Feedback: This is very exciting work, Alex. Are you proposing to examine all of the males in this category? Also, are you proposing to consider why there are no Thetford males in this category? WS

Burial clauses and male privilege: a localised phenomenon? Alex Marchbank, 13.12.17

Masculinit*ies,* likefemininit*es,* as D. M. Hadley has argued, were constructed and reconstructed in different times and places, explaining the need for pluralisation, and reinforcing Judith Butler’s assertion that the construction of gender changes with historical context.[[1]](#footnote-1) This following section will explore how masculinity was expressed in different places at different times, with a particular focus on how men were able to express their identities through their burial clauses

Testators from both Faversham and Thetford use various features to describe their burial locations, including compass points, images in the church, and references to actions they habitually undertook during their lifetimes. Unique to Faversham, however, are requests by male testators to be buried near other men of no identified relationship. Such a request can be found in twelve wills made by men from Faversham, which represents 4.05 percent of male wills from the town. Although this seems like a small proportion, it is worth pursuing further given that this phenomenon does not occur at all in Thetford. By looking closely at these requests we can learn much about the different kinds of spaces available in Thetford and Faversham, as well as why male testators in the Kentish market town were able to express their burial locations in this way.

It should be noted that three male testators, one from Faversham and two from Thetford ask to be buried next to their fathers.[[2]](#footnote-2) This relationship is noted by the testator and as such these expressions are excluded from this analysis. Such requests among women can be found as Margaret Gebon from Faversham also asks to be buried next to her father in the town’s parish church, but she is the only female testator to request this.[[3]](#footnote-3)

A total of twelve men from Faversham describe their intended burial location in terms of other men. The earliest of these requests is in 1485, and the latest in 1529. Five requests are in the form of a ‘multiple description’ that is, they give the name of the man whose burial they wish to be close to combined with another description of the space. A furtherfive give a ‘combined description’, i.e. they state just the name of the man by whom they want to be buried.One individual describes the space in terms of a male and a female burial, asking to be buried between the two, and a final man gives two different options for his burial: either in the Abbey at Faversham or in the Collegiate Chapel at Arundel, next to a man he identifies as ‘sometime earl of Arundel’.[[4]](#footnote-4) The variety of descriptions suggests not only that these testators conceived the spaces of their burials in different ways, but also that they hoped to achieve different things through their burials. This section will explore some of the factors which may have motivated men from Faversham to describe their burials in terms of other men, including using them as a navigational tool, to articulate devotional interests, as expressions of status, a relationship or a friendship. Often these categories overlap and intertwine, demonstrating the multiple meanings that a burial could have. The male burial clauses will then be contrasted with female burial clauses from Faversham as well as burial clauses from Thetford to more fully explore the impact of gender and place on expressions of identity within late medieval wills.

# The significance of place within devotion

Some men’s burial requests point toward the significance of place as an aspect of religious devotion. This is something which can be identified in a great number of wills from across the two market towns: testators often ask to be buried before a particular image, altar, or cross [ref]. By combining the name of a particular altar with an individual, however, testators were able to clearly articulate the exact space in which they wanted their body to be buried.

One such request comes from the will of Robert Wediote, whose will dates from 1511.[[5]](#footnote-5) His burial request has been categorised as a combined description, and he gives a detailed description of his burial location, asking to ‘be buried in the parish church of Faversham before the image of Jesus in the said church on the South side of the stone of Edward Thomson’.[[6]](#footnote-6) There could be many reasons why Robert chose the place before the image of Jesus for his burial, and factors such as the availability of space, affection, status and devotional interests in Jesus may have all played a role in this decision. Certainly the religious element seems to have been a significant aspect for Robert, as he leaves in his will ten marks for commemoration for him and his wife at the Jesus altar, demonstrating Christocentric devotional leanings. This would ensure that Robert’s body would be close to the action of the mass for a year at least.[[7]](#footnote-7) And in the event of his children dying without heirs, Robert appointed the proceeds from the sale of his lands to be used to fund another three years’ worth of divine service at the same altar.[[8]](#footnote-8) Burial before the Jesus altar thus seems to be in keeping with Robert’s devotional interests, and it is telling that this is the first location mentioned in his burial clause. This demonstrates a prioritisation of the location near to the altar.

What, therefore, is the significance of the inclusion of the second part of Robert’s burial clause: ‘on the South side of the stone of Edward Thomson’? Given Robert’s devotional interests in Jesus it is quite likely that his inclusion of Edward’s stone in his description was navigational, and was included to ensure that Robert got the precise location that he wanted, rather than expressing a social connection between the two men. This interpretation is further supported when we consider that it is the *stone* of Edward Thomson that Robert mentions. Unlike other clauses in which testators ask to be buried near to named individuals, it is the ‘stone’ by which Robert identifies the space, rather than the ‘burial’ or ‘body’. He is therefore navigating the space by using recognizable features which already exist in it, rather than appealing to communal memory in order to secure his favoured location.

Further evidence which refutes the idea of a social bond between the two men comes from the will of Edward Thomson himself. This is dated from 1494, seventeen years before Robert’s.[[9]](#footnote-9) His will, much like Robert’s, makes no mention of the other man, or anyone else sharing the surname. We cannot use negative evidence to say for certain that the two men were not acquainted in life, but given the time difference and the lack of references to either man in the other’s will, a social connection is unlikely. If this is the case, it raises interesting questions about the nature of memory and the importance of commemoration within the parish in this period. It demonstrates that seventeen years after Edward Thomson’s death, people still recognised his burial and were able to use it as a point of reference. This is significant, because women do not seem to be able to talk about space in this way, arguably preventing them from securing the precise space they wanted, should it happen to be next to an unrelated man.

# Relationship

We have already seen that some male testators asked to be buried next to their fathers, and in each of these instances the testator notes this relationship as part of the description of the space.[[10]](#footnote-10) It is also possible that some of the twelve men from Faversham who ask to be buried next to other men without noting the relationship were also doing so out of an expression of familial unity.

John Drylond, who made his will in 1499 was likely related to James Drylond, next to whom he asked to be buried.[[11]](#footnote-11) Whilst no will survives for James, a deed implementing the terms of the will was copied into Faversham’s Town Book, which gives the date of the will as 1487. A long-standing prolific family of Faversham, men with this surname are recorded as mayors of the town from as early as 1350.[[12]](#footnote-12) Whilst there is no record of James being a mayor, the survival of the deed in the town book suggests that he was an important member of the community. From John’s will we know that James was buried in the abbey, and it was unlikely that either man was a monk or abbot of the institution, as they both owned property.[[13]](#footnote-13) Just 4.8 percent of Faversham testators requested burial within the abbey or its grounds, and it seems that as in other locations this was a privileged burial location reserved for the wealthiest members of the town.[[14]](#footnote-14) Thus we can read John’s burial clause not only as an expression of family unity but also as an expression of status.

# CONCLUSION

Describing burial location in terms of other men’s burials allowed men to express lots about themselves. It enabled them to be extremely specific about the location of their burial (Thomas Knight). It enabled them to express their status, as well as family connections or affiliations (John Drylond). It perhaps also enabled them to express specific religious preferences (Robert Wediote). Ultimately, however, by requesting burial next to another man, these male testators were able to be specific about their burial location in a way which women were not. Arguably for many of these testators, they were able to use their burials and the descriptions of them within their testaments to express an element of their shared identity with that other man.

Identity, it has been argued, is a synthesis which changes constantly, always being created and recreated, and which is closely related to time, place, and culture.[[15]](#footnote-15) Miri Rubin’s understanding of identity draws on many of these elements, but she develops this further to argue that identity is also relational and experienced through relationships to other individuals.[[16]](#footnote-16) When considering burials of men next to other men, the relational element of identity becomes particularly clear. We can see that by asking to be buried next to another man enabled these men to privilege different aspects of their identities in ways which eluded female will-makers.

1. D. M. Hadley, ‘Introduction’, in *Masculinity in Medieval Europe*, ed. by D. M. Hadley (Harlow, 1999), pp. 1–18 (p. 1); Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York, 1990), p. 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. John Exbregge from Faversham (PRC/17/6/214c) and John Boton (NCC will register Jekkys 240) and John Bernard (PCC PROB 11/17/156) both from Thetford express this wish. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. PRC/17/12/126b. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Thomas Knight (PRC/17/12/253) and Robert Browne (PRC/32/10/12a) [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. *The Early Town Books of Faversham, c. 1251-1581*, ed. by Duncan Harrington and Patricia Hyde, 2 vols (Folkstone, 2008), ii, p. 554. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. PRC/17/12/233. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. *Is this what it means when it says ‘a priest to sing for my soul’?* [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. PRC/17/12/233. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. PRC/32/4/59 [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. For example: [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. PRC/17/7/125b. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. *The Early Town Books of Faversham, C. 1251-1581*, ed. by Duncan Harrington and Patricia Hyde, 2 vols (Folkstone, 2008), i, II, pp. 80, 552. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Footnote to property ownership by monks/abbots; heads of monastic houses. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Vanessa Harding has shown that for Londoners, burial in a religious house could be a mark of status. Similarly, David Postles has remarked that: ‘Religious houses then offered burial […] for its symbolic value for the house within its locality’, reflecting on the symbiotic relationship between the status of the house and the status of the individuals buried there. Vanessa A. Harding, ‘Burial Choice and Burial Location in Later Medieval London’, in Steven Bassett (ed.) *Death in Towns: Urban Responses to the Dying and the Dead, 100-1600* (Leicester, 1992), pp. 119–35 (p. 124); David A. Postles, ‘Monastic Burials of Non-Patronal Lay Benefactors.’, *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 47/4, (1996), p. 637. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. A. L. Epstein, *Ethos and Identity: Three Studies in Ethnicity* (London, 2009); Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity* (Cambridge, 1991); Lorna Bleach and Katariina Närä, ‘Introduction’, in Lorna Bleach and others (eds) *In Search of the Medieval Voice* (Newcastle, 2009), pp. xii–xix. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Miri Rubin, ‘Identities’, in Rosemary Horrox and W. Mark Ormrod (eds.) *A Social History of England 1200-1500* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 383. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)