

WILLIAM THORNBURY (D.1481), VICAR OF FAVERSHAM – AND ANCHORITE?

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Almost 150 years ago, in 1877, in the pages of this journal, in a pioneering article on anchorites at Faversham, an anonymous author argued that William Thornbury, after resigning the vicarage there in 1476, spent his final years living as an anchorite in the churchyard until his death in 1481.¹ This claim has been widely accepted and repeated. Thornbury appears in a standard modern account of medieval recluses, Anne Warren's *Anchorites and their Patrons in Medieval England* (1985), and subsequent studies.² The evidence given by the anonymous author for Thornbury's inclusion as an anchorite is threefold: an allusion to this in the epitaph at the foot of his monumental brass in Faversham church, a reference to 'his chapel and parvise in the parish cemetery' in his last will, and the well-documented presence of anchorites at Faversham in the century before the Reformation. Such renunciation of worldliness by beneficed secular clergy is rare but not unknown, with Thornbury often cited as a prime example. Yet Thornbury's status as priest-anchorite sits uneasily with his grand monumental brass in the chancel of Faversham parish church. His portrayal there wearing a cope and almuce (a fur hood with long front tassels) beneath an elaborate canopy with his coat of arms prominently displayed suggests that he had not completely renounced the world. This article re-examines the evidence for the claim that Thornbury was an anchorite. Before doing so it is important to set out what is known about his origins, career and monument.

The Thornbury family and Faversham

The Thornbury family – comprising of William and his two brothers, John and Richard – was associated with Faversham for half a century from the mid 1430s to 1488. Its antecedents, however, are obscure – the Faversham Thornburys have no known connection with the more prominent Thornburys of Little Munden, Herts., with whom they are sometimes linked.³ Little is known of the brothers' parents beyond their names – John and Agnes.⁴ Although John and Agnes are obscure their sons are comparatively well-documented. Each had a successful career, John (d.1473) in royal service, William (d.1481) in the Church and Richard (d.1488) as a merchant. All three brothers had strong associations with Faversham: William was vicar by 1441;⁵ John acquired the manor of Ospringe, near Faversham, in 1433, and soon afterwards became a freeman of the town;⁶ and Richard was styled 'of Faversham, recently of London, draper' in 1437.⁷ Each held property in the

town or surrounding countryside.⁸ Their connection with the town, however, lasted only one generation as neither John nor Richard had male heirs.

Much of what we know about the Thornbury family derives from John's career.⁹ This suggests that they were rising Kent gentry, albeit a family that owed its status more to marriage and service than the possession of its own landed estates. John may have begun his career as a soldier in the 1420s. By December 1433, when he acquired the manor of Ospringe through his second wife, Margery, the widow of Thomas Poultney, John Thornbury's gentry status was assured; in 1435 he held lands in Kent worth £20 a year. Some of these lands may have been in Goodnestone as he was styled as 'recently of Goodnestone next Faversham' in 1437.¹⁰ By 1438 he had made a further advantageous marriage, to Anne (d.1460), the daughter of John Thorlegh of West Grinstead (Sussex) and the widow of Richard Halsham of West Grinstead.¹¹ That year Richard's brother, Sir Hugh Halsham (d.1442), settled on her a life interest in the manor of Collingbourne Valence (Wilts.) valued at £10.¹² Also that year John received his first royal commission, to investigate grain hoarding in Kent.¹³ One of his fellow commissioners was Sir Richard Waller of Groombridge (d.c.1462), a distinguished soldier and, through his service to Cardinal Beaufort, Bishop of Winchester (d.1447), a leading member of the Beaufort affinity in Kent in the 1430s and 1440s.¹⁴ On withdrawing from military campaigning in 1431, Waller entered royal service as sheriff of Surrey and Sussex in 1433-4 and Kent in 1437-8. His Beaufort service began in 1434 and from 1439 to 1447 he was master of Cardinal Beaufort's household. John Thornbury seems to have been a protégé of Waller and it was probably through him that he entered Beaufort and royal service. His association with Richard Waller continued in 1442 when both served as feoffees of Sir Walter Moyle (d.1480), a justice of the king's bench.¹⁵ Their association probably arose from geographical proximity. In 1446 Thornbury was styled as 'of Speldhurst parish', the parish in which the Wallers' principal residence, *Groombridge Place*, was located.¹⁶

John Thornbury followed Waller in serving both the crown and the Beaufort family. He was escheator of Hampshire and Wiltshire in 1438-9, for Essex and Hertfordshire in 1441-2 and sheriff of Kent in 1445-6. In 1450 he obtained a pardon following Jack Cade's revolt, though it is doubtful that he was actively involved as his career was not interrupted.¹⁷ Between 1451 and 1454 he served as receiver of Queen Margaret's Kent estates of Milton Regis and Marden. He was MP for Kent in the 1453-4 parliament and went on to be escheator of the county from 1456 to 1458. His Beaufort service began in 1441 when he was appointed bailiff of the bishop's liberty in Hampshire and, in 1442, keeper of Bishop's Waltham (Hants.). Subsequently, in 1448-9, he was a member of the retinue of Edmund Beaufort, Duke of Somerset.¹⁸ Thornbury's royal service was exclusively Lancastrian. Although he was pardoned for being a member of the 'Lancastrian affinity' in 1462 and 1468, he did not hold royal office after 1460.¹⁹ As we shall see, John Thornbury's Waller and Beaufort connections served his brother William well.

Several conclusions about the Thornbury family's geographical origins and social status can be drawn from this outline of John's career. It seems likely that the family's origins were in Kent, either at Goodnestone or Speldhurst, but by 1433 John had settled at Ospringe and in 1450 was styled as 'of Faversham'. His links with Hampshire and Wiltshire came through marriage and service rather

than inherited family estates there. As his advantageous marriages suggest, the Thornburys were a gentry family. From 1438 John is consistently styled esquire.²⁰ However, the obscurity of earlier generations of the family suggests they were of parish rather than county importance; his brother Richard styled himself gentleman rather than esquire. John's successful career in royal and Beaufort service raised the family's status and enabled his only child, his daughter Philippa, to make a succession of advantageous marriages to prominent gentry families: first to John Pympe (d.1454) of Nettlestead, second to Sir William Tyrell (d.1471) of Rawreth (Essex), and third to Sir John Guildford (d.1493) of Rolvenden.²¹ The family's arms – *Argent on a bend engrailed Sable three roundels Ermine* – are known from William's brass. The same arms are recorded for 'John Thornebery of Sowthereych' in a mid-fifteenth-century roll of arms.²² This probably refers to John Thornbury of Faversham, though Sowthereych has not yet been located. The Thornbury arms were also displayed in the glass of Faversham parish church where they appeared impaled with Thorlegh – *Vert nine ecallops, three, three, two, one Or* – the arms of John Thornbury's third wife, Anne (Fig. 1).²³ Richard Thornbury was also armigerous and left instructions for his arms to be inscribed on his brass in Faversham Abbey.²⁴

William Thornbury's career in the Church

William Thornbury's early life and career in the Church are as obscure as his family ancestry. Nothing is known of his education except that he was not a university graduate. He first appears in the records as William Thornbury, clerk, in 1435 when he acted as a feoffee of his brother Richard.²⁵ By May 1441 he was a successful cleric in possession of a benefice, the vicarage of Faversham, which he held for thirty-five years.²⁶ He was probably already established near Faversham by this time as in 1437 he was accused of detaining livestock worth

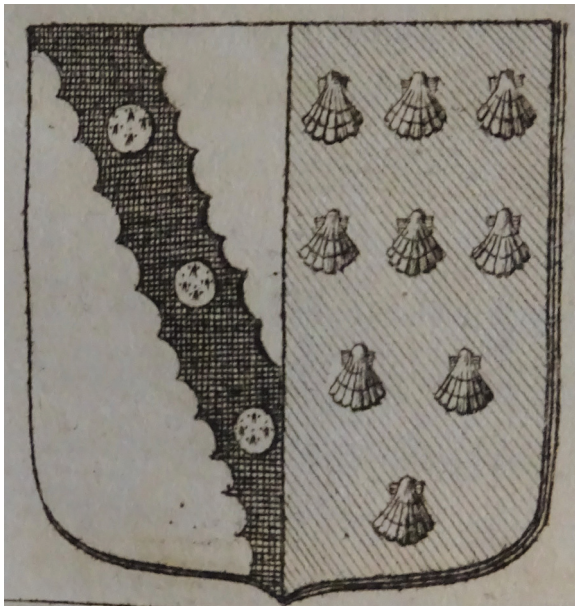


Fig. 1 The arms of Thornbury impaled with Thorlegh, formerly in Faversham church. (Jacob, *History of Faversham*, 1774, pl. 10.)

twenty marks at Langedon, near Faversham.²⁷ Langedon is a settlement in the parish of Goodnestone where his brother John had interests.

By 1443 Thornbury had entered the service of Cardinal Beaufort as one of his chaplains, perhaps on the recommendation of his brother John who was already employed by the cardinal.²⁸ If, as is likely, William's association with Cardinal Beaufort began before 1443 it may well have facilitated his appointment to Faversham. The church was appropriated (annexed) to St Augustine's Abbey, Canterbury, which appointed the vicar. The abbey regarded Beaufort as an important benefactor. In his will Beaufort remitted a substantial loan of 500 marks (£366 13s. 4d.) and made generous payments to the abbot and monks to pray for his soul.²⁹ Once in Beaufort's service, William Thornbury sought to advance his career by obtaining a dispensation for pluralism. His licence, granted on 6 June 1443, allowed him to hold two incompatible benefices (those with cure of souls) to the value of £50 for the rest of his life and to exchange them as he wished.³⁰ From 1446 he usually held two benefices simultaneously. In June that year he became rector of Eythorne, Kent, and subsequently, between 1446 and 1453, he was instituted to the vicarage of Eastchurch.³¹ There is no record of his appointment to Eastchurch but in November 1453 he resigned it and was instituted to the rectory of St Peter's, Sandwich.³² Twelve years later, in 1465, he exchanged St Peter's for the vicarage of Chislet, which he probably retained until 1481.³³

Thornbury was a moderately successful cleric, a small-scale pluralist who did not acquire canonries in collegiate or cathedral churches or move into the service of another bishop. For most of his career he enjoyed a comfortable income from two benefices ranging from £32 to £56 a year. Faversham was valued at £26 17s. 4½d. in the *Valor Ecclesiasticus* of 1535 and Chislet at £30 0s. 0d.³⁴ Eythorne, was assessed at £16 0s. 0d., Eastchurch, at 20 marks (£13 6s. 8d.), and St Peter's, Sandwich, at £8 0s. 0d.³⁵ Thornbury's income was substantially higher than most parochial incumbents; in 1535 three-quarters of parochial benefices were worth less than £15 and half less than £10.³⁶ An income of £30-50 matched that of the better off lesser gentry of fifteenth-century England, the esquires and prosperous gentlemen.³⁷ Birth and his brother's connections gave Thornbury access to benefices. The patron who presented him to Eythorne in 1446 was Edward Guildford (d.1448), whose son Sir John Guildford married Richard Waller's daughter and later William's niece Philippa, the daughter of his brother John.³⁸ Eastchurch was appropriated to Boxley Abbey, where John Thornbury had a chamber.³⁹ The patron of Thornbury's last two benefices, St Peter's, Sandwich, and Chislet, was St Augustine's Abbey, Canterbury, which had already presented him to Faversham.⁴⁰ Although all Thornbury's benefices were in the diocese of Canterbury, most were some distance from Faversham and it is unlikely that he served them personally. Only Eastchurch, on the Isle of Sheppey, was within a few miles, but the journey there required a ferry across the Swale. In most of his benefices he was an absentee incumbent, albeit with a papal dispensation for plurality and from 1453 a papal licence for non-residence for life.⁴¹

Despite his dispensation for absence, there is solid evidence that Thornbury was resident at Faversham and undertook his pastoral duties there. In 1459 he, together with the churchwardens and mayor, purchased a new tenor bell for the parish church, whereas in March 1441 the vicar was not involved when five new bells were bought.⁴² The vicarage was Thornbury's principal residence, at least towards

the end of his life and probably earlier; in 1473 his brother John bequeathed to him a silver salt cellar, a gilt cup and ‘all other things of myn that is in his owne place att the vikerage of Faversham’.⁴³ Thornbury’s burial in the chancel close to the high altar and provisions for his soul in his parish church is a further indication of his attachment to Faversham; pluralist incumbents like him were usually buried in churches they had a particular connection with. Thornbury’s tenure of the vicarage was unusually long-lasting. He was vicar for thirty-five years whereas many of his immediate predecessors had been short-lived.⁴⁴ Thornbury’s links with Faversham were strengthened by the property he held in the town, two tenements in Middle Row.⁴⁵ In addition, he was sufficiently respectful of the civic life of the town to make provision for the attendance of the mayor at his obit.⁴⁶

Yet, although he was resident in Faversham, the fifty or so surviving wills from the period 1448-81 do not suggest that Thornbury developed strong pastoral ties with his parishioners. Only one testator made a bequest to him, a modest 12*d.*, and none appointed him to positions of trust, either as executor or supervisor of their wills.⁴⁷ In this respect Thornbury seems to have been a rather aloof figure. He did, however, include one leading citizen of Faversham, Simon Orewell the younger, a brewer, among the feoffees of his property whom he appointed in August 1474.⁴⁸ Instead, the positions of trust held by Thornbury reflected his gentry status. In 1443 he acted as the feoffee of Thomas Burgeys, esquire, and his wife Anne.⁴⁹ Fourteen years later he again acted for Anne whose first husband had been John Martyn (d. 1436), justice of the court of common pleas.⁵⁰

Thornbury’s last years have been much misunderstood, and are complicated by what appears to be conflicting evidence. He had resigned the vicarage of Faversham by 16 October 1476, when his successor was instituted, in order, the anonymous author has argued, to become an anchorite. It is more likely, however, that his resignation was, in effect, his retirement, perhaps caused by worsening health or old age – he had been vicar for thirty-five years and was probably about sixty years old.⁵¹ According to the 1877 translation of his epitaph (which is discussed more fully below), he died on 23 March 1480/1. In the next line of his epitaph he is said to have been vicar for ‘*binis vicenis ... annis*’ – either twenty-two or forty years as ‘*binus*’ can be translated as either two or twice – and to have lived a further eight years (in the anonymous author’s view as an anchorite). Yet it is hard to reconcile these dates with what is known of his life. The date of his death is plausible given that he drew up his last will three months earlier, on 7 December 1480. But he was vicar for more than twenty-two years but not as long as forty and died four years after his resignation not eight years later. The date on which his last will (disposing of his lands and tenements) was proved, 19 March 1483/4, three years after his death (and eight years after he resigned as vicar), adds a further complication, but one that can probably be explained by delays in the administration of his estate; Thornbury’s testament – setting out his funeral and disposing of his moveable goods – does not survive. Overall, it seems likely that Thornbury died, as his epitaph relates, on 23 March 1480/1.

Thornbury’s monumental brass

William Thornbury’s brass occupies a prominent and privileged position in the chancel, close to the high altar (**Fig. 2**). Despite significant damage, it is still an



Fig. 2 The monumental brass of William Thornbury (d.1481) in Faversham church.
(Photo © author.)

imposing monument. Using a range of embellishments, it commemorates him as a pious high-ranking cleric, not as an anchorite who has renounced the trappings of ecclesiastical success for an austere cell. Its scale and decoration were designed to impress. The brass, a product of the London F workshop⁵² which was active in the last quarter of the fifteenth century, is set in a very large slab, 2540 x 1219 mm. It consists of an effigy, with a scroll above the head, beneath a single canopy with two pinnacles. Eight scrolls, four on each side, flank the slender shafts of the canopy and there is a shield in each corner of the slab and a twelve-line Latin epitaph at the foot of the effigy. Like many brasses, it has been ravaged by time: the canopy, almost all of the pinnacles, the upper parts of the shafts, the shields and the flanking scrolls have been lost. In addition, in 1832 the lower part of the slab was used to mark the burial place of John Bax and his wife. Some of this damage, which broke the slab in two, was probably caused either by the raising of the chancel floor in 1754-5 or the relaying of it 'with old monumental slabs' in the course of the 1874-5 restoration by Christian.⁵³ Currently, the north choir stalls cover the right-hand edge of the slab. Fortunately, Thomas Fisher's drawing of the brass, dating from between 1795 and 1805, conveys its original splendour and records the heraldry of the upper two shields and three of the flanking scrolls (Fig. 3).

The twin themes projected by Thornbury's brass are his status and his piety. Canopies on brasses, which derived from the microarchitecture of church facades and shrines, were a general mark of status.⁵⁴ A clearer statement of Thornbury's social rank, his armigerous status, is made by the four shields at each corner. Fisher's drawing shows that the upper two contained the Thornbury arms – *Argent on a bend engrailed Sable three roundels Ermine* – and the lower two may also have depicted them. Thornbury was concerned to show his ecclesiastical status as well as his social status. This was achieved by the vestments he is depicted wearing in his effigy. He is not shown robed in Mass vestments – an indication of his priestly status – as most clergy were, but wearing an embroidered processional cope fastened with a morse. It was usually the higher clergy – the canons and dignitaries of collegiate and cathedral churches – who chose to be depicted wearing a cope as a mark of their status. Furthermore, Thornbury is shown wearing an almuce which is clearly visible around his neck, its tassels extending below the sleeves of his surplice. The wearing of an almuce was a highly valued privilege confined to canons and dignitaries. It is not clear why Thornbury is shown wearing one as he is not known to have held any canonries.⁵⁵ The most likely explanation is that his service to Cardinal Beaufort entitled him to wear one. In the early fifteenth century several magnates – including Beaufort's nephew John, Duke of Bedford – sought and received papal licences for their household chaplains to wear them and it is likely that chaplains of cardinals had the same privilege.⁵⁶

Thornbury's piety is largely conveyed by the scrolls on his brass. Rather than rely on the stock phrases found on many scrolls, those on Thornbury's brass were chosen with care. Above his head a scroll affirms his faith in the Church and the saints, quoting from the Apostolic Creed, '*Credo i[n] s[an]c[t]am eccl[es]iam catholica[m] s[an]c[t]o[r]um com[mu]nionem* (I believe in the Holy Catholic Church, the communion of saints)'. Although an unusual inscription on a monument, this is an entirely orthodox expression. The eight flanking short scrolls

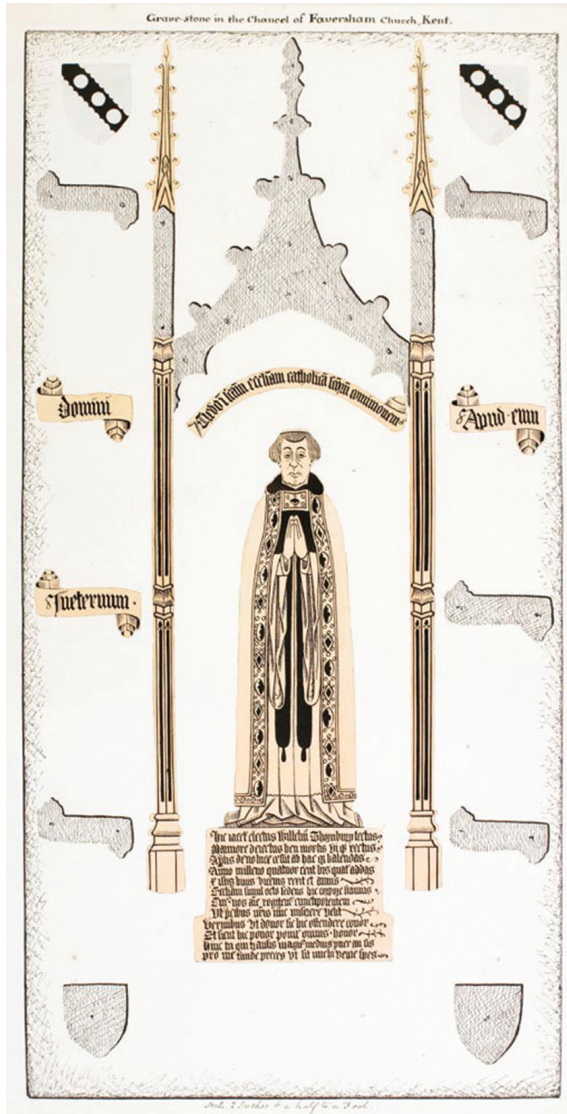


Fig. 3 Thomas Fisher’s drawing of the Thornbury brass (Fisher (Kent) 1/97).
 (© The Society of Antiquaries of London.)

are harder to interpret but equally orthodox. Fisher records the second and third on the left hand side as ‘*Domini*’ and ‘*Ineternum*’ (an elided version of *In aeternum*) respectively. Reading them vertically, the four left hand scrolls may originally have read ‘*Misericordias*’ ‘*Domini*’ ‘*In aeternum*’ ‘*Cantabo*’ (I will sing of the mercies of the Lord for ever) from Psalm 88:2. With only one known, the right-hand scrolls are more elusive. The second scroll reads ‘*Apud eum*’. Perhaps this

was part of Psalm 129:7, familiar from the Vespers of the Dead (the *Placebo*), ‘*et copiosa apud eum redemptio* (and with him plentiful redemption)’ but this does not include a fourth scroll. Both of these suggested scroll inscriptions invoking God’s mercy and forgiveness were fitting for a tomb seeking prayers for the soul of the deceased.

At the foot of Thornbury’s effigy there is a twelve-line Latin verse epitaph (**Fig. 4**). The accompanying translation does not attempt to scan or rhyme:

*Hic iacet electus Willelm[us] Thornbury tectus
Marmore deiectus heu mortis vi [quo]q[ue] rectus.
Ap[ri]lis deno luce cessit ab hac q[ue] kalendas
Anno milleno quatuor cent bis quat[er] addas
X, istis binis vicenis rexit et annis
Eccl[es]iam, simul octo sedens hic corpore stannis.
Cui[us] nos a[n]i[m]e rogitem[us] cunctipotentem
Ut p[re]cibus n[ost]ris nu[n]c miserere velit.
Vermibus ut donor sic hic ostendere conor
Et sicut hic ponor ponit[ur] omnis honor.
Hinc tu qui transis magn[us] medius puer an sis
Pro me funde preces ut sit michi venie spes.*

(Here lies William Thornbury, elect and righteous, covered
By marble, felled, alas, by the power of death.
On the tenth of the kalends of April [23 March] he departed hence from the
light
In the year one thousand four hundred, twice four, add
Ten [i.e. 1480/1], to these, two times twenty years he ruled
The church, at the same time for eight years, sitting here bodily in [these]
stalls.
Let us now beseech the Almighty that by
our prayers He may be merciful on his soul.
Here I am given to worms, as here I attempt to show
And as I am laid here, so all honour is laid down.
You who pass by here, whether old, middle aged or a child
Offer prayers for me, that I may have hope of pardon.)

Written in hexameters with leonine (internal) rhymes in the first two lines, line 5 and lines 9 to 12, it is a curious mixture of stock phrases and impenetrable Latin.⁵⁷ Most of it is made up of standard components, the deceased’s date of death, meditations on death and requests for prayers. The opening two lines are a variation on a common theme, the deceased lies beneath the gravestone, overcome by death. However, the description of Thornbury as ‘*electus*’ is noteworthy as this is usually only found in the inscriptions of bishops and abbots who (in theory) were chosen by their communities. This use of *electus* is theological, to mean



Fig. 4 The Latin verse epitaph at the foot of William Thornbury's brass. (Photo © author.)

chosen for salvation. It was probably used because it rhymed with *tectus*. The demands of meter and rhyme also determined the rather convoluted wording of the year of his death, 1480/1, 'the year one thousand four hundred twice four add ten'. Lines 5 and 6 are, as we have seen, problematic. In line 5, in the 1877 translation, Thornbury is said to have been vicar for twenty-two years and spent a further eight years as an anchorite. As discussed earlier, these time periods are difficult to reconcile with what is known of Thornbury's life. It is possible that '*binis*' in line 5 is being used to mean twice rather than two, that he was vicar ('ruled this church') for forty years. Thornbury died roughly forty years after his appointment to Faversham in c.1441, but this interpretation is not consistent with his resignation in 1476. The allusion in line 6 of the 1877 translation to Thornbury becoming an anchorite seems to be a mistranslation of *stannis* as cells, an interpretation that is discussed at greater length below.

The last six lines of the epitaph are requests for prayers for the soul of the deceased – the primary function of a medieval monument – and a meditation on death. Lines 9 and 10 are standard phrases that are found on other inscriptions, with a minor variation; instead of 'placed' (*ponor*) for worms, Thornbury is 'given' (*donor*) to them.⁵⁸ These lines are often found alongside images of shrouds. The final two lines, requesting the prayers of passers-by, were also widely used in inscriptions. Epitaphs such as Thornbury's were increasingly popular in the fifteenth century,

especially among clergy, and were intended to display status as much as the canopies, pinnacles and coats of arms that decorated their monuments.⁵⁹ Elaborate rhymes demonstrated their learning and skill in writing Latin verse. A delight in leonine rhymes and ingenious ways of writing the year of death are particular features of these clerical epitaphs. The generally high standard of the Latin of Thornbury's epitaph raises the question of who wrote it. Was it Thornbury himself? As a non-graduate he may not have had the necessary Latin skills to write polished verse. On the other hand, his limited skill in writing Latin verse would explain the reliance on stock phrases in places. The lack of clarity in lines 5 and 6 may be due to another less skilled author completing the epitaph after his death.

Thornbury's brass presents him as a successful beneficed cleric with the trappings of worldly and ecclesiastical status: cope, almuce, Latin verse epitaph and coat of arms. The prominence of these badges of status does not suggest that he had renounced them for the austerity of an anchorite's life, a life enclosed in a small one or two-roomed cell devoted to prayer, meditation, reading and silence, one lived frugally without material comforts.⁶⁰ How then were anchorites commemorated? This is difficult to establish as very few of their monuments are known. The lack of surviving anchorite monuments is partly because some were buried in their cells, in all probability without any lasting monument. Skeletons have been found in several anchorite cells – a female skeleton was discovered in the cell attached to St Anne's church, Lewes (Sussex) – and anchorite wills confirm this practice.⁶¹ Simon Appulby (d.1537), a London anchorite at All Hallows on the Wall, requested burial 'within the tombe alreedy set and made in the ankerage'.⁶² Graves were dug in the cells of some anchorites as an aid to contemplation in which they were ultimately buried and rites of enclosure, such as that found in the pontifical of Archbishop Chichele (1413-43), included these graves in the ceremony of inclusion.⁶³

The handful of surviving monuments to anchorites or hermits that can be identified with any degree of certainty are modest or plain.⁶⁴ The earliest – a small incised slab now in Lincoln Cathedral – commemorates Joan Levirs, a Gilbertine anchoress, and dates from c.1400-20.⁶⁵ A small brass plate dating from c.1500 at Wellingham (Norfolk) commemorates a hermit, Thomas Leek (**Fig. 5**). Both memorials are small – 535 x 875mm and 57 x 177mm respectively – and consist only of brief



Fig. 5 The monumental brass of Thomas Leek (c.1500) at Wellingham (Norfolk). (Lack, Stuchfield and Whittemore, *Monumental Brasses of Norfolk* (forthcoming).)

inscriptions. The former reads ‘*Hic iacet ioh[ann]a levirs | anachorita ordi[ni]s s[an]cti | gilb[er]ti cuius a[n]i[m]e p[ro]piciet[ur] d[eu]s | ihesu merci* (Here lies Joanna Levirs, anchoress of the order of St Gilbert, on whose soul may God have mercy. Ihesu merci)’ and the latter ‘*Hic iacet enim Thomas Leeke Heremita* (Here indeed lies Thomas Leeke, hermit)’.⁶⁶ The mid fifteenth-century brass at Swithland (Leics.) commemorating Agnes Scot – perhaps a female hermit rather than an enclosed anchorite – is something of an exception in that it is a large monument that includes an effigy (Fig. 6).⁶⁷ Agnes is portrayed wearing a long, flowing gown with a veil on her head. Even so, her monument has no visual marks of worldly status. As the inscription makes clear, the brass is as much a commemoration of her patron, Lady Ferrers, as it is of Agnes and its scale probably reflects the wishes of her noble benefactor.

William Thornbury’s brass contrasts strongly not only with what might be termed ‘standard’ anchorite monuments – those of Joan Levirs and Thomas Leek – but also the more elaborate brass of Agnes Scot. It is also strikingly different from the monuments of those secular clergy who chose to be commemorated humbly, the type of commemoration that might be thought fitting for someone who has renounced the world for a life of asceticism and contemplation. John Chaundler (d.1432), rector of Brasted, asked for a marble slab costing 40s. with one word, *OBLIVIO* carved on it.⁶⁸ William Talbot (d. 1498), a canon of Southwell (Notts.), is commemorated there with a small slab incised with a scroll reading ‘*Hic iacet Willelmus Talbot miser et indignus sacerdos expectans resurrectionem mortuorum sub signis thau* (Here lies William Talbot wretched and unworthy priest awaiting the resurrection of the dead under the sign of the tau)’. Other late fifteenth-century Kent clergy of similar social and ecclesiastical status to Thornbury have modest monuments. Both Thomas Fogge (d.1502), the son of Sir John Fogge, at Cheriton and John Tubney (d.1457), archdeacon of St Asaph, at Southfleet where he was rector, were commemorated with small ‘off the peg’ brasses. Fogge’s effigy measures a modest 356 x 114mm and Tubney’s half-effigy 305 x 191mm.

Thornbury the anchorite?

The essence of the anonymous author’s claim that Thornbury became an anchorite is an allusion in the sixth line of his epitaph which, in the translation he used, reads ‘Years eight in cells hard by his limbs he rested. (... *simul octo sedens hic corpore stannis.*)’. The 1877 author argues that this is a reference to Thornbury’s chapel and parvise in Faversham churchyard, the ‘cells’ in which the former vicar was enclosed. However, as has been suggested, this translation is doubtful. The anonymous author relied on a fellow Kent antiquary, Thomas Godfrey-Faussett, to translate the epitaph. His translation of the word ‘*stannis*’ in line 6 as ‘cells’ is at the heart of the anonymous author’s argument. Godfrey-Faussett cited Du Cange as his authority that ‘*stannum*’ could be translated as ‘cell’ but a search of *stannum* and *scannum* (of which *stannum* is a variant) in Du Cange’s *Glossarium mediae et infimae Latinitatis* does not list this meaning.⁶⁹ A search of the *Dictionary of Medieval Latin from British Sources* is equally fruitless.⁷⁰ The latter gives five translations of *stannum/scannum*: bench (for sitting) or chair; counter or market stall; platform or dais; support for a cripple; and an embankment. The use of the



Fig. 6 The mid fifteenth-century monumental brass of Agnes Scot at Swithland (Leics.).
(Photo © Martin Stuchfield.)

plural ‘*stannis*’, cells rather than cell, in the epitaph presents another difficulty. If it was intended to refer to an anchorite’s dwelling it would be in the singular.⁷¹

There are other problems with Godfrey-Faussett’s translation. While *sedere* can be used metaphorically to mean remain or abide in a place, its principal meaning ‘to sit’ is to be preferred in this context as it is being used in conjunction with furniture. The translation of *hic* as ‘hard by’ rather than ‘here’ is also difficult to justify and seems to be a forced allusion to the alleged cells in the churchyard. The most accurate translation of ‘*stannis*’ in Thornbury’s epitaph is church seating, either pews or stalls. Even with this translation the line – ‘at the same time for eight years sitting here bodily in [these] pews/stalls’ – remains hard to understand. It may be a reference to Thornbury’s retirement, that he is no longer vicar but sits in the pews with the congregation – there was certainly seating for the congregation in the church by 1496 – but this does not explain the reference to eight years.⁷² Another possible explanation is that it refers to new choir stalls which had been made eight years earlier but there is no evidence of this. Without Godfrey-Faussett’s translation of ‘*stannis*’ as ‘cells’, the anonymous author’s claim is hard to sustain.

To support the claim the anonymous author presents four other pieces of evidence: Thornbury’s grant of his property to feoffees in 1472; his resignation of the vicarage of Faversham in 1476; the reference to his chapel and parvise in the churchyard; and the presence of an anchorite cell there. All are at best circumstantial and insufficient to claim that Thornbury himself was enclosed. Grants of property by beneficed clergy to feoffees – often, as in Thornbury’s case, to establish an obit or a chantry – were frequent and widespread and cannot be regarded as evidence of preparation for inclusion. Both his brothers had made similar grants, John in 1448 and Richard in 1449; indeed, he acted as feoffee of both.⁷³ Though the resignation of a benefice towards the end of a clerical career was less common than granting property to feoffees, this was still standard practice. Thornbury, who owned several properties in Faversham and came from a gentry family, could afford the loss of income caused by his resignation of the vicarage, especially as he seems to have retained the vicarage of Chislet. His grant to feoffees and resignation are more likely to indicate advancing age or declining health rather than inclusion.

William Thornbury’s stipulation in his last will that his feoffees were to maintain ‘his chapel and parvise in the churchyard (*capella sua et p[ar]vis[us] sui in angl[u] o cimit[er]ii paroch[ianis] ib[ide]m situat[us]*)’ is not sufficient evidence to say that he was enclosed in it.⁷⁴ The parvise was probably a porch, though sometimes *parvisus* is used to mean a chamber or parlour.⁷⁵ Anchorites’ cells, however, were usually referred to using a range of specialist terms: *domus anachoristae*, *anchoragium*, *inclusarium* and *recluserium*.⁷⁶ Anchorites were usually enclosed in cells rather than chapels, though priest-anchorites either had an altar in their cell or access to one in the church to which they were attached. It is possible that there was an anchorite’s cell attached to the Faversham chapel but there is no evidence of this. The reference to ‘his’ chapel in Thornbury’s last will suggests that he built it or had substantially refurbished it rather than that he was enclosed in it. It was probably one of the two chapels recorded in the churchyard in 1512, a chapel of Our Lady on the south side and a chapel of the Trinity and Our Lady on the north side.⁷⁷ Chapels in medieval churchyards were not unusual and are recorded in other places such as Bodmin, Chester, Reculver and Sherborne.⁷⁸

Horsham (Sussex), like Faversham, a town with a single parish, also had two.⁷⁹ It was sometimes easier to build a separate chapel in the churchyard than to extend the church. Such chapels were used for a variety of purposes: those at Higham Ferrers (Northants.) and St Mary's chapel in St John's Precinct, Chester, were used as schools, and St Anne's chapel in the same churchyard, was a fraternity chapel.⁸⁰ The two Faversham chapels had liturgical functions in 1512 and are unlikely to have been used as a cell for an anchorite at that date.⁸¹

As the anonymous author's pioneering work shows, there was a strong anchoritic tradition at Faversham.⁸² There was an anchorite for much of Thornbury's time as vicar, from at least 1465. The cell was on the north side of the churchyard, probably abutting on to the church, and was perhaps large enough for a servant.⁸³ The anchoritic tradition at Faversham remained strong and well-supported until the Reformation; parishioners regularly made bequests to the anchorite in their wills.⁸⁴ But in asserting that William Thornbury was himself enclosed the author goes further than the evidence justifies. Thornbury was certainly a patron of the local anchorite. The arrangements he made for his obit in 1480 included payments of '4*d.* to the anchorite and 2*d.* to his servant'. It is unlikely that he was referring to himself in this provision. If he had been enclosed in 1476 there would have been two anchorites in Faversham churchyard in the late 1470s, Thornbury himself and the anchorite he included in his obit.

Finally, in assessing the case for Thornbury's inclusion it is helpful to set out what is known about other beneficed clergy who became anchorites. Although many priests became anchorites most of them were either unbeneficed or regulars (either monks or friars) seeking a more austere solitary life. Few beneficed clergy gave up their benefices to become anchorites.⁸⁵ The best documented is William Bolle, rector of Aldington (Sussex). In 1402 he resigned his rectory and was enclosed on the north side of Chichester Cathedral. His cell was comparatively roomy, 26 x 29ft and had access to the Lady Chapel so that he could say mass there.⁸⁶ By the time Bolle was enclosed the process of inclusion had come under episcopal supervision and required the consent of the bishop as well as the patron and incumbent of the church concerned. Episcopal oversight, set out in William Lyndwood's *Provinciale* (an authoritative mid-fifteenth century compilation of canon law), focused on three elements: the character and fitness of the candidate for inclusion; the provision of a suitable cell; and the provision of sufficient financial support.⁸⁷ Once episcopal consent had been given, a rite of enclosure was performed at the end of which the door of the anchorite's cell was blocked up. Bolle's inclusion is recorded in the bishop of Chichester's register, but such proceedings – which were usually delegated to diocesan officials – are poorly recorded. Even so, there is no record in the register of Archbishop Bourghier (1454-86) of any commission to assess Thornbury's suitability for inclusion or any suggestion that he resigned Faversham in order to be enclosed. What little evidence there is of Thornbury's final years suggests that far from turning away from the world he remained very much engaged with it. In 1480 he pursued John Bonaunter, a chaplain from Reculver, and Reginald Norman, a husbandman from Harbledown, in the court of common pleas for a debt of £20.⁸⁸

CONCLUSION

The anonymous author's contention that William Thornbury resigned the vicarage of Faversham and spent his final years as an anchorite in his chapel in Faversham churchyard, though widely repeated, cannot be upheld. It is perhaps significant that earlier antiquaries did not come to this conclusion. John Lewis (d.1747), who in his history of Faversham abbey and church drew attention to 'the fashion of those superstitious times', made no mention of the epitaph but did comment, with some disdain, on the scroll above his head, '... the modish way of expressing this Article [of the Creed], to countenance the new Notion of the Infallible Authority of the clergy'.⁸⁹ And Rotha Mary Clay, the doyenne of anchorite scholars, was circumspect, noting that 'the meaning of his epitaph is obscure' but she did conclude that 'it seems probable' that he became an anchorite.⁹⁰ The author's claim is based on a mistranslation of his epitaph. Thomas Godfrey-Faussett's translation of '*stannis/scamnis*' as cells is not supported by the authority he cites, Du Cange. His translation seems to have been unduly influenced by the supporting evidence presented by the anonymous author. Even taken together none of this evidence can be regarded as sufficient to show that Thornbury himself was enclosed. His brass does not reflect the life of withdrawal, asceticism and contemplation sought by anchorites. Rather, William Thornbury was the figure he is portrayed as on his brass, a successful beneficed cleric, conscious of his armigerous status and ecclesiastical rank. His piety, as reflected in the scrolls on his brass and the provisions he made for his soul, was orthodox and typical. It articulates the widespread late medieval anxiety about death, judgement and purgatory and the fervent desire that the faithful would indeed 'Offer prayers for me, that I may have hope of pardon'.

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ENDNOTES

- ¹ Anon, 1877, 'Anchorites in Faversham Churchyard', *Archaeologia Cantiana*, XI, 24-39.
- ² Warren, 1985, *Anchorites and their Patrons in Medieval England* (Berkeley), pp. 259-60, 267; M.M. Sauer, 2016, 'Extra-temporal Place Attachment and Adaptive Reuse: The Afterlives of Medieval Anchorholds', in *Studies in Medievalism* 25, pp. 173-190, at 185.
- ³ C. Rawcliffe, 1992, 'Thornbury, Sir Philip (d. 1457), of Little Munden and Bygrave, Herts.', in *The House of Commons 1384-1421*, ed. J.S. Roskell, 4 vols (Stroud), IV, p. 591.
- ⁴ Maidstone, Kent History Centre, PRC 17/5 ff. 73v-74r.
- ⁵ *CPR, 1446-52*, p. 364.
- ⁶ D.I. Grummitt, 2020, 'Thornbury, John (d. 1473), of Ospringe and Faversham, Kent', in *The House of Commons 1422-61*, ed. L. Clark, 7 vols (Cambridge), VII, pp. 47-9.
- ⁷ TNA, CP 40/705 accessed on 5 April 2021 through the Anglo-American Legal Tradition website (front no. 583) http://aalt.law.uh.edu/AALT1/H6/CP40no705/aCP40no705fronts/IMG_0583.htm.
- ⁸ At his death John Thornbury held land in Syndon in the parish of Ospringe and in Harty on the Isle of Sheppey and an inn in Faversham (TNA, PROB 11/6/202). Both Richard and William Thornbury held property in Faversham (PRC 17/3 f. 494; PRC 17/5 ff. 73v-74r).

- 9 Grummitt, 'Thornbury, John', pp. 47-9, on which this and the next paragraph are largely based.
- 10 CP 40/705 accessed on 5 April 2021 through the Anglo-American Legal Tradition website (front no. 714) http://aalt.law.uh.edu/AALT1/H6/CP40no705/aCP40no705fronts/IMG_0714.htm.
- 11 D.G.C. Elwes and C.J. Robinson, 1876, *A History of the Castles, Mansions and Manors in Western Sussex* (London), p. 284; J.R. Scott, 1876, *Memorials of the Family of Scott of Scot's-Hall in the County of Kent* (London), pp. 142-3.
- 12 *CPR, 1436-41*, pp. 161, 164; *IQPM*, vol. 20, nos 345-8.
- 13 *CPR, 1436-41*, p. 266.
- 14 A.F. Pollard, rev. E.L. O'Brien, 'Waller, Richard (c. 1395-c. 1462)', ODNB online edn, ref: [odnb/28560](https://www.oxforddnb.com/entry/odnb/28560) accessed 2 February 2021; M. Mercer, 1999, 'Lancastrian Loyalty in Kent during the Wars of the Roses', *Archaeologia Cantiana*, cxix, 221-43 at 224-9.
- 15 TNA, CP 25/1/293/70 no. 268.
- 16 *CCR, 1441-7*, p. 450.
- 17 *CPR, 1446-52*, p. 364.
- 18 G.L. Harriss, 1989, *Cardinal Beaufort, A Study in Lancastrian Ascendancy and Decline* (Oxford), p. 362; *Forty-Eighth Report of the Deputy Keeper of the Public Records* (London, 1887), p. 379.
- 19 *Pardon Rolls of Edward IV and Henry VI 1468-71*, ed. H. Kleineke (List and Index Society, vol. 360 (2019)), no. 1316.
- 20 *CPR, 1436-41*, p. 161.
- 21 M. Mercer, 'Kent and National Politics, 1437-1534: The Royal Affinity and A County Elite', unpubl. Ph.D. thesis, University of London, 1994, pp. 103-4.
- 22 *Dictionary of British Arms: Medieval Ordinary*, eds D.H.B. Chesshyre, T. Woodcock, J. Grant, I. Graham, S. Flowers and T. Chalmers, 4 vols (London, 1992-2015), II, p. 55.
- 23 E. Jacob, 1774, *The History of the Town and Port of Faversham in the County of Kent* (London), p. 49, pl. 10; *Dictionary of British Arms: Medieval Ordinary*, eds Chesshyre *et al.*, III, p. 262.
- 24 PRC 17/5 ff. 73v-74r.
- 25 CP 25/1/115/309 no. 382.
- 26 *CPL, 1431-47*, 235. There is no record of Thornbury's institution to Faversham but he was probably appointed a few months earlier. His predecessor, John Brampton, probably died in 1441 as his last known benefice was vacant by October 1441 (A.B. Emden, *A Biographical Register of the University of Oxford*, 3 vols (Oxford, 1957-9), I, p. 248).
- 27 CP 40/705 accessed on 5 April 2021 through the Anglo-American Legal Tradition website (dorse n. 1339) http://aalt.law.uh.edu/AALT1/H6/CP40no705/bCP40no705dorses/IMG_1339.htm.
- 28 *CPL, 1431-47*, p. 334.
- 29 London, Lambeth Palace Library [LPL], Reg. Stafford, f. 111v.
- 30 *CPL, 1431-47*, pp. 334, 362.
- 31 Reg. Stafford, f. 89v.
- 32 LPL, Reg. Kempe, f. 326r.
- 33 A new vicar was appointed on the death of his predecessor on 27 March 1481 (*Registrum Thome Bourgchier Cantuariensis Archiepiscopi, A.D. 1454-86*, ed. F.R.H. Du Boulay, Canterbury and York Society 54 (1957), p. 347).
- 34 *Valor Ecclesiasticus Temp. Henry VIII: Auctoritate Regia Institutus*, eds J. Caley and J. Hunter, 6 vols (London, 1810-34), I, pp. 69, 35.
- 35 *Valor Ecclesiasticus*, I, pp. 44, 79, 43.
- 36 P. Heath, *English Parish Clergy on the Eve of the Reformation* (London, 1969), p. 173.
- 37 C. Dyer, 1989, *Standards of Living in the Later Middle Ages: Social Change in England c. 1200-1520* (Cambridge), pp. 31-2.
- 38 Reg. Stafford, f. 89v.
- 39 Reg. Kempe, f. 326r. His will refers to 'his chamber at Boxlee' (PROB 11/6/202).
- 40 *Reg. Bourgchier*, ed. Du Boulay, p. 279.
- 41 *CPL, 1447-55*, p. 141.

⁴² *Royal Commission on Historical Manuscripts, Sixth Report*, 2 vols (London, 1877-8), I, pp. 509-10.

⁴³ PROB 11/6/202.

⁴⁴ In the 1420s there was a succession of five brief tenures, the longest lasting three years (*The Register of Henry Chichele, Archbishop of Canterbury*, ed. E.F. Jacob, 4 vols, Canterbury and York Society 42, 45-7 (1937-47), I, pp. 199-200, 205-7, 230, 252).

⁴⁵ *Royal Commission on Historical Manuscripts, Sixth Report*, I, p. 510.

⁴⁶ PRC 17/3 f. 494.

⁴⁷ PRC 17/1 f. 96r.

⁴⁸ *Royal Commission on Historical Manuscripts, Sixth Report*, I, p. 510.

⁴⁹ TNA CP 25/1/115/317 no. 584.

⁵⁰ Canterbury, Canterbury Cathedral Archives, DCc-ChAnt/W/216.

⁵¹ This is based on the assumption that he was ordained priest (for which the minimum age was 24) around the time he became vicar of Faversham.

⁵² There was a succession of workshops active in London which have been identified on stylistic grounds and given letters of the alphabet to distinguish them.

⁵³ Jacobs, *Town and Port of Faversham*, p. 46; F.F. Giraud and C.E. Donne, 1876, *The Visitor's Guide to Faversham* (Faversham), pp. 54-5.

⁵⁴ N.E. Saul, 2009, *English Church Monuments in the Middle Ages: History and Representation* (Oxford), pp. 154-62.

⁵⁵ It is also possible that he may have held a canonry in a Kent collegiate church such as Wingham or Wye as full lists of their canons have yet to be established.

⁵⁶ *CPL, 1417-31*, pp. 384-5.

⁵⁷ For a discussion of medieval inscriptions see J. Bertram, *Icon and Epigraphy: The Meaning of European Brasses and Slabs*, 2 vols (s.l., 2014).

⁵⁸ Bertram, *Icon and Epigraphy*, I, pp. 116-20.

⁵⁹ Saul, *English Church Monuments*, pp. 347-65.

⁶⁰ *Hermits and Anchorites in England, 1200-1550*, ed. E.A. Jones (Manchester, 2019), pp. 66-8, 73-8.

⁶¹ R. Gilchrist and B. Sloane, 2005, *Requiem: The Medieval Monastic Cemetery in Britain* (London), p. 131.

⁶² M.C. Erler, 1998, 'A London Anchorite, Simon Appulby: His Fruyte of Redempcyon and its Milieu', *Viator*, 29, pp. 227-39, at 239.

⁶³ E.A. Jones, 2012, 'Rites of Enclosure: The English "Ordines" For the Enclosing of Anchorites S. XII – S. XVI', *Traditio*, 67, pp. 145-243, at 151, 160-3, 199-205. The practice is also found in some twelfth-century rites.

⁶⁴ A twelfth- or early thirteenth-century inscription on an arch now in the churchyard of St John sub Castro, Lewes, is thought to commemorate Magnus, a Danish prince-anchorite.

⁶⁵ N.J. Rogers, 2008, 'Portfolio of Small Plates', *Transactions of the Monumental Brass Society*, 17:6, pp. 607-8.

⁶⁶ W. Lack, H.M. Stuchfield and P. Whittemore, *The Monumental Brasses of Norfolk* (forthcoming).

⁶⁷ K. Wilson-Lee, 2009, 'A Fifteenth-Century Brass at Swithland and the Commemoration of Female Religious in Late-Medieval England', *Transactions of the Monumental Brass Society*, 18:1, pp. 25-35.

⁶⁸ *Register of Henry Chichele*, ed. Jacob, II, pp. 450-1.

⁶⁹ ducange.enc.sorbonne.fr.

⁷⁰ *Dictionary of Medieval Latin from British Sources*, prep. R.E. Latham, 17 vols (London: 1975-2013), Available online at <https://logeion.uchicago.edu/lexidium>

⁷¹ The author is grateful to Stephen Freeth for this suggestion.

⁷² A. Hussey, 1907, *Testamenta Cantiana, A Series of Extracts from Fifteenth and Sixteenth Century Wills Relating to Church Building and Topography, East Kent* (London), p. 121.

⁷³ *CCR, 1447-54*, pp. 62, 133.

⁷⁴ PRC 17/3 f. 494.

⁷⁵ *Dictionary of Medieval Latin from British Sources*, prep. Latham, s.n. parvisus.

⁷⁶ The cell in the churchyard of St Leonard's, Exeter, was referred to as a *cubiculo* in 1447 (*The Register of Edmund Lacy, Bishop of Exeter, 1420-1455*, ed. G.R. Dunstan, 5 vols (Canterbury and York Society, 60-3, 66 1963-72), II, p. 395).

⁷⁷ Hussey, *Testamenta Cantiana East Kent*, pp. 127-8.

⁷⁸ N.I. Orme, 1996, 'Church and Chapel in Medieval England', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, sixth series, 6, pp. 75-102 at 87, 92. An archaeological investigation of the churchyard in 2007 found evidence of walls and possibly some vaults ('Archaeological Evaluation, Excavation and Watching Brief at the Church of St Mary of Charity, Faversham, Kent', unpubl. report by the Swale and Thames Archaeological Survey Company, 2007, ref SKE 18023).

⁷⁹ *Transcripts of Sussex Wills*, ed. R.G. Rice and W.H. Godfrey, 4 vols, Sussex Record Society, 41-3, 45 (1935-41), II, p. 345.

⁸⁰ VCH *Cheshire*, V part 2, pp. 156-9.

⁸¹ The chapel on the south side of the churchyard was used for burials and bequests to both chapels suggest mass was regularly celebrated in them (Hussey, *Testamenta Cantiana East Kent*, pp. 127-8).

⁸² A much fuller list of benefactions to the Faversham anchorites can be found in Hussey, *Testamenta Cantiana East Kent*, pp. 128-9.

⁸³ There were regular bequests to the servant of the anchorite (Hussey, *Testamenta Cantiana East Kent*, pp. 128-9). Not all servants of anchorites lived with them.

⁸⁴ Hussey, *Testamenta Cantiana East Kent*, pp. 128-9; Warren, *Anchorites and their Patrons*, pp. 258-60.

⁸⁵ Those seeking a more contemplative life had alternatives to becoming an anchorite such as entering a religious house.

⁸⁶ Warren, *Anchorites and their Patrons*, pp. 64-5.

⁸⁷ Warren, *Anchorites and their Patrons*, pp. 89-91; *Hermits and Anchorites in England*, ed. Jones, chapter 1.

⁸⁸ CP 40/871 accessed on 5 April 2021 through the Anglo-American Legal Tradition website (front no. 886) http://aalt.law.uh.edu/AALT3/E4/CP40no871/aCP40no871fronts/IMG_0886.htm.

⁸⁹ J. Lewis, 1727, *The History and Antiquities of the Abbey and Church of Favresham in Kent* (London), pp. 66-9, 73.

⁹⁰ R.M. Clay, 1914, *The Hermits and Anchorites of England* (London), p. 115.