

The memorial brass of William and Alice Norwich, St George Colegate

In the north chancel chapel of St George Colegate survives a mid-15th century memorial to William Norwich and Alice his wife. The purbeck marble slab measures 1.43m x 2.10m. Inlaid brass figures of the couple, which stand on a gothic bracket similar to that of Thomas and Katerina Roos (Rose) at Salle (c. 1441), measure 0.84 and 0.835m respectively. The diminutive figure between them represents their son, also named William. Blomefield recorded the inscription beneath the bracket to read:

'Hic iacent Willus: Norwiche quondam maior huius civitatis et
Alicia consors sua qui hanc capellam fieri fecit ad laudem et
honorem beatissime virginis marie et omnium sanctorum et dictus
Willus: obiit quarto die Februarii A^o Dni M^o cccc^o lxxiii^o, et dicta
Alicia obiit secundo die Januarii A^o Dni Mcccclxxii quorum ani-
mabus propicietur Deus Amen.'

(Blomefield and Parkin 1806, 470)

('Here lies William Norwich once mayor of this city and
Alice his wife who did make this chapel in laud and
honour of the blessed virgin mary and all saints and the said
William died on the fourth day of February in the year of our lord 1463, and the said Alice
died on the second day of January 1473, may
God bless their souls')

The inscription was printed by Blomefield in 1745 and republished in 1806, engraved and printed by Thomas Talbot in 1793-4 and also by John Sell Cotman in 1815. Blomefield and Cotman give the same wording (as above) whereas Talbot's inscription reads '*honorem dei & beatissime*'. On the evidence available it is very difficult to get a sense of the interdependency of these records or their reliability. In summary, Cotman's rendering of the inscription most accurately reflects the brass itself – for example the contractions have not been expanded, as they have by Blomefield and Talbot, and except for an et/ampersand having been moved from the beginning of the third line to the end of the second, the type-setting is a faithful copy. Today the year of William's death is illegible; whether it was already illegible in 1815 and Cotman relied on Blomefield or Talbot for the date is unknown. In either case the date must have been incorrectly recorded by all, as neither William Norwich senior nor junior died in 1463.



Grave slab for William and Alice Norwich. ©
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This brass undoubtedly commemorates William Norwich *junior*, who served as mayor of Norwich in 1461 and died in 1470, not his father. Historic and repetitious mis-recording of William's death date as 1463 may have originated with Blomefield in 1745 – it is possible to imagine him, in the gloom of a north facing chapel, reading MCCCCLXX as MCCCCLXIII.

In his sepulchral choices, William Norwich junior did not follow, or elaborate upon, his father's actions, but set himself a different and more ambitious path. William Norwich senior wrote his will on 16 February 1459, and is termed citizen of Norwich and rafman. The will was proved on 8 October 1460 (NCC Brosyard 210). He requested burial in the Carmelite friary, left his unpaid tithes and obligations to the high altar of St Saviour's, and requested prayers for his soul to be said there. No mention is made of St George Colegate anywhere in the document. Unlike his son, William senior desired burial alongside family members who had predeceased him. His body was to lie next to Walter Norwich, his father (*patris mei*) and his late wife Agnes (*nuper uxoris mee*). His present wife, Cecilie, was to receive 20 marcs, and other named living relations are a nephew Christopher Norwich, a son John Norwich, and William Norwich junior, alderman, named as an executor.

According to the Norwich Taxation list of 1451, William junior was taxed at £20, his father at only £2 (Virgoe 1988, 150). This implies a wealth four times that of Ralf Segrym and equal to Robert Toppes; the son had clearly advanced far beyond his father's achievements. In his will William junior left legacies to a number of churches as well as St George Colegate, including St Saviour's and St Etheldreda's (where interestingly his father is said to lie buried), and to the four mendicant friaries. Instructions are given for a funeral procession lit by 24 torches, with the torches to be given to the poor churches in Norwich (*pauperibus ecclesiis Norwico*) afterwards. He also made provision for a boy to attend schools at Norwich and Cambridge, under his wife's guidance (PROB 11/5/493 and Cozens-Hardy and Kent 1938, 29).

Although Norwich was almost certainly the founder and patron of the chapel in which he was buried, his will does not mention its construction. The will does make full provision for a chantry priest (named as Thomas Perott). It also confirms his association with the new space in specifying that his body was 'to be buried beneath the chapel of the Blessed Maria in the church of St George Colegate in the middle of the same chapel before the altar there'. Alice Norwich, died 1473, requested burial in the same chapel next to her husband. She also stipulated that an honest priest was to celebrate there, for the good of her soul, for two years and provided him with vestments to the value of £20 (NCC Gelour 4). Evidently William had left excellent provision for his wife. Tempering this picture of their success, riches and generosity is the glimpse of William and Alice's piety and humility permitted by the prayer scrolls on their memorial. That emanating from William reads 'Sana domine animam meam quia peccavi tibi' ('Heal O Lord my soul because I have sinned to thee' – antiphon following Psalm 40 in the Office of the Dead, Matins); and that from Alice: 'Jesu fili virginis miserere nobis' (Jesus, son of the Virgin, have mercy on us). The texts indicate William and Alice's devotion to the Virgin and Christ, and may explain the angel holding a column and scourge, redolant of the Passion, on one of the chapel's roof corbels.

In a manner reminiscent of Ralf and Agnes Segrym at St John Maddermarket (whose double brass also survives – see separate article), William and Alice Norwich expanded the footprint of the east end of their parish church, facilitating increased liturgical provision and thus enhancing the sanctity and activity of the church. The chapel was a parochial provision as much as a personal one, a gift to the living as well as a focus for commemoration of the dead. When in 1514 Thomas Waryn requested burial 'in the chapel of all hallows in the parish church of St George of Colegate' the chapel was no longer private space. (PROB 11/18/110).

Bibliography

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