



THE BLUNDEVILLE MONUMENT
AT
THE CHURCH OF ST MARY THE VIRGIN
NEWTON FLOTMAN



Ron Fiske. Morningthorpe ©

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By Ron Fiske.

Newton Flotman church is best known for its associations with the Blundeville family. They are said to have taken their name from Blunvill on the east coast of Normandy and, at the time of the domesday survey c1086, one of them, by the name of Richard, was a sub-tenant of Hubert de Monte Canisio who held lands under William the Conqueror in Norfolk, Suffolk and Essex. It was not until c1199 that Ralph de Blumville was termed 'of Newton Flotman' and the family continued to live in the village for the next four hundred years (1).

As lords of the manor of Newton they lived in a manor house, later called Newton Hall, and now a farmstead, which is about half a mile north-east of the church, to the east of the Norwich-Ipswich road, right on the borders of the River Tas (2).

For more visual reminders of the family it is best to first look up to the top of the church tower. Here on the often overlooked east battlements are three shields of impalements, denoting marriages, interspersed by four panels of text, the fourth being a letter M perhaps denoting the churches dedication to St. Mary. The Norfolk historian, Francis Blomefield saw the inscriptions c1740 but found them 'so high I could not read it.' Fortunately a self-styled 'Viator' found himself in the churchyard in 1861 and, having a telescope with him, made out the remnants of three panels as: -

The swete	aima ei'	patron'
Pascion of	ae.....	anno dom
ite crist	me ac...	ni 1531 (3)
Help us	Emme uxoris	

About a hundred years later Miss M. Sawbridge told Nicholas Pevsner 'that on the east side of the battlements, invisible from the ground [sic] is an inscription to Ralph Bloudeville with the date 1503 (4)' Both these statements cannot be supported

The first southernmost shield is badly worn but sufficient of it remains to show it is: *Quarterly per fess indented, a bendlet overall (BLUNDEVILLE), impaling: Per pale, on a fess wavy between three crosses paty, as many crescents (GODSALVE, Elizabeth Godsalve being the wife of Edward Blundeville (1499-1568).*

The second, centre shield is well cut, and is for Blundeville impaling a *Saltire engrailed* for an unknown Blundeville wife. No person who bears such arms are named in the published pedigrees but it is worth noting that the KERRISTON arms (*Gules a saltire engrailed Argent*) occur in three stained glass windows at

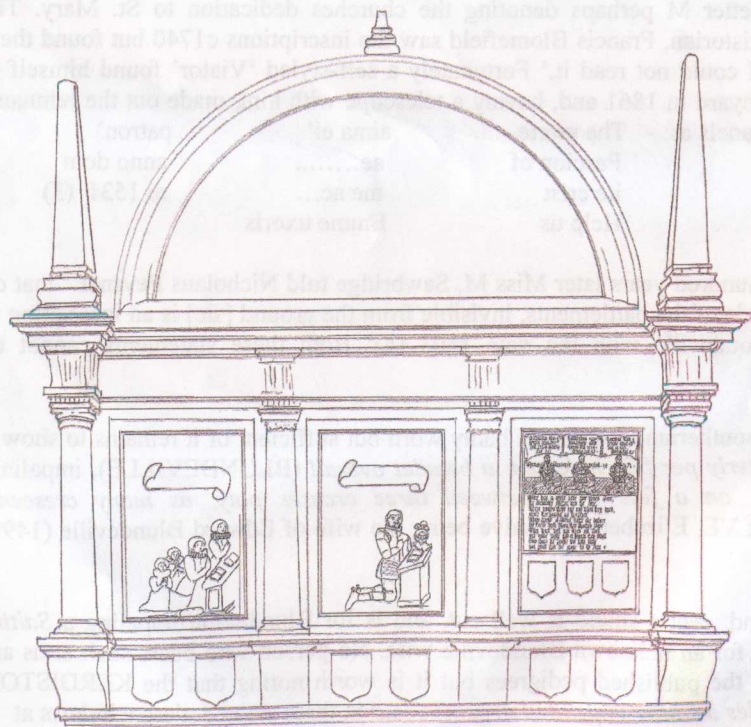
nearby Rainthorpe Hall. The last of the male Kerdestons was Sir Thomas Kerdeston who died in 1446 leaving a daughter, Elizabeth, who married Sir Terry Robsart. Thus, if a female Kerdeston married a Blundeville the marriage must have taken place before this date although the shield may, of course, be retrospective.

The third, northernmost shield is also well cut and features Blundeville impaling: *A cross engrailed debruised by a bendlet*. This probably represents the 'differenced' arms of a GURNEY (*Argent a cross engrailed Gules*), Constance Gurney of West Barsham having married Ralph Blundeville who died in 1514.



Blomefield also saw these shields. He recognised the Gurney impalement and mentions another bearing: *Five de-lises* but this appears to be a mistake.

Inside the church is the Blundeville monument situated in the chancel in the 'founder's place':-

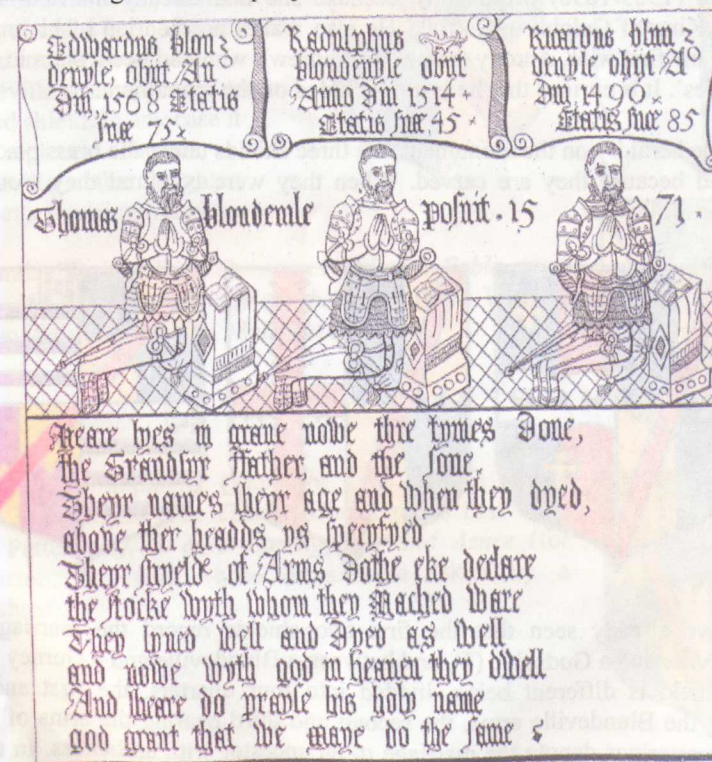


At one time it has highly coloured, the two outer columns being marbled before terminating in green painted square tapering pillars supporting the semi circular arch which featured a painting of Noah's Ark (5). One suspects that as the colouring decayed a decision was made to remove it and regrettably the sanding down removed virtually all of the painting, even including the six coloured arms at the bottom of the entablature. Only the incised impalement lines and traces of the sixth shield remain.

In the first (left as viewed) concaved compartment are the sculptured kneeling figures of two women and two young girls. Above them is a scroll which used to be lettered 'Rosa et Margareta uxores Thome Blundvile cum filijs suis Elizabetha et Patientia'

In the second, central concaved compartment is the figure of a man kneeling at a faldstool with his helm and a three plumed crest by his side. The scroll above him was formerly lettered 'Thomas Blundevile filius Edwardi.'

The third compartment is completely out of keeping with the other two. It accommodates a graven brass plaque which is self-explanatory:-



In summary it is clear that the figure in the central compartment is that of Thomas Blundeville (1522-1606) with, to one side, his two wives Rose and Margaret accompanied by their two daughters Elizabeth and Patience and, on the brass on the other side, that of his father Edward, his grandfather Ralph and his great-grandfather Richard. If we need any further evidence we can find it in the will of Thomas dated 1 November 1605:

to 'my wife Margaret whom I constitute my executrix, yft I dye at Newton Flotman or any where ells within the precincts of England to bury my body (without any pompe of funerall more than a sermon, & a dynner for my good neighbours) in Newton Flotman chancel under suche tome as I have already in my lyff tyme caused to be made for my self, my two wyfes, my two daughters Elizabeth and Patience & for a monument of three of my next former auncestors, vidz, my great Grandsyre, my Grandsyre & my father.....' (6).

In the will Thomas makes provision for his eldest daughter, Elizabeth, who was born in 1584 and was to marry in 1610, Rowland Meyrick of County Radnor. He does not mention by name, and makes no provision for his other daughter, Patience (1585-1638) presumably because she had already married, in 1605, Robert King of Culpho in Suffolk. He also makes no mention of his unmarried son, by his first wife, Antony (some say Andrew), who had been 'slain in the Low Countries'. It is curious that he is not included on the monument.

As to the heraldry on the monument, the three shields under the brass plaque have survived because they are carved. When they were coloured they would have looked as follows:-



We have already seen that the first two shields record the marriages of a Blundeville and a Godsalve (7), and between a Blundeville and a Gurney (8). The third shield is different being divided into four quarters, the first and fourth bearing the Blundeville arms, the second and third bearing the arms of Inglose. Such quarterings denote the marriage of an ancestor with an heiress. In this case the marriage of Richard Blundeville with Catherine the daughter and heir of Robert Inglose. In effect, as the male blood had run out, she was bringing her

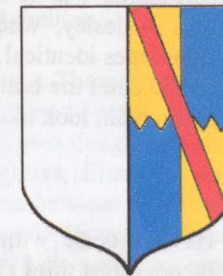
family arms to her husband. However the shield would not have been used by the couple themselves, only by any of their descendants.

For the six shields on the bottom of the monument, only faint traces remain of the last one (no.6 below). We therefore have to rely chiefly on former authorities (9). Reading from left to right they were ascribed as follows:-

1. Blomefield recorded this as *Sable, a lion rampant between three cross crosslets Argent* (for Robert King of Culpho who married Thomas Blundeville's daughter, Patience). Armstrong says it impaled Blundeville which, on account of the incised impalement line, seems likely.



2. Blomefield and Armstrong say this was for Blundeville alone. If so it must have been painted over the impalement line. Alternatively it could mean that only the Blundeville arms appeared on an impaled shield. In any case it would represent Thomas Blundeville's other daughter, Elizabeth, awaiting Marriage.



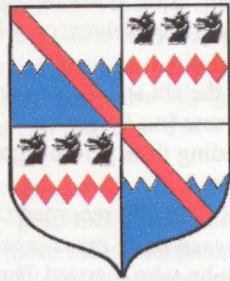
3. Blundeville impaling: *Or a water-bouget, Sable on a chief of the second, three bezants* (for Thomas Blundeville's second wife, Margaret Johnson).



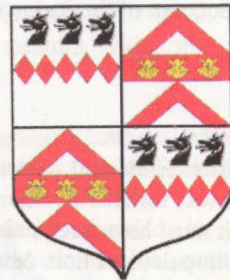
4. Blundeville impaling: *Quarterly, 1 & 4 Sable crusily and a stork Argent* (For Thomas Blundeville's first wife, Rose Puttenham), 2 & 3 *Lozengy Or and Azure* (for Warbleton, an heir, whose arms were taken by a Puttenham).



5. Most authorities give this as Blundeville impaling Ardesley but, for reasons given in No.6 it is more likely Blundeville impaling Bosville.



6. Most authorities give this as Ardesley quartering Hemenhale but there is no account of a Hemenhale heir marrying an Ardesley and no account of an Ardesley/Blundeville marriage. For this reason it is considered that it was intended for Bosville rather than Ardesley, whose arms are said to be similar sometimes identical. While Blomefield says the heads on the chief are bulls, and others say bears, the traces that remain look like wolves' heads.



Having dealt with the Blundeville heraldry it is worth reconsidering the incongruous third compartment of the monument with its brass memorial. To do so it will be helpful to give a brief description of its creator, Thomas Blundeville -

A noted Tudor poet and author he lived from 1522 to 1606, a similar time-line to his sovereign, Queen Elizabeth (1533-1603). He was entered at Gray's Inn in 1541 and married Rose the daughter of Robert Puttenham of Sherfield, Hampshire in St. Stephen's church Norwich 27 June 1554. In 1555 their son Anthony was born but unhappily died, or was killed, in the Flemish Wars sometime after 1571 or perhaps after 1576 when he reached his majority. Rose had previously died in October 1564 and was buried in Winkbourn, the home of Thomas's brother-in-law William Burnell and his sister Constance. It seems it was a welcome retreat, particularly mentioned by Thomas in his *Arte of Logicke* which he wrote 'many years past whilst I sojourned with my dear Brother in law, master William Burnell, a man of most singular humanitie and great hospitalitie in his house in Winkborne in Nottinghamshire, not far from Southwell.'

Thomas is said to have spent his early years in London and this may explain why, when the heralds made their visitation into Norfolk in 1563 he is barely mentioned, all prominence being given to his younger brother John. Indeed, it is John's coat of arms (Blundeville quartering Inglose with a crescent at mid point

to difference himself from his older brother) that is featured. In 1568 Thomas's father died and he inherited Newton Flotman Manor. He is then said to have returned to Norfolk although he is listed in the London Subsidy Returns of 1576 as being worth twenty pounds.

His ten books and pamphlets show exceptional knowledge and ability and cover a wide variety of subjects: horse riding, foreign translations, moral treatises, the art of governing, history, cartography, fortifications, mathematics, astronomy and logic. His early works were dedicated to the notorious Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester who, at the age of seventeen, came to Norfolk in 1549 to help quell Kett's Rebellion. On the journey he is said to have met Amy Robsart, also seventeen years of age whom he later married and, some say killed, in order to make the way clear for his courtship of Queen Elizabeth. All this would have been well known to Thomas as Amy's step father, Roger Appleyard, was Lord of the Manor of Rainthorpe, the other manor in Newton Flotman. Later Thomas dedicated his books to Sir Francis Windham, a judge of the common pleas whose father, Sir Edmund also played a part in suppressing Kett's Rebellion.

In 1581, being well aware of his lack of living male progeny, Thomas married again, this time to Margaret the daughter of John Johnson of Wood Norton. Again luck was against him as Margaret only provided him with two daughters. Not only this but a great dispute arose between the two daughters, Elizabeth and Patience. The problem arose when a marriage was projected between Elizabeth and Robert King of Culpho, Suffolk. According to him, while he was abroad, Elizabeth took up and left home with some unknown knight. This news was sent out to Robert King whilst he was in Italy asking him to return home and accept the hand of Elizabeth's sister, Patience, instead. This he duly did. Later Elizabeth married Rowland Merrick and the dispute between the two went on for many years.

Thomas Blundeville's problems are hinted at in his will. To his wife, Margaret he left all his manors including the manor and advowson of Newton Flotman providing she gave her daughter, Elizabeth, her portion 'so as she marry with her mother's consent.' She was also to have

'all my moveable goods, saving the furniture of my hall parlour & reserving also myne armourie both offensive & defensive & all my books of all sorts & sciences & my instruments of astronomy & geography & my books of musike which I will shall remayne for ever with my said manor house as heirs lome, hoping that some of myne heyres & of my name that shall hereafter by God's grace inherite my said manor & lands will delight in suche good scyences as I my self have done.'

Margaret lived on till 1617 when the festering dispute between her daughters and their families erupted. The wilful Elizabeth entered the manor and riffled the contents while Patience and her husband Robert are alleged to have taken away

the items Thomas wished to remain in the house. Many legal suits followed until, eventually, Robert King, or Robert King Blundeville as he styled himself, won the day. In 1646, eight years after Patience's death he sold the estate to John Burman of Norwich

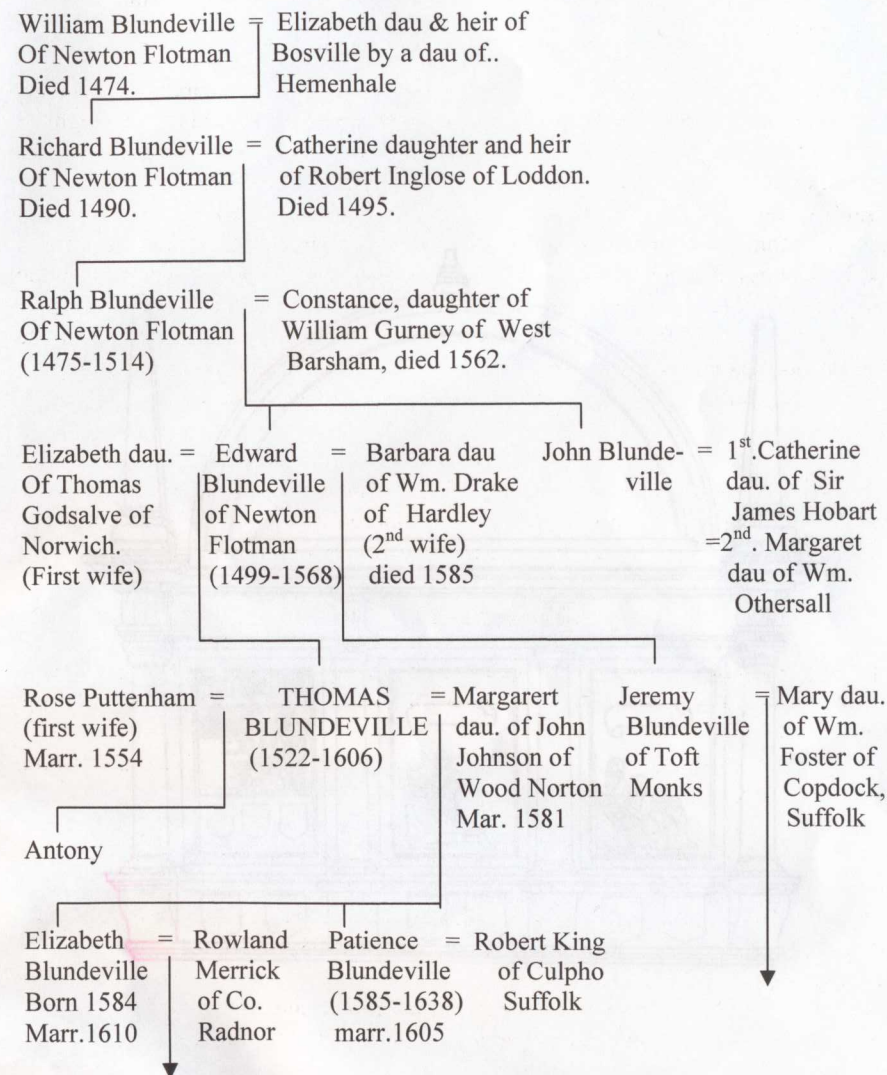
With these details in mind we return to that strange third compartment on the Blundeville memorial. Inspection suggests its arrangement was an afterthought. It appears to be hollow behind the brass plaque, and the stone armorials below it are carved on two stone inserts and not cut on the stone entablature itself. Some light could be shone on the matter if the words in Thomas's will were clearer. When he says the tomb was made in his lifetime for his immediate family and for a monument for his ancestors, does he mean one or two memorials? It is quite possible that there were two and the plaque, which says Thomas fixed it in 1571, thirty-four years before he wrote his will, might then have been fixed in the church only to be later taken down and be reaffixed in the stone monument to hide the gap left for a non surviving son, or something now hidden?

At the end of his will Thomas directed that all his evidences be laid in the great chest with two locks which was then in the new false roof of the manor house he called his 'Poor Swan's nest'. Bear this in mind as you leave the northern portal of the church for there stands an ancient chest from who knows from where!

References.

- (1). A.Campling. *Thomas Blundeville, of Newton Flotman, co Norfolk (1522-1606) Author and Poet, tempo Elizabeth.* In *Norfolk Archaeology* vol. XXI, pp. 337-8.
- (2). F. Blomefield. *An Essay towards a History of Norfolk.* London, 2nd Edn. 1805-10, vol.V. p.68, footnote 6.
- (3). *The East Anglian or Notes and Queries.* Vol.I, p.317.
- (4). N. Pevsner. *The Buildings of England. North-west and South Norfolk,* 1962, p.270.
- (5). C.M.Hood (Editor) *The Chorography of Norfolk. An Historical and Chorographical Description of Norfolk.* Norwich 1938, p.130.
- (6). Campling p.353
- (7). The crosses are variously coloured, sometimes counterchanged. Those shown here are as they appeared in the heralds' visitation of Norfolk 1589 (RCF MS2, fo.6)
- (8). It will be noticed that the Gurney arms on the church battlements are differenced with a bendlet.
- (9). Hood pp.130-1 & 175; Blomefield V, 69; [Armstrong] *History and Antiquities of Norfolk.* Norwich 1781, vol.VII, Humbleyard division, pp.101-3; and E. Farrer. *The Church Heraldry of Norfolk.* Vol.I, Norwich 1887, p.179.

Select Pedigree.



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