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# Ritual, Patronage and Commemoration: The Late Medieval Church at Wensley, North Yorkshire

**Eleanor Warren**

The church of Holy Trinity in the village of Wensley is situated on the north bank of the River Ure, which runs through the valley of Wensleydale in North Yorkshire. The river valleys of the Yorkshire Dales form natural corridors of communication that offered trans-Pennine routes between settlements in the Roman period, if not earlier.<sup>1</sup> The village itself does not now reflect the scale of activity that it once saw in the medieval period, but its church provides more than a few clues. What is immediately striking is its size, in comparison with the small unassuming village in which it sits. This suggests that the church was once supported by great wealth and patronage. Underlying the compartmentalised periodical history are themes which suggest a long-standing continuity of importance within the landscape, which transcends conventional historical boundaries, such as the Norman Conquest, or the end of the Latin rite in the sixteenth century.<sup>2</sup>

There is evidence for a church at Wensley since the Anglo-Saxon period, with rich patrons and a likely monastic function; therefore, the current church occupies a site that has been a focus of ritual and settlement for many centuries.<sup>3</sup> The focus of this paper is on how, having inherited such a site, the community and patrons of the later medieval church expressed their own piety, patronage and power, both ritual and secular. There is a wealth of surviving late medieval features and fittings at Holy Trinity which illuminate the history of the church and its

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<sup>1</sup> Robert White, 'A Pennine Gap? The Roman Period in the North Yorkshire Dales', in *Recent Research in Roman Yorkshire: Studies in Honour of Mary Kitson Clark*, ed. by J. Price and P. R. Wilson, BAR British Series, 193 (Oxford: Archaeopress, 1988), pp. 197-217 (p. 197); James Lang, *Corpus of Anglo-Saxon Stone Sculpture*, 7 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984-2008), VI (2001), p. 5. Richard Bradley discusses how the major valleys and their rivers were likely systems of communication and sites of activity in the prehistoric period, in *The Prehistory of Britain and Ireland* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 16.

<sup>2</sup> Frank Harrison has suggested in his classic work that the end of the Latin rite marks the close of the medieval period, because English music was so intimately bound up with ritual tradition. Frank L. Harrison, *Music in Medieval Britain* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1958), p. xiii.

<sup>3</sup> Wensley has a series of high status Anglian stone carvings dating from the eighth, ninth and tenth centuries, indicating a monastic site with potentially royal patrons. W. G. Collingwood, 'Anglian and Anglo-Danish Sculpture in the North Riding of Yorkshire', *Yorkshire Archaeological Journal*, 19 (1907), 267-413 (pp. 407-08); Lang, *Corpus*, VI, pp. 221-27.

place within the local community.<sup>4</sup> Many of these features are connected to Wensley's late medieval patrons, the Scropes of Bolton, and represent the most explicit late medieval forms of commemoration.

### **The Medieval Church and Parish of Wensley**

The parish of Wensley was situated within the Archdeaconry of Richmond, which had been formed in c. 1088 by Thomas of Bayeux, Archbishop of York, and which covered the western parts of Yorkshire, Lancashire and Westmorland.<sup>5</sup> The parish contained the townships of Bolton, Leyburn, Preston-under-Scar, Redmire and Wensley, spreading across 14,000 acres of varied landscape.<sup>6</sup> At the Domesday survey in 1086 there were two berewicks in Wensley: one on the south side of the River Ure and one on the north side. These two separate holdings followed different lines of descent.<sup>7</sup> There is no church at Wensley mentioned in Domesday but in the early thirteenth century the advowson of the church at Wensley was given to Crowland Abbey, Lincolnshire. The gift is attributed to Osbert, son of Nigel, who held four knight's fees of the honour of Richmond and appears to have held a moiety of Wensley church.<sup>8</sup> However, the advowson was disputed by Wimar, son of Warner, who held the other moiety and claimed that he had presented the last rector. Wensley was isolated from the main estate of Crowland and was vulnerable to alienation and inconvenient to administer. In such circumstances therefore, the church was returned to Osbert's son, Roger de Ingoldsby, in 1256, in exchange for lands in

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<sup>4</sup> Paul Everson and David Stocker have suggested that considering the context and treatment of a church after the sixteenth-century Reformation and the survival of a wealth of medieval artefacts and features helps us to better understand the medieval significance of the church. Paul Everson and David Stocker, *Custodians of Continuity? The Premonstratensian Abbey at Barlings and the Landscape of Ritual*, Lincolnshire Archaeology and Heritage Reports Series No. 11 (Sleaford: Heritage Trust of Lincolnshire, 2011), p. 10.

<sup>5</sup> The Archdeaconry of Richmond had also originally included Cumberland, but in 1127 Cumberland was removed to found the See of Carlisle. H. B. McCall, *Richmondshire Churches* (London: Stock, 1910), p. xxiii.

<sup>6</sup> The landscape of the parish ranged in height from 1,800 feet in the north to 350 feet near to the River Ure. William Page, ed., *The Victoria History of the Counties of England: A History of Yorkshire North Riding*, 2 vols (London: University of London, 1914; repr. 1968), I, p. 268.

<sup>7</sup> Ann Williams and G. H. Martin, eds, *Domesday Book: A Complete Translation* (London: Penguin, 2003), p. 816; Stephen Moorhouse, 'Anatomy of the Yorkshire Dales: Decoding the Medieval Landscape', in *The Archaeology of Yorkshire: An Assessment at the Beginning of the 21st Century*, ed. by T. G. Manby, Stephen Moorhouse and Patrick Ottaway, YAS Occasional Paper, 3 (Leeds: YAS, 2003), pp. 293-362 (pp. 301-02); Page, *Victoria History: North Riding*, I, p. 270.

<sup>8</sup> In 1231 the abbot of Crowland claimed he held the advowson by the gift of Osbert.

Ingoldsby, Lincolnshire, nearer to Crowland Abbey.<sup>9</sup> The Ingoldsbys continued to hold half a knight's fee in Wensley and the advowson of the church into the late thirteenth century, with the other half fee being held by Nicholas de Wensley, until the whole of Wensley, as a unified township, including the church, passed to the Scrope family in the early fourteenth century.<sup>10</sup>

Wensley was granted a market charter in 1202, and thereafter became an important market town. From 1307, when James de Wensley obtained a licence, there was a market on Wednesdays and an annual fair on the eve, feast and morrow of Holy Trinity, demonstrating the significance of the church's dedication feast to the economy and life of the village and parish.<sup>11</sup> The importance of Wensley within the local landscape only began to decline in the seventeenth century after Leyburn, just a mile and a half away, was granted its own market charter. This displaced the markets at both Middleham and Wensley, eventually transforming Wensley into the quiet village it is today.<sup>12</sup> The village of Wensley is now part of the parish of Preston-under-Scar cum Wensley and the church of Holy Trinity is no longer used for regular worship.<sup>13</sup>

The oldest parts of the current church date from the mid-thirteenth century, and the developments of the church fabric in this period reflect great investment. The south wall of the thirteenth-century chancel survives much as it was built in c. 1245, with three single lancet windows: the western of these windows is divided by a transom to form a low-side window, the eastern one is now blocked up, whilst the middle of the three may have also had a low-side window, but has subsequently been altered to make way for a door in the post-medieval period. The east window of the chancel has five lights divided by mullions, dated to around 1250, and is an unusual example of 'plate' tracery in the north.<sup>14</sup>

The current north wall of the chancel was rebuilt on the old foundations in the fifteenth century, with a vestry and priest's lodging added on that side. The chancel is therefore the same

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<sup>9</sup> Charles Travis Clay, ed., *Early Yorkshire Charters*, 12 vols, Yorkshire Archaeological Society Record Series (1914-65), V (1936), pp. 24, 256-58; Sandra Raban, *The Estates of Thorney and Crowland: A Study in Medieval Monastic Land Tenure* (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Department of Land Economy, 1977), pp. 35, 57-58, 94; C. W. Foster, ed., *Final Concords of the County of Lincoln*, Lincoln Record Society, 17 (1920), p. 125.

<sup>10</sup> Page, *Victoria History: North Riding*, I, p. 270.

<sup>11</sup> Page, *Victoria History: North Riding*, I, p. 268.

<sup>12</sup> Robert White, *The Yorkshire Dales: A Landscape through Time* (Ilkley: Great Northern Books, 2002), p. 68; Ella Pontefract, *Wensleydale* (London: Dent, 1936), p. 194.

<sup>13</sup> The church at Wensley is currently under the care of the Churches Conservation Trust.

<sup>14</sup> McCall, *Richmondshire Churches*, pp. 159-61.

size now as it was in the thirteenth century and is almost as big as the nave of the church.<sup>15</sup> The current nave has dimensions that closely resemble those of pre-Conquest churches, and it is probable that it occupies the position of the earlier church that must have existed. The size of the chancel may be the result of the thirteenth century desire for spacious chancels, but it is possible that the chancel occupies the site of a second Anglo-Saxon church.<sup>16</sup> The sedilia on the south chancel wall are elaborately carved with dog-tooth design, displaying the wealth of craftsmanship at work in the church (Figure 1). There is adequate space here for a number of priests and the work to the chancel suggests the patronage of a significant rector.<sup>17</sup> Despite the isolation in distance of Wensley from Crowland Abbey, some of the building work on the chancel must have been planned and executed during the period when Wensley was in the hands of the abbey.



Figure 1: Thirteenth-Century Sedilia. Photograph by the author.

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<sup>15</sup> Page, *Victoria History: North Riding*, I, p. 276; McCall, *Richmondshire Churches*, pp. 159-60.

<sup>16</sup> McCall, *Richmondshire Churches*, pp. 159, 161; Page, *Victoria History: North Riding*, I, p. 275. As demonstrated at Jarrow, early monastic sites could have at least two churches, sometimes on the same axis. Rosemary Cramp, *Wearmouth and Jarrow Monastic Sites*, 2 vols (Swindon: English Heritage, 2005-06), I (2005), pp. 352-54. There is also evidence at Wensley for fuller development of the site than currently exists. In 1915 some north-south foundations made of heavy roughly dressed stones were found in the churchyard. It was suggested at the time of discovery that they were the foundations of an Anglo-Saxon church, or they could be the foundations of buildings in the monastic complex. Anonymous, *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of London*, 2nd series, 28 (1915-16), 228-30 (p. 228).

<sup>17</sup> Everson and Stocker have identified an occurrence of enhancement to chancels in the East Midlands in the 1330s all undertaken by notable rectors. Everson and Stocker, *Custodians of Continuity?*, p. 337.

The next phase of building work at the church coincides with the transfer of the manor and church of Wensley to the Scrope family. The aisles, of three bays on either side, were added to the nave around the turn of the fourteenth century. This necessitated the demolition of the earlier church, although it is likely that the pier arcades were built upon the old foundations. The north door is the main entrance to the church, being on the side of the village, but this is not its only unusual feature. The size and grandeur of the door is something that would not look out of place in an abbey or monastic church: it is flanked by nook shafts carrying large circular capitals and a pointed arch. The north porch is later than the aisle, featuring the coat of arms of Scrope (azure a bend or) over the exterior doorway, and truncates part of the elaborate north door. The chancel walls were raised in the fifteenth century with a new low-pitched roof added, and at a similar time the buttresses were raised and adorned with armorial shields. The tower arch indicates the presence of a western tower at the end of the thirteenth century, but the tower and west ends of the aisles were reconstructed into their present state in the eighteenth century.<sup>18</sup>

### **Death, Judgement and the Individual**

In the later Middle Ages changes in attitudes towards death, with a move towards the individual need for intercession, created new expressions of patronage and commemoration, and these changes can be seen at Wensley. Two surviving grave-slabs indicate the changes taking place in the commemoration of Wensley's community. In the north of England the use of grave slabs extended further down the social scale and became common for non-elite members of society. This was partly due to the availability of locally quarried stone and village masons, making them much cheaper to produce.<sup>19</sup> The thirteenth century seems to have been the period when this form of monument was most popular, before the growth in the use of other forms such as effigies and brasses. The first of Wensley's grave slabs, now positioned inside the church against the west wall near to the north door, can be dated between 1250 and 1300 due to its bracelet derivative cross head form with clustered trefoil terminals. This sort of slab was the type of memorial most commonly used by priests, poorer knights and some more well-off villagers. The cross represents

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<sup>18</sup> Page, *Victoria History: North Riding*, I, pp. 276-77; McCall, *Richmondshire Churches*, pp. 161-63, 165. The buttress shields are described below.

<sup>19</sup> Peter Ryder, *The Medieval Cross Slab Grave Cover in County Durham* (Durham: Architectural and Archaeological Society of Durham and Northumberland, 1985), pp. 6-7.

Christ and the Crucifixion, but also the individual Christian life, and a move towards individual judgement in death.<sup>20</sup>

The second slab (Figure 2), currently resting against the outside of the south wall, is also likely to date from the second half of the thirteenth century, although it represents a different type of design. The slab is broken but seemingly had no cross design, and instead bears engravings of a sword and a square, usually interpreted as a book. This slab style with emblems signifies a move away from complete anonymity in death for the non-elite, especially in northern regions where inscription remained elusive. The sword emblem does not necessarily represent that the deceased was a knight, but it is a symbol of rank and certainly represents a male burial.<sup>21</sup> However, the combination of a sword and a book, which is usually the symbol of a priest, is interesting. Such a combination has been found on a number of slabs in County Durham, but the symbolism is unknown. Peter Ryder has suggested that the majority of emblems used on grave slabs are found in the Book of Revelation. In the case of the sword it appears in Revelation as the sword of divine retribution and judgement, therefore as well as symbolising rank it holds a religious meaning particularly significant for a sepulchral monument.<sup>22</sup> The emblems on the Wensley slab may therefore indicate that the individual was from an educated, upper-stratum of society, and was also perhaps a priest.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Ryder, *Medieval Cross Slab*, pp. 9, 11, 16; L. A. S. Butler, 'Medieval Cross-Slabs in Nottinghamshire', *Transactions of the Thoroton Society of Nottinghamshire*, 56 (1952), 25-40 (p. 25); L. A. S. Butler, 'Symbols on Medieval Memorials', *Archaeological Journal*, 144 (1987), 246-55 (p. 250).

<sup>21</sup> Ryder, *Medieval Cross Slab*, pp. 18, 20; L. A. S. Butler, 'Minor Medieval Monumental Sculpture in the East Midlands', *Archaeological Journal*, 121 (1964), 111-53 (p. 140); Butler, 'Symbols on Medieval Memorials', p. 250.

<sup>22</sup> Ryder, *Medieval Cross Slab*, pp. 17, 31; Butler, 'Symbols on Medieval Memorials', p. 250; Revelation 1. 16, 2. 12, 2. 16, 19. 15.

<sup>23</sup> There are examples of Wensley's later medieval rectors being from the local landowning families, see below.



Figure 2: Thirteenth-Century Grave Slab, with sword and book emblems. Photograph by the author.

The remnants of a fourteenth-century wall painting at Wensley on the north aisle wall, displaying the lower part of the Three Living and the Three Dead, also indicates more general changes in the expression of parochial piety. This scene usually shows three kings hunting on foot in a forest, all finely dressed and with the trappings of wealth. As they hunt they encounter three walking skeletons, often depicted on contrasting landscapes. Such paintings were part of the changing imagery of reminders of death, judgement and the afterlife. In the fourteenth century Doomsday began to dominate the walls of churches, as attitudes focused more on individual salvation, with death and judgement inescapable irrespective of rank and privilege.<sup>24</sup>

The patronage of Wensley's paintings was a means of proof of the patron's virtuous piety and social ambition, and was inseparable from fears of purgatory and judgement. But wall paintings' meanings could be social as well as specific. They were part of the parish's inherited tradition, giving identity and memory to the parish and its patrons, and embracing the generations of people who viewed them. At Wensley in particular this seems to be the case, as we have the survival of something quite special. Wensley's Three Living and Three Dead scene displays the first known textual inscription in vernacular English: '[AS] WE A[RE] NOVE

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<sup>24</sup> Roger Rosewell, *Medieval Wall Paintings in English and Welsh Churches* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2008), pp. 24, 81-82, 303.



[THUS] SAL THE BE [B] WAR WYT ME'. This is evidence of Wensley's patrons communicating the message of the painting to the ordinary parishioners, and thus connecting the whole community in its expression of piety, fear and judgement.<sup>25</sup> From its early fourteenth-century date it is probable that the patron of this painting was a member of the Scrope family, who had acquired the land and church of Wensley by this time.

### **Patronage and Lordship: The Scropes of Bolton**

The Scropes were significant lay patrons who used the church to express their piety, status, lineage and power. Their presence is explicit both outside and inside the church, through armorial shields and inscriptions. There were two branches of the Scrope family, those of Masham and those of Bolton. They had established considerable landed estates in the North Riding of Yorkshire by 1400 and had become successful in major political and administrative positions. Both branches of the family descended from Sir William Scrope (c. 1259-1312) of Bolton in Wensleydale, located five miles north-west of Wensley. Henry Scrope (c. 1312-92), William's grandson, was first Lord Scrope of Masham, whilst another grandson, Richard Scrope (c. 1337-1403), became first Lord Scrope of Bolton. It is the Scropes of Bolton with whom the church of Wensley is connected. Richard Scrope, first Lord of Bolton, was a prominent statesman, concerned for his status and standing within society. He was Chancellor of England at the time when he obtained a licence to crenellate his manor house at Bolton.<sup>26</sup> The castle's appearance and position gave a great impression of strength, situated to dominate much of Wensleydale. However, there is no moat or ditch, and the castle was intended to serve both a military and domestic function, as a symbol of the family's status and power rather than as a citadel.<sup>27</sup> The rise of the Scropes to prominence through their careers in the fourteenth century has tended to obscure the fact that well before 1300 the Scropes were an established family

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<sup>25</sup> 'As we are now thus shall thee be beware with me'. Rosewell, *Medieval Wall Paintings*, pp. 23, 99, 207-09, 303.

<sup>26</sup> Brigitte Vale, 'Scrope, Richard, first Baron Scrope of Bolton (c. 1327-1403), soldier and administrator', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* <[www.oxforddnb.com](http://www.oxforddnb.com)> [accessed 4 November 2013]; Brigitte Vale, 'Scrope, Sir Geoffrey (d. 1340), justice and administrator', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* <[www.oxforddnb.com](http://www.oxforddnb.com)> [accessed 4 November 2013]; James Tait, rev. by Nigel Ramsay, 'Scrope, Sir Henry (b. in or before 1268, d. 1336), justice', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* <[www.oxforddnb.com](http://www.oxforddnb.com)> [accessed 4 November 2013]; Page, *Victoria History: North Riding, I*, p. 272.

<sup>27</sup> White, *The Yorkshire Dales*, p. 54.

belonging to the knightly stratum of society and by the first half of the thirteenth century they had acquired land in the manor of Wensley. It was Henry Scrope, son of William Scrope, who ultimately acquired the remainder of the manor of Wensley from the de Wensley's, through a series of mortgages.<sup>28</sup>

Just as Bolton Castle was designed to be a demonstration of secular strength and power, the Scopes of Bolton used the church at Wensley as a demonstration of their religious piety, patronage and status within the parish. The church of St Oswald in Bolton was built in c. 1325 and was dependent upon the church at Wensley, having only the rights of baptism and not burial. At Bolton Castle itself the Scopes could benefit from private forms of piety and commemoration within the chapel of St Anne, where a licence was granted to found a chantry with six chaplains in 1393.<sup>29</sup> But it was at Wensley that the Scopes could make their patronage explicit for all to see, and for Richard, first Lord Scrope, this proved valuable to the security of the family's lineage and status. In 1385 he initiated a lawsuit against Sir Robert Grosvenor over the right of the arms of the Scopes, azure a bend or. The action lasted for five years, during which time 246 witnesses, many of them dukes, earls, lords and knights, testified to support Scrope's case, demonstrating the respect with which Scrope was held within landowning society.<sup>30</sup> The church of Wensley and the testimony of its rector Simon de Wensley were significant to the case, and furthermore, de Wensley's testimony provides us with evidence of the extent of the patronage of the Scopes at Wensley in the fourteenth century, of which there is now little surviving architectural evidence. His account states that there were numerous windows in the church which once bore the arms of Scrope, including both the west and east windows. De Wensley added that the patronage of the church had always been vested in Sir Richard Scrope and his ancestors, indicating the extent to which the Scopes had appropriated the church for their own commemoration.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Brigette Vale, 'The Profits of the Law and the "Rise" of the Scopes: Henry Scrope (d. 1336) and Geoffrey Scrope (d. 1340), Chief Justices to Edward II and Edward III', in *Profit, Piety and the Professions in Later Medieval England*, ed. by Michael Hicks (Gloucester: Sutton, 1990), pp. 91-102 (pp. 92, 99).

<sup>29</sup> Page, *Victoria History: North Riding*, I, pp. 278-79.

<sup>30</sup> Vale, 'Scrope, Richard, first Baron Scrope of Bolton' [accessed 4 November 2013]; Philip Morgan, 'Grosvenor, Sir Robert (d. 1396)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* <oxforddnb.com> [accessed 4 November 2013].

<sup>31</sup> The testimony is given in McCall, *Richmondshire Churches*, pp. 173-74.

Simon de Wensley's role as a valuable witness in the Scrope versus Grosvenor case also demonstrates that he himself was a man of eminence in both character and position: he was likely a member of the de Wensley family, who held the fee of Wensley in the late thirteenth century.<sup>32</sup> Furthermore, Simon de Wensley is commemorated in Wensley church with one of the most conspicuous examples of a rector's own expression of piety and memorialisation: a monumental brass effigy which lies in the chancel next to the altar. The identification of the brass comes from the will of Oswald Dykes, who requested to be buried 'under the stone where Sir Symond Wenslow was buried', and whose own brass inscription lies above the effigy.<sup>33</sup> Simon de Wensley was rector between 1361 and 1395, but, from the character of design and workmanship it has been suggested that the brass dates to no later than 1375. The brass has been identified as of the Flemish school and is of very fine quality.<sup>34</sup> From the thirteenth century onwards it became common for the wealthy to seek commemoration in the form of effigies of themselves, which were often constructed before the death of the individual.<sup>35</sup> The effigy of Simon de Wensley represents him in living form dressed in his mass vestments with his hands crossed and pointing down as if in humility. A chalice rests upon his chest and his feet upon two small dogs. The effigial tomb acted as a memorial and as evocation of the presence of the individual during intercessory ritual, but also to remind the living of the impermanence and fragility of life and the need to prepare for death.<sup>36</sup>

Oswald Dykes' desire to be buried before the altar next to his celebrated predecessor is not unusual, and nor is the appropriation of the earlier grave; burial within the church was popular as it enabled the daily solicitation of prayers, and therefore space was at a premium, especially in the most prominent places such as the chancel and the doorway.<sup>37</sup> However,

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<sup>32</sup> McCall, *Richmondshire Churches*, pp. 172-73, 179.

<sup>33</sup> James Raine, 'Notice of a Remarkable Sepulchral Brass of Flemish Design, in the Church of Wensley, Yorkshire', *Archaeological Journal*, 12 (1855), 238-44 (p. 238).

<sup>34</sup> A. H. Thompson, ed., 'The Registers of the Archdeaconry of Richmond, 1361-1442', *Yorkshire Archaeological Journal*, 25 (1920), 129-268 (pp. 168, 194); McCall, *Richmondshire Churches*, pp. 170, 172.

<sup>35</sup> Simon Roffey, *The Medieval Chantry Chapel: An Archaeology* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2007), pp. 104-05.

<sup>36</sup> Roffey, *Medieval Chantry Chapel*, p. 105.

<sup>37</sup> Raine, 'Notice of a Sepulchral Brass', p. 239. On the significance of burial location within churches see: Roberta Gilchrist and Barney Sloane, *Requiem: The Medieval Monastic Cemetery in Britain* (London: Museum of London Archaeological Service, 2005), p. 219; Nicholas Rogers, 'Hic Iacet...: The Location of Monuments in Late Medieval Parish Churches', in *The Parish in Late Medieval England*:

Oswald Dykes was rector of Wensley between 1588 and 1607, two hundred years after Simon de Wensley and a generation after the Reformation.<sup>38</sup> It is significant therefore that even for some decades after the Protestant Reformation, which swept aside ideas of purgatory, intercession and sacred ‘space’, such traditions and desires about burial continued at Wensley. Dykes’ request suggests an embedded social memory concerning the significance of Simon de Wensley to the church’s history, and the parish’s perception of continuity with this history and its ritual religious traditions.

Simon de Wensley’s successor in 1395, John Tibbay, was also a prominent ecclesiastic with a close relationship to his lord and patron Richard, first Lord Scrope of Bolton. Tibbay was a canon of York, Southwell and Lincoln, suggesting he may also have been a lawyer and administrator, and indicating he was likely from a similar social standing as the Lord of Bolton himself.<sup>39</sup> Tibbay was executor to Lord Scrope’s will in 1400, a role which indicates a significant level of trust between the two men, and he was also bequeathed a number of silver vessels, including a goblet engraved with the arms of Scrope.<sup>40</sup> In his will Richard Scrope also bequeathed forty pounds for the mending of the bridge over the Ure at Wensley. Part of Wensley’s current bridge is fifteenth century, and is probably that built using Scrope’s bequest.<sup>41</sup> The repair or building of bridges was part of the good works often provided for by testators. As well as being a practical aid to the community, bridges were symbolic of the Christian life and could be invested with much meaning, such as Christ’s journey into Jerusalem or the crossing of the River Jordan. This rebuilding would have been perceived as a significant act within the parish and it is important to recognise that these two facets of the bridge, the ritual symbolism and the mundane infrastructure, are inextricably linked. The symbolic significance of the river crossing displayed here by Richard Scrope may also have been an active preservation of ritual

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Proceedings of the 2002 Harlaxton Symposium, ed. by Clive Burgess and Eamon Duffy (Donington: Tyas, 2006), pp. 261-82.

<sup>38</sup> McCall, *Richmondshire Churches*, pp. 183-84.

<sup>39</sup> McCall, *Richmondshire Churches*, pp. 180-81. Tibbay held in plurality with the rectory of Wensley the prebends of South Muskham in Southwell Minster, Botevant in York Minster from 1407 and Clifton in Lincoln Cathedral from 1410. York’s prebends were the most valuable in England, with an average of forty-eight pounds in 1291, and York’s canons were therefore amongst the country’s wealthiest and most prominent ecclesiastics. Many of York’s canons were university educated canon lawyers, involved in the highest levels of church and state.

<sup>40</sup> *Testamenta Eboracensia: A Selection of Wills from the Registry at York*, Surtees Society, 4 (1836), pp. 277-78.

<sup>41</sup> *Testamenta Eboracensia*, 4 (1836), p. 274; White, *The Yorkshire Dales*, p. 62.

continuity, remembering the foundation of the early church on this site next to the river crossing, itself perhaps recalling the focus of pre-Christian ritual.<sup>42</sup>

Such acts of physical patronage were accompanied by other good works, including the provision of chantries, which funded priests who assisted the parish at no cost to the community, and were part of a system of reciprocity that existed between church patrons and the rest of the parish.<sup>43</sup> In 1398 Richard Scrope founded a chantry of Our Lady, for which he gave the manor of Brompton-upon-Swale to the Premonstratensian Abbey of St Agatha's at Easby, to provide and pay a chantry priest to serve at the chantry within Wensley church.<sup>44</sup> Chantries were part of the move towards the personalisation of intercession in the later medieval period and, like building works and other donations made by the more wealthy members of society, they were designed to solicit prayers from the rest of the parish. This integration of the benefactor's name into the liturgy was more effective at perpetuating memory than any physical reminder.<sup>45</sup> Chantries were therefore the culmination of the ritual importance of memorials to the dead of which Wensley had been a focus since at least the Anglo-Saxon period.

In addition to his chantry and other bequests of money, in March 1399 Richard Scrope acquired a licence to turn Wensley church into a college for one master or warden, a chaplain

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<sup>42</sup> The location of the church at Wensley is characteristic of early Anglo-Saxon monastic sites, being close to two water supplies, the River Ure and Wensley Brook. The church stands close to the later medieval bridge over the river, an important crossing point in this part of the dale. River crossings were often places of ritual significance in the pre-Christian period and were 'converted' in the Christian era, with early churches founded nearby. The ritual significance of the crossing thus became as a symbolic path representing the rites of passage. The location of the church at Wensley, therefore, suggests the purposeful inheritance and potential continuity of ritual place. Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England c. 1400-1580* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), p. 367. Stocker and Everson have demonstrated that in the Witham valley the success of the church in the seventh century was in its concern to appropriate and 'convert' indigenous structures and ideologies, such as the causeways and crossings, with different churches and monasteries taking 'custody' and 'supervisory responsibility' of them in the later middle ages. David Stocker and Paul Everson, 'The Straight and the Narrow Way: Fenland Causeways and the Conversion of the Landscape in the Witham Valley, Lincolnshire', in *The Cross Goes North: Processes of Conversion in Northern Europe, AD 300-1300*, ed. by Martin Carver (Woodbridge: York Medieval Press, 2003), pp. 271–88 (pp. 281, 283-84); Everson and Stocker, *Custodians of Continuity?*, pp. 8, 319.

<sup>43</sup> Clive Burgess, "'Longing to be Prayed for": Death and Commemoration in an English Parish in the Later Middle Ages', in *The Place of the Dead: Death and Remembrance in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, ed. by Bruce Gordon and Peter Marshall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 44-65 (p. 57).

<sup>44</sup> *The Certificates of the Commissioners Appointed to Survey the Chantries, Guilds, Hospitals, Etc., in the County of York*, Surtees Society, 91 (1892), p. 104. See below for the connection between the Scropes and Easby Abbey.

<sup>45</sup> Duffy, *Stripping of the Altars*, p. 329.

and as many fellows, which were to be secular canons, and other ministers as seemed expedient. In his will he bequeathed the remainder of his goods to the master and his associates of the College of Holy Trinity. The college was to provide a chaplain for the chapel of St Anne in Bolton Castle and for St Oswald's church.<sup>46</sup> However, the establishment of the college does not appear to have taken place immediately. In 1420 Richard Scrope, the third Lord Scrope of Bolton, made a request in his will that his executors were to obtain a licence to found a college 'in such a place as [his] executors think best [...] in honour of the Annunciation of Our Lady'.<sup>47</sup> It is probable that the third Lord Scrope was reviving the idea of the college proposed by his grandfather, and therefore that this first proposal never saw fruition. It also appears that, if this was the case, the second proposal for a college was unsuccessfully completed. The chantry certificates made in 1546 make no mention of Wensley being a collegiate church; the only chantry recorded in the church is that founded by Richard Scrope in September 1398.<sup>48</sup> Nevertheless, the idea of founding a college shows the extent of patronage and appropriation of the church at Wensley by Richard Scrope, and would have transformed the function of the church entirely, with the community of the new college most likely being held to daily celebrate mass and the canonical hours. Such a foundation served multiple purposes: it was an explicit expression of Scrope's wealth and status, as well as of his personal piety; it was a facility for extracting prayers, ensuring increased daily masses and intensifying the daily worship of God.

The fourteenth-century testimony of Simon de Wensley mentions that several members of the Scopes were buried at Wensley, including Sir William Scrope, the grandfather of Richard, first Lord Scrope of Bolton.<sup>49</sup> William's burial at Wensley demonstrates his identification with Wensley as his parish church, recognising the ritual significance of the site as a place of burial and commemoration, and through him the Scopes of Bolton inherited the manor and church of Wensley. The testimony also refers to 'several others of [their] lineage and name [...] buried there, one after another, under large square stones'.<sup>50</sup> Wensley continued to be

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<sup>46</sup> The Certificates of the Commissioners Appointed to Survey the Chantries, Guilds, Hospitals, Etc., in the County of York, Surtees Society, 92 (1893), p. 559; Testamenta Eboracensia, 4 (1836), p. 278; McCall, Richmondshire Churches, p. 177.

<sup>47</sup> Testamenta Eboracensia: A Selection of Wills from the Registry at York, Surtees Society, 53 (1868), pp. 1-2.

<sup>48</sup> Certificates of the Commissioners, 91 (1892), p. 104; Thompson, 'The Registers of the Archdeaconry of Richmond', pp. 203-04.

<sup>49</sup> Testimony of Simon de Wensley, in McCall, Richmondshire Churches, p. 173.

<sup>50</sup> McCall, Richmondshire Churches, p. 173.

the burial place of Scrope family members, as the gravestone now set in the wall of the north aisle testifies. This stone commemorates Henry and Richard Scrope, the younger sons of Henry, seventh Lord Scrope, who both died unmarried in 1525.<sup>51</sup> However, the Scropes of Bolton were also patrons of St Agatha's Abbey at Easby: Sir Henry Scrope, son of Sir William Scrope and father of Richard Scrope, first Lord Scrope of Bolton, was so great a benefactor of the abbey, purchasing the patronage of it along with other lands in 1333 from the descendant of its twelfth-century founder, that he was subsequently styled as the abbey's founder.<sup>52</sup> Henry's patronage of the abbey created a connection between Easby and Wensley which ultimately benefitted both the family and the church at Wensley. He established a chantry in 1333, paying St Agatha's Abbey two hundred pounds to provide a canon to say mass daily for himself and his family in Wensley church.<sup>53</sup> This chantry does not feature among the records of certificates made when the chantries were dissolved during the Reformation, but it may have been superseded by the chantry provided by Richard Scrope in 1398, which was also to be provided by St Agatha's with a priest. Following Henry Scrope's 're-foundation' of St Agatha's, the lords of Bolton were buried with regularity at Easby rather than at Wensley. Henry himself was buried at Easby in 1336, whilst Richard, first Lord, Roger, second Lord and Richard, third lord Scrope, all requested to be buried there.<sup>54</sup>

Nevertheless, the Scropes' concern for their lineage and status is reflected in continued acts of patronage towards the church at Wensley. Significant architectural changes were made in the fifteenth century which reflected a pattern of recovery from the economic and social

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<sup>51</sup> McCall, *Richmondshire Churches*, p. 174.

<sup>52</sup> McCall, *Richmondshire Churches*, pp. 166-67; Tait, rev. by Ramsay, 'Scrope, Sir Henry' [accessed 4 November 2013]; John W. Clay, ed., *Yorkshire Monasteries: Suppression Papers*, Yorkshire Archaeological Society Record Series, 48 (1912), pp. 17, 99.

<sup>53</sup> Easby was a Premonstratensian abbey, which, being staffed by regular canons who were ordained priests, rather than monks, had an outward-looking commitment and responsibility to the communities of the locality. Vale, 'The Profits of Law', p. 93; Everson and Stocker, *Custodians of Continuity?*, pp. xix, 331.

<sup>54</sup> See the wills of Richard and Roger Scrope, *Testamenta Eboracensia*, 4 (1836), pp. 272-74, 328-39; will of Richard Scrope, *Testamenta Eboracensia*, 53 (1868), p. 1. John, the abbot of St Agatha at the time of the Scrope and Grosvenor controversy, gave evidence concerning some tombs then in the abbey church belonging to Scrope members. See W. H. St John Hope, 'On the Præmonstratensian Abbey of St Agatha juxta Richmond', *Yorkshire Archaeological Journal*, 10 (1889), 117-58 (pp. 123-24); McCall, *Richmondshire Churches*, pp. 166-67; Tait, rev. by Ramsay, 'Scrope, Sir Henry' [accessed 4 November 2013]; Vale, 'The Profits of Law', p. 98.

upheavals of the previous century by wealthy individuals and families flaunting their piety.<sup>55</sup> Generous patrons assisted the parishioners greatly in their duty to maintain the nave of the church.<sup>56</sup> Heraldic devices demonstrate which works can be attributed to the Scropes: the raising of the aisle buttresses and chancel roof. The lower parts of the buttresses appear to be contemporary with the fourteenth-century aisle walls, but the upper parts have niches under ogee arches each containing a coat of arms of the families tied to the Scropes by marriage. Beginning at the north-west angle and working eastwards along the north side of the church, these shields are: a fesse between three leopards' faces for De la Pole; a chief and three chevrons embraced in a base for Fitzhugh (Figure 3); a bend charged with a label of three points for Scrope of Masham (Figure 4); a saltire for Neville; three water bougets for Ros (Figure 5); a saltire charged with a label of three points, impaling three fusils, conjoined in fesse, for Neville of Raby and Montague (Figure 6); a saltire for Neville; three water bougets for Ros; a bend for Scrope; a fesse between three roses. This last shield has not been identified, but the shield has been renewed and it is probable that the original device was a fesse between three leopards' faces for De la Pole. Blanche, daughter of Sir William de la Pole, was the wife of Richard, first Lord Scrope. The Fitzhugh shield is for Joan Fitzhugh who married John, fifth Lord Scrope of Bolton in 1447, but the arms for Henry Scrope's marriage to Elizabeth Percy in 1480 do not appear, thus providing a date of about 1470 for the raising of the buttresses and this adornment.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Rosewell, *Medieval Wall Paintings*, p. 25.

<sup>56</sup> L. A. S. Butler, 'Documentary Evidence and the Church Fabric', in *The Archaeological Study of Churches*, ed. by Peter Addyman and Richard Morris, CBA Research Report, 13 (London: Council for British Archaeology, 1976), pp. 18-21 (p. 20); Burgess, "'Longing to be Prayed for'", p. 53.

<sup>57</sup> Page, *Victoria History: North Riding, I*, p. 277; McCall, *Richmondshire Churches*, pp. 163-64.





Figure 3: (left) Fitzhugh. Photograph by the author



Figure 4: (right) Scrope of Masham. Photograph by the author.



Figure 5: (left) Ros. Photograph by the author.



Figure 6: (right) Neville of Raby. Photograph by the author.

The close connection between the Scropes and the rectors of Wensley continued into the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. In 1447 Richard Scrope, the younger son of the third Lord Scrope of Bolton, became rector of Wensley. He was later Chancellor of Cambridge University and Bishop of Carlisle, acquiring a licence to simultaneously maintain hold of the rectory of

Wensley, vacating all positions by his death in 1468.<sup>58</sup> Such a relationship between lord and rector, and perhaps the importance placed by the Scropes upon their lineage, led one rector, Henry Richardson, to include the arms of Scrope upon his own provision to the church. The surviving chancel stalls were the provision of Richardson, rector from 1524 until at least 1535, with whose name they are carved, and dated 1527. They are also elaborately decorated with carved beasts and the arms of the Scrope and Tiptoft families (Figure 7).<sup>59</sup>



Figure 7: Chancel stalls with quartered shield of Scrope and Tiptoft and dragon carving. Photograph by the author.

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<sup>58</sup> McCall, *Richmondshire Churches*, p. 182; Henry Summerson, 'Scrope, Richard (c. 1419-1468, bishop of Carlisle)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* <[www.oxforddnb.com](http://www.oxforddnb.com)> [accessed 4 November 2013].

<sup>59</sup> The eight animals are suggested to be the following: a wyvern, a bear, a leopard, a lion, a dragon, a unicorn, a hare and a hound, collared and chained. McCall, *Richmondshire Churches*, p. 165. The connection between the Scropes and Tiptofts is described below.

The patronage, status and prominence of several of Wensley's rectors in the later Middle Ages is a reflection of the value of the benefice itself. In the 1291 taxation record of Pope Nicholas IV, the church at Wensley is valued at £46 13s. 4d., and in the 1535 Valor Ecclesiasticus this had increased to £51 14s. 8d.<sup>60</sup> The 1291 figures are useful in giving an insight into whether the rectors were well placed to undertake the ambitious rebuilding of their chancel, which in the case of Wensley both the taxation figures and the church itself show that they were.<sup>61</sup>

Throughout the later Middle Ages the Scropes benefitted from being patrons of both St Agatha's and Holy Trinity. However, such explicit expressions of patronage at Wensley indicate that the church there was a significant part of the Scropes' ritual identity, and that they recognised the significance of the church as the parochial centre of their estate. Ultimately, this ritual attachment was sufficiently strong for Wensley to continue as the focus of worship and commemoration for the lords of Bolton even after the canons and abbey of Easby had been suppressed.<sup>62</sup>

### **Dissolution and Preservation**

At the dissolution of St Agatha's Abbey in 1536 the role of Wensley church changed again, as Wensleydale became involved in an important series of events concerning the state of traditional religion.<sup>63</sup> The abbeys of Easby and Coverham were among the first to be dissolved, both having an income of less than two hundred pounds, and much support for rebellion was recruited from the areas of their estates.<sup>64</sup> The commons planned to bring on side the region's gentry, and so made a visit to the leading figure in Wensleydale, Lord John Scrope of Bolton. However, John

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<sup>60</sup> T. Astle, S. Ayscough and J. Caley, eds, *Taxatio ecclesiastica angliae et walliae auctoritate P. Nicholai IV circa A.D. 1291* (London: [n. pub.], 1802), p. 327; McCall, *Richmondshire Churches*, p. 182.

<sup>61</sup> Butler, 'Documentary Evidence and the Church Fabric', p. 19.

<sup>62</sup> An interesting comparison can be made here with the relationship identified between another Premonstratensian abbey, that of Barlings in Lincolnshire, and the local parish church of St Edward's at Barlings village, which retained some parochial functions and survived as a place of popular worship, even after the parochial centre was removed to the abbey, and after Barlings Abbey was suppressed. See Everson and Stocker, *Custodians of Continuity?*, p. 359.

<sup>63</sup> In October 1536 discontent arose over the government's challenges to the old religion. In the north, monasteries were still playing an important role in providing alms and charity because people were living in poorer conditions. Geoffrey Moorhouse, *The Pilgrimage of Grace: The Rebellion that Shook Henry VIII's Throne* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 2002), pp. 33-34.

<sup>64</sup> M. L. Bush, 'The Richmondshire Uprising of October 1536 and the Pilgrimage of Grace', *Northern History*, 29 (1993), 64-98 (p. 72); Clay, *Yorkshire Monasteries*, pp. vi, 24.



was later brought into line by the king along with the rest of the northern gentry.<sup>65</sup> Wensleydale had become a centre of resistance to the Reformation, and Wensley appears as if a last refuge for the rituals of traditional religion at this time.



Figure 8: Screen-work displaying the arms of Scrope and Dacre (Scrope and Tiptoft quartered impaling Dacre). Photograph by the author.

In the north aisle of Wensley church there survives some fine medieval screen-work bearing the coats of arms of the Scropes and associated families, which must have belonged to a chantry, and is likely in the location of the chantry of Our Lady founded in 1398 by Richard Scrope. However, it has been said that this screen-work was brought from St Agatha's Abbey after the Dissolution.<sup>66</sup> Roger Dodsworth is cited as authority on the origin of the screen: in his account of the church from 1622 he records that there is 'the frame of a quyer of wood brought

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<sup>65</sup> Bush, 'Richmondshire Uprising', p. 90; Moorhouse, *Pilgrimage of Grace*, pp. 80, 126, 128, 242-43. Geoffrey Moorhouse wrongly identifies the Lord Scrope involved as Henry Scrope, the father of John Scrope, who died in 1533. McCall, *Richmondshire Churches*, p. 169; Page, *Victoria History: North Riding*, I, p. 271; Clay, *Yorkshire Monasteries*, p. 101.

<sup>66</sup> Page, *Victoria History: North Riding*, I, p. 277; McCall, *Richmondshire Churches*, p. 166; Nikolaus Pevsner, *The Buildings of England: Yorkshire, The North Riding* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1966), p. 382; Pontefract, Wensleydale, p. 192.

from St Aggas Monastery, as they say'.<sup>67</sup> This suggests that Dodsworth himself was repeating a tradition that had already developed, and may be based in some truth. John Scrope did acquire the lease of St Agatha's after its dissolution in December 1537 and therefore his accrediting with bringing the screen to Wensley is plausible.<sup>68</sup>

The panel shown in Figure 8 bears the coat of arms of Scrope and Tiptoft quarterly, impaling quarterly of six for Dacre: Dacre, Greystock, Greystock ancient, Boteler, Morville and Vaux. This commemorates the marriage of Henry, seventh Lord Scrope of Bolton, and his second wife Mabel Dacre, and is the last marriage chronologically shown on the screen. The running inscription and heraldry on the west side of the screen shows that it was indeed the provision of Henry Scrope, who died in 1533. The inscription records that 'Here lyeth Henry Scrope knight the VII of that nayme the IX Lorde of Bolton ande Mabell his wyefe doughter to the Lorde Dakers de Graystock'.<sup>69</sup> It is probable that Henry was buried at St Agatha's, as his predecessors of the title had been, and if this were the case then the screen would originally have been at Easby as well. It therefore would have made sense for it to be moved, after the dissolution of Easby, to Wensley, where the suppression of the Scrope chantries had not yet occurred.

The lower panel on the west face of the screen displays the following shields: Scrope and Tiptoft quartered and impaling Scrope of Masham (for Henry, fourth Lord Scrope of Bolton, and his wife Elizabeth, daughter of John, fourth Lord Scrope of Masham), Scrope and Tiptoft quartered in a garter (for John, fifth Lord Scrope of Bolton), Scrope and Tiptoft quartered, impaling Fitzhugh and Marmion (for John, fifth Lord Scrope of Bolton, and his wife Joan Fitzhugh, whose mother was Elizabeth Marmion of Tanfield), Scrope and Tiptoft quartered, impaling quarterly Percy and Lucy (for Henry, sixth Lord Scrope and Elizabeth Percy), and Scrope and Tiptoft impaling Dacre (for Henry, seventh Lord Scrope and his wife Mabel Dacre).<sup>70</sup> The quartering of the arms of Scrope and Tiptoft on these devices represents the marriage of Roger, second Lord Scrope of Bolton, and Margaret, daughter of Robert, third Lord

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<sup>67</sup> Roger Dodsworth: Yorkshire Church Notes 1619-1631, ed. by J. W. Clay, Yorkshire Archaeological Society Record Series, 34 (1904), p. 227.

<sup>68</sup> Clay, Yorkshire Monasteries, p. 101.

<sup>69</sup> McCall, Richmondshire Churches, pp. 167, 170.

<sup>70</sup> McCall, Richmondshire Churches, pp. 168-70; Page, Victoria History: North Riding, I, p. 277.



Tiptoft.<sup>71</sup> This union appears to have been perceived as significant enough to appear thereafter on all the other shields, although surprisingly the arms of Tiptoft (a saltire engrailed) do not appear among the buttress shields.

Figure 9: Possible Reliquary. Photograph by the author.

Also in the north aisle at Wensley is an unusual wooden chest or aumbry, which may have functioned as a reliquary with a poor box attached (Figure 9). It has been suggested that this was also brought from Easby at the Dissolution.<sup>72</sup> However, there seems to be no reason to suggest that the chest did not belong to Wensley all along, given the extent of high status patronage and ritual importance already present there.<sup>73</sup> Whether the screen and reliquary were rescued from Easby or belonged at Wensley all along, their survival through the Reformation signifies that Wensley somehow managed to avoid the loss of such items associated with Catholicism. The preservation of such furniture indicates a lingering ritual significance in the minds of the community. Wensley continued to be a place of importance within the changing landscape, transcending the usual historical boundaries, and perhaps assuming new significance and symbolic importance for its parishioners who were struggling to cope with great religious and social upheaval.

Following the dissolution of Easby Abbey, the Lords of Bolton continued to worship and be buried at Wensley, with the 'Easby' screen eventually converted into the Bolton family pew

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<sup>71</sup> McCall, *Richmondshire Churches*, pp. 168-69.

<sup>72</sup> Pontefract, *Wensleydale*, p. 193.

<sup>73</sup> McCall, *Richmondshire Churches*, p. 170.

and added to in the Jacobean period.<sup>74</sup> It is unusual in a parish church to find so many visual reminders of the important role it once played as a place of ritual worship, particularly those so intimately connected to ideas of purgatory, intercession and the cult of saints. This survival of evidence suggests the deliberate preservation and cherishing of this identity by the community. The patronage of such a devoted local family like the Scropes may have helped to maintain a sense of continuity within the landscape, which was dependent upon memory, custom, and the knowledge of Wensley's ritual past by each generation within the community.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> The Lords of Bolton continued to be buried at Wensley into the modern period. The vault was opened for the burial of Lord Bolton in 1895, a significant event because of the discovery of a fragment of Anglo-Saxon stone sculpture. McCall, *Richmondshire Churches*, pp. 159, 166, 170; Lang, *Corpus*, VI, p. 222.

<sup>75</sup> See Everson and Stocker, *Custodians of Continuity?*, pp. 5, 7.