

## WHO LIES HERE? THE TOMB MONUMENT OF AN EARLY-FOURTEENTH CENTURY KNIGHT IN MICHELMERSH CHURCH

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### ABSTRACT

*In the chancel of Michelmersh church is to be seen the fine early fourteenth-century effigy of an unidentified knight. On the evidence of the descent of the manor of Braishfield in Michelmersh, it is suggested that the person commemorated is Sir Roger Woodlock, nephew of Henry Woodlock, bishop of Winchester. Sir Roger's entry into the ranks of Hampshire landowning society affords a good example of how medieval bishops could use their power and wealth to advance the fortunes of their relatives and provide them with material landed endowment.*

In the chancel of Michelmersh church (Hants.) on a modern tomb chest close to the north wall of the sanctuary is the fine early fourteenth-century freestone effigy of a knight. The figure is represented cross-legged with his hands held in prayer, and his feet resting on a vigorously carved deer (Fig. 1). The armour, conventionally for the time, consists of a mail coif and hauberk and, over the latter, a long surcoat, which is secured around the waist by a narrow band and is open in front to reveal the hem of a vertically quilted aketon and poleyns with a central keel. The man's buckled sword-belt is decorated with quatrefoils and has a ring attachment to the scabbard. The man wears ailettes to the rear of the shoulders, and over his left arm is slung a shield bearing a charge of two chevrons (Fig. 2). Around the heels are worn small rowel spurs. The man's head rests on two cushions, the upper one placed diagonally, and an angel is shown seated on each side. The surfaces of the arms and legs are smooth, suggesting that the mail of the hauberk was represented by a combination of gesso and polychromy. The effigy measures 5

feet 10 inches and is well preserved, except for the angels' heads and the bottom of the shield, which are both missing.

No inscription survives on the slab bearing the effigy, and none is recorded by any herald or antiquary. The identity of the man commemorated is, therefore, not known. The boldly incised chevrons of the shield afford no direct clue to identification, as the tinctures, which would have been rendered in polychromy, have gone. A modern brass plate on the front of the chest says that the figure is 'believed to be Sir Geoffrey de Canterton, forester of the king in the New Forest'. No knight of this name is recorded as a landholder in either Michelmersh or anywhere else locally in the period in question. The church guide book ventures the possibility that the person may be a member of the Hotot family on the grounds that this family's arms resembled those shown on the shield (Chambers 2012, 17). The Hotots, however, were an East Midlands knightly lineage and did not have any territorial interests either in Hampshire or in the counties nearby. In his *Heraldry from Military Monuments before 1350* the Reverend Henry Lawrance notes the presence of the arms, but recognises that in the absence of the tinctures no certain identification is possible (Lawrance 1946, 51).

If the charge on the shield fails to yield any insight into the identity of the knight commemorated, however, it may be possible to approach the matter by resort to a different but complementary method. We could instead investigate the history of the descent of the manors in the parish of Michelmersh in the medieval period to see if, at the time in question, there was a lord whose arms included chevrons similar to those shown on



Fig. 1 Michelmersh church. View of the knightly tomb effigy showing the deer under the man's feet (Nigel Saul)

the shield. In the late Middle Ages there were two manors in the parish, the principal and larger of these comprising Michelmersh itself and a smaller one based on the settlement of Braishfield, a few miles to the south-east (For the descent of the manors in Braishfield, see VCH Hants 3, 425). Michelmersh itself had since the mid eleventh century formed part of the temporalities of the cathedral and diocese of Winchester, and had been settled before 1205 on the prior and convent of St Swithun, the monastic community that provided the cathedral's clerical establishment. The ownership of the manor of Braishfield is less easy to establish, and the task of tracing it is frustrated by gaps in the evidence. It is clear, however, that by the first half of the fourteenth century the manor was in the hands of the Woodlock family. In 1346 one Roger Woodlock is recorded as holding a quarter of a knight's fee in the parish, which had formerly been in the hands of one John Brayboeuf. This is very probably the same estate as that which in 1316 had been settled on an earlier Roger Woodlock and his wife, Joan, by a feoffee, Sir Richard de la Bere (Ibid.). A man by the name of Roger Woodlock is recorded as one of the two largest taxpayers in the parish in the parliamentary subsidy levied in 1327 (Mitchell-Fox & Page 2014, no. 4). It seems reasonably clear that by the first half of the fourteenth century the Woodlocks had established themselves as the principal landowners in the manor of Braishfield, and in effect as its lords. We are fortunate to have evidence of the arms of the Woodlock family by virtue of the chance survival of a seal of Roger Woodlock's dating from 1317. The arms represented on the seal are these: *on a chevron 3 bucks' heads caboshed* (BL, Harleian Charter 58 B 40; Birch 1894, 678–9). The presence of the chevrons establishes a clear link with the arms on the knightly effigy in Michelmersh church. At the same time, in the buck's heads – the heads of the male deer – we have an immediate explanation for the presence of the vigorously carved deer as a footrest on the monument. There can be little doubt that the effigy at Michelmersh commemorates that same Roger Woodlock who was owner of the seal and was the beneficiary of the settlement of 1316.

Roger Woodlock at first appears a man of insufficient importance to be commemorated by such a fine tomb monument in his local church. He figures curiously little in the affairs of his native county. He was never appointed a sheriff, keeper of the peace or commissioner of array, posts that were normally taken by members of the landed gentry; nor was he ever elected a knight of the shire for Hampshire in parliament. It may be that his surprisingly low profile is to be accounted for by his periods of absence on military service. He was to serve on no fewer than four occasions in armies which the ineffective Edward II led against the Scots in pursuit of his father's claim to overlordship over the northern kingdom. On two of these occasions, in 1310 and 1314, he served under Sir Henry le Tyeys, and once, in 1319 at the siege of Berwick, under Sir Roger Damory (TNA, C71/4 m. 13; C71/6 m. 1; C71/10 m. 4). In addition, in January 1322 he enlisted with the king on his campaign against the baronial rebels in the Welsh Marches, on this occasion serving under the Hampshire knight, Sir John de St John of Basing (CPR 1321–4, 67). There are tantalising hints that Sir Roger may well have had a somewhat wider range of acquaintances than the limited documentary record might suggest. In May 1315 he appears alongside Sir Edmund Bacon and Sir Henry le Tyeys as a witness to the sale by a local clerk of lands in Nuneham Courtenay (Oxon.) to Warin, Lord Lisle of Shirburn (Oxon.) and Kingston Lisle (Berks.) (Wells-Furby 2004, 601). Le Tyeys was, of course, the man under whom he served in Scotland. Moreover, as we have seen, he used the services of a Berkshire knight, Sir Richard de la Bere, for the settlement that he made of the Braishfield estate in the 1316. On at least one unhappy occasion he is recorded, not uncharacteristically for a country landowner, as involved in an act of violence. This was in October 1319, when he was named as a participant in an attack on the property of one John de Dummer at Bromley, in Stoke Abbots (Dorset) (CPR 1317–21, 483). In the following year he was to suffer a retaliatory attack by the Dummers on his own lands, for which the offenders were later to receive a pardon (Ibid., 503). The background to this tit-for-tat feuding with the Dummers is to be found in a claim that he had to the manor of Drayton in Barton Stacey (Hants.) by right of



Fig. 2 Michelmersh church. View of the tomb effigy from the north side showing the shield with the charge of the chevrons (Nigel Saul)

his then wife Marjorie, heiress of the de Calnes who had held the manor, a claim which was disputed by the Dummars (VCH Hants 4, 420). It appears that Woodlock's right to the manor was eventually upheld, as his son is found in possession of it after him.

These few references constitute the sum total of Roger Woodlock's appearances in the official documentary record. By comparison with the more active knights of his day, Roger did not cut much of a figure in Hampshire society. Nor did he come from an established knightly lineage and have to his name a string of manors stretching across several counties. He was in fact a complete newcomer to the county scene, a first generation landowner. He owed his position in the ranks of local landowning elite entirely to his kinship with one of the most powerful figures in the county, a man who was effectively his sponsor. This was Henry Woodlock, the bishop of Winchester from 1305 to 1316. Thanks to a crucial reference in a charter of May 1316 we learn that Roger, the landowner at Braishfield, was none other than the bishop's nephew. In the course of a grant to him of the wardship and marriage of the son of Roger Daundely, a feudal tenant of the see, the bishop refers to the grantee, who is styled a knight, in these terms: 'domino Rogero Wodeloke militi nepoti nostro' (Goodman 1941, 639). In all probability, Roger was retained as a member of his uncle's household. In August 1311 he is recorded as accompanying the bishop on his journey to the council summoned by the pope at Vienne in southern France (CPR 1307-13, 382). It is all but certain that it was his kinship with the bishop that opened the doors of local landowning society to him. On the journey to Vienne one of his companions was Master Roger de la Bere, a kinsman of the Berkshire knight Sir Richard de la Bere, who five years later was to act as his feoffee in the settlement that he made of the manor of Braishfield.

The bishop was himself also a man who had risen to eminence, in his case in the Church, from a position of relative obscurity. The scion of a middling freeholding family from Marwell, near Winchester, an episcopal manor, he had entered the convent of St Swithun's, Winchester, as a young man, perhaps as an oblate, and was elected prior in 1295 (for his career see Page

ODNB). He was elevated to the see nine years later, and was to hold it until his death in 1316. In the course of his time as prior and then bishop he engaged in numerous acts of family patronage, not only helping to establish his nephew at Braishfield but also securing the appointment of his clerical relatives to benefices either directly or indirectly in his gift. He appointed his close kinsman Roger, perhaps a brother, to the rectory of North Waltham (Hants.), directly in his gift, while for his cousin Richard, an Oxford graduate, he secured a string of valuable rectories in the diocese: Richard is found holding in quick succession the benefices of Bentworth, Mickleham, Godshill, Freshwater and Wonston, and he was to end his career a canon of St Paul's Cathedral (Waight 1998, 202; Emden 1959, 2072). At the family's native village the bishop built up a small estate, which by the 1360s had come to be known as the manor of Marwell Woodlock. It was by no means unusual for prelates and other senior churchmen in the Middle Ages to take advantage of their position to advance the interests of their relatives in this way. Archbishop Melton of York, a younger contemporary of Woodlock's, was to do much the same for his relatives in the north, and so too, in the Thames and Cherwell valleys, later in the century, was another, more famous bishop of Winchester, William of Wykeham. It was thanks largely to his great uncle's endeavours that Sir Thomas Wykeham was to become established as lord of Broughton (Oxon.) (Butler 1951, 54-68; VCH Oxon 9, 86-88).

The manor of Braishfield was not the only estate of which Roger Woodlock appears to have been in possession at the time of his death. At different points in the century the family's presence is also recorded at the manors of Sherfield English, Drayton in Barton Stacey and Upper Eldon in King's Somborne. Roger Woodlock is noted as lord of Upper Eldon in a landholding survey compiled in 1316; it is not known, however, by what means he came into possession of the property (Feudal Aids 2, 310). Sherfield was only acquired by the family later in the century by virtue of the marriage of Nicholas Woodlock, probably Roger's grandson, to Joan, sister of Richard English and claimant to half of the manor;

the property was to descend in the Woodlock family down to the early fifteenth century (VCH Hants 4, 510). The two other properties of Braishfield and Drayton in Barton Stacey, however, appear to have passed into Roger's hands simultaneously, and sometime in the early years of the century. What points to this is the fact that in each case there is a link with the knightly family of Brayboeuf, likewise of Hampshire. At Braishfield one John Brayboeuf was the previous holder of the estate, while at Drayton the Brayboeufs were the overlords of the fee, from whom the actual owners, the de Calnes, held as tenants (VCH Hants 3, 425; 4, 420). Roger Woodlock is known to have acquired Drayton through his marriage to Marjorie, daughter of Herbert de Calne, who on the death of her only surviving brother became her father's heir. It is tempting to suppose that this highly advantageous match, which Roger had little right to expect in his own right, was arranged for him by his uncle, the bishop. Subsequently, through the useful link with the Brayboeufs, which the Drayton deal opened up, the bishop was able to arrange the acquisition for his nephew of the manor of Braishfield too. The four properties together made for a modest but relatively compact estate centred in the Test valley, to the north and west of Romsey. It seems that for a while the family also had an interest in 'Flexland' in Meonstoke, in the east of the county, where Roger is recorded as a taxpayer in 1327 (Mitchell-Fox & Page 2014, no. 445). Unfortunately, very little is known of the later history of the Woodlock family beyond the basic descent through the male line. Roger was married first to Marjorie de Calne and then, secondly, to one Joan, the beneficiary with him of the settlement made in 1316. By one or other of these marriages he had a son Roger, who had a son Nicholas, who in turn was succeeded by Thomas, apparently the last of his line. It can be assumed, however, that, at least in the early part of the century, Braishfield was the family's main seat, as it was in Michelmersh church that Sir Roger chose to be buried.

Although the effigy to Roger's memory is today placed in the chancel, it is unlikely that this was its original position. At the beginning of the fourteenth century most laity who qualified for intra-mural burial were interred either in the

nave of the church or in a side chapel. Burial in the chancel was a privilege reserved for the clergy and for especially deserving laity – chiefly, advowson holders and benefactors who had helped with the costs of rebuilding (Saul 2017, 171–2). Woodlock was not the holder of the advowson of Michelmersh, which belonged to the bishop; and it is unlikely that he was involved in helping with the costs of any building work. There are no grounds for supposing, then, that he would have been buried in the chancel. It is not known for certain where the monument was located originally, but a strong possibility must be one of the two transeptal chapels which were added to the fabric in the thirteenth century. Only the northern chapel survives today, its southern counterpart having been demolished in post-medieval times. It may well be that one or other of the two chapels was associated with the manor of Braishfield, and was used by its lords as a burial place. Quite possibly too, that chapel was made the setting for a chantry foundation, established to Woodlock's memory, with the tomb effigy placed next to the altar, visible from the rest of the church, but set in a semi-private space. The commissioning of tomb effigies in the Middle Ages was often associated with chantry provision, the deceased's effigy acting as a mnemonic prompt to the priest to intercede for that person's soul (Saul 2017, 135–160; Roffey 2007, 42–126).

The date of Roger Woodlock's death is not recorded. Because he did not hold his lands in chief from the crown, no inquisition *post mortem* was taken by the king's escheator on his demise. His son, however, another Roger, is known to have been in possession of the manor of Drayton by 1330, which suggests that his father had died sometime in the late 1320s (VCH Hants 4, 420). It is not clear whether the Roger who is recorded as a taxpayer in the parish of Michelmersh in 1327 is the father or the son, see Mitchell-Fox & Page 2014, no. 4). Medieval tomb monuments were usually commissioned within two or three years of the death of the person commemorated. In the present case, however, at least on the evidence of the armour represented, it is unlikely that commissioning took place any earlier than 1330. Indeed, a date of some years later, nearer to the mid-1330s, is almost certainly to be preferred. What argues for this is the presence on the effigy

of rowel spurs and not prick spurs by the ankles. Rowel spurs are only found on tomb effigies from the late 1330s onwards; on monuments of the first three decades of the century prick spurs are invariably shown. The likelihood must be that the effigy was commissioned a few years after Sir Roger's death by either his widow or his son, perhaps once arrangements for the offering of intercession had been properly set up in the church.

The effigy may be reckoned one of the finest of its date in Hampshire, and it is unfortunate that the identity of the person it commemorates

should for so long have remained obscure. It can now be shown with reasonable certainty, however, that the person represented is Sir Roger Woodlock of Braishfield. The story of how this man came to be established as a landowner in the Test valley of west Hampshire affords a good illustration of how senior churchmen in the Middle Ages could use their wealth and power to advance the interests of their close relatives. The tomb of the bishop himself in Winchester Cathedral has long since been destroyed, but the survival of the effigy in Michelmersh church attests his family's one-time prominence in Hampshire society.

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