

'Here every dust would make history': the dowager countess of Derby and constructing a legacy in Reformation England*

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Abstract

The dowager countess of Derby prepared for her 1637 death by actively blending rituals and rites to construct her legacy. Scholars have long studied the changing nature of death rituals during the English Reformation but have focused on either an in-depth examination of a single practice or a broad study emphasizing trends in death rituals and their change over time. An analysis of the way a single countess prepared for death reveals that the seventeenth-century aristocracy could express themselves in diverse ways and allowed peers new and nuanced ways to dictate how they wanted to be remembered.

Nestled beside greenbelt countryside in the English village of Harefield, Middlesex sits St. Mary the Virgin church. With 800 years of additions to the original twelfth-century building, this parish church looks like a patchwork quilt of stone and brick. Upon entering the church, visitors are surrounded by tombs, plaques and statues, mostly commemorating members of the Newdigate family.¹ But dominating all else is an enormous richly-coloured tomb in a corner of the upper chancel. This is the resting place of Alice Spencer Stanley Egerton, dowager countess of Derby, who died on 26 January 1637. The countess also left her mark a few hundred yards away with almshouses she established in her will, 'for the relief and maintenance of six poor women of the said parish to reside'.²

Scholars and visitors have commented on the countess's opulent tomb and humble almshouses for centuries. Nikolaus Pevsner, Bridget Cherry and Nigel Llewellyn each included her tomb in their comprehensive studies. Pevsner and Cherry also briefly noted her almshouses.³ Although the countess's tomb and almshouses have garnered attention,

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¹ The Newdigate family lived in Harefield at various times between the 15th and 20th centuries.

² The National Archives of the U.K. (hereafter T.N.A), Prob/11/174, 'Last Will and Testament of Alice Egerton', 24 Jan. 1637.

³ B. Cherry and N. Pevsner, *London 3: North West: the Buildings of England* (Harmondsworth, 1991), pp. 315–22; N. Llewellyn, *Funeral Monuments in Post-Reformation England* (Cambridge, 2000), pp. 294–5; N. Pevsner, *The Buildings of England: Middlesex* (Harmondsworth, 1951), pp. 89–93. See also D. Lysons, *An Historical Account of those Parishes in the County of Middlesex: which are not described in the Environs of London* (1800); H. Cochran, *St. Mary's Harefield: Description of the Monuments, Etc. With 14 Illustrations* (Rickmansworth, 1936), pp. 32–4; W. F. Vernon, 'Parish church of Harefield, Middlesex, and the manor of Moor Hall', *Archaeological Jour.*, xxxvi (1879), 145–53; W. Goatman, *Harefield and her Church* (Harefield, 1972), pp. 21–6.

people seem to have only seen the facades, while overlooking her intended connection between the two structures. In their analysis of Lady Jane Bacon's life (1581–1659) and tomb, Felicity Heal and Clive Holmes wrote, 'Lady Bacon intended that her tomb should be a text to be read by observers, a text that moved beyond the usual expressions of familial piety and lineage identity'.⁴ Jonathan Finch called tombs an 'ideal vehicle' for expressing Protestant identities in Reformation England.⁵ These concepts certainly apply to the countess's tomb, but she utilized a variety of 'vehicles' to perpetuate her intended image. She purposefully layered rituals and structures to prepare for her death and build her legacy. She initially wrote her will on 24 December 1636, while she was still 'in good health'.⁶ Her condition took a dramatic turn within a month, as she added an additional schedule on 24 January 1637 and died just two days later. According to the instruction in her will, she was to be interred on 28 January 1637, two days after her death. By reading her tomb, almshouses, instructions and bequests left in her will in conjunction with one another and against the backdrop of her life, we can observe how an early modern countess viewed the death rituals and rites of her age. This helps us to better understand the complex options available to, and choices made, by early modern English elites and how they prepared for their own deaths during periods of religious change.

The countess blended death rituals to construct her legacy by using her tomb, almshouses, doles to the poor, distribution of blacks (mourning clothes) and night funeral to make important statements about herself and her family, statements that she knew could not be read on a tomb alone. She constructed a legacy that would celebrate her Spencer roots, Stanley marriage, role as a mother, position in Harefield and life as a patroness. While she briefly mentioned her second marriage, details are notably absent. She wanted her contemporaries to admire her rapid rise, yet conversely, she wanted to give the impression that she was part of an ancient nobility. She did all of this while maintaining a conformist image in sixteen-thirties England. Very few sources survive illuminating the countess's religious beliefs but those that do suggest that she was probably a conformist or a moderate Calvinist.⁷ Examining how an individual person prepared for death and constructed their legacy demonstrates nuanced choices that can be missed in more comprehensive studies that search for cultural norms and ritual changes during the English Reformation. This approach puts people at the centre, and

⁴ F. Heal and C. Holmes, 'Prudentia ultra sexum: Lady Jane Bacon and the management of her families', in *Protestant Identities: Religion, Society, and Self-Fashioning in Post-Reformation England*, ed. M. McClendon, J. Ward and M. MacDonald (Stanford, Calif., 1999), pp. 100–24, at p. 101.

⁵ J. Finch, 'A reformation of meaning: commemoration and remembering the dead in the parish church, 1450–1640', in *The Archaeology of Reformation c.1480–1580*, ed. D. Gaimster and R. Gilchrist (Leeds, 2003), pp. 437–49, at p. 446.

⁶ T.N.A., Prob/11/174.

⁷ California, Huntingdon Library (hereafter H.E.H.), Hastings Religious MS. 1(13), 'Commonplace Book, Notes of Sermons, and Religious Meditations for Elizabeth Hastings, countess of Huntingdon', c.1621; H.E.H., HM 15369, 'Certain Collection of the Right Honorable Elizabeth, late Countess of Huntingdon, for her own private use', 1633. For details about the religious affiliations of the Hastings and Egerton families, see T. Cogswell, *Home Divisions: Aristocracy, the State and Provincial Conflict* (Manchester, 1998); I. Morgan, *Prince Charles's Puritan Chaplain* (1957); V. Wilkie, '"Such daughters and such a mother": the countess of Derby and her three daughters, 1560–1647' (unpublished University of California Riverside Ph.D thesis, 2009), pp. 108–38. The literature on this broader subject is extensive. See, e.g., D. Como, *Blown by the Spirit: Puritanism and the Emergence of an Antinomian Underground in Pre-Civil-War England* (Stanford, Calif., 2004); *Religious Politics in Post-Reformation England: Essays in Honour of Nicholas Tyacke*, ed. K. Fincham and P. Lake (Woodbridge, 2006); P. Marshall, '(Re)defining the English Reformation', *Jour. British Stud.*, xlviii (2009), 564–86; N. Tyacke, *Anti-Calvinists: the Rise of English Arminianism c.1590–1640* (Oxford, 1987).

exemplifies that, as Keith Thomas so eloquently stated, ‘The body might decay, but reputation was the immortal part’.⁸

The foundation for much of the analysis of the changing meanings and expanding options of death rituals in seventeenth-century Reformation England lies in the anthropological belief that over centuries, rituals take on cultural meanings and significance beyond their original religious contexts. Comprehensive studies, like those by David Cressy and Peter Marshall, tend to focus on rituals, not people.⁹ These studies offer either an in-depth examination of a single practice, or they provide a widespread examination of an array of practices to emphasize general trends in death rituals and post-mortem charity, their meanings and their changes over time.¹⁰ While these models are critical to historical understanding, they deny us the chance to consider how people prepared for their own deaths by overlooking the significance of personal context and choice. As Angela Nicholls argued in her study of almshouses, it can be ‘difficult to judge how far individuals were subject to a precise set of motivations’.¹¹ A close analysis of the way a single person prepared for death by reading all of their chosen rituals as collective sources reveals that the seventeenth-century aristocracy could express themselves in a variety of ways. By the sixteen-thirties, selectively drawing from an array of possible death rituals allowed the elite new and nuanced ways to dictate how they wanted to be remembered.

The correlation between death practices and the rise of individualism, or individuals asserting a sense of themselves and how they wanted to be remembered is the focus of much scholarly debate.¹² Clare Gittings, and more recently Sarah Tarlow, argued that

⁸ K. Thomas, *The Ends of Life: Roads to Fulfilment in Early Modern England* (Oxford, 2009), p. 235.

⁹ D. Cressy, ‘Death and the social order: the funerary preferences of Elizabethan gentlemen’, *Continuity and Change*, v (1990), 99–119, at p. 99; P. Marshall, *Beliefs and the Dead in Reformation England* (Oxford, 2002), p. 312. See also: V. Harding, ‘Choices and changes: death, burial and the English Reformation’ in *Archaeology of Reformation*, pp. 386–98, at p. 387; S. Tarlow, ‘Reformation and transformation: what happened to Catholic things in a Protestant world?’, in *Archaeology of Reformation*, pp. 108–21, at p. 118.

¹⁰ There are extensive readings for both studies of single practices and comprehensive studies. For studies on a single practice, see C. Bartram, ‘“Some tomb for a remembrance”: representations of piety in post-Reformation gentry funeral monuments’, in *Pieties in Transition: Religious Practices and Experiences, c.1400–1640*, ed. R. Lutton and E. Salter (Aldershot, 2007), pp. 129–43; J. Helt, ‘Women, memory and will-making in Elizabethan England’, in *The Place of the Dead: Death and Remembrance in Late Medieval Europe*, ed. B. Gordon and P. Marshall (Cambridge, 2000), pp. 188–205; D. Hickman, ‘Wise and religious epitaphs: funerary inscriptions as evidence for religious change in Leicestershire and Nottinghamshire, c.1500–1640’, *Midland History*, xxvi (2001), 107–27. For comprehensive studies, see D. Cressy, *Birth, Marriage, and Death: Ritual, Religion, and the Life-Cycle in Tudor Stuart England* (Oxford, 1997); C. Gittings, *Death, Burial and the Individual in Early Modern England* (1984); *Archaeology of Reformation: Death, Ritual, and Bereavement*, ed. R. Houlbrooke (1989); Marshall, *Beliefs and the Dead*; L. Stone, *The Family, Sex, and Marriage in England 1500–1800* (New York, 1977); Thomas, *Ends of Life*.

¹¹ A. Nicholls, *Almshouses in Early Modern England: Charitable Housing in the Mixed Economy of Welfare 1550–1725* (Woodbridge, 2017).

¹² For debates over the Reformation, death ritual and the rise of individualism, see Bartram, ‘Some tomb’, p. 142; L. Becker, *Death and the Early Modern Englishwoman* (Aldershot, 2003), p. 2; Cressy, *Birth, Marriage, and Death*, p. 10; Gittings, *Death, Burial and the Individual*, p. 14; Harding, ‘Death, burial, and the English Reformation’, p. 390; R. Houlbrooke, ‘Introduction’, *Death, Ritual, and Bereavement*, pp. 1–24, at p. 7; S. Tarlow, *Ritual, Belief and the Dead in Early Modern Britain and Ireland* (Cambridge, 2011), pp. 12–15; Thomas, *Ends of Life*, pp. 37–43; J. Woodward, *The Theatre of Death: the Ritual, Management of Royal Funerals in Renaissance England 1570–1625* (Woodbridge, 1997), p. 4. For further discussion on individualism in early modern Europe, see J. Burckhardt, *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy* (1860); S. Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: from More to Shakespeare* (Chicago, Ill., 1980); A. Macfarlane, *The Origins of English Individualism: the Family, Property and Social Transition* (Oxford, 1978); J. Martin, ‘Inventing sincerity, refashioning prudence: the discovery of the individual in renaissance Europe’, *American Hist. Rev.*, cii (1997), 1309–49; J. Martin, *Myths of Renaissance Individualism* (New York, 2004); Stone, *Family, Sex, and Marriage*, pp. 223–4; M. Todd, ‘Puritan self-fashioning: the diary of Samuel Ward’, *Jour. British Stud.*, xxxi (1992), 236–64.

the seventeenth century saw the rise of people exerting individualism at their death, while Lucinda Becker contended that individualism held no place in early modern preparation for death. Ralph Houlbrooke's work lies in between with the assessment that any growth of individualism was merely an indirect part of the Reformation. Peter Marshall, Keith Thomas and Barbara Harris have framed the argument that in the medieval/early modern periods, subjective identities gave way to a person's desire for 'posthumous fame', meaning that individuals held personal desires to be remembered in specific ways and they acted on these desires.¹³ In constructing her legacy, the countess certainly demonstrated her desire for 'posthumous fame'. She constructed this legacy by coalescing her gender and status in specific ways to make broader statements about her desired place in both her own world and in the ways future generations would perceive her. While it is problematic to use a single person to make sweeping comments about early modern concepts of gender, status, individualism and fame, these concepts provide a critical framework for the countess's wider world. This article looks at early modern death rituals as used by an individual person. The approach opens up the space to complicate the ways scholars conceive of and study the selective blending of death rituals, options for post-mortem charity, and construction of almshouses and tombs.

The countess's tomb is the most vivid relic of her life (see Figure 1). Her effigy lies on a carved black curtain, decorated with the crests of her birth-family, her first husband, her daughters and three sons-in-law. With her hands in a prayer position, her recumbent figure gazes up into a dome shrouded in green and gold curtains. Her figure is clothed in a red gown, matching the dresses of the figures of her three daughters kneeling below her. Two sides of the canopy are enclosed with black tablets with gold lettering. The first reads:

This is the monument of Alice Countesse Dowager of Derby, one of the daughters of Sir John Spencer of Althorp in the county of Northampton Knight: and wife of the right Honorable Ferdinando Earl of Derby, By whom she had issue 3 daughters. His daughters coheiress Anne the eldest married to Grey Lord Chandos, Frances the second to John Earl of Bridgewater, Elizabeth the third to Henry Earl of Huntingdon. This Countess died the 26 Jan. 1636 and her aforsaid Honorable Lord and Husband (who died before her) lieth buried in the Parish church of Ormeskerke with his ancestors whose souls remaine in everlasting joy.

The second tablet simply reads:

This Noble Lady's second husband was my Lord Chancellor Egerton whose only daughter, was mother to Julian Lady Newdigate.

The four corners at the top of the tomb are marked with a crowned griffin, a symbol of the Spencer family. At the top is a banner that reads, 'Dieu Defende le Droit', the Spencer family motto. The supporters of her coat-of-arms, a stag and a griffin, belonged to the family of her first husband, Ferdinando Stanley, earl of Derby. Beyond the reference in her shield, there is just one small heraldic device at the bottom of her

¹³ B. Harris, 'Defining themselves: English aristocratic women, 1450–1550', *Jour. British Stud.*, xlix (2010), 734–52; B. Harris, 'The fabric of piety: aristocratic women and care of the dead, 1450–1550', *Jour. British Stud.*, xlviii (2009), 308–35; Marshall, *Beliefs and the Dead*, p. 273; Thomas, *Ends of Life*, pp. 235–45.



Figure 1. Monument of Alice, Countess of Derby, 1636 (*An Inventory of the Historical Monuments in Middlesex* (Royal Commission on Historical Monuments, 1937), plate 128).

tomb signifying her second marriage, which is partially obstructed by another concrete tomb.¹⁴

The countess's human remains are concealed in the floor under her tomb, which sets this tomb apart from the markers mounted on the walls around the church.¹⁵ The countess's will stipulated that her body was, 'to be laid in the Tomb which I lately made

¹⁴ J. Elven, *The Book of Family Crests: Comprising Nearly Every Bearing with Its Blazonry* (8th edn., 2 vols., 1856).

¹⁵ Hickman, 'Wise and religious epitaphs', p. 116.

in the upper Chancel of the parish Church of Harefield'.¹⁶ This suggests that Alice commissioned her own tomb and may have even inspected her final resting place.¹⁷ She also secured the prime spot in the upper chancel months prior to her death, ensuring parishioners would always be looking at the splendour and artistry of her funeral monument.

In designing her tomb, the countess highlighted crowned griffins and the Spencer family motto to make her connection to her natal family central to her legacy. By the fifteen-thirties, the Spencers had established themselves as one of the nation's leading providers of wool, mutton and sheep sales. At parliament, on 8 May 1621, a famous feud took place between Sir Robert Spencer, Alice's nephew, and the earl of Arundel. Arundel and other long-established members of the aristocracy disliked Spencer's 'new money', and ridiculed Sir Robert's ancestors for being sheep farmers. Sir Robert famously retorted, 'that two honorable persons of [Arundel's] ancestors were condemned here in Parliament without being heard'.¹⁸ Sir Robert was referring to Arundel's ancestors, the duke of Norfolk and the earl of Surrey, both of whom were executed for treason. This feud exemplifies the disdain that the Spencers faced as they grew in wealth. At her death, Alice defended her birth family's honour by using their heraldry and motto as a pinnacle on her tomb.

Throughout the sixteenth century, the Spencers attempted to silence their critics by arranging lucrative matches for their daughters. Alice's 1580 union to Ferdinando Stanley solidified the Spencer's elevated status. The Stanley ancestry included some of the most recognized figures in English history, figures that Alice then counted as kin. On his mother's side, Ferdinando's great-grandparents were Mary Tudor and Charles Brandon, duke of Suffolk; his great-great-grandparents were Henry VII and Elizabeth of York. Ferdinando was also related to the Tudors on his father's side, as Margaret Beaufort's third husband was Thomas Stanley, first earl of Derby. Ferdinando and Alice passed these notable relations on to their three daughters and their Tudor bloodlines connected them to the Cliffords, Greys and Dudleys. Their Stanley lines connected them with the Howards and Hastings. The increased status of her Spencer roots combined with her Stanley marriage gave Alice a formidable family tree; and at her death she used the heraldry to prove it.

In sharp contrast, while there is a tablet that mentions the countess's second marriage to Lord Chancellor Ellesmere, Thomas Egerton, her heraldic nod to the marriage is relegated to one small impalement in the lower right-hand side of the tomb, which is no longer fully visible. Her second husband is not even referred to by name, nor does the tablet mention his lower titles of Viscount Brackley and Baron Ellesmere; only his powerful position is articulated. As an illegitimate child, Egerton lacked the impressive pedigree of Alice's first husband. He was raised by a country lawyer in Cheshire and showed considerable aptitude for the law, which allowed him to rise through the ranks of Elizabethan society with hard work and endless study. His rise and career were impressive, but his family tree looked like a seedling when compared to that of the Stanleys, or even the Spencers. The tablet offers an explanation as to why the countess was entombed in a church that was later primarily the burial site of the Newdigates.

¹⁶ T.N.A., Prob/11/174.

¹⁷ N. Llewellyn, 'Honour in life, death and in the memory: funeral monuments in early modern England', *Trans. Royal Hist. Soc.*, 6th ser., vi (1996), 179–200, at p. 191.

¹⁸ The Cecil Papers <https://www.proquest.com/products-services/cecil_papers.html#overviewlinkSection> [accessed 13 June 2019], 130/39, 'Lord Spencer's Speech', 8 May 1621.

Julian Leigh, Egerton's granddaughter, married Lord Richard Newdigate on 2 February 1632, five years before the countess's death. In the later seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the Newdigates became influential residents of Harefield and this tablet helps to contextualize the tomb as Newdigate markers increased in the church over time. It is possible to speculate that this tablet may not have originally been part of the tomb, but may have been added by a later Newdigate at some point after Alice's death, as it seems unlikely that she would bother to make mention of this distant family line.¹⁹ This tablet is not visible to parishioners looking up to the upper chancel, only being visible from the side of the tomb.

The countess and Egerton had a notoriously unhappy marriage. The union seemed doomed to misery from the start, for on 21 October 1600, when John Chamberlain reported their marriage to Dudley Carleton, he added 'God send him good luck'.²⁰ Despite their shared desires to accumulate wealth and status, the countess and Egerton had very different views about acceptable displays of this wealth.²¹ Egerton composed a long memo before his death, entitled, 'An unpleasant declaration of things passed between the Countess of Derby and me'. In it he wrote that for many years he had, 'suffered her to dispose the whole [estate] as her own will and pleasure. And how indefinitely wasteful, ploddingly and proudly it hath been consumed and misspent'. He continued with the sentiment that, 'it greiveth me to remember ... what reparations and sorrows I have suffered through her humorous, proud and disdainful carriage and her turbulent spirit, and by her curses railing and bitter tongue'.²² Clearly, towards the end of his life, Egerton did not look back lovingly at this marriage. Alice undoubtedly shared these sentiments, and it is of little wonder that she chose not to highlight Egerton's crest with pride. She had the final word by relegating him to a minor spot on her lavish heraldic monument.

The situation is complicated because, while Alice's second marriage did not produce any children, Egerton's son and heir, John, married Alice's middle daughter, Frances, just a few months after their parent's wedding. The fifteen children John and Frances produced were descendants of both Egerton and Alice. The fact that Alice commissioned, and most likely inspected, her tomb means that she wanted to minimize the long-lasting memory of her second marriage, but she knew her grandchildren and future generations would share the Egerton line. Peter Sherlock has described tombs as 'eminently suited to promoting one's place in the world not as it actually was but as it should have been'.²³ Alice did this with her tomb by selectively highlighting relationships that furthered her desired image of herself.

Once Alice established what she wanted mourners to remember about her birth family and marriages, she turned to her daughters' marriages. The countess displayed the crests of Lord Chandos, the first husband of her eldest daughter, Anne. Chandos and Anne were married sometime before 1607 and had six children, with five living into adulthood.²⁴ They lived peacefully at Sudeley Castle until Chandos's death in 1621.

¹⁹ A description of the tablet is included in Lysons, p. 112.

²⁰ State Papers Online <<https://www.gale.com/intl/primary-sources/state-papers-online-early-modern>> [accessed 13 June 2019] SP 12/275, fo. 100, John Chamberlain to Dudley Carleton, 21 Oct. 1600.

²¹ L. Knafla, *Law and Politics in Jacobean England: the Tracts of Lord Chancellor Ellesmere* (Cambridge, 1977), p. 59.

²² H.E.H., EL 213, Thomas Egerton, 'An unpleasant declaration of things passed', 27 July 1611.

²³ P. Sherlock, *Monuments and Memory in Early Modern England* (Aldershot, 2008), p. 40. For more on debate about roles of monuments, see Finch, 'Reformation of meaning', p. 442; Bartram, 'Some tomb', p. 133; Marshall, *Beliefs and the Dead*, p. 127, Thomas, *Ends of Life*, pp. 245–50.

²⁴ Wilkie, 'Such daughters', pp. 215–16.

Three years later, Anne married the notorious earl of Castlehaven. In 1631, Anne accused Castlehaven of plotting and assisting in her rape. The proceeding trials and the earl's subsequent execution provided England with a salacious scandal.²⁵ The countess played a pivotal role in influencing the outcome of the trial and she worked ardently to help her family put the affair behind them.²⁶ The countess noticeably left off of her tomb any mention of Anne's disastrous second marriage.²⁷ On her tomb, Alice's middle daughter, Frances, is depicted next to the impalement of her arms with those of her husband, John Egerton, the earl of Bridgewater. As mentioned, Bridgewater was not only Alice's son-in-law, but also her stepson. The earl of Bridgewater was a major figure in the Caroline administration; in 1631, Charles I appointed him as the President of the Marches of Wales.²⁸ While the marker denoting Alice's marriage to Ellesmere is pushed down to the bottom of her tomb, the earl of Bridgewater's coat is appropriately placed on the impalement next to the figure representing the countess of Bridgewater. The countess's youngest daughter, Elizabeth, is also shown next to the impalement of her coat next to her husband's, Henry Hastings, fifth earl of Huntingdon. The earl and countess of Huntingdon lived in Leicestershire, where the earl served as the lord lieutenant of the county. The countess of Huntingdon fostered a network of local poets and writers while raising her four children.²⁹ The countess displayed her daughters' 'trophy husbands' with dignity. Lawrence Stone argued that heraldry and tombs functioned to celebrate a family history and ancestry rather than an individual person's legacy.³⁰ Alice, however, actively selected the unions she wanted people to remember and left off those she wanted people to forget.

The countess's tomb not only celebrates her daughters for their lucrative marriages; it also highlights her role as a mother. This was a popular component of women's tombs in the seventeenth century and contemporaries read it as a sign of virtue.³¹ During her life, Alice was an active literary and theatrical patroness and several of the writers she patronized commemorated her relationships with her daughters.³² The dedication of John Davies's 1609 publication, *The Holy Roode, or Christ's Crosse*, reads, 'To the Right Honorable, well-accomplished Lady, Alice, Countess of Derby, my good Lady and Mistress: And, to her three right Noble Daughters by Birth, Nature, and Education ... that now is, be all Comfort when so ever'.³³ In 1616, Thomas Gainsford wrote in the dedication of the second book of *The Historie of Trebizond, In Foure Bookes*, 'I thought it most befitting

²⁵ Mervin Touchet, *The Arraignment and Conviction of Mervin, Lord Audley, Earl of Castlehaven* (1642); *The Trial of the Lord Audley, Earl of Castlehaven, For Inhumanely Causing His Own Wife to be Ravished and for Buggery* (1679).

²⁶ State Papers Online, SP 16/192, fo. 11, Alice Egerton to Secretary Dorchester, [Apr.] 1631; SP 16/189, fo. 140, Alice Egerton to Secretary Dorchester, 21 May 1631; SP 16/192:13, Alice Egerton to Charles I, [May] 1631; SP 16/198, fo. 26, Alice Egerton to Secretary Dorchester, 6 Aug. 1631. See also C. Herrup, *A House in Gross Disorder: Sex, Law, and the 2nd Earl of Castlehaven* (Oxford, 1999); Wilkie, 'Such daughters', pp. 238–86.

²⁷ Herrup, *House in Gross Disorder*, p. 62.

²⁸ State Papers Online, SP 16/196, fo. 25, 'Appointment of John Egerton to the President of the Marches of Wales', 8 July 1631.

²⁹ Cogswell, *Home Divisions*; Wilkie, 'Such daughters', pp. 68–72.

³⁰ Stone, *Family, Sex, and Marriage*, p. 225. Keith Thomas articulated a similar view in *Religion and the Decline of Magic: Studies in Popular Beliefs in 16th and 17th Century England* (Oxford, 1971), p. 604, however his recent work in *Ends of Life*, develops his findings on this point.

³¹ Llewellyn, *Funeral Monuments*, p. 287; Thomas, *Ends of Life*, p. 246.

³² F. Fogle, "'Such a rural queen': the Countess Dowager of Derby as patron', in *Patronage in Late Renaissance England: Papers Read at a Clark Library Seminar 14 May 1977*, ed. F. Fogle and L. Knafla (Los Angeles, Calif., 1983), pp. 1–29; Wilkie, 'Such daughters', pp. 139–95.

³³ John Davies, *The Holy Roode, or Christs Crosse* (1609), p. 2.

to look out for some handsome props of supportation, and so have placed the daughters in one circle with the Mother: Yea, such daughters, and such a Mother, that me thinks you move together like fair Planets in conspicuous Orbes; from whose influence can proceed nothing, but sweet presages'.³⁴ These dedications depict the influence that Alice had over her daughters and celebrate all four women as an idealized family. Alice used her tomb as another place to immortalize her relationships with her daughters.

Alice's tomb and literary sources also commemorate another important relationship in her life – that with the village of Harefield. In the early sixteen-thirties, the countess's family commissioned John Milton to write *Arcades*, a pastoral performed as an entertainment for the countess at Harefield Place. Her grandchildren performed many of the parts. In it, Milton wrote:

Mark what radiant state she spreads
In circle round her shining throne,
Shooting her beams like silver threads.
This, this is she alone,
Sitting like a Goddess bright
In the centre of her light.

I will bring you where she sits,
Clad in splendour as benefits
Her deity.
Such a rural Queen
All Arcadia hath not seen.³⁵

The lyrics of the poem, as well as its performance in Harefield, situate the countess as a figurative local monarch; if she was the 'rural Queen', then Harefield was her kingdom. She commemorated that legacy and gave it a physical form by making the village her final resting place.

While the tomb of the countess shares many common features of aristocratic women's tombs of the era, her selected burial site strays from convention. Llewellyn and Harris noted that both pre- and Reformation widows tended to be buried with their first husbands.³⁶ The countess used the location of her tomb to further her own desired image as a 'rural Queen', but, the fact that she was a widow who was not buried anywhere near either of her husbands indicates a significant divergence from social norms.³⁷ Milton's entertainment helps to demonstrate the countess's longstanding devotion to Harefield, but there are several other reasons why she probably preferred to be buried there. Forty-three years had passed between Ferdinando Stanley's death and that of the countess. She was seventy-seven years old at her death and while there is no doubt that her early marriage had a lasting impact on her life, the majority of her life took place after her first husband's death. Harefield had been her home for thirty-six years.

While the countess thought fondly of her first marriage, her subsequent relationship with the Stanley family was precarious. After Ferdinando's death, the countess entered into a thirteen-year-long lawsuit with her brother-in-law, William, sixth earl of Derby.

³⁴ Thomas Gainsford, *The Historie of Threbizond, In Foure Bookes* (1616), p. 79.

³⁵ *The Complete Poetry of John Milton*, ed. J. Shawcross (New York, 1990), p. 120, ll. 14–19, p. 123, ll. 91–5.

³⁶ Llewellyn, *Funeral Monuments*, p. 290; Harris, 'The fabric of piety', p. 327.

³⁷ Sherlock, *Monuments*, p. 40.

Ferdinando left control of his properties to his wife and daughters.³⁸ Convinced that inheriting the title meant inheriting the family's lands, William was outraged.³⁹ The battle finally ended with an act of parliament in 1607. The new earl of Derby paid his nieces £20,400 – £8,000 cash and £11,200 for lands he wanted to purchase back from them, and £1,200 for lands he had illegally sold prior to the settlement. The Act also finalized the distribution of estates and lands.⁴⁰ This outcome disintegrated relations between the countess and William Stanley and she probably did not want to negotiate her final resting place with her estranged brother-in-law. Alice's heraldic tomb shows off her connection to the Stanleys, but the tomb's location speaks to the years of tension with the family. Based on the details of Alice's second marriage given above, it is little wonder that she did not want to be buried with her second husband.

An even more complex legacy emerges when we broaden our scope to include the construction of her almshouses and her use of post-mortem charitable giving. In the seventeenth century, displays of magnificence, such as heraldic tombs and elaborate entertainments, could be seen as ostentatious.⁴¹ Some who knew the countess thought of her as difficult and financially irresponsible, as indicated by John Chamberlain's letter to Dudley Carleton and by Egerton's account of his long-suffering marriage to her described above. This means her contemporaries may have read her tomb and its unconventional location away from either of her husbands as signs of vanity and aggressive independence. Her almshouses and charity, in contrast, represented a virtuous and generous spirit. *The Book of Common Prayer* allowed considerable space for Alice to utilize rituals of charitable giving and she masterfully manoeuvred within that space.⁴²

Alice called for the construction of her almshouses in her will and requested that her executors and the parish appoint 'a Master of the said hospital and remained to read twice service or some other godly prayers daily to the said six poor women'.⁴³ Accommodations for six residents was the median size of almshouses by the middle of the seventeenth century.⁴⁴ The brick houses have an H-shaped plan and eight narrow chimneys rise from the roof. Two stone reliefs of crowned griffins rest above the windows flanking the front door, again highlighting the connection with the Spencer family. Alice stipulated in her will that each widow was to receive five pounds per annum for life for her maintenance, as was the appointed master for the hospital. She left twenty shillings per annum for the physical upkeep of the building. She also requested that a year after her death, her executors were to purchase lands valued at thirty-six pounds for the use of the master and widows. This was all very generous, yet Alice was never one to miss a chance to incorporate her

³⁸ T.N.A., Prob/11/84, 'The Last Will and Testament of Ferdinando Stanley, fifth earl of Derby', 12 Apr. 1594.

³⁹ J. J. Bagley, *The Earls of Derby 1485–1985* (1985); B. Coward, *The Stanleys, Lords Stanley, and Earls of Derby, 1385–1672: the Origins, Wealth, and Power of a Landowning Family* (Manchester, 1983); Wilkie, 'Such daughters', pp. 196–219.

⁴⁰ T.N.A., C 89/10/33, 'Act of Parliament for settling disputes between heir male & coheiresses of Ferdinando Earle of Derby & for assuring Estates', c.1607. See also Northamptonshire Record Office, E (B) 53.

⁴¹ Llewellyn, *Funeral Monuments*, p. 248.

⁴² 'The Order for the Buriall of the Dead', *Book of Common Prayer* (1636), nn. 292–4.

⁴³ T.N.A., Prob/11/174.

⁴⁴ Nicholls, *Almshouses in Early Modern England*, p. 71; W. K. Jordan, *Philanthropy in England 1480–1660: a Study of the Changing Pattern of English Social Aspirations* (1959), p. 18; M. McIntosh, *Poor Relief in England 1350–1600* (Cambridge, 2012), pp. 197–8.

heraldic rite so she went so far as to 'appoint them my seal of arms engraven in silver and made lozenge-wise to be their common seal'.⁴⁵ She clearly envisioned the indefinite use of her hospital, which speaks of Alice's desire for posthumous fame. As Thomas explained, 'a well-managed charitable institution could live forever in a way that families never did' and Alice's will laid out detailed plans for the long-term management of her almshouses and for their residents.⁴⁶ Commissioning almshouses also secured Alice as a patroness to Harefield's poor single women. The countess's tomb represents a widow who remained in Harefield for eternity on her own. The construction of her almshouses symbolizes her desire to provide means to other single women of the village. Lucinda Becker has claimed it would be dangerous for a woman to assert a personal agenda from her deathbed but the construction of her almshouses, along with nearly 400 years of continuous use, indicated that the people of Harefield listened to and had no issues with the countess's expressed wishes, undermining Becker's argument.⁴⁷

The countess's choice to commission her almshouses speaks to the argument made by Nicholls, that 'early modern almshouses were not just a continuation of their medieval predecessors ... but took on a distinct identity'.⁴⁸ While some, like Brian Bailey, have argued that the practice of commissioning almshouses declined in England during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, more recent scholarship recasts the construction of almshouses in light of the expansion of secular parish relief for the local poor in the seventeenth century.⁴⁹ Secular parish relief and the construction of almshouses, patronized by both men and women, increased significantly during the course of the seventeenth century.⁵⁰ While shifting senses of secular parish relief may have provided new motivations for local patronesses, elites had long been commissioning hospitals and almshouses. Nicholls argued that 'the physical representation of one's virtue in this way might have been the greatest importance for those with most to prove, those whose position in society was less secure or only newly established'.⁵¹ Alice's almshouses do not just speak to her local patronage; they reflect her life-long ambition to elevate and stabilize her status, and that of her kin. They also help to curtail the impact of her reputation for extravagance during her life and her enormous heraldic funeral monument.

Upon her death, the countess undertook other grand gestures of charity. Her will called for fifty pounds to be distributed 'to the poorest inhabitants of Harefield' and another fifty pounds to be distributed 'to the poorest inhabitants of Colham, Hollingdon and Woxbridge [*sic*]', neighbouring communities where the countess owned property.⁵² This practice was no longer part of the state-sanctioned religion; *The Book of Common Prayer* makes no mention of doles at all. Most seventeenth-century contemporaries deemed the tradition of

⁴⁵ T.N.A., Prob/11/174. The lozenge-shaped shield was commonly used by widows and elite single women.

⁴⁶ Thomas, *Ends of Life*, p. 258.

⁴⁷ Becker, *Death and the Early Modern Englishwoman*, p. 38.

⁴⁸ Nicholls, *Almshouses in Early Modern England*, p. 14.

⁴⁹ B. Bailey, *Almshouses* (1988), p. 104 (Bailey mistakenly lists 1610 as the date of the construction of the countess's almshouses); S. Hindle, *On the Parish? The Micro-Politics of Poor Relief in Rural England c.1550–1750* (Oxford, 2004), pp. 1–14; Nicholls, *Almshouses in Early Modern England*, p. 5; T. Wales, 'Poverty, poor relief and the life-cycle: some evidence from 17th century Norfolk', in *Land, Kinship and Life-Cycle*, ed. R. M. Smith (Cambridge, 1984), pp. 351–404.

⁵⁰ Wales, pp. 351–404.

⁵¹ Nicholls, *Almshouses in Early Modern England*, p. 75.

⁵² T.N.A., Prob/11/174.

doles as superstitious and outmoded, so her choice to utilize this ritual is complicated.⁵³ Doles might have identified her as a Catholic securing prayer to minimize her soul's stint in purgatory, or as a devout Calvinist using charity as a sign of her election.⁵⁴ Yet the few surviving sources that nod to Alice's confessional identity indicate both as highly unlikely, and, more importantly, her will makes no mention of post-mortem charity specifically to facilitate the health of her soul. The Reformation altered the act's religious meaning and for conformists in the sixteen-thirties, like Alice, charity merely took different, oftentimes more institutionalized forms.⁵⁵ The growing acceptance of secular charity and post-mortem charity at the local parish level contributed to her image as a local patroness. They also helped counter-balance the grandeur of her tomb and extravagant lifestyle. Post-mortem charitable acts allowed Alice to construct a lasting legacy as a virtuous elite woman.

The countess's will specified that twenty poor women from Harefield, twenty poor women from Colham, Hollingdon and Uxbridge (collectively), all her household servants at Harefield Place, her daughter Anne, grandsons George and William Brydges, and granddaughter Alice Hastings should all receive blacks.⁵⁶ By the late sixteenth century, many people viewed mourning as superstitious, or worse, Catholic, and opposed the distribution of blacks.⁵⁷ Blacks were also expensive, which may have been another deterrent to their distribution.⁵⁸ But as a life-long conformist and woman of significant means, Alice did not need to worry about the negative connotations or financial limitations associated with the distribution of blacks. Her reputation for religious conformity and wealth allowed the 'rural Queen' to ensure a magnificent band of mourners would reflect her grandeur and help to launch her 'posthumous fame'.

The countess also outlined detailed instructions for her funeral. Her will reads, 'I desire that mine own servants within two days and two nights next after my decease may carry [my body] to my said tomb in the night time there to be interred in decent and Christian manner, only with forty touchers'.⁵⁹ In the seventeenth century, the aristocracy practiced

⁵³ Harding, 'Death, burial, and the English Reformation', p. 393; Helt, 'Women, memory and will-making', p. 194; Hickman, 'Wise and religious epitaphs', p. 119; Hindle, *On the Parish?*, pp. 121–2; Houlbrooke, 'Death, church, and family in England between the late 15th and the early 18th centuries', *Death, Ritual, and Bereavement*, pp. 25–42, at p. 30; R. Houlbrooke, 'The age of decency: 1660–1760', in *Death in England*, ed. P. Jupp and C. Gittings (New Brunswick, 2000), pp. 174–201, at pp. 191–2; Marshall, *Beliefs and the Dead*, pp. 167–87; Thomas, *Decline of Magic*, p. 66. Thomas also argued that in very few instances, people left doles to nullify a curse, but there is no evidence to indicate this interpretation has any bearing here.

⁵⁴ I. K. Ben-Amos, "'Good works' and social ties: helping the migrant poor in early modern England', *Protestant Identities*, pp. 125–40, at p. 135; C. Gittings, 'Urban funerals in late medieval and Reformation England', in *Death in Towns: Urban Responses to the Dying and the Dead, 100–1600*, ed. S. Bassett (Leicester, 1992), pp. 170–83, at p. 173; Thomas, *Decline of Magic*, p. 601.

⁵⁵ Ben-Amos, "'Good Works'", pp. 125–40; C. Schen, 'Strategies of poor, aged women and widows in 16th century London', in *Women and Ageing in British Society Since 1500*, ed. L. Bothelo and P. Thane (New York, 2001), pp. 13–30; P. Slack, *From Reformation to Improvement: Public Welfare in Early Modern England* (Oxford, 1999).

⁵⁶ T.N.A., Prob/11/174.

⁵⁷ Harding, 'Death, burial, and the English Reformation', p. 392; R. Houlbrooke, 'Civility and civil observances in the early modern English funeral', in *Civil Histories: Essays Presented to Sir Keith Thomas*, ed. P. Burke, B. Harrison and P. Slack (Oxford, 2000), pp. 67–85, at p. 73; Marshall, *Beliefs and the Dead*, pp. 167–8; Schen, 'Strategies of poor', p. 20; Thomas, *Decline of Magic*, p. 66.

⁵⁸ Houlbrooke, 'Civility and civil observances', p. 80.

⁵⁹ T.N.A., Prob/11/174.

two styles of funerals, heraldic funerals and night funerals. Heraldic funerals 'stress[ed] the continuing power of the aristocracy' and some peers also believed that the College of Arms added virtue to the service.⁶⁰ Alice commissioned a tomb that was dripping with heraldry and she received a death certificate from the College of Arms, yet she did not want a heraldic funeral.⁶¹ In fact, by requesting a night funeral, the countess ensured that her funeral would be outside the regimented jurisdiction of the College of Arms, and thus the state.⁶² The prevalence of night funerals increased throughout the seventeenth century as noble men and women wanted their funerals to reflect their own personal wealth, authority and social rank.⁶³ Many seventeenth-century women also opted for night funerals because it avoided the necessary embalming required for a heraldic funeral.⁶⁴ A night funeral for the countess, therefore, served two purposes: to allow her more control over her funeral and to provide the chance to draw upon a more modern death ritual.

A controversial night funeral combined with her choice to be buried away from either of her husbands meant that it was imperative for the countess to utilize proper Protestant scripts to protect her reputation. She did not want to appear too subversive. The preamble of her will states:

First I commend my soul into the hands of Almighty God my maker trusting in and through the only merits, meditations, death and intercession of my most blessed Saviour Jesus Christ to have free remission of all my sins and everlasting life in all glory and happiness with that my glorious and blessed Saviour, my body I commit to the grave and dust from whence it came to be laid in the tomb which I lately made in the upper chancel of the parish church of Harefield ... until by the joyful resurrection it shall be raised up to life.⁶⁵

The countess's preamble follows the era's conformist Protestant script by placing all power in Christ.⁶⁶ It also closely mirrors the language *The Book of Common Prayer* instructed priests to read at burial services: 'For as much as it hath pleased Almighty God of his great mercy to take unto himself the Soul of our dear brother, here departed, we therefore commit his body to the ground ... and certain hope of resurrection to eternal life'.⁶⁷ Alice appropriately appointed her personal chaplain, John Prichard, to deliver her funeral sermon.⁶⁸ She set aside ten pounds for his services, or 'if he be not present to make it then I give the said ten pounds to such other Reverend Preacher as my executors shall appoint'.⁶⁹ The arrangements she made for her own funeral demonstrate her religious conformity. They also demonstrate her desire to choose the style of funeral for herself, thus illustrating the kinds of options elites had in the seventeenth century.

⁶⁰ Gittings, *Burial and the Individual*, p. 175; Harding, 'Death, burial, and the English Reformation', p. 392; Houlbrooke, 'The age of decency', at p. 189; Llewellyn, *Funeral Monuments*, p. 248.

⁶¹ H.E.H., EL 1019, 'Death Certificate for the Dowager Countess of Derby', Jan. 1637; College of Arms, 18 fo. 53v, 'Death Certificate for the Dowager Countess of Derby', Jan. 1637. The College of Arms adhered to state-sanctioned prescriptive funeral rites.

⁶² Marshall, *Beliefs and the Dead*, p. 153. Marshall argued that some opted for night funerals because they believed the Church of England to be 'irredeemably corrupt', but this argument is too extreme for the countess's case.

⁶³ Gittings, *Burial and the Individual*, p. 188, p. 196; Houlbrooke, 'Age of decency', p. 190.

⁶⁴ Gittings, *Burial and the Individual*, p. 190; Houlbrooke, *Death, Religion, and the Family*, p. 272.

⁶⁵ T.N.A., Prob/11/174.

⁶⁶ Houlbrooke, *Death, Religion and the Family*, p. 123.

⁶⁷ 'The Order for the Buriall of the Dead', 1559 *Book of Common Prayer* (1636), nn. 292–4.

⁶⁸ Harding, 'Death, burial, and the English Reformation', p. 391; Marshall, *Beliefs and the Dead*, pp. 158–9.

⁶⁹ T.N.A., Prob/11/174.

The sermon given at the countess's funeral is lost, but Robert Codrington's, 'An Elegy Sacred to the Immortal Memory of the Excellent and Illustrious Lady' survives. Codrington presented his elegy to the countess's granddaughter, Alice Hastings, the eldest child of the earl and countess of Huntingdon. Young Alice spent considerable time with her grandmother in Harefield. Along with blacks, the countess left a number of personal affects and a £3,000 marriage portion to her granddaughter, making it clear that they shared a special bond.⁷⁰ This bond is accentuated in the opening lines of Codrington's poem: 'to the right honourable and true Noble the Lady Alice Hastings, her most virtuous and lamenting grandchild'.⁷¹ In 1634, Codrington dedicated his translation of Peter du Moulin's *A Treatise of the Knowledge of God* to Alice, in which he apologizes for what his 'presumption hath offended', suggesting that he did not know the countess at the time, but was merely courting her patronage.⁷² In that dedication he wrote, 'Goodness itself being so habitual unto you, that it seems she is become even your nature, and may be called as much your complexion as your practice'. He went on to say, 'This I have received from the mouth of Fame, which I deliver not to your ears, but so the truth of your Story, which parallels your love to Learning with the nobleness of your other Virtues, and prefers your love unto Religion above them'.⁷³ Three years later, Codrington continued to express his admiration for the countess in his elegy. More importantly, he articulated key components of the legacy she had shrewdly worked to establish. Codrington wrote:

All shall improve themselves by her, and try
As blessed like to her to live, as blessed to die,
Religion shall rejoice, and Heaven shall smile
To see their pious troupes increased, the while
The grateful World shall holy trophies raise,
To Spencers honours, and high Stanleys praise.⁷⁴

In this stanza, Codrington highlighted one of the most important aspects of the countess's desired legacy: the equal importance of her Spencer and Stanley families. Also like Alice, Codrington neglected any mention of Egerton.

Codrington incorporated her tomb and earnest desires for a long-lasting legacy when he wrote:

More bright by death; yet weep! For yet this tomb
Holds Nature's cheapest treasures, would you come
And all perfections in one volume see,
Here every dust would make history,
Which he that looks on, and not spares a groan,
Adds but more marble to her burial stone.⁷⁵

⁷⁰ T.N.A., Prob/11/174.

⁷¹ Los Angeles, Williams Andrew Clark Library (hereafter Clark Libr.), C6715MI/E38, Robert Codrington, 'An Elegie sacred to ... Alice Countess Dowager of Derby', 1637.

⁷² Robert Codrington, *A Treatise of the Knowledge of God* (1643); V. Larminie, 'Codrington, Robert (1601/2–1665?)', translator and writer', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004) <<https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/5798>> [accessed 25 Sept. 2018].

⁷³ Codrington, *Treatise of the Knowledge of God*.

⁷⁴ Clark Libr., C6715MI/E38.

⁷⁵ Clark Libr., C6715MI/E38.

Codrington not only captured the stature of her tomb and the fact that her body lay beneath it, but he emphasized her desire to 'make history'. This piece, which was obviously written after her death, resonates with the critical aspects of the countess's desired legacy. Codrington understood her message.

Retha Warnicke has written that a woman's '[death] bed was used as a kind of stage from which to act out the last role of her life'.⁷⁶ When preparing for her death, the countess choreographed a multi-faceted legacy and she used the village of Harefield as her stage. She relied on a blending of rituals and rites to construct her desired image. She also deviated from the norm in several areas to craft her message. It is only by focusing on her, and not just on her rituals, that the impact of this becomes clear. She commissioned a tomb in the seventeenth-century style that would remind visitors of her Spencer roots and Stanley marriage, while minimizing Egerton's lack of pedigree and ignoring her daughter Anne's disastrous marriage to the earl of Castlehaven. She intended the tomb's location to speak to her reign over Harefield and independence as a widow; commissioning almshouses extended her patronage to single women in the parish. Her extensive distribution of post-mortem doles demonstrated her acknowledgement of her social responsibility to the parish poor. Her distribution of blacks helped create a large band of mourners as another way of marking her status. Her night funeral reminded those same mourners of her independence by relying on this seventeenth-century funeral style. The countess utilized a broad array of newly available death rituals to carve out space to instill a lasting legacy of elite womanhood, kinship, virtue, charity, patronage and grandeur.

⁷⁶ R. Warnicke, 'Eulogies for women: public testimony of their godly example and leadership', in *Attending to Women in Early Modern England*, ed. B. Travitsky and A. Seeff (Newark, Del., 1994), pp. 168–86, at p. 170.