

Regional portraiture and the heraldic connection in Tudor and early Stuart England¹

Robert Tittler



1 *Sir Gervase Holles (1547-1627)*, British School, 1586. Oil on panel. Private collection

2 *Sir Gervase Holles (1547-1627)*, British School, 1626. Oil on panel. Private collection

In 1657 the distinguished antiquary and Royalist officer Gervase Holles (1607-75) set about writing the 'memorials' of his family, in which he recalled a telling incident regarding the portrait done of his namesake and grandfather in 1626. The elder (Sir) Gervase Holles (1547-1627) had enjoyed a distinguished career in local government and both diplomatic and military service, but was now, in his 80th year, living near the remote Lincolnshire fishing port of Grimsby² in frail and failing health. A portrait had been done of him when he was thirty-nine, showing him in full vigour with a head of rich, brown hair (Pl 1). The family now wanted another. As his grandson recalled it:

It was my father's desire to have this last picture drawne, to which end he had got a workeman (the best yt was then in the country) to his house, and besought my grandfather with much impunity that he would be pleased to sit, but could not prevayle with him. Whereuppon he commanded me... to use my endeavours: by which at last he was unwillingly overcome, and taking a key out of his pocket he gave it me and bid me take out of such a trunk a white sattin doublet ambroidered with flowers of silke and golde, saying withall that he did not like theis fooleries, but, seeing we would have it so, and that he could be drawne with no better face, he would be drawne in a good doublet. He caused the fellow to paint in the picture an holly tree all withered and leavless (save for one or two at the bottome) with this under it - *Aliter Eui*.

The grandson added the thought that, 'that peice [*sic*] (though performed but by an ordinary hand) was very like him and representes a most comely and venerable countenance' (Pl 2).³ As it happens, both portraits survive in a private British collection.

The recourse to a local 'workeman', 'the best yt was then in the country' (meaning 'county' in contemporary parlance), and not one of the celebrated London-based portrait

painters of the day, proves significant. It tells us that a century after Hans Holbein changed the face of English portraiture at court, and just as Rubens and Van Dyck formed the cutting edge of formal portraiture in courtly and aristocratic circles, the Holleses could readily find an un-named 'workeman' with 'an ordinary hand' somewhere near Grimsby to turn out a most 'comely and venerable countenance' of his sitter.

The requirements of the court circle, city elite, and visiting landed elites from the realm over had long made London the unrivalled centre for portraiture in the entire British Isles. By the 1620s the flourishing, tight-knit community of foreign-born and especially Netherlandish painters, sculptors, engravers, embroiderers, and other artisans was well into its third generation, training its own sons (and sometimes daughters) and keeping its skills largely within a complexly intermarried web of artisan families.⁴ Despite decades of spirited and vigorous opposition from the largely native-born members of the Painter-Stainers Company, who also took on portrait work when they could get it, they had long since become the dominant force in that activity.⁵ Their approach to portrait painting, as a 'polite' discipline governed by formal, classically-derived, and academic principles of depiction, had come to define the terms of contemporary fashion. The fruit of their works, with their carefully studied single-point perspective, naturalistic form, classically drawn figures, meticulously modeled drapery, subtle language of gesture, and sophisticated use of colour in sundry blended forms,

could be seen in the country houses of the landed elite throughout the realm. Numerous surviving examples may also be seen today in art galleries at home and abroad.

Yet despite this undoubted dominance of the foreign-born or trained artists and their continentally-derived approach to portraiture, very nearly every county, city, and major town continued to have native-born 'workmen' whose occupational training in a wide variety of crafts allowed them to produce portraiture for a predominantly local or regional clientele. Such local painters, commonly known in their time as 'painter-stainers', have been identified for this period in, eg, Norwich, King's Lynn, Chester, Gloucester, Leicester, Bury St. Edmunds, and similar communities,⁶ and at least one of them, Holles's 'workman', in the poor, small and remote fishing port of Grimsby.⁷ Scores of their portraits, if but a fraction of those which were created, also survive. Though most of these lack the aesthetic qualities which would gain them places in art galleries as such, these 'vernacular' portraits may still sometimes be seen in folk museums, museums of local history, and on the walls of country houses and civic institutions.

These 'vernacular' productions were, and were considered at the time, as works of craft rather than art: it is doubtful whether the concept of portraiture as art could be said even to have emerged in England by this time. Though not necessarily clumsy or crude in their detailed working of such elements as clothing or lace, they lacked any sustained acquaintance with the formalities of, eg, perspective, chiaroscuro, naturalistic modeling, gesture or the subtleties of blended colours which had come to typify the Italian, French or (especially influential on the English scene) Netherlandish schools. When measured by formal standards of contemporary continental painting, the overall unaccomplished quality of these vernacular images has allowed them to be dismissed by connoisseurs, curators and traditional art historians alike. Along with the anonymity of its creators, these qualities have made the vernacular portraiture of that era exceptionally difficult to study.

We will probably never discover precisely who Holles's 'workman' might have been. Yet there are strong indications of what *type* of workman he or (improbably but not impossibly) she will have been, and what sort of training will have imparted the skills he or she possessed. Aside from the occasional itinerant refugee from abroad,⁸ most who took on such work amongst the middling elites of provincial England will have been local or regionally based, native English craftsmen, trained through apprenticeship in traditional, often ecclesiastically-supported, crafts like wood carvers, glass painters, tomb-makers, embroiderers and manuscript illuminators. They are most likely of all to have been trained as painter-stainers (including the sub-set of arms or herald-painters) or as heralds who painted: occupations which were so closely related in some of their skill requirements and potential clientele as often to have been pursued by one in the same person. None of these occupations has been explored as fully as they deserve to be for their influence on contemporary portraiture. But it is the role of heraldic training, and its influence on contemporary English painters and portraiture, which remains least familiar and arguably the most influential.

At first glance, the institutional relations between painter-stainers and heralds makes this occupational intimacy a little surprising. Jurisdictional conflict between the Painter-Stainers Company of London and the heralds and other officials of the College of Arms remained almost as frequent and hard-fought as those between the Painter-Stainers and

foreign 'interlopers'.⁹ But in practice both painter-stainers and herald painters painted a wide variety of heraldic devices on an equally wide variety of objects and surfaces. Both required training in many of the same techniques and used the same materials and tools of the trade. It was inevitable that their expertises should overlap and that members of the two groups should vie for control of such work. And, indeed, competition between them ensued on a frequent and continual basis throughout the period at hand.

And yet, as is well but only superficially known, the activities of heraldry and portraiture were closely and often collaboratively linked in the 16th and early 17th centuries.¹⁰ One component of the Painter-Stainers Company of London consisted of those trained specifically in herald painting or arms painting.¹¹ In a familiar pattern of occupation back-scratching, and whether in London or not, heralds had frequently to collaborate with painter-stainers and other such craftsmen to carry out their tasks; painter-stainers often relied on heralds to bring them work.

Taking the Holles's experience as its point of departure, this essay explores the working relations between heralds and painter-stainers, in provincial England as well as in London, up to c1640. It concludes with an assertion of the likely effects of that intimate collaboration on the visual characteristics of English portraiture of this era.

The very nature of their job required officers of the College of Arms, and especially the heralds, to remain in close and continuing contact with the armigerous and would-be armigerous families, and with the civic institutions, of each shire. By the early 15th century the assumption and display of armorial bearings had become so common, and so unregulated, that the Crown gave the College of Arms the task of reforming and supervising it. Such efforts were only sporadically effective over the next century. But in 1530, a royal commission authorized the Clarenceux King of Arms, one of the three kings of arms serving under the Earl Marshal, to carry out systematic heraldic visitations of each of the shires under his jurisdiction, all of which lay south of the River Trent. Clarenceux engaged heralds, deputy heralds, and other officers of the College of Arms, along with county sheriffs, bailiffs of hundreds, and lesser officials, in the task.¹² Together, these officials set out to inspect every use of arms they could find, affirming and recording the legitimate ones, destroying the rest, and fining those who had illicitly assumed unauthorized arms. Major rounds of visitations were held not just in the area within Clarenceux's jurisdiction but nation-wide, in the years 1580, 1620 and 1666, though visitations of particular shires were carried out from time to time in other years as well.¹³

In addition to carrying out visitations of this sort and certifying the legitimacy of existing arms where appropriate, the heralds and their deputies received, vetted, and adjudicated new requests for arms from the socially mobile families of that era, designing the actual arms for those whose requests they approved. They also arranged public processions, so as to maintain strict order of precedence amongst participants. They presided at weddings and funerals of armigerous families, so as to keep straight the implications of those comings and goings for family pedigrees. They awarded and designed new arms for each successive generation of armigerous families, helped design armorial displays for funeral monuments, and carried out sundry similar chores as part of their regular work.¹⁴ Critically, if more generally, they were obliged, in the words of a 1609 manual on the duties of a herald, 'to keep the seacrettes of Knights, Esquires, Ladyes and gentlemen as a confessor of Arms and not to discover [ie 'disclose'] them in noe wise.'¹⁵

In addition, heralds performed similar functions for char-

tered civic institutions, including grammar schools, charitable institutions, university colleges, trade guilds (including the London liveryes), which were frequently being re-established or founded anew in the decades following the Henrician and Edwardian dissolutions, and even entire boroughs, many of which were first incorporated in this era.¹⁶

Under these circumstances, and along with many other implications, officers of the College of Arms therefore became intimately familiar with the arms-bearing families and institutions in each shire of their jurisdiction. Their task required expertise in genealogical research (literally hundreds of their volumes of genealogy notes and sketches survive in central and county archives) and close working relations with officials of the county, hundred, and parish. They had to be able to provide accurate drawings and paintings of the various armorial devices which were the visual product of their work. The results of those extensive efforts were recorded in thousands of field notes, in the form of armorial sketches or 'tricks', genealogical charts, and explanatory prose, before they were recorded in the visitation records held in the College itself.

Visitations, and the armigerous status which they verified or bestowed on individuals and their families, definitively affirmed the very gentility to which the landed classes of the day so earnestly and famously aspired. The award or certification of arms served, along with what Lawrence Stone has described as the 'genealogical trees and sumptuous tombs as symptoms of the frenzied status-seeking and ancestor worship of the age', as the common coinage of social status.¹⁷ The award of arms to institutions had much the same effect, albeit providing political legitimation for the institution rather than social legitimation for the family.¹⁸

In all, the functional similarities between the display of arms and the display of portraits prove quite close. Both not only emerged from analogous aspirations, but both also required some of the same skills to produce. And because the jurisdiction of the College of Arms extended to every corner of the realm, and because those who carried out visitations were either skilled in the visual arts themselves or worked closely with those who were, heralds found themselves in an excellent position to provide portraits themselves or, more likely, to connect their clients to regional painters who could do the work instead.

Some members of the College of Arms were sufficiently skilled in the visual arts as to be able to respond fully to these needs themselves. Some even enjoyed parallel careers as painters, and especially portrait painters, at the highest level of skill and patronage to be found at least amongst the native-born English practitioners of the day.

The most prominent of this latter number was undoubtedly William Segar (c1564-1633), who was probably born in England of Dutch heritage. Although he was initially trained as a scrivener, another skill appropriate to the herald's work, Segar landed the post of Portcullis Pursuivant in his 21st year (1585), moving up the ladder of College offices to Somerset Herald (1589), Norroy King of Arms (one of three kings of arms, the highest position in the College under the Earl Marshal himself) in 1597 and then to Garter King of Arms in 1604. Though he came into disfavour and was briefly imprisoned for granting arms to a bogus claimant, he was eventually restored to James I's good graces and knighted in 1616.¹⁹ Along with George Gower, Robert Peake, William Larkin, and the miniaturists Nicholas Hilliard and Isaac Oliver, Segar must be counted amongst the most prominent English-born portrait painters of the day. Among works confidently attributed to him are portraits of the Earl of Leicester the Earl of Essex; Francis, the Countess of Essex; and Queen Elizabeth herself.²⁰

Another herald/portraitist, Edward Norgate (1581-1650), was

something of a polymath, being highly skilled also in music and calligraphy, serving as an agent in the purchase of paintings abroad for Queen Henrietta Maria and the Earl of Arundel and as tutor to Arundel's sons. His broad skills brought him to the attention of the court circle under Charles I and to an appointment in the College of Arms, first as Rouge Croix Pursuivant and then Windsor Herald. Along with these sundry occupations and appointments, Norgate also painted miniatures, and wrote a treatise on the subject, *Mimianura*, which is both important and frequently cited.²¹

Those heralds who lacked these skills, or whose extraordinary work load simply necessitated calling for help, had to rely on others outside the official ranks of the College: painter-stainers, herald-painters, arms painters, and similarly designated craftsmen. In and around the royal court, such obligations comprised a major employment for the hierarchy of painter-stainers working under the jurisdiction of the Sergeant-Painter to the Crown, where such jurisdiction was formally laid out in the patent for that office.²² But elsewhere throughout the realm as well, painter-stainers were commonly employed to paint or 'refresh' the arms of individual towns and boroughs, or those of the crown displayed in buildings like town halls, parish churches, and market halls. To facilitate their help in visitations, some of them were formally deputized as officers of the College of Arms in their own right; others were employed as *ad hoc* deputies for such work, without ever becoming members of the College. As the press for heraldic services reached near crisis proportions from the late 16th century, some deputy heralds were even permitted to carry out entire visitations on their own.²³

Most of these men will have been locally-based painter-stainers with particular training or experience as herald painters: 'A Herald Painter', we read in Randle Holme III's *The Academy of Armorie*, 'is such as Paints Coats of Armes on Escochions, Shields, Tables, Penons, Standarts and such like'.²⁴ Whether formally deputized or not, painter-stainers such as Peter Henson of Oundle, the Sergeant-Painter John Browne, Jacob Chaloner of Chester, or the prominent London painter-stainer Richard Scarlett, even kept extensive notes on heraldic devices of families in particular areas just like the heralds whom they assisted.²⁵

Given these circumstances, personal relations between heralds on the one hand and their painter-stainer collaborators could be extremely complex. Competition for commissions, and resentment of one by the other for appearing to overstep occupational boundaries, remained common throughout the era, even resulting in litigation and legislation.²⁶ But interdependence, and the collaboration to which it led, remained equally common and sometimes quite extensive, often extending even to apprenticeships and intermarriage. Evidence of professional ties sometimes includes tokens of gratitude from painter-stainers to particular heralds who had provided patronage. Not all painter-stainers went as far as Robert Greenwood, who left in his 1585 will bequests to the heralds Edmund Knight (Norroy King of Arms), Richard Lee (Richmond Herald), Robert Coke (Clarenceux King of Arms), Edmund Coke (deputy herald for Chester) and Robert Glover, (Somerset Herald),²⁷ but these gestures were not by any means unique.

Such matrices of employment, apprenticeship, family and influence were also often specific to a particular region, where they could extend to virtually all the sundry activities involving painting in that region. The model for this sort of close-knit and even inbred local artisan community remains the complex matrix of foreign-derived artisan families of sixteenth and seventeenth century London so closely described by Mary Edmond.²⁸ But similar family and occupational matrices, albeit on a smaller scale, may also be found in some



3a Detail of portrait in Pl 3b, showing monogram lower right, an R and H combined.

3b *Thomas ap Ieuan ap David of Ardymwnt* (b 1560), British School, perhaps attributable to Randall Home I 'the Elder' (1570/71-1655). Oil on panel, 67.5 x 54.3 cm. National Museum of Wales, Cardiff

4 *The Cholmondeley Ladies*, British School, c1600-10. Oil on wood support, 88.6 x 172.3 cm. Tate Britain



provincial areas. And, given the relative unfamiliarity of the provincial scene in the production of visual imagery in this period, it may be even more instructive to illuminate the latter than to add to what is known about the former.

Something of the sort has been well-described in Norwich, where foreign-born painter-stainers and other 'stranger'-craftsmen settled in considerable numbers in the Elizabethan era. Restricted in a variety of ways from full entry into local life, and sharing a common language and heritage, they intermarried, took on each others' children as apprentices, and sustained their ethnic identity for several generations thereafter. Part of that continuity extended to occupational continuity in the visual arts,²⁹ though this is not to suggest an absence of such craftsmen within the native born population. The usual rivalry between native and foreign workmen ensued, sometimes even to the point of violence, before the two groups began to blend together into one over the first half of the 17th century.

Although far less populous, affluent, or favoured as a place of settlement by 'strangers' from abroad, the west coast port of Chester provides a similar case of occupational and familial intermingling. Chester not only served as the jurisdictional focal point of a particular office in the College of Arms, the Chester Herald of Arms in Ordinary, probably created to serve the needs of the County Palatine of Chester,³⁰ but it hosted from well back in the fourteenth century its own guild association representing the interests of local painters. In 1536, and especially so as to share expenses in producing the City's annual Shepherds' Play, the Painter-Stainers formally merged with the Glaziers, Embroiderers, and Stationers, gaining a charter from the Mayor of that City, Henry Gee, under that rubric.³¹ The performance of the play was shortly to be proscribed by a Puritan mayoral regime,³² but the Guild itself endured well into the 18th century, with the painter-stainers remaining its largest and most influential component over most of that time. The Company charter specifically licensed its painter-stainers members to practice 'the arts of painting, hatching, lymninge, staining and seeling', all of which specifically echoed requirements of the herald painter. Hatching, or the drawing of fine, parallel lines to indicate shading, was particularly essential to heraldic painting. Different patterns of hatching were employed in heraldic sketches, or 'tricks', both to represent the different colours of the arms and as vital elements in the design of a coat of arms itself.³³

An important figure in that Company for the point at hand

was Thomas Chaloner (d 1598), poet, painter-stainer, and a valued aid to the leading magnate in the area, Henry Stanley, 4th Earl of Derby. Chaloner had long been engaged in painter-stainer work in and around Chester and in several sorts of work for the earls of Derby. He had performed with the earl's players, and had been commissioned to paint an elaborate screen for the earl's residence.³⁴ But in his heraldic capacity he became Deputy to the Norroy King of Arms in 1598 and had carried out seven years earlier, as an *ad hoc* deputy, a visitation of the City of Chester in 1591.³⁵ Chaloner took on as one of his apprentices the next key figure to sustain the link between heralds and painters in the Chester area, Randle Holme (1570/71-1655). And though Chaloner could little foresee it, his new apprentice was to succeed him in more than the narrow occupational sense. Holme married Chaloner's own widow, Elizabeth, nee Alcock, and took on Chaloner's son Jacob as his own apprentice in 1602, thereby starting the younger Chaloner on an active and successful career of his own.

Holme enjoyed a long and illustrious local career as a painter-stainer, master of the Chester Company of Painter-Stainers, Mayor of Chester and both Sheriff and JP for the shire.³⁶ But several of his other achievements are particularly important to us. He established the direct line of his male descendants as herald painters and painter-stainers for three generations to follow, all of those successors in turn taking his forename as well as his occupation: Randle Holme II, (1601-1659); Randle Holme III (1627-1699/1700) and Randle Holme IV (d 1707). Holme the Elder, as he shall be known here, remained actively involved in heraldic painting and other aspects of the herald's work for a good many years. Though his own father was a blacksmith, some of Holme's ancestors had served as heralds in the 15th century, and he may well have thought of this as a deeply rooted family tradition which it was his role to revive.³⁷ In any event, his own introduction to this profession began with his apprenticeship to Chaloner (1578-c1585). As his career unfolded, he came to serve in several capacities as a deputy herald in his own right. His first record-



ed act in that capacity came in 1591, when he made extensive additions to Chaloner's 1580 visitation of Chester, and this no doubt counted heavily in earning him his first appointment as Deputy to the Norroy King of Arms for Cheshire, Shropshire and North Wales in 1600. It extended until 1619, at which point he became deputy for Cheshire, Denbighshire and Flintshire.³⁸ The fact that he was obliged to report each Easter in person to the College of Arms itself in London further certifies that this was no mere casual, part-time appointment.³⁹

Holme himself may or may not have painted portraits. The portrait of Thomas ap Ieuan ap David of Arddynwent (Pl 3) has been tentatively attributed to him, and it certainly offers ample evidence of heraldic imagery.⁴⁰ He is at least likely to have done this and other similar portraits. But we do know that Holme established a family-based workshop of painter-staining and herald-painting which extended to successive generations of Cestrians who carried on and expanded upon that trade. They included his own sons William (1599-1623) and Randle II as well as apprentice and putative step-son Jacob Chaloner. They extended to Edward Bellen (d 1650) one of whose signed works has survived,⁴¹ and the well known mid-17th century regional portrait painter John Souch, about whom more will be said below. Randle Holme II apprenticed the well known mid-century engraver Daniel King, who went on to work with the antiquary and herald William Dugdale and the engraver Wenceslaus Hollar.⁴² In his early years as master of his own shop Souch employed Thomas Leigh as his journeyman, Leigh then proceeding to a long career as a well documented itinerant portrait painter.⁴³ Later on Souch apprenticed Thomas Pulford, whose portraits of the Puritan radical William Prynne formed the focal point of a local riot of Prynne's Puritan supporters in 1637.⁴⁴

All of these men, and others like them,⁴⁵ were members of the Chester Company at one time or another, some also serving as its officers. Most of them also maintained an active presence in heraldry. Randle Holme II served as Deputy Herald.⁴⁶ Jacob Chaloner may or may not had the status of a deputy herald in the College of Arms himself, but he took a serious interest in, and derived much of his income, from heraldic work. At least two volumes of his heraldic sketches may still be found in the British Library, consisting largely of the sketches or 'tricks' of heraldic devices of armigers in several northwest counties.⁴⁷

The close family and occupational relations among heralds, herald-painters and painter-stainers thus seem well established in provincial centres as well as within London. But we need to ask if the traditions of herald painting, and those skilled in its production, bore any stylistic effect on portraiture of the time, and we need to know how such putative characteristics might be manifested in actual portraits. Taking the Chester region as our point of focus, two portraits come to the fore as plausible and representative responses to the question. One is the highly distinctive and much discussed double portrait *Two Ladies of the Cholmondeley Family*, which hangs in Tate Britain. The other is John Souch's distinctive and somewhat cryptic family portrait *Sir Thomas Aston at the Deathbed of his Wife*, also derived from the cultural hinterland of Chester, held at the Manchester City Art Gallery.

The *Cholmondeley Ladies* (Pl 4) is a distinctively stark and enigmatic version of the family group portrait so fashionable in that era. It has been persuasively dated to the opening years of the 17th century.⁴⁸ Although the identity of the actual subjects remains uncertain, it incontrovertibly derives from one of the two branches of the Cholmondeleys of Cheshire, an extended, middling gentry family well known in the shire. The picture shows two nearly identical young women reclining next to each other against pillows on a bed, each holding an infant diagonally across her lap. They are both fashionably dressed in silvery white, which stands out dramatically against the black hair of each figure and the dark background of the whole scene. A brownish coverlet and splashes of bright crimson round out the principal palette of the whole. Though there is some intricate figuring of the lace work in the elaborate collars and dress worn by each figure, the workmanship of all else remains schematic. Flesh is modelled, to the extent that it is modelled at all, in a flat, schematic monotone; ornate sleeves are modelled in an equally schematic and wholly unnatural manner. Save for the strikingly direct stare of each woman, emotional depth has entirely eluded the painter. The painting remains entirely two-dimensional: figures resembling cardboard cut-outs pasted against the panel. For all its undeniably striking appearance, it remains a naive painting of its time, undoubtedly created by someone lacking the artistic vocabulary of contemporary polite portraiture. That

would fit virtually any of the local, Chester-based, painters who have been suggested as its creator.⁴⁹

What is of more interest to us is its several close affinities with contemporary heraldic painting and significance. The family in all its parts would have been well known to the heralds and herald painters of the region. Cholmondeleys were thick on the ground throughout the region, and members of the family appear in all the major heraldic visitations of the shire during the 16th and 17th centuries, including those on which herald painters collaborated.⁵⁰ The scene, marking the birth of a succeeding generation of the family, would have been of particular interest to heralds carrying out such visitations, and to the family wanting to have its genealogical succession recorded in that manner.

True to heraldic painting in general, the colours are few, largely pure and heavily symbolic: white standing for cleanliness, purity, and joy; black, *inter alia*, for prudence and humility; and red a symbol of blood – much in evidence in childbirth – and of bravery.⁵¹ The use of colour in heraldic painting, which was, indeed, central to the culture of heraldry itself, comprised a complex, well and widely understood symbolic language. Lacking the need or ability to convey emotional characteristics in any more direct manner,⁵² heraldic painters and those influenced by them used particular and pure colours to signal particular human emotions or personal characteristics. Many vernacular portraits also deployed colours in this fashion, refraining from blending them as freely as might have been done by the fashionable continental painters of the day, since that would literally have diluted their symbolic meaning. Whether painters followed or created contemporary English fashion in such stark use of colour remains an open question, and an important one. But such usage was fairly common in English School portraits of the era, whether court or provincially-based.

The lack of natural shading or anything resembling naturalistic modelling, the two-dimensional quality, the limited palette of colours (each of which nevertheless carried substantial symbolic weight), and the schematic definition of form and gesture, all read directly from the heraldic *vade mecum*. They yield scant evidence of contact with the polite, formal portraiture of contemporary Netherlandish or other continental traditions. This cannot be anything but a thoroughly naive work carried out by a local painter with extensive familiarity and experience in heraldic painting. It undoubtedly did, as has been suggested, come from any one of that small number of painter-stainers specializing in arms painting in the Holme circle,⁵³ or even (as has somehow not been considered) by Randle Holme I himself.

Sir Thomas Aston on the Death-bed of his Wife (Pl 5) presents something closer to contemporary convention and something less of a mystery. We know who the subjects are: Sir Thomas (1600–46), a minor courtier and Cheshire gentleman; his first wife Magdalene, née Poultney (d 1635); his second wife, Anne; and two children presumably of the first marriage.⁵⁴ We know (because he signed it) that John Souch painted it, that he did so around 1635, some three decades after *The Cholmondeley Ladies*, and (as noted below) we know a fair bit about him too. We may take the work itself to represent local and regional portraiture at a more advanced stage of contact with the formal polite mode and with the techniques required by that mode. But *Sir Thomas Aston* still bears the footprints of heraldic painting. At least in its conventional reading, the scene offers a clear genealogical record of a complex family: the death of one wife, the marriage with another, the two children by, presumably, the first

marriage, all revolving around Aston as the *pater familias*. His family also figures in contemporary heraldic visitations. He, too, will have known, and been known by, regional heralds and herald painters. In fact, both correspondance and genealogical records tell us that branches of the Aston and Cholmondeley families remained in close and frequent touch with each other throughout the decades in which both paintings appeared.⁵⁵

And if Souch makes a clear effort to move away from the laconic use of colour in the heraldic idiom, he still makes ample use of symbolic objects – the cross, globe, skull, the watch depending from Aston's waistband, the coat of arms itself – to represent elements of character or emotion which his still only partially developed 'artistic' skills preclude demonstration in any more subtle or direct ways. He is obviously grasping for a three-dimensional, naturalistic perspective, and a realistic sense of gesture and posture, but not yet successfully so. The whole scheme of the work suggest the distorted perspective of a country fair fun-house. And though he also makes an honest effort at naturalistic modelling of figures, flesh and clothing, this too falls short of the era's best work.

All this fits with what we know of John Souch (1594–1645).⁵⁶ His father, an Ormskirk draper, apprenticed young John to Randle Holme the Elder in 1607 for 10 years. Souch became a freeman of Chester as a member of his master's Chester Company of Painters shortly thereafter. He soon became a well established portrait painter, catering mostly to the mostly 'Anglo-Catholic' and Royalist gentry of Cheshire and surrounding counties. As many as 16 surviving portraits have been attributed to him, six of them signed. He also served in local office, and, most important, he served as well as Deputy to the College of Arms for Cheshire, Shropshire and North Wales.⁵⁷ precisely the areas in which he found his patronage. Holme would have trained Souch in heraldic as well as other forms of painting, probably helped him secure his post as deputy herald, and played an active role in steering potential patrons to his star pupil. Most significantly, it was almost certainly Holme, in his heraldic capacity, who would have presided over the funeral of Magdalene Aston in 1635, just as he had over that of Thomas Aston's father and namesake, which led Aston to commission the painting.⁵⁸ In addition, Holme would almost certainly have afforded Souch free and frequent access to the extensive and important collection of contemporary prints and drawings which Holme and his son were collecting in these years: a collection geared to the understanding of contemporary continental figurative art.⁵⁹

This many-faceted training, and the obvious friendship which it spawned, gave Souch a considerable edge over whomever painted *The Cholmondeley Ladies*, in the very same region, a generation earlier. The contrast between the two works, and the training which would have produced them, marks the development of at least a semi-formal and polite, native English, and regional portraiture emerging over that timespan.

In conclusion, the very nature of English vernacular portraiture as produced by mostly anonymous painter-stainers, herald painters and similar craftsmen makes it impossible to attribute all but a very few specific portraits to their creators. We can only speculate about the identity of the artist who painted *The Cholmondeley Ladies*. We shall probably never know for certain who painted Gervase Holles's portrait in 1626. Yet there is abundant circumstantial evidence to suggest that it would have been a local painter-stainer ('the best yt was then in the country'), and one who had in all proba-

bility worked with visiting heralds in or around the 'country' of Lincolnshire. The addition of the subject's coat of arms, the symbolic withered holly in the upper right, the motto below it, the prominent, status-defining gloves, and the two dimensional effect of the whole, suggests no less.

Until roughly the end of the 16th century native English craftsmen who painted portraits outside of metropolitan London, the Home Counties, and southern or eastern-facing coastlines will at first have had very little contact with continental, even Netherlandish, techniques or models from which to learn. They were unlikely to have travelled much abroad or to have been able to apprentice with those who had. But by the early 17th century they will have come more often to observe formal and polite portraiture in the country houses of regional gentry and aristocracy or in occasional trips to London, and to have seen prints and engravings of the sort collected by the Holmes. Like John Souch, many such painters came in time to try and emulate the more formal, continentally-driven, styles which the imperatives of social competition led their potential patrons more frequently to demand.

Yet even in Souch's work, earnest attempts to assimilate the new styles and techniques did not entirely eradicate the old ways. The native English painters of the day, influenced as they often were by the requirements of heraldic painting and of heraldry itself, produced a portraiture distinctive for its close, literal, and intricate detail, its extensive deployment of symbolic objects and colours, its concern for the genealogical record, and other heraldic pre-occupations, but not by the emotional depth or all round subtlety which characterized the best of contemporary portraiture produced by the mainstream of foreign, and especially Netherlandish, 'artists' of the day.

We see these lingering influences even in the better known native-English portraitists of the Jacobean and Caroline era: in the incomplete understanding of perspective in Souch's *Sir Thomas Aston* or in William Larkin's *Richard Sackville, 3rd Earl of Dorset* of 1613 and his other works in the same collection,⁶⁰ or in some of the work of Robert Peake.⁶¹ Larkin in particular also exemplifies the penchant for creating contours with firmly drawn outlines which were then filled in with colour, rather than by building such contours up tonally, with shaded layers of paint in a chiaroscuro effect.⁶² The



5 *Sir Thomas Aston at the deathbed of his wife* by John Souch (1594-1645), 1635. Oil on canvas, 203.2 x 215.1 cm. Manchester Art Gallery

former technique, along with the flat, two-dimensional, and poorly modeled applications of colour and the common inclusion of detailed pattern work which it encouraged, remained a characteristic of both an heraldic and an English approach; the lack of chiaroscuro, or (as in *The Cholmondeley Ladies*) its clumsy application, distinguished it from mainstream continental portraiture, as did its still crude and laconic language of gesture. Peake, like John Browne, Andrew Wright, Nicholas Lyzard, George Gower and others before him, served as Sergeant Painter,⁶³ a post which, amongst its considerable breadth of required expertise, might well have included heraldic work and even portraiture.

If the term 'English School' is to mean much more than merely work completed in England and presumably by an English painter, then these are the elements most likely to characterize it in the period at hand, and to distinguish it from formal portraiture as it was produced at that time elsewhere over most of Europe.

1 I am grateful to Dr Anne Thackray and Dr Barry Cooper for their comments on earlier drafts of this essay, though no remaining infelicities should be attributed to anyone but myself.

2 The memorialist himself had long ago left his seat in Grimsby to live elsewhere because he found the former, 'seated in an extreme nook of the Kingdom', too remote for his liking. AC Wood, ed, *Memorials of the Holles Family, 1493-1656*, Camden Society, 3rd series, 55 (1937), p viii.

3 Wood, *Memorials*, p125.

4 Described in fine detail in Mary Edmond, 'Limners and Picturemakers', *New Light on the Lives of Miniaturists and Large-Scale Portrait Painters Working in London in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, *Walpole Society*, XLVII (1978-80) pp60-242.

5 Susan Foister, 'Foreigners at Court: Holbein, Van Dyck, and the Painter-Stainers Company', in David Howarth, ed, *Art and Patronage in the Caroline Courts, Essays in Honour*

of *Sir Oliver Millar*, Cambridge, 1993, pp32-50; Christopher Brown, 'British Painting and the Low Countries', in Karen Hearn, *Dynasties, Painting in Tudor and Jacobean England, 1530-1630*, 1995, pp27-31.

6 Summarized in Titler, *The Face of the City, Civic Portraiture and Civic Identity in Early Modern England*, Manchester, 2007, pp73-82.

7 No urban area in Lincolnshire will have held more than a few thousand souls in the year of Holles's portrait, and the county itself had not yet succeeded in regaining its former affluence. Grimsby's population has been estimated at around 750 in 1603, and it seems unlikely to have enjoyed dramatic growth between then and the date of Holles's portrait. Francis Hill, *Tudor and Stuart Lincoln*, 2nd edn, Stamford, 1991, pp70-74, 78-94; Peter Clark and Jean Hosking, *Population Estimates of English Small Towns, 1550-1851*, 2nd edn, Leicester, 1993, p99.

8 Bantlingly laconic references such

as that to 'the Dutch painter' are not uncommon in surviving accounts for portrait payments, and in eastern coastal towns and cities like Norwich the presence of such men was sufficiently common to allow a very few of them to be known by name. Victor Morgan, 'The Dutch and Flemish Presence and the Emergence of an Anglo-Dutch Provincial Artistic Tradition in Norwich, c. 1500-1700', in Juliette Rodling, et al, *Dutch and Flemish Artists in Britain, 1550-1800*, Leiden, 2002, pp57-72.

9 WAD Englefield, *The History of the Painter-Stainers Company of London*, London, 1923, and Borg, *The History of the Painter-Stainers*; JH Parker Oxspring, 'The Painter-Stainers and their Dispute with the Heralds' (3 volume typescript, College of Arms MS Her/BH), no date; Susan Foister, 'Foreigners at Court': Accounts of the Company of Painter-Stainers, Glaziers, Embroiderers and Stationers of Chester', Chester Record Office MS ZG17/1-2, unpaginated, *passim*; and, for a

regional example of this rivalry, GD Squibb, 'The Deputy Heralds of Chester', *Journal of the Chester Archaeological and Historic Society* 56 (1969), pp27-28.

10 Jim Murrell, 'John Guille's Book: a Heraldic Painter's *Vade Mecum*', *Walpole Society*, LVII (1995) p4; Foister, 'Foreigners at Court', pp34-38; Squibb, 'Deputy Heralds of Chester', pp23-28.

11 Edmond, 'Limners and Picturemakers', pp64-5.

12 Anthony Wagner and George Squibb, 'Deputy Heralds', in Frederick Emmission and Roy Stephens, ed, *Tribute to an Antiquary: Essays Presented to Marc Fluch by some of His Friends*, 1976, pp229-33 and Appx III, pp252-63.

13 Stephen Friar, *The Sutton Companion to Heraldry*, Stroud, 1992, 2004, pp 9-11.

14 Summarized succinctly in Friar, *Companion to Heraldry*, pp8-10; Squibb, 'Deputy Heralds of Chester', pp242-28.

15 'A Collection on Heraldry', Society of Antiquaries MS 213, fol3r.

- 16 Robert Tittler, *The Reformation and the Towns in England, Politics and Political Culture, c. 1540-1640*, Oxford, 1998, especially pp87-96. An excellent example of what a herald did in a visitation to a particular town may be found in the records of the Burghmote Court of Maidstone, in which the 1619 visitation of the herald Richard Phillipot, and his thorough search of the arms and mottos of the borough, are closely described. Centre for Kentish Studies, Maidstone, MS MD/ACM1/2.
- 17 Lawrence Stone, *The Crisis of the Aristocracy, 1558-1641*, Oxford, 1965, p715.
- 18 For social legitimation, virtually a commonplace, see Stone, *loc. cit.* For religious legitimation, see Tarnya Cooper, 'Memento Mori Portraiture: Painting, Protestant Culture and the Patronage of the Middle Elites in England and Wales', unpublished PhD thesis, Sussex University, 2001, and Cooper, 'Predestined Lives? Portraiture and Religious Belief in England and Wales, 1560-1620', in Tara Hamling and Richard L. Williams, ed., *Art Re-Formed, Re-assessing the Impact of the Reformation on the Visual Arts*, Newcastle, 2007, pp49-64. And for civic legitimation, see Tittler, *The Face of the City*, especially chapters 4-5. I am grateful to Dr Cooper for permission to read and cite her thesis.
- 19 ODNB, *vide* Segar, William, by Anthony RJS Adolph, though this entry remarkably fails even to mention Segar's career as a painter of considerable note. See also Erna Auerbach, *Nicholas Hilliard*, 1961, pp271-81.
- 20 Karen Hearn, *Dynasties, Painting in Tudor and Jacobean England, 1530-1630*, 1995, pp77, 91; Auerbach *op. cit.*, pp271-81; DT Piper, 'The 1590 Lumley Inventory: Hilliard, Segar and the Earl of Essex', *Burlington Magazine*, XCIX (1957), pp299-303.
- 21 Edward Norgate, *Miniatura, or the Art of Limning*, JM Muller and Jim Murrell, ed., 1997; Auerbach, *op. cit.*, pp282-85.
- 22 Noted in Foister, 'Foreigners at Court', p36.
- 23 Wagner and Squibb, 'Deputy Heralds', pp232-33.
- 24 Randle Holme, *The Academy of Armorie*, 1688, part III, p147.
- 25 See the manuscript volume of such drawings and sketches kept 'By me Peter Henson of Owndell [Oundle] Painter' in the early years of the seventeenth century; National Art Library MS 86.H.H.62.L.29-1982; Brown's early 16th-century books of heraldic drawings; NA PROB 11/50/14; Chaloner's volumes of heraldic notes in the British Library as BL Harleian 1091, Additional MS 26,704, and Additional MS 47,185, and Scarlett's collection of '...pedigrees, draughts and writings', left to his son and namesake by his will of 1607; National Archives (hereafter NA) PROB 11/109, BL Harleian MSS 1354, 1366 and 2021.
- 26 Wagner and Squibb, 'Deputy Heralds', especially pp235-6; Susan Foister, 'Foreigners at Court', p32.
- 27 NA, PROB 11/68/372r, 16 June, 1585.
- 28 Edmond, 'Limners and Picture Makers', *passim*.
- 29 Virginia Tillyard, 'Civic Portraits Painted for, or Donated to, the Council Chamber of Norwich Guildhall, before 1687, with Documentary Evidence Relating to the Artistic Background of the City, the Artists and the Sitters', unpublished MA thesis, Courtauld Institute of Art, London, 1978; Tillyard, 'Painters in Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century Norwich', *Norfolk Archaeology*, 37 (1980), pp315-18; Morgan, 'The Dutch and Flemish Presence and the Emergence of an Anglo-Dutch Provincial Artistic Tradition', pp63-8.
- 30 Friar, *Companion to Heraldry*, p17; Squibb, 'Deputy Heralds', pp23-36.
- 31 BL Harleian MSS 2054, fols88r-89v, 91r, and 156b; *Victoria History of the County of Chester*, V, part II, Woodbridge, Suffolk, 2005, pp115-116, 200.
- 32 Lawrence M. Clopper, ed., *Records of Early English Drama, Chester*, Toronto, 1979, p198; Robert Tittler, 'Henry Hardware and the Face of Puritan Reform in Chester', in Tittler, *Townspeople and Nation, English Urban Experiences, 1540-1640*, Stanford, 2001, pp140-155.
- 33 The latter usage applied especially to what was known as the Petra Sancta system of hatching; Friar, *Companion to Heraldry*, pp188-9.
- 34 Thomas Hughes, 'On Chester Literature, its Authors and Publishers during the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries', *Journal of the Architectural, Archaeological and Historic (sic) Society of Chester*, II (1864) pp21-30; Joy Hancox, *Kingdom for a Stage, Magicians and Aristocrats in the Elizabethan Theatre*, Stroud, Gloucestershire, 2001, pp15-17; BL Harleian MS 1927, fols13-14. My thanks to Prof. Lawrence Manley and Prof. Sally-Beth MacLean for the last two references.
- 35 Wagner and Squibb, 'Deputy Heralds', p233; partly appended to J. Paul Rylands, ed., *Visitations of the City of Chester, 1580*, Harleian Society, 18 (1882), pp261-72.
- 36 ODNB, *vide* Holme, Randle; George Ormerod, *The History of the County Palatine and City of Chester*, 2nd edn (1882), I, p335; 'Accounts of the Company of Painter-Stainers, etc., of Chester', Chester Record Office MS ZG17/1-2, *passim*.
- 37 An earlier Randle Holme left a book of 'arms in trick' c. Henry VI, and a Thomas Holme served as Clarenceux King of Arms until his death in 1493. Ormerod, *Chester, loc. cit.*; ODNB, *vide* Holme, Randle; Louise Campbell and Francis Steer, eds., *A Catalogue of the Manuscripts in the College of Arms, Collections 1*, 1988, pp41 and 567.
- 38 John Paul Rylands, ed., *The Visitation of Cheshire, 1580*, Harleian Society, 18 (1882), p260; ODNB, *vide* Holme; George J. Armitage and J. Paul Rylands, ed., *Pedigrees Made at the Visitation of Chester, 1613*, Harleian Society 59 (1909) p1; Walter H. Godfrey, *The College of Arms, Queen Victoria Street, Being the Sixth and Final Monograph of the London Survey Committee*, 1963, p86; Wagner and Squibb, 'Deputy Heralds', p237; Squibb, 'Deputy Heralds of Cheshire', pp27-29.
- 39 ODNB, *vide* Holme, Randle; Rev. Canon S. Cooper Scott, 'Cotes Monument: Once Set Up in St. John's Church, Chester', *Journal of the Architectural, Archaeological and Historic [sic] Society of Chester*, n.s., 8 (1902) p13; Godfrey, *College of Arms*, p86.
- 40 National Museum of Wales, cat. no. A 3691, c.1610.
- 41 'Unknown Man of the Family of Edwards of Rhual', dated 1636; current location uncertain; Heinz Archive painters' files, *vide* Bellen, Edward.
- 42 ODNB, *vide* King, Daniel.
- 43 Some 16 portraits have been at least tentatively identified as Leigh's, some of them signed and dated. But much confusion has sprung from the failure to realize until very recently that there were two Thomas Leighs, father and son, who were itinerant portrait painters in the early 17th century. Stephanie Roberts of the National Museum of Wales and I have undertaken a study of the Leighs and their work, soon to be published. Leigh's employment by Souch, and both Leighs' employment as Chester journeymen later in the century, is recorded in Chester Record Office MS ZG 17/1 and 2, 'Accounts of the Painter-Stainers, Glaziers, Embroiderers and Stationers of Chester', unpaginated, for 1618, 1619, 1642 and 1642.
- 44 Ormerod, *Cheshire*, II, pp456-57; Brian Stewart and Mervyn Cutten, ed., *The Dictionary of Portrait Painters in Britain up to 1920* (1997), p432; The Revd Canon Blomefield, 'Puritanism in Chester in 1637, an Account of the Reception of William Prynne by Certain Inhabitants of the City of Chester', *Journal of the Architectural, Archaeological and Historic [sic] Society of Chester*, III (1885), pp281-3; RC Richardson, 'Puritanism and the Ecclesiastical Authorities' in Brian Manning, ed., *Politics, Religion and the English Civil Wars, 1673*, pp24-25.
- 45 Throughout the Elizabethan and Jacobean era the amalgamated Company of the four original crafts included approximately six to ten Painter-Stainers at any one time, at least half of them having one or more apprentices at the same time. Chester Record Office MS ZG 17/1-2, *passim*.
- 46 Wagner and Squibb, 'Deputy Heralds', p258.
- 47 BL Additional MS 26,704, A book of arms, crests, quarterings and mottos of the Irish nobility, done by Jacobus Chaloner, anno 1634', and BL Additional MS 47,185, a book of heraldic tricks and sketches done by Chaloner ('Chaloner the trickier of this book') for the herald Henry Lilly. A third volume, BL Harleian MS 1091, contains tricks and sketches for the visitation of Devonshire taken by William Harvey, Clarenceux King of Arms, in 1564. Chaloner's name appears at the bottom of the title page, but the early date of this manuscript suggests that this was a mark of Chaloner's ownership rather than of his compilation of the volume.
- 48 The painting has been described, and its context explored, with particular thoroughness in JT Hopkins, "'Such a Twin Likeness
- There was in the Pair': An Investigation into the Painting of the Cholmondeley Sisters", *Transactions of the Architectural, Archaeological and Historic [sic] Society of Lancashire and Cheshire*, 144 (1991), pp1-37 and especially pp2-6.
- 49 Hopkins, "'Such a Twin Likeness'", pp25-27.
- 50 Rylands, *Visitation of Cheshire in the Year 1580, passim*; JP Rylands, ed., *Pedigrees made in the Visitation of Cheshire, 1613*, Harleian Society, 59 (1909), *passim*; and Arthur Adams, ed., *Cheshire Visitation Pedigrees, 1663*, Harleian Society, 93 (1941), *passim*.
- 51 J. Gage, *Colour and Culture, Practice and Meaning from Antiquity to Abstraction*, 1993, pp82-84.
- 52 A theme pursued in Tittler, 'Portraiture and Character in Shakespeare's England', *Dalbois Review*, 86.1 (Spring, 2006), pp7-26.
- 53 Hopkins, "'Such a Twin Likeness'", pp25-27.
- 54 ODNB, *vide* Aston, Sir Thomas. An unresolved question remains about the assigned date of the painting, 1635, and the identity of the second woman, as Aston's second marriage did not take place until 1637. Both marriages produced children, though those of the first marriage all died young.
- 55 See letters and other references scattered through the Aston Papers, BL Add MSS 36,901-36, 927.
- 56 The following based on Julian Treuherz, 'New Light on John Souch of Chester', *Burlington Magazine*, COOXX (May 1997) pp300-307; Weiss Gallery Collection, *Icons of Splendour, Early Portraiture, 1530-1700*, 2004, p15; Heinz Archive, National Portrait Gallery, 'British Painters 1625-1650' file; Witt Library, Courtauld Institute of Art, 'Souch' file.
- 57 Treuherz, 'New Light', p301.
- 58 Weiss Gallery, *Icons of Splendour*, p15; JP Rylands, ed., *Cheshire and Lancashire Funeral Certificates, 1600-1670*, Record Society of Lancashire and Cheshire, 6 (1882), p9.
- 59 Robert Tittler and Anne Thackray, 'Print Collecting in Provincial England Prior to 1650; the Randle Holme Album' *British Art Journal*, 11, no. 1 (2008) pp23-30.
- 60 Depicted and discussed in Karen Hearn, ed., *Dynasties, Painting in Tudor and Jacobean England, 1530-1630* (1995), pp199-201. See also Roy Strong, 'William Tarkin: Icons of Splendour' in Strong, *The Tudor and Stuart Monarchy, Pageantry, Painting, Iconography*, 3 vols, Woodbridge, 1998, III, pp1-68.
- 61 Including, for example, his *Henry, Prince of Wales with Sir John Harrington of 1603 and Henry, Prince of Wales of 1610*; Hearn, *Dynasties*, pp186-8. Peake, a Lincolnshire man, had trained as a goldsmith, but his extensive experience in the Revels Office of the Royal Household and as Sergeant Painter to James I afforded extended contact with painter-stainers and the traditions of arms painting as well. See Gower's patent of office reprinted in JW Goodison, 'George Gower, Sergeant Painter to Queen Elizabeth', *Burlington Magazine*, XC (September 1948) p263.
- 62 Strong, *op. cit.*, pp7-9.
- 63 Appointed in 1607; ODNB, *vide* Peake, Robert.