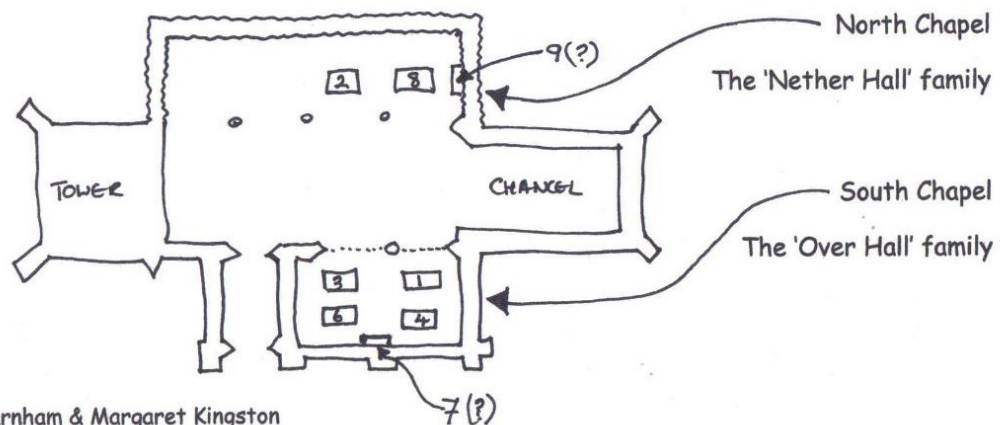


The Farnham Monuments: Myths, Legends and Family Fables

The Farnham Chapel at St Bartholomew's, Quorn, is one of the few remaining private chapels within a parish church. It belongs to the Farnham Trust and can only be opened with permission of the trustees.

Plan of the C16 St Bartholomew with location of tombs according to Nichols



1. 1502 Thomas Farnham & Margaret Kingston
2. 1548 William Farnham & Dorothy Neville
3. 1557 Francis Farnham & Margery Cave
4. 1561 Robert Farnham & Mary Langham (parents of Francis)
5. 1562 Thomas Farnham & Helen Challoner (2nd son of William & Dorothy, Thomas bought the Chantry off the Crown but his monument is at Stoughton)
6. 1574 Thomas Farnham & Anne Eyre (2nd son of Robert & Mary)
7. ? Wall monument possibly to Thomas & Anne
8. 1587 John Farnham & Dorothy Welwyn (1st son of William & Dorothy)
9. ? Relief allegedly of Robert de Farnham at the Battle of Crecy/Siege of Calais but most likely of John Farnham

The Chapel was added to an existing Norman church in 1392 by John de Farnham. There are no extant medieval monuments. According to a church guide a relief showing a battle scene is of Robert de Farnham (d.1349) at the Battle of Crecy/Siege of Calais in 1346; it is certainly not of this date and will be dealt with in more detail below. Today, the south chapel is crammed full of monuments to the Farnhams dating from 1502 onwards and it is the splendid chest tomb with recumbent effigies of John Farnham (d.1587) and his wife Dorothy Walwyn (fig.1) that dominates the chapel. Even a Bacon

Fig 1: John & Dorothy Farnham



(c.1775) flanked by two neo-gothic monuments (c.1850) are in its shadow. However, the chest tomb was never intended to be placed in this chapel, and none of the existing seven early-modern alabaster monuments are in their original location. The 1887 re-ordering of St Bartholomew's which made the church more serviceable to the living had a dramatic and damaging effect on the Farnham monuments.

During the sixteenth century, the Farnhams engaged in what can only be described as a flurry of memorialising. They commissioned nine monuments - including two for second sons - seven of which are at Quorn.¹ John and Dorothy's is the last in the series and it is this monument and how it related to the other early-modern alabaster memorials that I shall concentrate on. Not only is this an impressive alabaster monument, but it is also an interesting example of how complex and problematic the study of a monument can be. For nothing is quiet as it seems. Sherlock reminds us that 'monuments were not commonplace objects automatically erected by gentry and nobility to convey formulaic messages' and that at most, only a third of these families erected any sort of memorial.² So it is worth exploring why a family should suddenly engage in this activity.

Shortly after the death of both the John de Farnham who commissioned the chantry chapel and his eldest son John Farnham in 1416 (there is a serious shortage of Christian names in this family), their respective wives seemed to have fallen out and the family split. The senior side of the family remained in Over Hall,³ whilst the younger son Thomas built Nether Hall.⁴ In St



Fig 2: Thomas & Margaret Farnham

Bartholomew's this necessitated two separate chapels. The Over Hall family used what is now the Farnham Chapel in the south aisle and the junior Nether Hall family used a chapel in the north aisle. Referring to Nichols, who recorded the monuments in the mid-eighteenth century prior to their reorganisation and restoration, it is possible to reconstruct where the tombs were originally sited. Using the dates on the monuments we may also speculate on the order in which they appeared.

The first monument is an incised slab which was on a chest to Thomas Farnham (d.1502) and his wife Margaret Kingston (fig.2). We don't know why Thomas and Margaret decided to commission this monument, but it is worth noting that Margaret's family had commissioned at least five monuments between 1480 – 1516, all of

¹ The seventh, recorded by Nichols, was according to Greenhill broken and disappeared in 1887.¹ An eighth attributed to Richard Parker is at Stoughton, Leicestershire.

² P.19

³ Over Hall later becomes Quorn House

⁴ Nether Hall later becomes Quorn Hall

which had been placed at Rothley (sadly four have been lost). The remaining one shares similarities with Thomas & Margaret's, especially the uncomfortable position of the hands and may have come from the same local workshop.

There followed at least three commissions from the Royley workshop at Burton upon Trent (2, 3 & 4 on the plan). All are incised slabs and were according to Nichols mounted on chests tombs. Today they are propped up ignominiously in the corner with that of Thomas & Margaret. Although this makes them much easier to read they have sadly lost their authority. Badham describes how such monuments would have been polychromed, gilded and decorated.⁵ The chests would have borne heraldic devices and probably weepers/children, much like those still present at Peatling Magna, and would have affected a much greater presence.

The style of the three Royleys draws directly from the first Farnham monument. The four together create a strong sense of continuity, even though one of them would have been originally placed across the way in the North chapel. Margery's dress is an exact copy of Dorothy's, and Robert and Francis (father and son both lawyers) also wear the same long gowns (Robert pre-deceased his father and was the older brother of Thomas (d.1574)).



Fig 3: Francis and Margery

The inventory of Francis' household possessions when he died still exists. The list consists of what would seem to us today to be mundane objects, such as towels and kettles.⁶ Richardson



Fig 4: Robert and Mary



Fig 5: William and Dorothy

reminds that this was 'a period in which there were still comparatively few objects of any kind in circulation', so a monument was a very important display of wealth.⁷ The sum total of Francis' household possessions was £29. 13s. As Greenhill laments we don't know how much a Royley

⁵ Badham (2004) p.20

⁶ Farnham (1912) p.219

⁷ Richardson (2013) p.68

incised slab on a chest cost. However, we do know that the Shirley monument (c.1585) with recumbent figures at Breedon on the Hill cost £22.⁸ This gives us an indicator of the expense involved.

Having the incised slabs lined up on a wall allows us to compare them. What is immediately noticeable is that the three Royley slabs all have exceptionally long inscriptions, the longest to appear in Greenhill's study. It takes nearly fifty lines to tell us that William is a man of modest means disinterested in worldly goods. This is rather a mixed message, given it appears on an expensive tomb. We are also told that Robert was:

A gentyll man.
 agodly welthye lyfe he ledde.
 greate pacience he poseste...
 his tenants he ded not oppresse.
 nor of his neghborys non.
 In haramefull sorte he dyd transgresse.

It is important to these three Farnhams that they are seen to be modest, upright and fair and their monuments bear witness to this. The Royley slabs stress continuity, but would not have been excessively showy. Although these memorials straddle the Reformation the marginal inscriptions all show a concern about the transit of their souls through purgatory.

The fifth monument commissioned for a Farnham during this period is not at Quorn but at Stoughton and is from Richard Parker's workshop. Although Thomas was a second son, he was important to the Farnham family. As Chancellor of the Exchequer under Edward VI and Mary, he was instrumental in securing the Farnham Chapel by buying it from the crown in 1553. So it is interesting that his monument is not at Quorn.

The sixth monument to Thomas Farnham (d.1574) and Anne Eyre was another incised slab which, according to Nichols, was set in the floor next to the other tombs in the south chapel. This slab is now lost. The seventh monument is the hanging monument (fig.6). Although Nichols ascribes this to another Thomas (d.1666), I

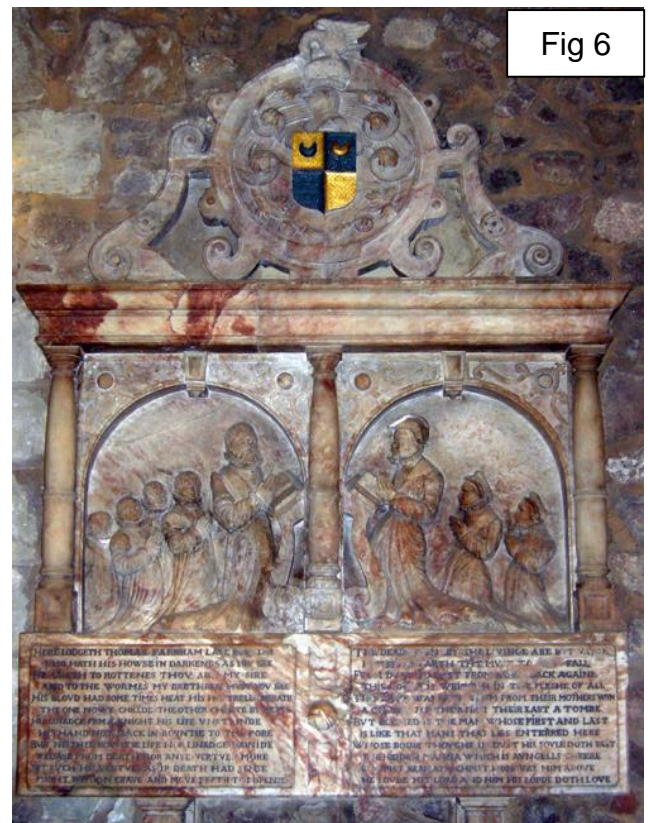


Fig 6

⁸ Shirley contract 1585

believe that the wall monument is in memory of Thomas, younger brother of Francis. There are four reasons for my attribution. The style of clothes is correct for this period and would be old fashioned in 1666. The hanging monument shows the right number of children, four sons and two daughters –the Thomas suggested by Nichols, had two sons and four daughters. Any monument for him would have been placed in the north chapel and the lack of dates on the wall monument might suggest they are already recorded nearby. Although this monument is visually different in style, the inscription continues to play a prominent role and is in a very similar in tenor:

He saieth to rottenes thou art my sire ...

His linadge from a knight his life unstainde

His hand not slack in bountie to the pore

By the 1570s, the south chapel would have been pleasantly cramped with five monuments whilst the north side still had just one. This brings us to John and Dorothy's monument which was originally placed in the north chapel. In the 1940s this monument was tentatively attributed to Epiphanius Evesham and since then this ascription has been repeated often, including in Pevsner. However, both White and Bayliss disagree with this attribution and Bayliss has suggested it is the work of a William Hargrave of Bilborough who worked at Wollaton Hall. In 1887, when it was relocated, the inscription was moved from the foot end of the monument to the head end. Although this is the only monument with fully carved figures, it would still have read very like the other four chest tombs, each monument consisting of images in the top two thirds and an inscription in the bottom third. This similarity is now lost and with it the visual clues that relate these monuments to each other.

As a young man, John had been a soldier and then became a pensioner at the court of Elizabeth I. He sold Nether Hall to Thomas his brother for £80. It was bequeathed back to him when Thomas died (1562). On John's demise it went to the next brother, Matthew. Although other estates went to the daughters of John and Thomas (neither had sons) it seems that it was important to keep the Quorn property in the Farnham name. In John's will he allows 100 Marks for a funeral 'answerable to my degree' and an equivalent sum for his monument, he also lists possible places for his burial. His first choice is the 'north side of St Bartholomew'; his second is in 'Christ church within Newgate by or near unto my good friends Walter Haddon and Nicholas Beaumont'. We don't know how much his monument cost, but 100 Marks is about £66 which is a substantial amount to spend on a tomb, compare this to the cost of Nether Hall.⁹ On the inscription it was important to let it be known that 'he descended of an antient house'. He takes his place

⁹ The most expensive Royley monument, to Thomas Fermor (d.1580) at Somerton was contracted to cost £40.

alongside the rest of the family, but also manages to redress the balance between the north and the south side by commissioning a very large and splendid monument.

John also departs from the sentiments so far expressed in the other inscriptions. He is neither in 'rottenes' like Thomas nor is he extolled for his modest and responsible lifestyle. He is celebrated both for having lived an exciting life – firstly on the battlefield 'for youth the best expense of days' and then at court 'where princes great he truly served ... for good conceit and pleasant wit favord in every place beloved of the noblest sorte well liked of the rest.' This post-Reformation inscription celebrates John's secular achievements and there is no purgatory to worry about because 'the heavens his soule containe'. Traditional values were upheld on the modest inscribed slabs made by the Royleys, and John Farnham's superb tomb, displaying an engagement with what was then termed the 'new style', is a complete departure from them.

So what of the putative Robert de Farnham alabaster relief? (Fig 7) Well it certainly doesn't date from the fourteenth century, but it could have been created later to commemorate this infamous ancestor.¹⁰ This would beg the question why was it commissioned 200 years after the event and originally placed in the North chapel? There is neither inscription nor date. Nichols records it as being on the wall next to John's monument. His sketch of the monument (Fig 8) shows that it had suffered somewhat and suggests it had lost its frame or surrounds.



Following its restoration it looks very like a contemporary portrait of John Farnham; his armour matches the effigy on the monument exactly. The Victorian restorer might have just replaced the original head and parts of the arm and leg. However, they may well have created new parts based on the portrait and John's effigy and thus confused things further. (Figs 9 & 10)

Kemp observes that there was a fashion for depictions of scenes in the life of the deceased, which started to occur at the end of the sixteenth century and he includes this relief as an example.¹¹

¹⁰ Robert de Farnham went to war to avoid charges for 'robbing Elena le Rous on Barrow Bridge'. He acquitted himself with such credit he was pardoned and able to return home.

¹¹ Kemp (1981) p.71

This would make it a portrait of John, which makes sense given its proximity to John's monument. However, I would like to add to this suggesting that the ambiguity was intentional from its inception. John or the commissioners of this relief were playing on the parallel of both he and Robert being soldiers. John on the cadet side of the family is attaching himself to Robert de Farnham, not only claiming a common ancestor, but also sharing some of his flamboyant reputation and challenging the conservative mores of his immediate family.



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