both contain several entries regarding widows, and a sample of the unpublished registers would yield still more.¹² Early parish records are likewise often dismissed as too scant to be of use but Vanessa Harding and other historians of early modern London have demonstrated how mistaken this can be and how much these registers can tell us about burial.¹³ Since the responsibility for arranging a man's burial often fell to his widow, parish registers are particularly useful to the study of widows and they have yet to be read in this way.

10 Litzenger, 'Cooke, John (d. 1528)', in *ODNB*.

11 Amy Louise Erickson, *Women and Property in Early Modern England* (London: Routledge, 2002); Laura Gowing, *Gender Relations in Early Modern England* (London: Routledge, 2012); *Widowhood in Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, ed. by Sandra Cavallo and Lyndan Warner (London: Routledge, 1999).

12 *Registra Stephani Gardiner et Johannis Poynt episcoporum Wintoniensium*, ed. by H. Chitty (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1930); *The Register of Thomas Wolsey, Bishop of Bath and Wells 1518–1523*, *John Clerke, Bishop of Bath and Wells 1523–1541*, *William Knyght, Bishop of Bath and Wells 1541–1547* and *Gilbert Bourne, Bishop of Bath and Wells 1554–1559*, ed. by Henry C. Maxwell-Lyte (London: Somerset Record Society, 1940).

13 See the ongoing 'People in Place: families, households and housing in early modern London, 1550-1720' collaborative research project: <http://www.history.ac.uk/cmh/pip/project.html>.

Despite the fact that widows are repeatedly emphasised in the Bible as a group deserving of protection and recognition, their neglect in ecclesiastical history is not confined to the medieval period. The contribution of the widows' vow, and of the vowesses themselves, to the English Church and, indeed, to the nation, will only be fully realised when the effect of their absence is assessed. The thesis has highlighted the ability of these women to adapt to adverse circumstances: Lady Margaret Beaufort and Anne Herbert amidst the tumultuous Wars of the Roses; the newly widowed Agnes Salman relinquishing her husband's mayoral property to his successor; Margaret Croke's 'old sekene'; Countess Katherine Courtenay losing her eldest son and her sister in rapid succession during her husband's imprisonment, only for him to die almost immediately after being released; and the uncertainty faced by Susan Kyngeston, Joan Cooke, and others, in the face of a rapidly advancing Reformation. Qualities of personal strength and endurance could not be removed by royal or episcopal decree and women in succeeding generations may have found other avenues for visibility and participation.

However, it is clear that the vow and its implied ecclesiastical sanction of an individual enhanced women's social and religious influence, assisting them in founding schools, managing property, conducting business, participating in monastic life, and becoming leaders in their parishes. Although a chastity vow may be a doubtful qualification for such influence, it facilitated patronage, philanthropy, and religious and cultural enrichment, the extent of which may not otherwise have been possible in a patriarchal church and society. One might be tempted to agree with Michael Sherbrook, lamenting the loss of religious houses in 1591, that we have been poorer for the loss of these widows who took the mantle and the ring.¹⁴

14 Sherbrook, 'the Falle of Religious Howses', in *Tudor Treatises*, ed. by Dickens, p. 132.

Appendix 1: Vowesses of the Canterbury Province, c. 1450-1540

An asterisk has been used to indicate where a vowess does not feature in Mary Erler's original list, and a dagger to indicate when a vowess went on to break her vow by remarriage.

Vowess	Location	Marital Status	Husband's death	Profession date	Date of death	How identified
Margaret	Crabhouse Priory, Norfolk				After 22 April 1497	Bequest: NRO, NCC Multon, fols 90-91
Juliana Anyell	Witton, Norfolk	Widow	After 6 Oct 1479			Brass: St Margaret's, Witton, Norfolk
Jane Armstrong	Corby, Northamptonshire	Widow		Before 28 August 1529	1529	Will
Maud Baker/Spicer	Bristol	Widow	1493		1504	Parish records: <i>All Saints', Bristol</i> , i, p. 22

Vowess	Location	Marital Status	Husband's death	Profession date	Date of death	How identified
Agnes Bawdewynne		Widow		c. 1452		Vow: episcopal register of John Chedworth, Lincoln
Margery Baxster/Page	Heveningham, Suffolk	Widow		Before 1 Oct 1533	1535/6	Will
Margaret Beaufort	Various	Married and widow (2 vows)	3 Aug 1504	1499 and 1504	29 June 1509	Vow: St John's College Archives, C7.11, fol. 47, quoted in Cooper, 'The Vow of Widowhood', 72-3
Cecily Bedell*	Westminster / Tongs, Hertfordshire	Widow	1518		1520/1	Lease: Westminster Abbey Lease Book II, fol. 124
Alice Beselles	Besellesleigh. Berkshire / Syon Abbey	Widow	1515	Before 24 May 1526	1526	Will
Elizabeth Biccomb	Crowcombe, Somerset	Widow		17 Apr 1459	1505	Vow: episcopal register of Thomas Bekynton, Bath and Wells
Margaret Bothe/Singleton†	Leek, Staffordshire	Widow		Before 8 Oct. 1482		Papal letter: <i>CPre</i> g, xiii.ii, pp. 835-6

Vowess	Location	Marital Status	Husband's death	Profession date	Date of death	How identified
Joan Braham	Wetheringsett, Suffolk	Widow			18 Nov 1519	Brass: St Andrew, Frenze, Norfolk
Elizabeth Brandon*	London	Widow	27 Jan 1510	21 April 1510	19 Oct 1516	Vow: episcopal register of John Fisher, London
Alice Brice	London	Widow	1467	Between 1467 and 1499	1499	Will
Agnes Browne*	Stamford, Lincolnshire	Widow	1476	Between 1476 and 1484	1484	Brass: All Saints', Stamford, Lincolnshire
Margaret Browne*	Stamford, Lincolnshire	Widow	1489	1489	1489/90	Will
Agnes Burton	Taunton, Somerset	Widow	1491/2	Between 1491 and 1504	1504	Will

Vowess	Location	Marital Status	Husband's death	Profession date	Date of death	How identified
Joan Byfeld	London	Widow	March 1482	28 March 1482	1492	Cely letters: see Hanham, <i>Celys</i> , p. 310
Jane Chamberlayne	London	Widow		Before 24 April 1492	1492	Will
Alice Chester	London	Widow	6 Feb 1485	Between 1485 and 1504	1504/5	Will
Emma Cheyne	London	Married	Before 2 Oct 1449 (enclosed as recluse, 1430)	c. 1427	After 2 Oct 1449	Patent roll: <i>CPR</i> , v, p. 304
Margaret Chocke*	London / Long Ashton, Somerset	Widow	1483	1483	1483/4	Will
Katherine Colman*	Little Waldingfield, Suffolk	Widow	1506	Between 1506 and 1531	1531/2	Will

Vowess	Location	Marital Status	Husband's death	Profession date	Date of death	How identified
Joan Cooke	Gloucester	Widow	1528	Between 1528 and 1544	1545/6	See Introduction
Alice Cotton†*	London diocese	Widow		Before 28 Aug 1498		<i>Supplications to Penitentiary</i> , iii, 3611
Katherine Courtenay	Tiverton, Devon	Widow	9 June 1511	13 July 1511	15 Nov 1527	Vow: episcopal register of Richard Fitzjames, London
Margaret Croke	London	Widow	1477	Between 1477 and 1491	17 Aug 1491	Chancery petition: see Lacey, 'Margaret Croke (d. 1491)', p. 158
Dorothy Curson	Norfolk/Suffolk			Before c. 1520	After c. 1520	Lease: NRO, Hare 5955 227xl
Joan Danvers	London and Berkshire	Widow	1439	Between 1439 and 1453	1457	Will

Vowess	Location	Marital Status	Husband's death	Profession date	Date of death	How identified
Margaret Davey	Bardwell, Suffolk	Widow		Before 9 July 1489	1489	Will
Thomasine Dawbeney		Widow		2 Apr 1506		Vow: episcopal register of Hadrian de Castello, Bath and Wells
Margaret Fox	Chesterfield, Derbyshire	Widow		4 March 1492		Vow: episcopal register of Thomas Rotherham, York
Elizabeth Frogmarton	London			26 Jun 1525		See Erler, 'English Vowed Women', 202
Joan Large/Gedney†	London	Widow	April 1441	Between April 1441 and 13 Aug 1442	1462	See Erler, 'Three Fifteenth Century Vowesses', pp. 171-5
Cecily Gerard	Winwick, Warrington	Widow		c. 1491		Commission: episcopal register of John Morton, Archbishop of Canterbury

Vowess	Location	Marital Status	Husband's death	Profession date	Date of death	How identified
Eleanor Gille		Married		27 Mar 1507		Vow: episcopal register of Hadrian de Castello, Bath and Wells
Alice Hampton	London / Minchinhampton, Gloucestershire	Unmarried		Before 14 Oct 1484	27 Sept 1516	Papal letter: <i>CPL</i> , xv, 60
Jane Harby	Lincoln	Widow		Before 7 April 1511	1511	Will
Anne Herbert*	Raglan, Wales	Widow	27 July 1469	Before c. 1471	1486	Poem, Guto'r Glyn: see chapter 2
Isabel Hyatt	Whitbourne, Worcester	Widow		30 May 1481		Vow: episcopal register of Thomas Myllyng, Hereford
Joan Hylsdyn*	Membland, Devon / Woodborough, Wiltshire	Widow		Between 1495 and 1501	1499	Vow: episcopal register of Richard Redman, Exeter
Eleanor Ide	Bruton, Somerset	Widow		20 Feb 1464		Vow: episcopal register of Thomas Bekynton, Bath and Wells

Vowess	Location	Marital Status	Husband's death	Profession date	Date of death	How identified
Susan Kyngeston	Childrey, Berkshire / Shalstone, Buckinghamshire / Syon Abbey	Widow	1514	Between 16 Apr 1514 and 24 May 1526	Sept 1540	Grandmother's will: TNA, PCC Prob. 11/22/150
Katherine Langley	London / Rickling, Essex	Widow	11 April 1487	Between 11 April 1487 and 13 April 1510	16 Oct 1511	Will
Elizabeth Leche*	Baslow, Derbyshire	Widow		c.1458		Commission: episcopal register of Reginald Boulers, Lichfield
Catherine Lytleten*†	London			Before 4 March 1467		<i>Supplications to Penitentiary</i> , ii, 1377
Alice Lynne	London	Widow	Between 6 August and 31 Oct 1421	31 Oct 1421	Between 1470 and 1480	Vow: register of Henry Chichele, Archbishop of Canterbury

Vowess	Location	Marital Status	Husband's death	Profession date	Date of death	How identified
Anne Malyvery*		Widow		Between 1495 and 1501		Vow: episcopal register of Richard Redman, Exeter
Joan Manfeld		Widow		14 May 1459		Vow: episcopal register of John Chedworth, Lincoln
Joan Marler	Coventry / Syon Abbey	Widow	12 Jan 1526 - 26 June 1527	Between 1526 and 20 Dec 1530	1530/1	Will
Isabel Maryon		Widow		10 Nov 1454		Vow: episcopal register of John Chedworth, Lincoln
Anne Meryng*	Derby	Widow	Between 1502 and 1507	Before 1540	During/after 1543	Chancery deed: TNA, C 147/169
Margery Middlemore	Edgbaston, Warwickshire	Widow	8 Nov 1502 - 14 Mar 1503	c. 1503	1531	Commission: see Dugdale, <i>Warwickshire</i> , v.ii, p. 895

Vowess	Location	Marital Status	Husband's death	Profession date	Date of death	How identified
Joan Pernaunt	Bristol	Widow	1508	Between 1508 and 2 May 1532	1533/4	Will
Jane Pole/Barantyne†	Various	Widow	?1528	?1528	After 1547	Act of Parliament: see Pierce, <i>Margaret Pole</i> , pp. 69-91
Christine Portman		Widow		c. 1458		Commission: episcopal register of Thomas Bekynton, Bath and Wells
Isabel Portyngton	Barton-upon-Humber, Lincolnshire	Widow		31 Dec 1458		Vow: episcopal register of Thomas Bekynton, Bath and Wells
Joan Pyttys*		Widow		Between 1495 and 1501		Vow: episcopal register of Richard Redman, Exeter
Margaret Rankyn	London	Widow		Before 2 Dec 1537		Lease: TNA, E 303/8/16

Vowess	Location	Marital Status	Husband's death	Profession date	Date of death	How identified
Katherine Rippelingham	London	Widow		Before 8 Feb 1473	1473	Will
Margery Roper/Pole*†	London / Kent	Widow	1488	Before 20 April 1492	2 Feb 1518	<i>Supplications to Penitentiary</i> , ii, 3115; iii, 3964
Agnes Sacheverell*	Darley, Derbyshire	Widow		c. 1458		Commission: episcopal register of Reginald Boulers, Lichfield
Agnes Salman	Southampton	Widow	1495	Between 1495 and 1501		Vow: episcopal register of Thomas Langton, Winchester
Joan Sergeant		Widow		6 March 1461		Vow: episcopal register of John Stanbury, bishop of Hereford
Margaret Springhouse		Widow		2 Aug 1477		Vow: episcopal register of Thomas Myllyng, Hereford
Joan Stretton		Unmarried		24 June 1456		Vow: episcopal register of John Chedworth, Lincoln

Vowess	Location	Marital Status	Husband's death	Profession date	Date of death	How identified
Margaret Sutton	Burton, Lincolnshire	Widow		Before 1 Oct 1525	Between 1525 and 1530	Will
Joan ap Thomas	Llangattock, Powys, Wales	Widow		28 July 1459		Vow: episcopal register of Thomas Bekynton, Bath and Wells
Agnes Wyggeston	Leicester	Widow	8 July 1536	8 Sept 1536	1541	Vow: episcopal register of John Longland, Lincoln
Elizabeth Willford	London	Widow	1406/7	9 April 1407	After 8 Jan 1441	Vow: episcopal register of Nicholas Bubwith, London

Appendix 2: Wills of Vowesses of the Canterbury Province, c. 1450-1540

NB. Wills of women who broke their vows through remarriage have not been included here, since they were no longer vowesses when the will was composed.

Vowess	Location	Will date	Will proved	Reference
Jane Armstrong	Corby, Lincolnshire	1529	1529	<i>Lincoln Wills</i> , ii, p. 143
Maud Baker/Spicer	Bristol	1503/4	1504	<i>All Saints', Bristol</i> , iii, pp. 33-9
Margery Baxster/Page	Heveningham, Suffolk	1533	1536	SRO, IC/AA2/12/169
Margaret Beaufort	Various	various	various	<i>The King's Mother</i> , Appendix 4
Alice Beselles	Besselsleigh, Berkshire / Syon Abbey	1526	1526	TNA, PCC Prob. 11/22/150
Elizabeth Biccomb	Crowcombe, Somerset	1505	1505	<i>Somerset Medieval Wills</i> , p. 83
Alice Brice	London	1499	1499	TNA, PCC Prob. 11/9/12
Agnes Browne	Stamford, Lincolnshire	1470		<i>History of Rutland</i> , pp. 129-30
Margaret Browne	Stamford, Lincolnshire	1489	1490	TNA, PCC Prob. 11/8/525
Agnes Burton	Taunton, Somerset	1503	1504	TNA, PCC Prob. 11/14/120

Vowess	Location	Will date	Will proved	Reference
Joan Byfeld	London	1492	1492	TNA, PCC Prob. 11/9/253
Jane Chamberlayne	London	1492	1492	TNA, PCC Prob. 11/9/115
Alice Chester	London	1504	1505	TNA, PCC Prob. 11/14/662
Margaret Chocke	London / Long Ashton, Somerset	1483	1484	TNA, PCC Prob. 11/7/156
Katherine Colman	Little Waldingfield, Suffolk	1531	1532	TNA PCC Prob. 11/24/176
Joan Cooke	Gloucester	1544	1546	TNA, PCC Prob. 11/31/182
Margaret Croke	London	1490	1491	TNA PCC Prob. 11/9/12
Katherine Courtenay	Tiverton, Devon	1527	1527	<i>Archaeological Journal</i> , 10, 53-8
Joan Danvers	London and Berkshire	1453	1457	TNA, PCC Prob. 11/4/212
Margaret Davey	Bardwell, Suffolk	1489	1489	TNA, PCC Prob. 11/8/189
Alice Hampton	London and Minchinhampton, Glos.	1514	1516	LMA, 9171/9 fol. 5v-6
Jane Harby	Lincoln	1511	1511	<i>Lincoln Wills</i> , i, p. 44
Susan Kyngeston	Childrey, Berkshire / Shalstone, Buckinghamshire / Syon Abbey	1540	1541	TNA, PCC Prob. 11/28/484
Katherine Langley	London / Rickling, Essex	1510	1511	LMA, 9531/9, fols viii to x (3d ser.)

Vowess	Location	Will date	Will proved	Reference
Alice Lynne	London	1458	1480	LMA, HW, CLA/023/DW/01/210, no. 13
Joan Marler	Coventry / Syon Abbey	1530	1531	TNA, PCC Prob., unregistered.
Margery Middlemore	Edgbaston, Warwickshire	1530	1531	TNA, PCC Prob. 11/24/14
Joan Pernaunt	Bristol	1532	1534	<i>All Saints', Bristol</i> , iii, pp. 51-4
Katherine Rippelingham	London	1473	1473	TNA, PCC Prob. 11/6/240
Margaret Sutton	Lincoln	1525	1530	<i>Lincoln Wills</i> , ii, pp. 17-9
Agnes Wyggeston	Leicester	1538	1541	<i>Wyggeston Hospital Charters</i> , pp. 46-9
Elizabeth Willford	London	1441		BL, Harley Charter 55 H 16

Appendix 3: Vows of Women in the Canterbury Province, c. 1450-1540

These are the words which would have been spoken by the woman at her ‘benediction of widows’ ceremony, as described in the Introduction. Episcopal registers sometimes recorded that the vow had taken place without transcribing the vow itself, which has further reduced the number of vows here.

The relevant vows are listed, with dates and references, in alphabetical order, though could also have been grouped by location or even by wording. The wording is almost identical in some cases, usually those from the same register, and the vows are universally formulaic. The woman names herself, confirms her widowed (or otherwise free) status, makes her vow to God (sometimes with embellishments), names the bishop before whom she is vowing, declares her intention to live chaste (sometimes referring to St Paul's teachings on widowhood), and confirms that she herself signs it.

The exception is the vow of Margaret Beaufort, from when she vowed for a second time after the death of her husband. The first vow has not survived. Because of her royal status, her vow was altogether a more public affair and thus its wording was of more importance: she would have written it herself, or at least have been consulted. It is far more elaborate and something of a public performance, and also gives much greater prominence to the bishop, John Fisher, who was Margaret's confessor and intimate companion.

Agnes Bawdewynne

c. 1452

In the name of the fadre and the sonne and the holy goste, I, Agnes Bawdewynne, wydow, and not wedded ne vnto no man ensured, be hote and make a vowe to god & to oure lady and to all the companye of hevyn, in the presence of

you worshipful fadre in god, Thomas, Bysshop enachdunensis, ordeyned and assigned by my worshipful ffadre and lord the Bisshop of lincoln, for to be chaste of my body and trevly shal kepe me chaste from this tyme forward as longe as my liff lastyth after the reule of saint poule. In nomine patris et filii et spiritus sancti, Amen.

(*Lincoln Diocese Documents*, pp. 244-5)

Margaret Beaufort, title (2nd vow)

3 August 1504

In the presence of my Lord God Jesu Christ & his blessed Mother the glorious Virgin Mary & all of the whole company of Heaven & of you also my Ghostly Father I Margaret of Richmond with full Purpose and good Deliberation for the Weale of my sinfull Soule with all my Hearte promise from henceforth the Chastity of my Bodye. That is never to use my Bodye having actuall knowledge of manne after the common usage in Matrimonye the which Thing I had before purposed in my Lord my Husbands Dayes then being Ghostly father the Byshop of Rochester Mr Richard Fitz James & now eftsence I fully confirm it as far as in me lyeth beseeching my Lord God That He will this my poor wyll accept to the remedy of my wretched Lyfe & Relief of my sinfull soule and that He will give me his Grace to perform the same. And also for my more Meryte & quietness of my Soule in doubtful things perteyning to the same I avowe to you my Lord of Rochester to whom I am & have been sence the first time I see you admitted verely determind (as to my chiefe trusty Councillour) to owe my Obedience in all things concerning the weakle and profyte of my Soule.

(St John's College Archives, C7.11, fol. 47, transcribed by Cooper: 'The Vow of Widowhood...', 72-3)

Elizabeth Biccomb

17 April 1459

I, Elizabet, widowe, vowe God perpetuel chastite of my body fro hens forward in the presence of yow, ful worshipful fader in God lord Thomas by the grace of God bisship of Bathe and Welles, and promitte stably to live in this avowe; and to do and perfourme the same I here with myn owne hand subscribe me +

(The Register of Thomas Bekynton, Bath and Wells, i, p. 316)

Katherine Courtney, Countess of Devonshire

13 July 1511

In the name of the father the sonne and the holy Ghoste I Katerine Cowrtneye Countes of Devonshire widowe & not wedded ne unto any man assured promyse & make a vowe to God and to our Ladye and to all the Companye of Heven in the presence of you worshipfull father in God Richarde Bishope of London for to be chaste of my bodye and truely and devoutly shall kepe me chaste for this time forwarde as long as my lyfe lastith after the rule of Sainte Paule. In nomine patris & filii & Spiritus Sancti.

(BL, Lansdowne MS 978/98, fol. 144b)

Isabel Hyatt

30 May 1481

I, Isabelle, late the wife of Robert Hyatt, widowe and not wedded, promyse and vowe fro this tyme forward to God, our Lady, and all the sayntys of hevyn, in the presence of yow, reverent Fadre in Criste, Thomas, bi the grace of God byshopp of Hereford, my ordinary and diocesane, the purpose and vowe of perpetuel castitie acordyng to the rule and ordinaunce of the blessid apostill seynte Paule, in the name of the Fadre, Sonne, and Holy Goste, Amen. In the confirmacyon of the which purpose and vowe with myne nowne hande y put to the sygne of the holy crosse.

(Registrum Thome Myllyng, Hereford, p. 62)

Joan Hylsdyn

Between 1495 and 1501

I Johan Hylsdyn Wyddow behest and vow to god to our lady Seynt Mary the blyssyd virgyn and to all they Saynts of hevyn perpetuall chastite of my body from hysforth to the to the lawde and honor of my lord Jhu Cryst and ffrely I offer me to lyff chast in hys service and commandmente tyll deth in the presens of yow worshipfull ffather in god Richard by the grace of god Byshoppe of Exeter and promyt stably to leve in thys avowe. And to do and and performe the same here wyth myn awn hand subscribe me

(Register of Richard Redman, Exeter, fol. 36v)

Eleanor Ide

20 February 1464

I, Alienore, wydowe, vowe to God perpetuel chastite of my body fro hens forward in presence of yow, reverend fader in God John by the grace of God bisship Tinense, and promitte stably to lyve in this avowe. And to do and performe the same I here with myn owne hand subscribe me +

(The Register of Thomas Bekynton, Bath and Wells, i, p. 409)

Joan Large

Between April 1441 and 13 August 1442

I, Johanna, that was sometime the wife of Robert Large, make mine avow to God and the high blissful Trinity, to our Lady Saint Mary, and to all the blissful company of Heaven, to live in chastity and cleanness of my body from this time

forward as long as my life lasteth, and never to take other spouse but only Christ Jesu.

(Episcopal record lost but vow found by Erler and reproduced in 'Three Fifteenth-Century Vowesses', pp. 171-5)

Alice Lynne

31 October 1421

I, Alice Lynne widowe a vowe to god perpetuel chastite of my body fro yis tyme fortheward in presence of you rightworshipful fader in god, Harry by ye grace of god Archebisshop of Cantirbury, and I behete to lyve stavely in yis avowe, and yerto withe myne owne (hand) I make yis subscripcyon.

(The Register of Henry Chichele, Archbishop of Canterbury, fol. 343v., replicated in Erler, 'Three Fifteenth-Century Vowesses', p. 168)

Anne Malyvery

Between 1495 and 1501

I Ane Malyvery Wyddow behest and vowe to god to our lady Seynt Mary the blyssyd virgyn and to all they Saynts of hevyn perpetuall chastite of my body from hynsforth to the lawde and honor of my lord Jhu Cryst and frely I offer me to lyff chast in his service and commandmente tyll deth in the presens of your worshipfull ffader in god Richard by the grace of god Byshoppe of Exeter and I promyt stabely to lyve in his avowe and to do and and performe the same with myn awn hand subscribe me

(Register of Richard Redman, Exeter, fol. 36v)

Joan Manfeld

14 May 1459

In the name of the fader, son & holy gost, Amen. I, Iohne Manfeld, wydow, & not wedded, nor vnto no man ensured, behote and avowe to god & to oure lady & to all the company of hevyn in the presence of you, Reuerend fader in god, Iohn, by the grace of god bishop of Lincoln, for to be chaste of my body and (treuly and devoutly) shall keep me chaste from this tyme forward as long as my lyff lastith, after the reule of saint paule. In nomine patris & filii & spiritus sancti, Amen.

(Lincoln Diocese Documents, pp. 113-4)

Isabel Maryon

10 November 1454

In the name of the fadir and the sone and the holy goste, I, Isabelle Maryone, of your diocese, wydowe, behest and avowe to god and oure lady saint Mary and to all the saintys, in youre presence Reuerend fader in crist Sir John, by the grace of god Bysshope of lincoln, for to be chaste and purpose to kepe me chaste from this tyme forward aslonge as my lyff lastithe. In witteneese wherof I subscribe here with myn owne hande — & faciebat crucem +

(Lincoln Diocese Documents, p. 245)

Isabel Portyngton

31 December 1458

In the name of god, Amen; I Isabel portyngton, of the diocise of lincoln, wydowe, and not wedded ne to no man ensured, behote and make avowe to god & to oure lady & to all the company of hevyn, in the presence of you, worshipful

fader in god, Iohn, Bisshop of lincoln, for to be chaste of my body, and treuly & deuoutly shall kepe me chaste from this tyme forward aslong as my lyff lastith, after the reule of saint poole. In nomine patris & filij & spiritus sancti, Amen.

(*Lincoln Diocese Documents*, p. 113)

Joan Pyttys

Between 1495 and 1501

I Johan Pyttys Wyddow behest and vow to god to our lady Seynt Mary the blyssyd virgyn and to all they Saynts of hevyn perpetuall chastite of my body from hynsforth to the lawde and honor of my lord Jhu Cryst and ffrely I offer me to lyff chast in hys service and commandmente tyll deth in the presens of yow worshypfull ffather in god Richard by the grace of god Byshoppe of Exeter and I promyt stably to lyve in thys avowe and to do and and performe the same wyth myn awn hand subscribe me

(Register of Richard Redman, Exeter, fol. 36v)

Joan Sergeant

6 March 1461

I, Johanne Sergeant, now late wyfe of Thomas Sergeant, whose soul God assoyle, of my free will and good deliberacion, vow and promitte to our Lord God and his moder, seynt Mary and all the seyntes of hevyn, in to your holy hands, my gostly fadur, John, by the grace of God bysshop of Hereford, from this day forward to my lyves end to kepe and observe clene chastite and continence of my body of trew wydewhode from all men ertheley, and in trew signe, tokene, and confirmacion hereof, I signe with myne owne hand this byll of my profession and vow with this holy +

(*Registrum Johannis Stanbury, Hereford*, pp. 68-9)

Margaret Sprynghouse

2 August 1477

I, Margarete, late the wiffe of Fooke Sprynghouse, widow, and not wedded, promise and vow fro this tyme foreward to God, our lady, and all the sayntis off hevyn, in the presence of yow, reverend fader in Crist, Thomas, by the grace off God bischoppe off Hereford, my ordynary and diocesane, the purpose and vow of perpetual castite accordyng to the rule and ordinance off the blessid apostle saynt Pawle, in the name of the Fadre, Sonne, and Holy Goste, and in the confirmacion of the wich purpose and vowe with myn nowne hande I put to the signe off the holy crosse.

(Registrum Thome Myllyng, Hereford, pp. 33-4)

Joan Stretton

24 June 1456

I, Iohan Stretton, of lincoln diocesse, not wedded, promitte and avowe to god and to oure lady and to all the saintis of hevyn, in youre presence, Reuerend fadre in god, Iohn, by the grace of god Bisshop of lincoln, the purpose of Chastite after the reule of Saint Paule, and with myn owne hand I subscribe here my self – In nomine patris & filij & spiritus sancti, Amen. +

(Lincoln Diocese Documents, pp. 87-8)

Joan ap Thomas

28 July 1459

I, Johane, widowe, vowe to God perpetuel chastite of my body body fro hens forward in the presence of yow, ful worshipful fader in God, lord Thomas by the grace of God bisship of Bathe and Wellys, and promytte stably to lyve in this

avowe. And to do and perfoure the same I here with myn owne hande subscribe
me +

(*The Register of Thomas Bekynton, Bath and Wells*, i, p. 326)

Agnes Wyggeston

8 September 1536

I, Agnes wigston, wedowe, nouthur dispensed ne contracted to eny man,
butt single woman, with suffyeynt deliberacion, with a good contynuance of tyme
hadd, doo here promysse and make myn avowe, to god, and to our lady, and to all
his saintes: In presence of you, Reuerend ffadre, my lorde Iohn bisshophe of
Lincoln myn ordynary, ffull purpose, ffrom this day fforwarde, to kepe viduall
contynence and chastyte. In the name of the ffadre, and of the sone, And of the
holy gooste. Amen. And in wytnes of this my profession I doo signe this bill with
my own hand, +

(*Lincoln Diocese Documents*, pp. 209-10)

Elizabeth Willford¹

9 April 1407

In dei nomine amen. Coram vobis reuerendo in Christo patre ac domino
domino Nicholas dei gracia London episcopo ego Elisabet Willford vidua de certa
mea sciencia ac animo deliberato, pure sponte et absolute, veueo et votum deo
emitto perpetue castitatis et continencie ac firmiter promitto me imperpetuum
durante vita mea corporali in huiusmodi voto stabiliter viuere et conuersari, in
cuius rei testimonium manu propria me subscribo, hoc sequens signum
faciendum. +

1 The entry appears alongside a vow for Alice Langhorne, taken the previous month. Alice's
vow is in English, while Elizabeth's is in Latin, and this is unexplained. No evidence has been
found that Alice survived into the decades after her vow, so she has not been included in the
study.

(Register of Nicholas Bubwith, London, transcribed by Hannam,
pp. 163-4)

Bibliography

Manuscript Primary Sources

Cambridge

Corpus Christi College

Parker Library MS 49 – Pontifical from St Augustine’s, Canterbury, early c15th

St. John’s College

D91.17 – Household accounts of Lady Margaret Beaufort

Cardiff

Cardiff Central Library

MS. 5.7 - Herbertorum Prosapia, a c17th history of the Herbert family

Exeter

Devon Heritage Centre

DEX/1/a/12, fol. 36v – Episcopal register of Richard Redman, bishop of Exeter:
vows of Joan Hylsdyn, Anne Malyvery, and Joan Pyttys, 1495-1501

Exeter University Library

MS 95 – historical notes by Canon J. M. J. Fletcher (1852-1940)

Ipswich

Suffolk Record Office

IC/AA2/12/169 - Archdeanconry Court of Suffolk: will of Margery Baxter of
Heveningham, 1536

Lichfield

Lichfield Record Office

B/A/1/11, fol. 94 – Episcopal register of Reginald Boulers, bishop of Lichfield:
commissions to vow Elizabeth Leche and Agnes Sacheverell, 1458

London

The British Library

Add. MS 12060 - 'A Book of Miracles and Examples of Virtue for the Guidance
of a Ruler, Dedicated to Queen Mary by Henry Parker Lord Morley.'

Add. MS 14848 – Register of William Curteys, Abbot of Bury St Edmunds, 1429-
46

Cotton MS Vespasian E V – Cartulary of St John’s hospital, Reading

Harley Charter, 55 H 16 – Will of Elizabeth Willford of London, 1441

London Metropolitan Archives

CLA/023/DW/01/210, no. 13 – Husting Wills: Alice Lynne of London, 1457

9171/9, fol. 5v-6 – Commissary Court wills: Alice Hampton, 1514

MS. 9531/9, fols viii to x (3d ser.), fol. 30V – Episcopal register of Richard FitzJames: will of Katherine Langley, 1510

The National Archives

NB. Since documents consulted in these collections are numerous, references for individual documents are footnoted in the body of the thesis and not replicated here.

C 1 - Chancery: Early Proceedings

C 4 - Chancery: Answers, etc.

C 142 - Chancery: Inquisitions Post-Mortem

C 147 - Chancery: Ancient Deeds

C 270 - Chancery: Ecclesiastical Miscellanea

E 40 - Exchequer: Ancient Deeds, Series A

E 41 - Exchequer: Ancient Deeds, Series AA

E 135 - Exchequer: Miscellaneous Ecclesiastical Documents

E 210 - Exchequer: Ancient Deeds, Series D

E 211 - Exchequer: Ancient Deeds, Series DD

LR 14 - Office of the Auditors of Land Revenue: Ancient Deeds, Series E

PCC Prob. 11 - Prerogative Court of Canterbury Wills

SC 2 - Special Collections: Court Rolls

SC 6/HENVIII - Special Collections: Ministers' and Receivers' Accounts: 1509-47

STAC 3 - Court of Star Chamber: Proceedings

Westminster Abbey Muniments

Westminster Abbey Lease Book II, fol. 112v 124, 170v

Westminster Archive Centre

WAC E2 – Westminster Abbey churchwarden's accounts

NorwichNorfolk Record Office

Hare 5955 227x1 - Accounts of Isabel Wygon, prioress of Carrow Abbey, 1503-35

NCC - Consistory Court of Norwich: numerous wills

WinchesterHampshire Record Office

21M65/A1/16, fol. 63 – Episcopal register of Thomas Langton, bishop of Winchester: vow of Agnes Salman, 1495-1501

Printed Primary Sources

- Archer, Margaret, ed., *The Register of Bishop Philip Repingdon, 1405-1419*, 3 vols (Lincoln: Lincoln Record Society, 1963-82)
- Bale, Anthony, ed. and trans., *The Book of Margery Kempe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015)
- Bannister, Arthur Thomas, ed., *Registrum Thome Myllyng, Episcopi Herefordensis A.D. 1474-1492* (London: Canterbury and York Society, 1920)
- Barker, Eric E., ed., *The Register of Thomas Rotherham, Archbishop of York 1480-1500* (Torquay: Canterbury and York Society, 1976)
- Basing, Patricia, ed., *Parish Fraternity Register: Fraternity of the Holy Trinity and SS. Fabian and Sebastian in the Parish of St. Botolph without Aldersgate* (London: London Record Society, 1982)
- Benson, L. D., ed. *The Riverside Chaucer*, 3rd edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008)
- Bentley, Samuel, ed., *Excerpta Historica, or Illustrations of English History* (London: Richard Bentley, 1833)
- Bliss, W. H. et al., eds, *Calendar of Entries in the Papal Registers Relating to Great Britain and Ireland: Papal Letters*, 17 vols (London: 1893-1986)
- Boase, C. W. ed., *The Register of the University of Oxford*, 5 vols (Oxford: Clarendon, 1885)
- Brewer, J. S. et al., eds., *Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, of the Reign of Henry VIII*, 21 vols (London: Public Record Office, 1862-1932)
- Burgess, Clive, ed., *The Pre-Reformation Records of All Saints' Church, Bristol*, 3 vols (Bristol: Bristol Record Society, 1995-2004)
- Butler, Cheryl, ed., *The Book of Fines: The Annual Accounts of the Mayors of Southampton*, 3 vols (Southampton: Southampton University Press, 2007-10)
- Campbell, William, ed., *Materials for a History of the Reign of Henry VII*, 2 vols (London: Longman, 1873-7)
- Cattley, Stephen Reed, ed., *The Acts and Monuments of John Foxe*, 8 vols (London: R. B. Seeley and W. Burnside, 1837-9)

- Chitty, H., ed., *Registra Stephani Gardiner et Johannis Poynt Episcoporum Wintoniensium* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1930)
- Clark, Andrew, ed., *Lincoln Diocese Documents, 1450-1544* (Lincoln: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner, 1914)
- Clarke, Peter D. and Zutshi, Patrick N. R., eds, *Supplications from England and Wales in the Registers of the Apostolic Penitentiary, 1410-1503*, 3 vols (Suffolk: Boydell and Brewer, 2013-15)
- Clayton, Muriel, *Catalogue of Rubbings of Brasses and Incised Slabs* (London: Stationery Office, 1915; repr. London: Victoria and Albert Museum, 1979)
- de Comines, Philip, *Historical Memoirs* (London: W. McDowall, 1817)
- Dunstan, G. R., ed., *The Register of Edmund Lacy, Bishop of Exeter, 1420-1455*, 4 vols (Torquay: Canterbury and York Society, 1963-72)
- Ellis, F. S., ed., *The Golden Legend, or The Lives of the Saints*, trans. by William Caxton, 5 vols (London: J. M. Dent, 1900)
- Ellis, Henry, ed., *Original Letters, Illustrative of English History*, 1st ser., 3 vols (London: Harding and Lepard, 1825)
- Ellis, Roger, ed., *The Liber Celestis of St. Bridget of Sweden* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987)
- Foster, C. W., ed., *Lincoln Wills Registered in the District Probate Registry at Lincoln*, 3 vols (Lincoln: Lincoln Record Society, 1914-30)
- Furnivall, Frederick J., ed., *The Fifty Earliest English Wills in the Court of Probate* (London: Trübner, 1882)
- Gidden, H. W., ed., *The Book of Remembrance of Southampton*, 3 vols (Southampton: Cox and Sharland, 1927-30)
- Goldberg, P. J. P., trans. and ed., *Women in England, c. 1275-1525: Documentary Sources* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1995)
- Hall, Edward, *Hall's Chronicle, containing the history of England, during the reign of Henry the Fourth, and the succeeding monarchs, to the end of the reign of Henry the Eighth* (London: J. Johnson et al., 1809)
- Haren, Michael J., ed., *Calendar of Papal Letters Relating to Great Britain and Ireland*, 19 vols (Dublin: Irish Manuscripts Commission, 1893-1998)
- Hodgson, Phyllis and Liegey, Gabriel M., eds, *The Orchard of Syon* (London: Oxford University Press, 1966)
- Jacob, E. F., ed., *The Register of Henry Chichele, Archbishop of Canterbury 1414-1443*, 4 vols (Oxford: Canterbury and York Society, 1937-47)
- James, N. W. and V. A., eds, *The Bede Roll of the Fraternity of St. Nicholas*, 2 vols (London: London Record Society, 2004)

- Kaye, J. M., ed., *The Cartulary of God's House, Southampton*, 2 vols (Southampton: Southampton University Press, 1976)
- King, Margot H. and Feiss, Hugh, trans., *Two Lives of Marie d'Oignies by Jacques de Vitry and Thomas of Cantimpré* (Toronto: Peregrina, 1998)
- Kingsford, C. L., ed., *The Stonor Letters and Papers, 1290-1483*, 2 vols (London: The Camden Society, 1919)
- Kirby, T. F., ed., *Wykham's Register*, 2 vols (London: Hampshire Record Society, 1896, 1899), ii (1899)
- Kitching, C. J., ed., *London and Middlesex Chantry Certificate, 1548* (Kent: London Record Society, 1980)
- Masters, Betty R. and Ralph, Elizabeth, eds and trans., *The Church Book of St Ewen's Bristol, 1454-1584* (London: Headley Brothers Ltd, 1967)
- Maxwell-Lyte, H. C. and Dawes, M. C. B., eds, *The Register of Thomas Bekynton, Bishop of Bath and Wells 1443-1465*, 2 vols (Frome and London: Somerset Record Society, 1934-5)
- Maxwell-Lyte, Henry C., ed., *Calendar of Patent Rolls: Edward IV, Edward V, Richard III, 1476-85* (London: Stationery Office, 1901)
- , *Calendar of Patent Rolls, Henry VI*, 5 vols (London: Stationery Office, 1901-9; repr. Nielden and Lichenstein: Kraus, 1971)
- , *The Register of Thomas Wolsey, Bishop of Bath and Wells 1518-1523, John Clerke, Bishop of Bath and Wells 1523-1541, William Knyght, Bishop of Bath and Wells 1541-1547 and Gilbert Bourne, Bishop of Bath and Wells 1554-1559* (London: Somerset Record Society, 1940)
- , *The Registers of Oliver King, Bishop of Bath and Wells 1496-1503, and Hadrian de Castello, Bishop of Bath and Wells 1503-1518* (London: Somerset Record Society, 1939)
- Mayor, John E. B., ed., *The English Works of John Fisher, Bishop of Rochester* (London: Trübner, 1876)
- Mazzoni, Christina, trans., *Angela of Foligno's Memorial* (Cambridge: Brewer, 1999)
- Oliver, George, 'The Will of Katharine, Countess of Devon, Daughter of Edward IV', *Archaeological Journal*, 10 (1853), 53-8
- Parry, Joseph H. and Bannister, Arthur Thomas, eds., *Registrum Johannis Stanbury, Episcopi Herefordensis A.D. 1443-74* (London: Canterbury and York Society, 1919)
- Raine, James, ed., *Testamenta Eboracensia: A Selection of Wills from the Registry at York*, 5 vols (London and Durham: Surtees Society, 1836-84)
- Roberts, Edward and Parker, Karen, eds, *Southampton Probate Inventories, 1447-1575*, 2 vols (Southampton: Southampton University Press, 1992)

- Rogers, Alan, ed., *The Wardens: Managing a Late Medieval Hospital* (Suffolk: Abramis, 2013)
- Sherbrook, Michael, 'the Falle of Religiouse Howses, Colleges, Chantreyes, Hospitalls, &c.,' in *Tudor Treatises*, ed. by A. G. Dickens (Wakefield: Yorkshire Archaeological Society, 1959), pp. 89-142
- Spearing, A. C., and Spearing, Elizabeth, *Julian of Norwich: Revelations of Divine Love* (London: Penguin, 1998)
- Stargart, Ute, trans. and ed., *The Life of Dorothea von Montau, a Fourteenth-century Recluse by Johannes von Marienwerder* (Lewiston: E. Mellen Press, 1997)
- Strachey, J. et al., eds, *Rotuli Parliamentorum; ut et Petitiones, et Placita in Parlamento*, 6 vols (London: 1767-77)
- Thomas, A. H., and Thornley, I. D., eds, *The Great Chronicle of London* (London: Sign of the Dolphin, 1938)
- Thompson, Hamilton A., ed., *A Calendar of Charters and Other Documents Belonging to the Hospital of William Wyggeston at Leicester* (Leicester: Edgar Backus, 1933)
- Urwick, Thomas Augustus, and Urwick, William, eds, *Records of the Family of Urswyk, Urswick, or Urwick* (St Albans, 1893)
- Windeatt, B. A., trans., *The Book of Margery Kempe* (London: Penguin, 2004)

Printed Secondary Sources

- Addy, S. O., 'A Contribution Towards a History of Norton, in Derbyshire', *Journal of the Derbyshire Archaeological and Natural History Society*, 2 (1880), 2-27
- Alamichel, Marie-Françoise, *Widows in Anglo-Saxon and Medieval Britain* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2008)
- Alsop, J. D., 'Religious Preambles in Early Modern English Wills as Formulae', *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 40 (1989), 19-27
- André, J. L., 'Widows and Vowesses', *Archaeological Journal*, 49 (1892), 69-82
- Attwater, Aubrey, and Roberts, S. C., *Pembroke College Cambridge: A Short History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010)
- Aungier, George James, *The History and Antiquities of Syon Monastery, the Parish of Isleworth and the Chapelry of Hounslow* (London: Nichols, 1840)
- Austin, Roland, *The Crypt School, Gloucester, 1539-1939* (Gloucester: John Bellows, 1939)

- , 'John and Joan Cooke's gift to Gloucester', *Transactions of the Bristol and Gloucestershire Archaeological Society*, 65 (1944), 199–219
- Baigent, Francis Joseph, 'Thomas Burgh and Isabella his Wife, with a Few Words on the Benediction of Widows', *Surrey Archaeological Collections*, 99 vols (London: Surrey Archaeological Society, 1858-2016), iii (1865), 208-19
- Bainbridge, Virginia R., *Gilds in the Medieval Countryside: Social and Religious Change in Cambridgeshire, c. 1350-1558* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1996)
- Barron, Caroline M., and Davies, Matthew, eds, *The Religious Houses of London and Middlesex* (London: Institute of Historical Research, 2007)
- Barron, Caroline M., 'The 'Golden Age' of Women in Medieval London' in *Medieval Women in Southern England*, ed. by Keith Bate (Reading: Graduate Centre for Medieval Studies, 1989), pp. 35-58
- , *London in the Later Middle Ages: Government and People 1200-1500* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004)
- , 'The Parish Fraternities of Medieval London', in *The Church in Pre-Reformation Society: Essays in Honour of F. R. H. Du Boulay*, ed. by Caroline M. Barron and Christopher Harper-Bill (Suffolk and New Hampshire: The Boydell Press, 1985), pp. 13-37
- , 'The Travelling Saint: Zita of Lucca and England', in *Freedom of Movement in the Middle Ages: Proceedings of the 2003 Harlaxton Symposium*, ed. by Peregrine Horden (Donington: Shaun Tyas, 2007), pp. 186-202
- Beaven, Alfred, *The Aldermen of the City of London*, 2 vols (London: Eden Fisher, 1908-13)
- Binski, Paul, *Medieval Death: Ritual and Representation* (London: The British Museum Press, 1996)
- Bird, James, et al., eds, *Survey of London*, 45 vols (London: London County Council, 1900-2000)
- Blake, N. F., *William Caxton and English Literary Culture* (London: Hambledon, 1991)
- Brockliss, L. W. B., *The University of Oxford: A History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016)
- Brown, Pamela Allen and Parolin, Peter, *Women Players in England 1500-1660: Beyond the All-Mail Stage* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008)
- Buitelaar, Marjo, 'Widows' Worlds: Representations and Realities', in *Between Poverty and the Pyre: Moments in the History of Widowhood*, ed. by Jan Bremmer and Lourens van der Bosch (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), pp. 1-18
- Burgess, Clive, 'A Fond Thing Vainly Invented: An Essay on Purgatory and Pious Motive in Later Medieval England', in *Parish, Church and People: Local*

- Studies in Lay Religion, 1350-1750*, ed. by S. J. Wright (London: Hutchinson, 1988), pp. 56-84
- , 'By Quick and by Dead': Wills and Pious Provision in Late Medieval Bristol', *The English Historical Review*, 102 (1987), 837-58
- , 'Chantries in the Parish, or "Through the Looking-Glass"', *Journal of the British Archaeological Association*, 164 (2011), 100-29
- , 'Friars and the Parish in Late Medieval Bristol: *Observations and Possibilities*', in *The Friars in Medieval Britain: Proceedings of the 2007 Harlaxton Symposium*, ed. by Nicholas Rogers (Donington: Shaun Tyas, 2010), pp. 73-96
- , 'Late Medieval Wills and Pious Convention: Testamentary Evidence Reconsidered', in *Profit, Piety and the Professions in Later Medieval England*, ed. by Michael A. Hicks (Gloucester: Sutton, 1990), pp. 15-33
- , 'London Parishes: Development in Context', in *Daily Life in the Late Middle Ages*, ed. by Richard Britnell (Gloucestershire: Sutton, 1998), pp. 151-74
- , 'London Parishoners in Times of Change: St Andrew Hubbard, Eastcheap, circa 1450-1570', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 53 (2002), 38-63
- , 'Shaping the Parish: St. Mary at Hill, London, in the Fifteenth Century', in *The Cloister and the World: Essays in Medieval History in Honour of Barbara Harvey*, ed. by John Blair and Brian Golding (Oxford: Clarendon, 1996), pp. 246-86
- , 'Time and Place: The Late Medieval English Parish in Perspective', in *The Parish in Late Medieval England*, ed. by Clive Burgess and Eamon Duffy (Donington: Shaun Tyas, 2006), pp. 1-28
- Burke, John, *A Genealogical and Heraldic History of the Landed Gentry*, 4 vols (London: Henry Colburn, 1833-39)
- Bynum, Caroline Walker, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, CA and London: University of California Press, 1987)
- Catto, Jeremy, 'Religious Change under Henry V', in *Henry V: The Practice of Kingship*, ed. by G. L. Harriss (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), pp. 97-116
- Cavallo, Sandra, and Warner, Lyndan, eds, *Widowhood in Medieval and Early Modern Europe* (London: Routledge, 1999)
- Clay, Rotha Mary, *The Mediaeval Hospitals of England* (London: Methuen, 1909)
- Cockayne, George Edward, et al., eds, *The Complete Peerage of England, Scotland, Ireland, Great Britain and the United Kingdom Extant, Extinct, or Dormant*, 2nd edn, 14 vols (London: St Catherine Press Ltd, 1910-98)

- Collis, Jennifer M., 'The Anchorites of London in the Late Middle Ages' (unpublished MA dissertation, Royal Holloway, University of London, 1992)
- Cooke, Kathleen, 'The English Nuns and the Dissolution', in *The Cloister and the World: Essays in Medieval History in Honour of Barbara Harvey*, ed. by John Blair and Brian Golding (Oxford: Clarendon, 1996), pp. 287-301
- Cooper, Charles Henry, *Memorials of Cambridge*, 3 vols (Cambridge: W. Metcalfe, 1860-66)
- , 'The Vow of Widowhood of Margaret, Countess of Richmond and Derby...', *Communications Made to The Cambridge Antiquarian Society*, 1 (1859), 71-9
- Copinger, W. A., *The Manors of Suffolk: Notes on their History and Devolution*. 7 vols (London: Unwin, 1905-11; repr. Forgotten Books, 2013)
- Cullum, Patricia, 'Vowesses and Veiled Widows: Medieval Female Piety in the Province of York', *Northern History*, 32 (1996), 21-41
- Cullum, P. H., and Lewis, Katherine J., eds, *Religious Men and Masculine Identity in the Middle Ages* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2013)
- Cutts, Edward L., *Scenes and Characters of the Middle Ages* (London: Simpkin, Marshall, Hamilton, Kent & Co., 1925)
- Davies, Matthew, 'Artisans, Guilds and Government in London', in *Daily Life in the Late Middle Ages*, ed. by Richard Britnell (Gloucestershire: Sutton, 1998), pp. 125-50
- Davis, Cecil T., *The Monumental Brasses of Gloucestershire* (London: Phillimore, 1899; repr. Bath: Kingsmead Reprints, 1969)
- Ditchfield, P. H., and Page, William, eds, *The Victoria History of the Counties of England: A History of the County of Berkshire*, 4 vols (London: Archibald Constable, 1906-24)
- Dowling, Maria, *Fisher of Men: A Life of John Fisher, 1469-1535* (London: Macmillan, 1999)
- Doyle, A. I., 'Books Connected with the Vere Family and Barking Abbey', *Transactions of the Essex Archaeological Society*, 25 (1955-60), 222-43
- Dugdale, William, *The Antiquities of Warwickshire*, 2 vols (London, 1656; repr. 1730)
- Duffy, Eamon, 'The End of It All: The Material Culture of the Medieval English Parish and the 1552 Inventories of Church Goods', in *The Parish in Late Medieval England*, ed. by Clive Burgess and Eamon Duffy (Donington: Shaun Tyas, 2006), pp. 381-399
- , 'Holy Maydens, Holy Wives: The Cult of Women Saints in Fifteenth- and Sixteenth-Century England', in *Women in the Church* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), pp. 175-96

- , *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England, c.1400-c.1580* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1992)
- Eeles, F. C., ‘Two Sixteenth-Century Pontificals Formerly Used in England’, *Transactions of the St Paul’s Ecclesiological Society*, 7 (1911-5), 69-90
- Elliott, Dyan, *Spiritual Marriage: Sexual Abstinence in Medieval Wedlock* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993)
- Emden, A. B., *A Biographical Register of the University of Cambridge to 1500*, 3 vols (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963)
- Emery, Anthony, *Greater Medieval Houses of England and Wales*, 3 vols (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006)
- Erickson, Amy Louise, *Women and Property in Early Modern England* (London: Routledge, 2002)
- Erler, Mary, and Kowaleski, Maryanne, eds, *Women and Power in the Middle Ages* (Athens and London: University of Georgia Press, 1988)
- , eds, *Gendering the Master Narrative: Women and Power in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2003)
- Erler, Mary C., ‘Margery Kempe’s White Clothes’, *Medium Ævum*, 62.1 (1993), 78-83
- , ‘Syon’s “Special Benefactors and Friends”: Some Vowed Women’, *Birgittiana*, 2 (1996), 209-22
- , ‘Three Fifteenth-Century Vowesses’, in *Medieval London Widows, 1300-1500*, ed. by Caroline M. Barron and Anne F. Sutton (London and Rio Grande: The Hambledon Press, 1994), pp. 165-84
- , ‘English Vowed Women at the End of the Middle Ages’, *Medieval Studies*, 57 (1995), 155-203
- , ‘Widows in Retirement: Region, Patronage, Spirituality, Reading at the Gaunts, Bristol’, *Religion and Literature*, 37.2 (2005), 51-75
- , *Women, Reading, and Piety in Late Medieval England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002)
- Farnhill, Ken, *Guilds and the Parish Community in Late Medieval East Anglia c. 1470-1550* (York: York Medieval Press, 2001)
- Fleming, Peter, ‘Identity and Belonging: Irish and Welsh in Fifteenth Century Bristol’, in *The Fifteenth Century VII: Conflicts, Consequences and the Crown in the Late Middle Ages*, ed. by Linda Clark (Suffolk: Boydell, 2003), pp. 175-93
- Foss, David Blair, *The Canterbury Archiepiscopates of John Stafford (1443-52) and John Kemp (1452-54) with Editions of their Registers* (unpublished doctoral thesis, King’s College, University of London, 1986)

- French, Katherine L., *The Good Women of the Parish: Gender and Religion After the Black Death* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008)
- , 'Loving Friends: Surviving Widowhood in Late Medieval Westminster', *Gender and History*, 22.1 (2010), 21-37
- , 'Margery Kempe and the Parish', in *The Ties that Bind: Essays in Medieval British History in Honor of Barbara Hanawalt*, ed. by Linda E. Mitchell, Katherine L. French and Douglas L. Biggs (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2011), pp. 159-74
- , *People of the Parish: Community Life in a Late Medieval English Diocese* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008)
- , 'Women Churchwardens in Late Medieval England', in *The Parish in Late Medieval England*, ed. by Clive Burgess and Eamon Duffy (Donington: Shaun Tyas, 2006), pp. 302-21
- Gilchrist, Roberta, and Marilyn Oliva, *Religious Women in Medieval East Anglia: History and Archaeology c. 1100-1540* (Norwich: Centre of East Anglian Studies, 1993)
- Gowing, Laura, *Gender Relations in Early Modern England* (London: Routledge, 2012)
- Griffiths, George, *Chronicles of the County Wexford* (Enniscorthy: Watchman, 1887)
- Haines, Roy Martin, *Ecclesia Anglicana: Studies in the English Church of the Later Middle Ages* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1989)
- Halstead, Caroline A., *Life of Margaret Beaufort, Countess of Richmond and Derby* (London: Smith, Elder and Co. Cornhill, 1839)
- Hanawalt, Barbara A., 'Remarriage as an Option for Urban and Rural Widows in Late Medieval England', in *Wife and Widow in Medieval England*, ed. by Sue Sheridan Walker (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1993), pp. 141-64
- , *The Wealth of Wives: Women, Law, and Economy in Late Medieval London* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007)
- Hanham, Alison, *The Celys and their World: An English Merchant Family of the Fifteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985)
- Hannam, Una C., 'The Administration of the See of London Under Bishops Roger Walden (1405-6) and Nicholas Bubwith (1406-7) with a Transcript of their Registers' (unpublished MA dissertation, University of London, 1951)
- Harding, Vanessa, *The Dead and the Living in Paris and London, 1500-1670* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002)

- Harper, Samantha Patricia, 'London and the Crown in the Reign of Henry VII' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Institute of Historical Research, University of London, 2015)
- Harper-Bill, Christopher, 'Dean Colet's Convocation Sermon and the Pre-Reformation Church in England', in *The Impact of the English Reformation, 1500-1640*, ed. by Peter Marshall (London: Arnold, 1997), pp. 17-37
- Harrod, Henry, 'On the Mantle and the Ring of Widowhood,' *Archaeologia*, 40 (1866), 307-10
- Harris, Barbara J., 'Defining Themselves: English Aristocratic Women, 1450-1550', *Journal of British Studies*, 49.4 (2010), 734-52
- Harris, Jonathan, *Greek Emigres in the West, 1400-1520* (Surrey: Porphyrogenitus, 1995)
- , 'Two Byzantine Craftsmen in Fifteenth-Century London', *Journal of Medieval History*, 21 (1995), 387-403
- Harriss, Gerald, *Shaping the Nation: England, 1360-1461* (Oxford: Clarendon, 2005)
- Hayward, Maria, *Rich Apparel: Clothing and the Law in Henry VIII's England* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2009)
- Heath, Peter, 'Urban Piety in the Later Middle Ages: the Evidence of Hull Wills', in *The Church, Politics and Patronage in the Fifteenth Century*, ed. by Barrie Dobson (Gloucester: Sutton, 1984), pp. 209-29
- Hill, Carole, 'Julian and her Sisters: Female Piety in Late Medieval Norwich', in *The Fifteenth Century VI: Identity and Insurgency in the Late Middle Ages*, ed. by Linda Clark (Suffolk: Boydell, 2006), pp. 165-88
- , *Women and Religion in Late Medieval Norwich* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2010)
- Hutchinson, Ann M., 'Devotional Reading in the Monastery and in the Late Medieval Household', in *De Cella in Seculum: Religious and Secular Life and Devotion in Late Medieval England*, ed. by Michael G. Sargent (Cambridge: Brewer, 1989), pp. 215-27
- Jewell, Helen M., *Women in Medieval England* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1996)
- Jones, Edward Alexander, and Walsham, Alexandra, *Syon Abbey and its Books: Reading, Writing and Religion, c. 1400-1700* (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2010)
- Jones, Michael K. and Underwood, Malcolm G., *The King's Mother: Lady Margaret Beaufort, Countess of Richmond and Derby* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992)

- Jordan, W. K., *Philanthropy in England, 1480-1660: A Study of the Changing Pattern of English Social Aspirations* (London: G. Allen and Unwin, 1959)
- Kelly, Henry Ansgar, 'Wives and their Property in Chaucer's London: Testimony of Husting Wills', *Studies in Medieval and Renaissance History*, 8 (2011), 81-195
- Kent, G. H. R., 'The Estates of the Herbert Family in the Mid-Fifteenth Century' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Keele, 1973)
- Kenyon, J. R., *Raglan Castle* (Cardiff: Cadw, 2003)
- Kingsford, Charles L., *The Grey Friars of London* (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1915)
- Lacey, Kay, 'Margaret Croke (d. 1491)', in *Medieval London Widows, 1300-1500*, ed. by Caroline M. Barron and Anne F. Sutton (London: The Hambledon Press, 1994), pp. 143-164
- Latham, R. E., *Revised Medieval Latin Word List from British and Irish Sources* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965; repr. 2008)
- Lee, Paul, *Nunneries, Learning and Spirituality in Late Medieval Society: The Dominican Priory of Dartford* (York: York Medieval Press, 2001)
- Lehmberg, Stanford E., *Sir Thomas Elyot: Tudor Humanist* (Texas: University of Texas Press, 1960)
- Lepine, David, 'And All Oure Parreshens': Secular Cathedrals and Parish Churches in Late Medieval England', in *The Parish in Late Medieval England*, ed. by Clive Burgess and Eamon Duffy (Donington: Shaun Tyas, 2006), pp. 29-53
- Leyser, Henrietta, *Medieval Women: A Social History of Women in England, 450-1500* (London: Phoenix Giant, 1995)
- Little, Lester K., *Religious Poverty and the Profit Economy in Late Medieval Europe* (London: Paul Elek, 1978)
- Lord, Peter, *The Visual Culture of Wales: Medieval Vision* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press)
- Lowe, Nicola A., 'Women's Devotional Bequests of Textiles in the Late Medieval English Parish Church, c. 1350-1550', *Gender and History*, 22.2 (2010), 407-429
- MacNamara, F. N. *Memorials of the Danvers Family (of Dauntsey and Culworth)* (London: Hardy and Page, 1895)
- Macy, Gary, *The Hidden History of Women's Ordination: Female Clergy in the Medieval West* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008)
- Mate, Mavis, *Women in Medieval English Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999)

- McFarlane, K. B., *Lancastrian Kings and Lollard Knights* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972)
- McKinley, R. A., ed, *The Victoria History of the Counties of England: A History of the County of Leicester*, 5 vols (London: Dawson, 1907-64)
- Moule, Thomas, *The English Counties Delineated: A Topographical Description of England*, 2 vols (London: George Virtue, 1837)
- Niebrzydowski, Sue, ed., *Middle-Aged Women in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2011)
- Norton, Elizabeth, *Margaret Beaufort: Mother of the Tudor Dynasty* (Stroud: Amberley, 2009)
- Oakley, Francis, *The Western Church in the Later Middle Ages* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1979)
- Obbard, Elizabeth Ruth, ed., *Medieval Women Mystics: Gertrude the Great, Angela of Foligno, Birgitta of Sweden, Julian of Norwich* (New York: New City Press, 2002)
- Oliva, Marilyn, *The Convent and the Community in Late Medieval England: Female Monasteries in the Diocese of Norwich, 1350-1540* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1998)
- Orme, Nicholas, *English Schools in the Middle Ages* (London: Methuen, 1973)
- , *Medieval Schools: From Roman Britain to Renaissance England* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2006)
- Orme, Nicholas, and Webster, Margaret, *The English Hospital, 1070-1570* (London and New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995)
- Page, William, ed., *The Victoria History of the Counties of England: A History of the County of Buckingham*, 4 vols (London: St Catherine Press, 1905-27)
- , *The Victoria History of the Counties of England: A History of the County of Hertfordshire*, 4 vols (London: Dawson, 1902-14)
- , *The Victoria History of the Counties of England: A History of the County of Kent*, 3 vols (London: St Catherine Press, 1908-32)
- Palliser, D. M., 'Introduction: The Parish in Perspective', in *Parish, Church and People: Local Studies in Lay Religion, 1350-1750*, ed. by S. J. Wright (London: Hutchinson, 1988), pp. 5-28
- Pantin, W. A., *The English Church in the Fourteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1955)
- Paxton, Catherine, 'The Nunneries of London and its Environs in the Later Middle Ages' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Lincoln College, Oxford, 1992)
- Pegge, Samuel, *An Historical Account of Beauchief Abbey* (London: J. Nichols, 1801)

- Peters, Christine, *Patterns of Piety: Women, Gender and Religion in Late Medieval and Reformation England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003)
- Phillimore, W. P. W., *Some Account of the Family of Middlemore of Warwickshire and Worcestershire* (London: Phillimore, 1901)
- Playne, Arthur Twisden, *A History of the Parishes of Minchinhampton and Avening* (Gloucester: J. Bellows, 1915)
- Pierce, Hazel, *Margaret Pole, Countess of Salisbury 1473-1541* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2003)
- Poole, A. L., *From Domesday Book to Magna Carta, 1087-1216*, 2nd edn (Oxford: Clarendon, 1955)
- Poole, Charles, *Old Widnes and its Neighbourhood* (Widnes: Swale, 1906)
- Powell, Susan, 'Lady Margaret Beaufort as Patron of Scholars and Scholarship', in *Patrons and Professionals in the Middle Ages: Proceedings of the 2010 Harlaxton Symposium*, ed. by Paul Binski and Elizabeth A. New (Donington: Shaun Tyas, 2012), pp. 100-21
- Powell, W. R., ed., *The Victoria History of the Counties of England: A History of the County of Essex*, 11 vols (London: Institute of Historical Research, 1903-2012)
- Power, Eileen, *Medieval English Nunneries c. 1275 to 1535* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1922)
- Rawlinson, Kent, 'The English Household Chapel, c.1100-c.1500 : An Institutional Study' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Durham, 2008)
- Rice, Nicole R., *Lay Piety and Religious Discipline in Middle English Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008)
- , '“Temples to Christ's Indwelling”: Forms of Chastity in a Barking Abbey Manuscript', *Journal of History and Sexuality*, 19.1 (2010), 115-32
- Richmond, Colin, 'Religion and the Fifteenth-Century English Gentleman', in *The Church, Politics and Patronage in the Fifteenth Century*, ed. by Barrie Dobson (Gloucester: Sutton, 1984), pp. 193-208
- Riddy, Felicity, 'Women Talking About the Things of God': A Late Medieval Sub-Culture', in *Women and Literature in Britain, 1150-1500*, ed. by Carol M. Meale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 104-27
- Rosenthal, Joel T., 'Fifteenth-Century Widows and Widowhood: Bereavement, Reintegration, and Life Choices', in *Wife and Widow in Medieval England*, ed. by Sue Sheridan Walker (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1993), pp. 33-58
- , 'Sir Richard Choke (d. 1483) of Long Ashton', *Somerset Archaeology and Natural History*, 127 (1983), 105-121

- Rosser, Gervase, *The Art of Solidarity in the Middle Ages: Guilds in England 1250-1550* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015)
- , 'Communities of Parish and Guild in the Late Middle Ages', in *Parish, Church and People: Local Studies in Lay Religion, 1350-1750*, ed. by S. J. Wright (London: Hutchinson, 1988), pp. 29-55
- , 'Sanctuary and Social Negotiation in Medieval England', in *The Cloister and the World: Essays in Medieval History in Honour of Barbara Harvey*, ed. by John Blair and Brian Golding (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), pp. 57-79
- Rousseau, Marie-Hélène, 'Chantry Foundations and Chantry Chaplains at St. Paul's Cathedral, London, c. 1200-1548' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Royal Holloway, University of London, 2003)
- Rowley-Williams, Jennifer Ann, 'Image and Reality: the Lives of Aristocratic Women in Early Tudor England' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Prifysgol Bangor University, 1998), pp. 101-4
- Salih, Sarah, *Versions of Virginity in Late Medieval England* (Cambridge: Brewer, 2001)
- Salzman, L. F., ed., *The Victoria History of the Counties of England: A History of the County of Cambridge*, 4 vols (London: Institute of Historical Research, 1938-59)
- Saul, Nigel, 'The Gentry and the Parish', in *The Parish in Late Medieval England*, ed. by Clive Burgess and Eamon Duffy (Donington: Shaun Tyas, 2006), pp. 243-60
- Snell, F. J., *The Customs of Old England* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1911)
- Southern, R. W., *Western Society and the Church in the Middle Ages* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970, repr. 1986)
- Spearing, Elizabeth, *Medieval Writings on Female Spirituality* (New York: Penguin Books, 2002)
- Spufford, Margaret, *Contrasting Communities: English Villagers in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974)
- Steuer, Susan, 'Identifying Chaste Widows: Documenting a Religious Vocation', in *The Ties that Bind: Essays in Medieval British History in Honor of Barbara Hanawalt*, ed. by Linda E. Mitchell, Katherine L. French and Douglas L. Biggs (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2011), pp. 87-105
- , 'Widows and Religious Vocation: Options and Decisions in the Medieval Province of York' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Minnesota, 2001)

- Stocker, David, 'Wool, Cloth and Politics 1430-1485: the Merchant Stockers of Wyboston and London', in *The Medieval Merchant: Proceedings of the 2012 Harlaxton Symposium*, ed. by Caroline M. Barron and Anne F. Sutton (Donington: Shaun Tyas, 2014), pp. 127-145
- Sutton, Anne F., *The Mercery of London: Trade, Goods and People, 1130-1578* (Hampshire, England and Vermont, USA: Ashgate, 2005)
- , *A Merchant Family of Coventry, London and Calais: The Tates, c. 1450-1515* (London: The Mercer's Company, 1998)
- , *Wives and Widows of Medieval London* (Donington: Shaun Tyas, 2016)
- Swanson, R. N., *Indulgences in Late Medieval England: Passports to Paradise?* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007)
- Tanner, Norman P., *The Church in Late Medieval Norwich 1370-1532* (Canada: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1984)
- Thomas, D. H., *The Herberts of Raglan and the Battle of Edgecote 1469* (Lincoln: Freezywater Publications, 1994)
- Thomson, J. A. F., 'The Well of Grace': Englishmen and Rome in the Fifteenth Century', in *The Church, Politics and Patronage in the Fifteenth Century*, ed. by Barrie Dobson (Gloucester: Sutton, 1984), pp. 99-114
- , 'Piety and Charity in Late Medieval London', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 16 (1965), 178-195
- Thrupp, Sylvia L., *The Merchant Class of Medieval London, 1300-1500* (Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press, 1948)
- Tucker, Penelope, 'Government and Politics: London, 1461-1483' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Royal Holloway, University of London, 1995)
- , *Law Courts and Lawyers in the City of London, 1300-1550* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007)
- Van Engen, John, *Sisters and Brothers of the Common Life: The Devotio Moderna and the World of the Later Middle Ages* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008)
- Venn, J. A., *Alumni Cantabrigienses*, 2 vols (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1924)
- Verey, David, and Brooks, Alan, eds, *The Buildings of England: Gloucestershire: The Cotswolds*, 3rd edn, (London: Penguin, 1999)
- Ward, Frank, 'The Divorce of Sir William Barentyne', *Sussex Archaeological Collections*, 68 (1927), 279-81
- Ward, Jennifer C., 'English Noblewomen and the Local Community in the Later Middle Ages', in *Medieval Women in their Communities*, ed. by Diane Watt (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1997), pp. 186-203

- , 'Townswomen and their Households', in *Daily Life in the Late Middle Ages*, ed. by Richard Britnell (Gloucestershire: Sutton, 1998), pp. 27-42
- Warren, Ann K., *Anchorites and their Patrons in Medieval England* (Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1985)
- Warren, Nancy Bradley, *Spiritual Economies: Female Monasticism in Later Medieval England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001)
- Waters, Robert Edmond Chester, *Genealogical Memoirs of the Extinct Family of Chester of Chicheley*, 2 vols (London: Robson and Son, 1878)
- Webb, Diana M., 'Woman and Home: The Domestic Setting of Late Medieval Spirituality', in *Women in the Church* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), pp. 159-74
- Wedgwood, Josiah Clement, *History of Parliament: 1439-1509*, 2 vols (London: Stationery Office, 1936-8)
- Weever, John, *Ancient Funeral Monuments* (London: 1631)
- Westcott, Margaret R., 'Katherine Courtney, Countess of Devon, 1479-1527', in *Tudor and Stuart Devon: The Common Estate and Government*, ed. by Todd Gray, Margery Rowe and Audrey Erskine (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1992), pp. 13-38
- Wilkinson, Louise J., *Eleanor de Montfort: A Rebel Countess in Medieval England* (London: Bloomsbury, 2012)
- Williams, D., 'The hastily drawn up will of William Catesby, esquire', *Leicestershire Archaeological and Historical Society Transactions*, 51 (1975-6), 43-51
- Wilson, Janet, 'Communities of Dissent: The Secular and Ecclesiastical Communities of Margery Kempe's Book', in *Medieval Women in their Communities*, ed. by Diane Watt (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1997), pp. 155-85
- Windeatt, Barry, 'Margery Kempe and the Friars', in *The Friars in Medieval Britain: Proceedings of the 2007 Harlaxton Symposium*, ed. by Nicholas Rogers (Donington: Shaun Tyas, 2010), pp. 125-41
- Wright, James, *The History and Antiquities of the County of Rutland* (London: Bennet Griffin, 1684)
- Yoshikawa, Naoë Kukita, 'Margery Kempe's Mystical Marriage and Roman Sojourn: Influence of St Bridget of Sweden', *Reading Medieval Studies*, 28 (2002), 39-57
- Zell, M. L., 'The Use of Religious Preambles as a Measure of Religious Belief in the Sixteenth Century', *Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research*, 50 (1977), 246-8

Online Publications

- 'Brass of the Month: February 2010: John Kyngeston, 1514, and his wife Susan, Childrey, Berkshire', *The Monumental Brass Society Website* <<http://www.mbs-brasses.co.uk/brass%20of%20the%20month%20february%202010.html>> [accessed 14 January 2014]
- 'Dartford Priory', *Dartford Town Archive* <http://www.dartfordarchive.org.uk/medieval/religion_pr.shtml> [accessed 15 July 2010]
- Dutton, Anne Marie, 'Women's Use of Religious Literature in Late Medieval England' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of York, 1995; online at <http://etheses.whiterose.ac.uk/2470/1/DX211582.pdf> [accessed 31 July 2016])
- Gater, G. H. and Godfrey, Walter H., eds, 'Memorials in the Church: Brasses', in *Survey of London: Volume 15: All Hallows, Barking-by-the-Tower, ii* (London: London County Council, 1934), online edn <<http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=74973>> [accessed 20 November 2010]
- Gregory, Rabia, 'Marrying Jesus: Brides and the Bridegroom in Medieval Women's Religious Literature' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of North Carolina, 2007; online at <https://cdr.lib.unc.edu/indexablecontent/uuid:dbcaac3a-c91e-4eb3-bb18-852a84d09859> [accessed 12 December 2015])
- Jehan, Bill, 'Blennerhassett Family Tree: Norfolk, Suffolk and Fermanagh', *Blennerhassett Family Tree: Genealogy One-Name Study* <<http://www.blennerhassettfamilytree.com/Family-Tree.php>> [accessed 14 January 2014]
- Knott, Simon, 'Churches of East Anglia: Suffolk' <<http://www.suffolkchurches.co.uk/>> [accessed 8 January 2017]
- Lamp, Reinhard, 'The Browne Brothers, All Saints, Stamford, Lincolnshire' <http://www.pegasus-onlinezeitschrift.de/2010_1/erga_1_2010_lamp-2_en.pdf> [accessed 14 January 2014]
- Latham, R. A., ed., *Calendar of Close Rolls, Henry VII: Volume 2* (London: Stationery Office, 1963), online edn <<http://www.british-history.ac.uk/cal-close-rolls/hen7/vol2/>> [accessed 22 December 2016]
- 'Dagenham Village' <<http://www.dagenhamvillage.co.uk>> [accessed 7 November 2015]
- 'Metal detector discoveries from Monmouthshire: Two spectacular treasure finds', *The National Museum of Wales*, 16 April 2007 <<http://www.museumwales.ac.uk/1903/>> [accessed 17 December 2015]

'The Raglan Ring', part of the *A History of The World* series on the BBC website
<[http://www.bbc.co.uk/ahistoryoftheworld/objects/RwuYrQlaSrOjF5QB
DPJGpQ/](http://www.bbc.co.uk/ahistoryoftheworld/objects/RwuYrQlaSrOjF5QB
DPJGpQ/)> [accessed 17 December 2015]

Online Databases

Bible Gateway <<http://www.biblegateway.com/>>

Guto'r Glyn.net <<http://www.gutorglyn.net/>>

History of Parliament Online <<http://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/>>

TEAMS Middle English Texts, Medieval Institute Publications

<<http://d.lib.rochester.edu/teams/>>

The Geograph Britain and Ireland Project <<http://www.geograph.org.uk/>>

The Hamline University Brass Rubbing Collection <<http://www.hamline.edu/brass-rubbings>>

The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, Oxford University Press

<<http://www.oxforddnb.com/>>

The Oxford English Dictionary, Oxford University Press <<http://www.oed.com/>>