

# A Growing Indifference? Somerset Baronet Burial Requests, 1580–1785

Lisa M. Toland

It mattered to the early modern gentry where they were buried. Even after the Reformation, the decisions taken concerning interment in prominent locations within a church and near deceased relatives invested post-mortem choices with meaning both social and spiritual though no longer soteriological.<sup>1</sup> The divorce between the living and the dead was not as complete as might be assumed from the historiography on burial in post-Reformation England. This has emphasised an increasing apathy towards burial location among testators from the mid-sixteenth into the eighteenth century. For instance, the social historian Ralph Houlbrooke in his important work on death and the family claims that following the Reformation 'the indifference about the place of burial which had hitherto been unusual gradually became conventional'. This lack of concern is measured by the 'precise resting-place[s]' disappearing from wills and 'the manner of burial [being] increasingly left to executors'.<sup>2</sup> The argument for this growing indifference is based on the changing nature and structure of last wills and testaments that became more strictly materialistic as the eighteenth century approached.

Historians have related this supposed lack of concern for burial location to the divide between the living and the dead that followed the Reformation with the rejection of theological concepts such as purgatory, the intercession of saints and efficacy of masses for the dead. Such liturgical practices performed by the living for the benefit of the dead came to be regarded as dangerous empty rituals. Within the

- 1 For general discussion see, David Cressy, *Birth, Marriage & Death: Ritual, Religion, and the Life-Cycle in Tudor and Stuart England* (Oxford, 1999), pp. 460–61.
- 2 Ralph Houlbrooke, *Death, Religion and the Family in England, 1480–1750* (Oxford, 1998), p. 125.

church itself, it was no longer assumed that proximity to a saint's image gave the deceased a soteriological advantage. Clare Gittings, as she traces rising individualism claims, 'From the Reformation onwards, the funeral ritual was stripped of any eschatological purposes, but simply served to dispose of the corpse, with no direct theological significance attached'.<sup>3</sup> This study calls both of these arguments, structural and liturgical, into question.

While the use of burial requests as historical evidence is frequent in social and family studies the number of early modern county, town or family-based studies that systematically trace burial requests in wills is not yet far-reaching enough to comfortably assert country-wide or even regional trends. Often, burial requests are assessed by historians as strong, but supplementary evidence of family and social ties within larger studies.<sup>4</sup> This article focuses centrally on the burial requests of the baronet families in Somerset between 1610 and 1785 as a reliable way to question the historiographical assertion of a growing indifference of testators to their own burial locations. These requests, or lack thereof, are also illustrative of the affinities of testators for place and people – for the communities they inhabited and the social circles they valued the most. This study asks: were post-Reformation testators unconcerned about their bodies' resting places? Did they attach any theological or liturgical significance to their burial planning? Was the long-standing medieval correlation between the body's final resting place and eternity eliminated within a few short generations?<sup>5</sup>

The Somerset baronets and the upper county gentry in general are a well-chosen group for consideration due to the moderate tenor of their political and religious sentiments, especially before and after the civil wars.<sup>6</sup> Their devotion to their local communities and family networks

3 Clare Gittings, *Death, Burial and the Individual in Early Modern England* (London, 1984), p. 40; Houlbrooke, *Death, Religion and the Family*, p. 125. In a historiographical via media David Cressy notes that 'the Reformation undercut the religious reasons for such preferences but did not eliminate the practice of selective placement in the ground'. Cressy, *Birth, Marriage & Death*, p. 460.

4 For instance, Amy Froide, *Never-Married: Singlewomen in Early Modern England* (Oxford, 2005), pp. 44–86.

5 Here my study is similar to Peter Sherlock's argument that post-Reformation monuments remained religious in purpose following the Reformation. He also discusses the language of the final resurrection, instead of highlighting the emphasis on immediate transport to heaven or hell. *Monuments and Memory in Early Modern England* (Farnham, 2008), pp. 4, 110–114.

6 Thomas G. Barnes, *Somerset, 1625–1640: A County's Government During the "Personal Rule"*, (Cambridge, Mass., 1982), p. 17.

provides a contrast to studies based in London where affinities were often more diffused and transient.

Few peers resided in Somerset between 1610 and 1785 so that the upper gentry, including the baronets considered here, comprised the heart of county leadership – many serving as deputy lieutenants. By and large their wealth and position were newly established, most fortunes being raised after the Henrician Reformation.<sup>7</sup> Those families that rose during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries made their money through royal service, rather than trade.<sup>8</sup> The wealthiest of these was Sir William Portman, but others included the Berkeleys, the Phelips, the Spekes and the Wyndhams.<sup>9</sup> The Smyths of Ashton Court were an anomaly in the county, building their fortune through merchantry.

Fifteen Somerset-based men were elevated to the baronetcy between 1611 and 1673.<sup>10</sup> Their families were the Berkeleys of Bruton, the Hastings of Redlynch, the Henleys of Henley, the Phelips of Barrington Court, the Portmans of Orchard Portman, the Pyms of Brymore, near Cannington, the Smyths of Ashton Court, the Sydenhams of Brympton d'Evercy, the Tyntes of Halswell, the Wakes of Clevedon, the Warres of Hestercombe and the Wyndhams of Trent, Somerset (now a part of Hampshire). Barring the Tyntes, all of these families died out in the direct male line prior to 1750.<sup>11</sup>

While at times these families were crucial actors in events at a national level, the Somerset gentry also maintained a staunch devotion to their local communities and their family networks. This can be seen particularly during the upheavals of the mid-seventeenth century. The Pouletts of Hinton (one of the few county peers) and their younger kin the Smyths of Ashton Court lived quietly during the Personal Rule of Charles I preferring domestic building projects to life in the capital. Sir Robert Phelips spearheaded early local resistance against Ship Money alongside Sir Charles Berkeley.<sup>12</sup> Even during the days of

7 Those that had longer histories included the Stawells of Cothelstone, the Rodneys of Rodney Stoke, the Spekes of Whitelackington, and the Luttrells of Dunster Castle. Barnes, *Somerset*, p. 19.

8 Barnes, *Somerset*, p. 19.

9 *Ibid.*, p. 20.

10 The three families that survived beyond 1750 were the Seymours of Bury Castle, the Wyndhams of Orchard Wyndham and the Hawleys of Buckland.

11 The Tyntes' final generation stretched from 1710–1785, the family headship being held by three brothers successively. A few of their family wills stretch into the early nineteenth century.

12 Barnes, *Somerset*, pp. 214–18; David Underdown, *Somerset in the Civil War and Interregnum* (Newton Abbot, 1973), p. 20.

Royalist-controlled Somerset from mid-1643 to early 1645 some gentry changed their allegiances, holding the 'unity of their county above partisan considerations ...' and 'would take part in its government under any reasonable regime if they could rather than see it destroyed'.<sup>13</sup> Protection of the home was prioritised by many in 1645 as Royalist and Parliamentary forces clashed at Taunton, Langport, Bridgwater and Bristol.<sup>14</sup>

Family fortunes, as well as local communities, were jeopardised by the constitutional trauma of the seventeenth century. Sir Robert Phelips pleaded to the Parliamentary Commission in 1645 to 'compound for delinquency, stating that "by compulsion he, as Captain, joined Sir William Ogle, who married his mother, and held the garrison for the King"'.<sup>15</sup> Sir Robert's son, Sir James, in a reversal of family loyalties would later arrange the hiding of Charles II in September of 1651.<sup>16</sup> He died a Roman Catholic in Ireland.<sup>17</sup> Sir William Portman died in the Tower after being captured at Naseby. His estate was sequestered for £20,000.<sup>18</sup> Sir John Wake mortgaged his estates for the king.<sup>19</sup> His brother Baldwin, a ship's captain, was imprisoned for supporting the king in 1642, and later in 1646 transported the young Prince of Wales to Cornwall. He was subsequently knighted and died in exile in Holland.<sup>20</sup> The fortunes of the Wakes were, arguably, broken by the pecuniary sacrifices Sir John made for the royalist cause.<sup>21</sup> The county families of Somerset frequently found their legal and family fortunes entangled with and sometimes decimated by larger constitutional strife.<sup>22</sup>

By the late 1650s, David Underdown reminds us, the next generation was 'more cynical than ever about the tired quarrels of their elders ...'. They embraced 'the general recognition that neighbourliness, and

13 Underdown, *Somerset in the Civil War*, p. 69.

14 *Ibid.*, pp. 95–114.

15 Hampshire Record Office, Winchester [hereafter HRO], 77M84/7227, The Flight of King Charles II Through Hampshire.

16 HRO, 77M84/7227, The Flight of King Charles II Through Hampshire; Underdown, *Somerset in the Civil War*, p. 162.

17 The National Archives, London [hereafter TNA] PROB 11/230, Sir James Phelipps, 22 June 1653.

18 G.E. Cockayne et al., *The Complete Peerage of England, Scotland, Ireland, Great Britain and the United Kingdom*, 13 vols (London, 1910–59), I, p. 90.

19 *The Complete Baronetage*, 6 vols (Exeter, 1900–1909), I, p. 180.

20 Peter Gordon, *The Wakes of Northamptonshire* (Northampton, 1992), p. 58.

21 Gordon, *The Wakes of Northamptonshire*, p. 62.

22 John Hayward, *The Church of St. Mary the Virgin, Bruton* (Bath, 1970).

community were preferable to division and conflict'.<sup>23</sup> This loyalty to kin and community is reflected in these families' burial requests and habits that maintained the importance of local place in these families' memories.

## I Final Will and Testament – The Religious Preamble

The preambles of late medieval and early modern wills lie at the heart of this study into the burial requests of early modern Somerset baronets. Before the Reformation, the purpose of a will and testament was to give away one's soul, body and worldly estate. The first was most often bequeathed to God, Mary and the saints, the second to the earth and the third to a combination of the Church, the poor, relatives and friends.<sup>24</sup> A will and testament was holistic in scope and soteriological in purpose. The testator carefully arranged for the body's disposal as well as the estate's so both would aid the soul in its progress towards heaven. The body was buried in consecrated ground and the estate was divided between groups and individuals who would pray for the soul's release from purgatory. Structurally the soul and body's bequeathal was in the preamble, while the disposal of goods, legacies and material property made up the subsequent part of a testament. While the temptation exists to draw a division between the will and the testament (the preamble and the dispensing of property) all of it was bound up in relation to the Church in the hope of eternal salvation.

Following the Reformation a will and testament continued to bequeath away the incorporeal spirit, the corpse and the wealth of the deceased. Progress towards salvation, however, was no longer aided by the physical proximity of the body to particular sacrality within churches or by the dispersal of property to the Church or the poor for the solicitation of their prayers. As a consequence the interdependence of the soul, body and material goods was less demonstrable. Mary and the saints disappeared, while the burial request remained intact, albeit in lessening frequency. The dispersal of property gradually came to dominate the purpose of the will, so that after the 1730s, historians argue, the will had become a primarily secular document.<sup>25</sup> For the

23 Underdown, *Somerset in the Civil War*, p. 190.

24 Houlbrooke, *Death, Religion and the Family*, pp. 110–11. For further and fuller discussion see, Diarmaid MacCulloch, *The Reformation* (New York, 2005), pp. 10–16; Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England, 1400–1580*, 2nd edition (New Haven, 1992), pp. 299–376, 504–23.

25 Houlbrooke, *Death, Religion and the Family*, p. 132.

wealthy, wills came increasingly to resemble closely other *in vivo* legal settlements: the will was simply the last in a lifetime's worth of legal agreements disposing of the testator's real and personal estate. However, the extent to which disappearing religious preambles and the increasingly secular nature of wills in the late seventeenth and eighteenth century necessarily translated into indifference about the body's disposal within the English Protestant imagination is questionable.

## II The Religious Preamble: Burial Requests

In late medieval Roman Catholic England 'most of the gentry, and the wealthier inhabitants of towns, were requesting burial within the church'.<sup>26</sup> Inside those spaces they claimed burial plots near images of the Virgin Mary and other saints or in the chancel as near to the east altar as possible.<sup>27</sup> Socially prominent testators bought liturgically potent burial spaces for the good of their soul, family promotion and self aggrandisement. Eternal and familial purposes were not mutually exclusive.

Pre-Reformation testators also requested burial near family members. Vanessa Harding found across social classes in London and Paris around 1500 that when a testator named a specific location within a particular church that he often 'cite[d] the grave of a particular person'.<sup>28</sup> Similarly Christopher Daniell discovered that in Yorkshire and Nottinghamshire wills (from 1389 to 1475) burial near one's family was of 'near equal weight' to 'particular geographical areas of holiness'.<sup>29</sup> The most frequent requests for burial were with a husband or wife.<sup>30</sup> Other prioritised relationships were parents buried with children, siblings buried together, and burial with uncles. Daniell's late

26 Ibid., p. 111.

27 Daniell conducted a wide study of 4,700 wills between 1389 and 1475 for most of Yorkshire and Nottinghamshire. Of the minority of testators who requested a specific burial location inside a church the majority (388) named the choir (a term that could include the high altar as well as the traditional area of the nave) while 187 requested burial near other altars, and a further 66 requested burial near a particular image. Churchmen, merchants, tradesmen, gentry and a handful of their wives made up the pool of the above testators. Christopher Daniell, *Death and Burial in Medieval England, 1066–1550* (London, 1997), pp. 97–99.

28 Houlbrooke, *Death, Religion and the Family*, p. 111; Vanessa Harding, *The Dead and the Living in Paris and London, 1500–1670* (Cambridge, 2002), p. 131.

29 Daniell, *Death and Burial*, p. 101.

30 Ibid., p. 101; Harding, *The Dead and the Living*, p. 131.

medieval study found only one reference to ancestors.<sup>31</sup> Identification with a larger kin group was not an articulated priority when making one's burial choice, though requests for burial near immediate family were common.

Following the Reformation specific directives for burial in wills declined substantially and quickly. In a sample of 500 London wills Vanessa Harding found that before 1520 testators who named a location for burial averaged 'between 90 and 98 per cent' per year, while in 1541 that figure dropped to 'nearly 20 per cent'.<sup>32</sup> Had burial placement become so unimportant to the first generation of English Protestants? Or was the failure to mention the body more related to the forceful abolition of purgatory, and a corresponding suspicion that burial directives, no matter how doctrinally impartial, were too closely related to popish preparations for the afterlife? Or as Harding suggests, did testators simply alter where and how they gave burial instructions?<sup>33</sup> This current study takes a familial and geographically-centred group of wills and thoroughly explores this seeming lack of interest in burial location.

While there was undoubtedly a decline, twenty per cent of Harding's sample still asked for a specific place of burial. Testators still requested burial in the chancel, albeit in diminished numbers.<sup>34</sup> Even with the abolition of the doctrine of purgatory, testators preferred liturgically potent (as well as socially prestigious) locations near the east end. Although requests to be buried next to family members were 'always relatively infrequent', Ralph Houlbrooke asserts that they were most popular among the aristocracy and wealthier gentry. His evidence for this assertion is based upon a series of solid, but a few geographically diffuse, samples and studies. For instance, George Frederick Emmison found that in the late sixteenth century approximately forty-two per cent of the peerage and knights of Essex were making burial requests.<sup>35</sup> Further down the social scale Houlbrooke found that in Selby, Yorkshire one out of ten wills between 1633 and 1680 named family

31 Daniell, *Death and Burial*, p. 102.

32 This sample included middling and lower classes. Harding, *The Dead and the Living*, p. 11.

33 Steven Bassett, (ed.), *Death in Towns: Urban Responses to the Dying and the Dead: 1000-1600* (Leicester, 1992), p. 11.

34 Harding, *The Dead and the Living*, p. 130.

35 Houlbrooke, *Death, Religion and the Family*, pp. 135-36; George Frederick Emmison, *Elizabethan Order: Disorder; Mainly from the Essex Sessions and Assize Records*, Essex Record Office publications, no. 56 (Chelmsford, 1970).

members, proof he concludes, that concern over burial location could still be found in society at large, though a relatively small percentage.<sup>36</sup>

The same relationships were prioritised by testators as they were in the late medieval period. Burial near spouses was the most frequently dictated, while some desired burial with children or parents.<sup>37</sup> More extended family members such as uncles, aunts, grandparents or even ancestors were rarely mentioned. The Reformation, then, did not noticeably affect the family members with whom testators desired burial, and neither period prioritised kin networks.

Finally, when wills are studied a question is often raised as to their reliability in tracing religious beliefs, including those related to burial. How much was a will's preamble formulaic or reflective of a scribe's interpretation? How much was a testament echoing the testator's creative voice? Formularies, such as the *Boke of Presidents* (1543), played a substantial role in the creation of wills especially the religious preamble. The gentry, though, were more likely to play a directional role in the will's creation than their social inferiors, even if they did not write the document themselves. Scribes employed by the gentry 'were often household chaplains, those who shared and inspired their devotional life'.<sup>38</sup> Generational and spousal mimicry also influenced the writing of wills: some testators used their predecessors' wills to help frame their own. This suggests, therefore, that elite testators had a substantial influence in even the more formulaic elements of the wills.

### III Baronet Family Burial Requests (1580 – 1785)

The wills of twelve Somerset baronet families between 1580 and 1785, show us the distinctive characteristics in the burial requests of their county's elite testators. These families received a baronetcy between the rank's creation in 1611 and 1750, had a family seat located in Somerset, died out in the direct male line before 1750 and were not elevated into the peerage.<sup>39</sup> These wills cover a useful diversity of

36 F. Collins, (ed.), *Selby Wills, 1634–1710*, Yorkshire Archaeological Society 47 (1912); Houlbrooke, *Death, Religion and the Family*, p. 136.

37 Harding, *The Dead and the Living*, p. 131; Houlbrooke, *Death, Religion and the Family*, pp. 125, 131.

38 Felicity Heal and Clive Holmes, *The Gentry in England and Wales, 1500–1700* (Basingstoke, 1994), p. 350.

39 These families' testamentary choices and trends are a part of my larger study of their legal and memorial habits that shows the formative power of generational precedent and personal whims on the economic and legal decisions of heads of families. Lisa

sex, age, family position and marital status. Half of the wills belonged to heads of families (including younger sons who succeeded at their brothers' deaths). The remaining fifty-one included wives of heads of families, twenty-one daughters (eleven never-married, ten married), other husbands of the heads of families' wives, four younger sons, and six sons-in-law. Of the twenty-seven married women who produced wills only two of them were married at their time of death. Widows outnumbered widowers within these families: wives more often survived their husbands.

Sixty-six Somerset testators (roughly sixty-five per cent) out of one hundred and two (1580–1785) specifically mentioned their burial location. A further twenty-four (nearly twenty-five per cent) surrendered their burial to their executors' discretion often in the manner of 'a good Christian burial'; a formulaic, but not wholly indifferent, statement of intent. In total, ninety spoke of the body's disposal in some form. Baronet families in Somerset were concerned with their burial.

The deceasing frequency of religious preambles in Somerset wills generally reflects previous findings. All of the wills between 1580 and 1660 included religious preambles, and sixty-five per cent did between 1660 and 1730. But only fifteen per cent of the post-1730 wills began with the twin disposal of soul and body to God.<sup>40</sup> Religious preambles in general declined after 1730.<sup>41</sup> The disappearance of the preface, however, did not necessarily indicate a corresponding disappearance in burial requests. From the 1690s onwards, burial preferences began appearing at the ends of wills. Twenty wills included burial instructions either both at the beginning and the end of the will, solely at the end of the will, or in a later codicil. As wills made the inclusion of burial requests increasingly awkward at the beginning of the document, testators began adjusting and including them immediately after they named their executor(s).<sup>42</sup> Overseeing the funeral was often the first business carried out by an executor. Of the twenty-two wills proved after 1730 with no religious preambles, ten of them still included burial requests.

---

M. Toland, 'Dusting of Monuments and Muniments: Somerset Gentry Families, 1610–1750', unpublished DPhil Thesis, University of Oxford, 2008.

40 1580 to 1660 included 36 wills, 1660 to 1730 included 38 wills, and 1730 to 1810 included 26 wills.

41 Houlbrooke, *Death, Burial and the Family*, p. 132.

42 TNA, PROB 11/911, Charles Berkeley, 27 September 1765.

#### IV Location of Burial

Somerset gentry testators valued their choice of burial location. Sixty-six testators indicated either where and/or how they wished to be buried with varying degrees of specificity. Parish churches were named in nearly all the wills. Most testators named the church as well as specific spaces inside. The most frequently identified geographic spots were vaults, aisles and chancels.

Single family vaults were a phenomena of the gentry from the late sixteenth century.<sup>43</sup> These wills reflect that trend. Twenty wills spoke of vaults within specific churches as qualifying statements: the body to be placed 'in the vault there lately made by me', in the late new vault where my late most dear Wife lyes interred' or 'with my Ancestors in the vault'.<sup>44</sup> By identifying vaults testators bound themselves rhetorically with individuals already buried within.

The establishment of a new vault was a public expression of family hegemony. The Smyth family's burial practices at All Souls, Long Ashton show this early obsession with establishing local power. Hugh Smyth died in 1580 without male issue and was succeeded by his younger brother Matthew. In his will Hugh asked to be buried at Long Ashton 'nere the place wheare I have twoe children buried'.<sup>45</sup> Instead, he was buried at St. Sepulchre's in London, but a year later Matthew exhumed his brother's body and moved it to a new vault at All Souls. The inauguration of this familial memorial space was heralded by an impressive cortege and a £200 funeral.<sup>46</sup> While this disinterment was laborious, Matthew promoted the new wealth and status of the Smyths, while simultaneously adhering to his brother's testamentary wishes for which Matthew was sole executor. Matthew's own funerary instructions were strikingly simple in comparison with the impressive display he prepared for his brother: he had already seen to the creation of a centre of family memory.<sup>47</sup>

43 Julian Litten, *The English Way of Death: The Common Funeral Since 1450* (London, 1991), p. 207.

44 TNA, PROB 11/66, Matthew Smyth, 1 June 1583, PROB 11/609, Sir John Smyth, 16 June 1726, PROB 11/566, William James, 9 December 1718.

45 TNA, PROB 11/63, Hugh Smyth, 6 March 1581.

46 J.H. Bettey, 'Hugh Smyth of Ashton Court 1530-1581: Somerset Landowner, Justice of the Peace and Troublemaker', *Archaeological and National History Society Proceedings* 136 (1992), 146-47; Anton Bantock, *The Earlier Smyths of Ashton Court from their Letters, 1545-1741* (Bristol, 1982), p. 28.

47 TNA, PROB 11/66, Matthew Smyth, 1 June 1583.

Besides family vaults, these wills also named aisles and chancels as preferred places of interment.<sup>48</sup> Aisles were sometimes associated with the location of family pews, or pre-existing burial vaults. In the mid-seventeenth century Sir William Portman asked to be buried 'in decent manner in the Vault in the Chauncell of the parish Church of Orchard aforesaid where my Auncesters lye interred'.<sup>49</sup> Testators who chose a specific place in a particular church often identified several other elements in determining their burial place, such as the chancel, as well as a family member.

Finally, a few testators identified places specific only to their family: Sir William Wake asked for burial 'under the blew stone where my father was buried'. His son Sir Baldwin likewise asked to be placed 'under the same stone and in the same grave where my father and grandfather and several of my ancestors lie buried'.<sup>50</sup> Edmund Wyndham requested burial at St. Decuman's, Watchet, the family parish church, 'betwixt my seate and my grandfather Sidnam his grave ...'.<sup>51</sup> Pre-Reformation requests for burial near images or statutes of saints were replaced by a wish for burial near 'sacred' family objects such as a particular stone or a family pew. Somerset testators maintained an awareness of the hierarchy within a church's internal geography, though these places were stripped of their soteriological benefits. Aisles and chancels identified socially prestigious spots. Most commonly they identified family vaults as places of collective memory where the individual joined their predeceased family.

## V Burial Next to Whom

Somerset gentry also continued, like their medieval predecessors, to request burial with family members. Spouses were the most frequently named. Nine widows requested burial near their husbands, and four husbands requested burial near their wives. Most often wives spoke of burial 'next to my late dear husband', or 'my late Lord and most loving husband ...'.<sup>52</sup> Ann Romsey née Ashburnham, formerly Smyth,

48 While Cressy find this tendency towards chancels and aisles in the Elizabethan period, these Somerset testators made these identifications throughout the period. Cressy, *Birth, Marriage & Death*, p. 461.

49 TNA, PROB 11/205, William Portman, 17 October 1648.

50 TNA, PROB 11/443, Sir William Wake, 15 January 1698, PROB 11/760, Sir Baldwin Wake, 8 February 1748.

51 TNA, PROB 11/128, Edmund Windham, 2 December 1616.

52 TNA, PROB 11/766, Arabella Gore, 9 December 1748, PROB 11/76, Elizabeth Poulett, 24 November 1590.

requested burial 'Betweene my two husbands'.<sup>53</sup> Her second husband, John Romsey, was buried in a Smyth vault at Long Ashton.<sup>54</sup> That both her husbands were buried in the same parish church, not to mention the same vault, was unusual and speaks to the great social prestige of her first husband, Sir John Smyth.

Singularly Somerset testators named ancestors in their requests nearly as often as widows named their husbands, and certainly more than parents, children or other relations.<sup>55</sup> The term, ancestors, was employed when at least three generations were buried in a particular parish church. Portman heads of families referred to ancestors in at least two successive wills. Sir Hugh Portman (d. 1629) requested his 'body to be buried in the chauncell of the parishe churche of Orchard aforesaid where my auncestors have bynne usually buried'.<sup>56</sup> The Berkeley, Smyth, Tynte, Wake and Wyndham families also included ancestral affinity in their burial requests. All of these requests were made by male heads of families stretching from 1632 to 1802.<sup>57</sup> Some gentry, particularly those men entrusted with the family's continuance, identified with their kin network, an identification that stretched into the grave.

More intimate affinities named, though less frequent, included fathers and parents. Men and women alike requested burial with both parents. Jarrit Smyth requested burial 'in the same Grave with my Father and Mother...', while the widow Rebecca Henley wanted to rest with her parents despite her husband being buried elsewhere.<sup>58</sup> Both of these latter testators were married adults. Burial with children and grandfathers were requested infrequently.<sup>59</sup>

53 Bristol Record Office, Bristol [hereafter BRO], AC/F/15, Ann Romsey, 1697; TNA, PROB 11/400, John Romsey, 3 Jul. 1690.

54 BRO, AC/F/8/7, 'Extract from the Register of Long Ashton of the Christenings, Marriages, & Burials of the Family'.

55 Eight testators referred to their ancestors. TNA, PROB 11/161, Sir Hugh Portman, 14 May, 1632, PROB 11/205, Sir William Portman, 17 October 1648, PROB 11/365, Hugh Smyth, 4 January 1681, PROB 11/402, Sir Maurice Berkeley, 27 June 1690, PROB 11/566, William James, 9 December 1718, PROB 11/705, Sir John Tynte, 14 October 1740, PROB 11/760, Sir Baldwin Wake, 8 February 1748, PROB 11/1379, Sir John Hugh Smyth, 5 August 1802.

56 TNA, PROB 11/161, Rachel Portman, 16 May 1632, PROB 11/205, Sir William Portman, 17 October 1648.

57 TNA, PROB 11/402, Sir Maurice Berkeley, 27 June 1690.

58 TNA, PROB 11/1102, Jarrit Smyth, 30 April 1783, PROB 11/1725, Rebecca Henley, 18 April 1743.

59 In the first instance: TNA, PROB 11/63, Hugh Smyth, 6 March 1581, PROB 11/911, Sir Charles Berkeley, 27 September 1765. In the second instance: TNA,

In a few cases burial requests reveal circles of affinity bound by shared commonalities, such as sex and marital status. Grace Portman, an unmarried testator, desired 'to bee buried in the isle of the parrish church of West Coker where my sister Mistress Elizabeth Portman, and my kinswoman Mistress Elizabeth Jones were buried'.<sup>60</sup> Of her seven siblings only Grace's sister Anne Seymour (d. 1695) outlived her. West Coker was Grace's place of residence and was at least twenty-five miles from her paternal parish of Orchard Portman. Her naming of two deceased single female relatives parallels material bequests made by unmarried women who chose to tangibly demonstrate an affinity with other legally independent women, whether spinsters or widows.<sup>61</sup>

Apart from the frequency of ancestral references those with whom these Somerset testators wanted to be buried closely resembles requests across the country. However, the collective memory apparent in references to ancestors suggests that heads of families felt affinity towards a wider and longer line of kin than has been portrayed heretofore and mirrors the local and familial priorities of the Somerset gentry.

## VI How to be Buried

According to the historiography in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century testators' funerals gradually became less elaborate and more private. However, these Somerset testators do show a noticeable continuance of interest in the manner of burial.<sup>62</sup> Thirty-six testators (or thirty-five per cent) provided some instruction for the treatment of their bodies, the construction of their coffins, the display of mourning blacks, the funeral processions, the choice of presiding

---

PROB 11/128, Edmund Wyndham, 2 December 1616, PROB 11/760, Sir Baldwin Wake, 8 February 1748.

60 TNA, PROB 11/306, Grace Portman, 17 December 1661.

61 Amy Louise Erickson describes the greater 'personalism' of women in their bequests. Ordinary women were more likely to favour other women in their giving, *Women and Property in Early Modern England* (London, 1993), pp. 204–22. This affinity transferred to burial requests as well. Amy Froide has shown that never-married women inhabited a multiplicity of natal, kin and surrogate-kin networks. She periodically uses burial requests to demonstrate these affinities. *Never-Married: Singlewomen in Early Modern England* (Oxford, 2005), pp. 44–86.

62 Ralph Houlbrooke's article on the increasingly private nature of gentry funerals highlights two Somerset families, the Phelips and Stawells, both of whom show their continued interest in appropriate and well-planned funerals, whether expensive or modest, between 1662 and 1714. Ralph Houlbrooke, "Public" and "private" in the funerals of the later Stuart gentry: some Somerset examples', *Mortality* 1 (1996), 163–76.

ministers and sermon texts and the erection of monuments. Some families were more obsessed than others: fifteen out of the eighteen surviving Smyth wills include funerary instructions. Sir John Smyth requested burial preparations like his wife's (that were arranged by him) including the fabric to wrap his corpse and line his coffin, as well as the name plate and arms affixed to it.<sup>63</sup>

Even as late as 1802 John Hugh Smyth copied out his grandfather's instructions nearly verbatim.<sup>64</sup> By mirroring his maternal grandfather's burial example rather than his father's, John Hugh affirmed his tie to the Smyth lineage. Mimicry of burial preparations demonstrated both affection and legitimacy.

Ten testators requested monuments. Monuments mirrored the affective relationships and lines of affinity expressed in burial requests but in a visual, public and permanent way. Nearly all of the monuments were planned for the church in which the testator requested burial, and often in close proximity to the body. After ordering his burial in the family vault, Copplestone Warre Bampfyle gave an extended description of the monument he desired, including that the structure would 'commerate my Father, my Mother and their Children and specify that my Mother was the sole daughter of Sir Francis Warre of Hestercombe Baronet by whose death the title became extinct...'.<sup>65</sup> Funerary instructions and requests for monuments reflected the same sentiments, affinities and ambitions that underlay where the body was to be placed, how the deceased was to be mourned and prepared for burial and how the life was to be permanently commemorated.

## VII No Instructions for Burial

Entrusting one's burial location to an executor has been understood as proof of testators' growing indifference towards where they were buried. Placing these wills in a family context shows that this claim of apathy is sometimes unfounded. Twenty-four testators (of the total one hundred and two) left the final resting place of their body to their executor's discretion.<sup>66</sup> A typical example is Sir Francis Warre who dictated 'my

63 TNA, PROB 11/365, Hugh Smyth, 4 January 1681, PROB 11/609, Sir John Smyth, 16 June 1726.

64 TNA, PROB 11/1379, John Hugh Smyth, 5 August 1802.

65 TNA, PROB 11/1210, Copplestone Warre Bampfylde, 2 November 1791.

66 This category includes wills where the testators indicated that the residue of their personal estates was to cover funeral expenses. Thomas Wyndham named his executor and instructed that his 'debts might be paid and [his] Funerall expences

Body I Comitt to the earth to be decently buried by my Executrix herein after named ...'.<sup>67</sup> Ralph Houlbrooke dates an increase in the referral to the executor's discretion from the 1640s.<sup>68</sup> A noticeably sharp increase is not reflected in these Somerset wills: those that entrusted executors with burial plans were clustered between 1610 to 1660 and 1690 to 1730.<sup>69</sup>

How should this surrender to an executor's discretion be interpreted? The relationship between an executor or executrix and the testator affected how burial instructions were made. As the most frequent executors, spouses and children were often trusted to make appropriate burial choices. Sir Francis Warre asked 'to be decently buried by [his] executrix', his second wife Margaret. Her discretion extended to transferring his corpse from Ghent, Flanders to the family parish church, St. Mary's Church, Kingston, Somerset, within ten days of his death.<sup>70</sup> Giving over the choice of burial location to an executor was often a sign of trust in a wife, son, daughter or close friend rather than a statement of indifference.

Finally twelve testators of the total one hundred and two made no mention of the testator's body or burial whatsoever. Here, surely, is a sign of indifference. Yet when factors such as the changing structure of the will, as well as the marital status and family position of the testators are considered, indifference towards burial often gives way to other explanations.

The lack of burial requests in these wills is partially explained by the absence of any religious preamble. In seven cases only the popular and brief phrase, 'In the Name of God Amen' begins the will. While the preamble was the most typical location for burial requests, its absence meant that instructions were given in another way.<sup>71</sup> Requests

---

discharged ...'. TNA, PROB 11/414, Sir Thomas Wyndham, 29 December 1692. However, further funerary instructions outside of the preamble including a brief demand for privacy have not been included in this category, even if the same testator did not request a specific place for burial. For example, John Romsey, second husband of Ann Smyth (d. 1697) gave his widow permission to bury him where she desired, but then went on to instruct regarding the hanging of blacks and mourning at his wake and funeral. TNA, PROB 11/400, John Romsey, 3 July 1690.

67 Somerset Record Office, Taunton [hereafter SRO], DD/GC/68, Will of Francis Warre, written 1718.

68 Houlbrooke, *Death, Religion and the Family*, p. 125.

69 Nine wills are in the first grouping and eight in the second.

70 SRO, DD/GC/68, Sir Francis Warre, written 28 November 1718; David W. Hayton, Eveline Cruikshanks, and Stuart Handley (eds), *The House of Commons, 1690–1715*, 5 vols (Cambridge, 2002), p. 806.

71 Bassett, *Death in Towns*, p. 11.

sometimes were made prior to a will's construction or even on the death bed. Rachel Wyndham who died unmarried directed: 'my body... to be buried in such place and manner as *I may hereafter by word of mouth or otherwise direct and appoint* and for want of such direction and appointment then my interment to be done decently at the discretion of my hereinafternamed executors'.<sup>72</sup> Decisions were sometimes made through correspondence. Writing to her sister, Arabella Astry planned her brother's burial: 'I am glad you approve of his being buried at Henbury', she wrote, 'twas where I designed to make a vault for myself so thought it most proper for that and other reasons'.<sup>73</sup> When religious preambles disappeared from wills, so did many burial requests: arrangements for burial were simply made in an alternative manner.

Marital status, age and place of residence were also influential as to whether or not burial directives were included. Five of the twelve wills without requests were dictated by females, four of whom were unmarried daughters.<sup>74</sup> Without a spousal affiliation to another parish these women were more likely than their married siblings to be buried in their natal family vault: interment in the local parish church was simply assumed. Frances Bampfylde, daughter of the Warre heiress Margaret, was commemorated and interred with six of her siblings in a vault at St. Mary's, Kingston. She was thirty-three at the time of her death and living at Hestercombe, the family home.<sup>75</sup> Her short will included no burial dictation.

Finally, seven men, six of whom were heads of the family did not include burial plans in their wills.<sup>76</sup> Their burials however took place in their local parish churches. Much like unmarried daughters, their burial place was often assumed. Yet it is unavoidable that a minority of

72 TNA, PROB 11/530, Rachell Wyndam, 1 December 1712 [My italics].

73 BRO, AC/C/89/12, Arabella Astry to Elizabeth Smyth, 13 December 1711.

74 Only one of the women, Dame Mary Hales, who did not mention her body or burial was married. She was also the heiress to the Pym fortune. SRO, DD/BR/ely/4, Dame Mary Hales wife of Sir Thomas Hales of Lawlett in Kent, Baronet, 23 August 1723.

75 SRO, DD/SAS/C/795, Warre Family History, [1791].

76 The parish clerk of Bruton noted that 'The Rt<sup>h</sup> Hon<sup>ble</sup> Charles Lord Viscount Fitzharding was between 12 & one of the clock in the night after a sermon preached by M<sup>r</sup> John Randall, then Minist. of Brewton, buried in the vault in the Chancell in a coffin of lead'. A year later Fitzharding's widow died. Her funeral was also at night and her burial was in the same vault. Douglas L. Hayward, (ed.), *The Registers of Bruton, Co. Somerset*, The Parish Register Society 1 (1907), p. 217; Michael C. Hurley and Adrian James Webb, *St. Edward, Gouthurst Parish Registers and Bishops' Transcripts: Baptisms and Burial 1539-1950, Marriages 1539-1949* (Tiverton, 1999), p. 91. TNA, PROB 11/685, William Berkeley alias Portman, 31 October 1737, PROB 11/813, Sir Charles Wake Jones, 1 February 1755.

testators truly seem to have had no preference and are representative of what Ralph Houlbrooke describes as the majority who were more 'concerned with the destination of the soul rather than the ultimate fate of the body'.<sup>77</sup>

Testators who failed to direct their burial in their wills comprised less than twelve per cent of the total group of wills. Consideration of marital status and family position shows that factors beyond the disappearing preamble can explain the absence of instructions. These Somerset gentry wills show a sustained interest in burial location. A minority trusted solely in their executor's discretion for their burial, a surrender that nonetheless does not always indicate indifference towards burial. A tiny number of these will-makers included no burial instructions, an absence most often illustrative of the preamble's disappearance as much as a sign of growing disinterest.

### VIII Two Case Studies: The Portmans and the Smyths

The extensive collections of wills extant for the Portmans of Orchard Portman and the Smyths of Ashton Court have left us with two examples of local gentry families whose burial requests show us their continued focus on kin networks. Both families reveal an inordinate concentration upon the creation of a single space of memory, and in this way, highlight the role testators played in growing parish centres of kinship.<sup>78</sup>

From their arrival into the Orchard neighbourhood, the Portmans strove for an appearance of lineal legitimacy, generational continuity and social prominence. A chapel built onto St. Michael's church honoured the marriage of Christina de Orchard (the late medieval local heiress) to the newly enriched Walter Portman. The building symbolised the conjoining of two prominent local families, and more specifically the rise of the Portmans and the lineal demise of the Orchards.<sup>79</sup>

Between 1552 and 1693 twenty-three individuals were buried in the single Portman vault including seven heads of families, six of their wives, two younger sons and one (unmarried) daughter, an assortment

77 Houlbrooke, *Death, Religion and the Family*, p. 124.

78 The legal history of the Portmans, particularly as it relates to wardships, was previously explored in Michael Hawkins' article, 'Wardship, Royalist Delinquency And Too Many Children: The Portmans in the Seventeenth Century', *Southern History* 4 (1982), 55–89.

79 Lady Adams (née Portman), *The History of St. Michael's Church Orchard Portman Somerset* (n.p., 1969).

of maternal relatives (individuals related to the Portman wives), a paternal female cousin, and three friends of the Portmans, including a family steward and the rector of nearby Branstons.<sup>80</sup> By opening up their vault to a wide array of relations and friends the Portmans illustrated that such patronage retained the family's local hegemony.

The testamentary burial requests of the Portmans affirm this demonstrable interest in the maintenance of their ancestral vault. Eight Portman wills of male heads of families between 1591 and 1727 survive. Of those eight, five requested burial in their ancestral parish church of St. Michael's, Orchard Portman, as did one younger brother and one sister. The parish register confirms that these wishes were carried out. Most heads of the family noted the vault and the family member with whom they identified.<sup>81</sup> For instance, Sir John Portman wanted burial with his 'dear parents'.<sup>82</sup> His younger brother Hugh asked exactly the same thing.<sup>83</sup> A testator demonstrated his allegiance and affinity for the corporate family identity by mimicking the burial requests of a predecessor.

In the following generation of the mid-seventeenth century all four Portman brothers died in succession, each inheriting the title for a time before passing away. Three were buried at Orchard Portman, two of whom requested the church as their final resting place.<sup>84</sup> Sir Hugh, in 1629, identified his burial not with his parents, but with his ancestors.<sup>85</sup> His younger and only surviving brother Sir William copied Sir Hugh asking also to be buried 'in the vault in the chauncell of the parish church aforesaid where my auncesters lye interred'.<sup>86</sup> The importance of Orchard Portman as the family burial place was reiterated when this baronet died in the Tower in August 1645.<sup>87</sup> By an allowance of Parliament his body was moved and buried at home nearly a month later.<sup>88</sup> Sir William (d. 1690) remained focused on Orchard Portman in his burial arrangements: 'my body may be buried in the vault which is in the church of Orchard aforesaid if I shall happen to dye within a

80 A.W. Vivian-Neal, 'Materials for the History of Orchard Portman', *Somerset Archaeological and National History Society Proceedings* 89 (1944), xv.

81 TNA, PROB 11/77, Sir Henry Portman, 10 February 1591.

82 TNA, PROB 11/121, Sir John Portman, 27 January 1613.

83 TNA, PROB 11/103, Sir Hugh Portman, 16 March 1604.

84 Vivian-Neal, 'Materials for the History of Orchard Portman', xv; Cokayne, *Complete Baronetage*, I, p. 90.

85 TNA, PROB 11/161, Rachel Portman, 16 May 1632.

86 TNA, PROB 11/205, Sir William Portman, 17 October 1648.

87 Vivian-Neal, 'Materials for the History of Orchard Portman', xv.

88 Cokayne, *Complete Baronetage*, I, p. 90.

fortnight'. If, however, he died at his new residence at Bryanston his executors would have three weeks between his death and interment, presumably to allow proper time for the movement of the corpse from Bryanston to Orchard Portman.<sup>89</sup>

The centrality of Orchard Portman declined in the early eighteenth century. The last Portman head of family remained concerned about his burial location, leaving detailed contingency plans, in which Orchard Portman figured as the first of three options. Sir Henry Seymour alias Portman (d. 1728) who inherited the Portman name and estates through his mother wanted to be buried in whichever family seat he died nearest to, whether Orchard Portman, Somerset or Sherborne, Dorset. If he died at the first he would be 'buried in the vault there'; however, if he died at his home in Dorset he appealed to his executors to 'lay out and bestow the sume of five hundred pounds ... in erecting and setting upp a monument on or neare my grave'. Finally, if Sir Henry died in London he was to be buried in Westminster Abbey 'so near to my late deare wife as conveniently maybe'.<sup>90</sup> Orchard Portman needed no further visual marker of the family's local supremacy. Bryanston, on the other hand, was purchased by Sir Henry's uncle and predecessor, Sir William Portman, so that the property and house were new acquisitions: the new seat at Bryanston required new monumental demarcation.<sup>91</sup> Sir Henry's will reiterated that the site of collective family burial necessitated monumental commemoration. Yet this burial flexibility suggests that being with ancestors was less important to the last testator than the public marker linking the deceased with the prestigious and ancient family.

The completeness of the Smyth family wills show, like those of the Portmans, that burial requests represented an expanding space of collective identity in a single parish church from the sixteenth into the eighteenth century – an expansion of which the testators were aware. The Smyths emerged from the merchant ranks in the 1530s. The purchase of Ashton Court near Bristol by John Smyth provided not only substantial property but provincial influence. He was the

89 TNA, PROB 11/401, Sir William Portman, 8 April 1690.

90 TNA, PROB 11/622, Henry Seymour Portman, 27 May 1728.

91 Vivian-Neal, 'Materials for the History of Orchard Portman', 23–25. Although Sir Henry Portman was buried at Orchard Portman, he was the last of the family interred there. In 1745 a family chapel was built at Bryanston, Dorset. The 1st Viscount demolished the old family mansion house and the south-facing family chapel at Orchard Portman. John Newman and Nikolas Pevsner, *Dorset* (London, 1997), p. 120; Adams, *The History of St Michael's Church*.

last head of the family not to be buried in All Souls, Long Ashton.<sup>92</sup> All eight of his male successors from Matthew in the mid-sixteenth century to Sir John in the mid-eighteenth century were buried at All Souls. In addition, at least fourteen children, seven wives, three second husbands of the Smyth wives, several half-siblings and a few nephews and nieces were buried there. In short, well over forty individuals with a relationship to the Smyths were buried at All Souls between 1558 and 1800.<sup>93</sup>

Twelve of the eighteen Smyth testators (between 1580 and 1802) requested burial in All Souls including seven successive heads of the family. Hugh Smyth (d. 1580) was the first head of the family to be buried at All Souls. His brother requested interment there as well: 'in the vaulte there lately made by mee'.<sup>94</sup> Matthew's son and the family's first baronet, Sir Hugh, copied his father's modest funeral preparations verbatim.<sup>95</sup> The mimicry of testamentary instructions demonstrated filial affinity, allegiance and duty.

Sir Thomas (d. 1642) referred to 'my vault in the parrish church of Longashton' when he made his will.<sup>96</sup> As with the Portmans it was the fourth generation buried at Long Ashton who employed the language of ancestors. Sir Hugh (d. 1680) asked to 'be decently interred in the parish church of Long Ashton aforesaid amongst my auncestors'.<sup>97</sup> The Smyths also employed the term 'auncestors' when the generational span of the family vault(s) in a single parish church went beyond a third generation. The burial instructions of the last two Smyth heads of families reflected the priority of spousal relationships.<sup>98</sup>

Throughout the late sixteenth, seventeenth and into the eighteenth century, Portman and Smyth testators were intentional about their burial requests. Mid-seventeenth century wills show an emphasis on family beyond nuclear relationships in the references to their ancestors, while the copying of burial requests from will to will show that testators used their predecessors' testamentary instructions to inform their own decisions. Later testators tended to include lengthier

92 Bantock, *Earlier Smyths*, p. 16.

93 BRO, AC/F/8/7, 'Extract from the Register of Long Ashton of the Christenings, Marriages & Burials of the Family'.

94 TNA, PROB 11/66, Matthew Smyth, 1 June 1583.

95 TNA, PROB 11/152, Sir Hugh Smyth, 14 June 1627.

96 TNA, PROB 11/211, Sir Thomas Smyth, 21 May 1650; proved secondly, TNA, PROB 11/252, Sir Thomas Smyth, 16 February 1656.

97 TNA, PROB 11/365, Hugh Smyth, 4 January 1681.

98 TNA, PROB 11/609, Sir Thomas Smyth, 16 June 1726, PROB 11/711, Sir John Smyth, 3 August 1741.

funerary instructions, and in the Portman's case named more than one possible burial location. Deliberate disposal of one's body mattered to the Portman and Smyth families for the purpose of solidifying a larger family identity and legitimacy that included the dead.

## IX The Theology of Protestant Burial

Finally, a handful of these Somerset wills show us how some English elite continued to invest burial with theological meaning. Disposal of the body, historians have argued, had little to no theological significance for post-Reformation testators. Where the corpse decayed did not affect the eternal security of one's soul. Those who continued to request burial within churches did so for social and political reasons alone.

For some testators burial did maintain theological meaning, which symbolically linked family life together with eternal life. The concept of soul sleep was a long-standing point of disagreement among English Reformers. What happened to the soul after death but before the Second Coming of Christ and the Last Judgement? While belief in the soul's immediate transport to heaven or hell might distance a testator from the Romish doctrine of purgatory, the difficulty was that the final judgement of Christ became repetitive, or 'a formality'.<sup>99</sup> 'As a consequence', writes Keith Thomas, 'the idea of an intermediary state between death and resurrection lingered on, to be embraced by a number of theologians in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century'.<sup>100</sup>

This doctrinal tenacity is also noticeable within the preambles of wills. An articulated belief in the eventual reunion of one's body and soul at the general resurrection provided theological significance to where and with whom these testators wanted to be buried. Those with whom they lay buried would be those with whom they would be raised on the Day of Judgement. Eight testators (between 1616 and 1712) referred to the general resurrection in the preamble of their wills. These hopeful assertions within much lengthier preambles show us the individual contribution of the testator. The families represented by these eight testators included some of the oldest in the county including the Berkeleys, Portmans, Sydenhams and most prolifically with four such inclusions, the Wyndhams.

99 Keith Thomas, *The Ends of Life: Roads to Fulfillment in Early Modern England* (Oxford, 2009), p. 227.

100 Thomas, *The Ends of Life*, p. 227.

Corporate familial bliss at the resurrection was expressed in Edmund Wyndham's will from 1616. Adopting the language of soul sleep he asked that his body 'be buried in the parrishe Church of St Decumans there to rest until the days of Resurrection wherein I doe hope that both soule and bodye shalbe conioyned to the praise and glorie of my God in whome I trust ...'. Later on he stipulated that he rest 'betwixt my seat and my grandfather Sidnam his grave'.<sup>101</sup> Did he associate his eventual rising with his grandfather's, or was the later instruction simply motivated by familial and local prestige and detached from this earlier doctrine?

Some testators directly linked the anticipated union of body and soul with their burial preferences. In 1742, Edward Gore, the husband of the co-heiress of the Ashton Court property Arabella Gore née Smyth, asked his second wife to bury him 'as near the Remains of my first Wife as may be in Sure and certain hopes of a Joyfull Resurrection to Eternal Life...'.<sup>102</sup> Earlier in 1656 Joan Speke née Portman, a widow, instructed that her body be buried at Whitelackington 'in the new Vault erected there close and next unto my late dear husband not doubtinge a Joyfull resurrection and union of Soule and body at the last day in eternal happiness...'.<sup>103</sup> Joan and Edward both believed they would be raised to immortality alongside their spouses.

Such references to the general resurrection alongside burial instructions, it could be argued, were simply another example of the formulaic dictations of religious preambles. Liturgical language did not always translate into a relatable practice. And yet the references to the general resurrection in this sample, as well as in others, suggests an intentionality of language and thought when it does appear.<sup>104</sup> Five of the eight examples here refer to the conjoining of body and soul. Sir Maurice Berkeley's eschatological narration is by far the most dramatic. Trusting in the discretion of his executors for a 'decent Christian burial'

101 TNA, PROB 11/128, Edmund Wyndham, 2 December 1616.

102 TNA, PROB 11, 721, Edward Gore, 29 October 1742.

103 TNA, PROB 11/253, Joane Speke, 5 March 1656.

104 Cressy's discussion of the general resurrection and its relationship to burial requests is limited to Elizabethan testators. Cressy, *Birth, Marriage & Death*, pp. 461–62. For western county Elizabethan and Stuart similarities see Dan Beaver, "'Sown in Dishonour, Raised in Glory": Death, Ritual and Social Organization in Northern Gloucestershire, 1590–1690', *Social History* 17 (1992). In his discussion of preambles between 1558 and 1660, Houlbrooke claims that general resurrection references were unusual, and that wills 'those which made explicit reference to the reunion of soul and body, or the incorruptible nature of the risen body' were even more unusual. Houlbrooke, *Death, Religion and the Family*, p. 124.

he asserts that his body will 'remayne until the same shalbe raised upp againe and both soule and body reunited and meete my Saviour in the Cloude at the generall Judgment and together with him and the rest of the faithful to enter into his glorie...'.<sup>105</sup> The eternal correspondence of one's body and soul lent not only social and familial weight to burial location, but eschatological as well.

A monumental (and sculptural) equivalent of these testamentary articulations of future salvation stands in the north-side chapel of the St. Leonard's, Rodney Stoke, Somerset. Rising from his stone coffin, his shroud slipping away from his face, the effigy of George Rodney, 'the fifth and last son of Sir Edward Rodney' greets the second coming with hands raised. A trumpet above heralds the general resurrection. The inscription speaks of his earthly life as the '25th heire male of his family', and his descent by his father of 'ye noble family of ye Seymours & by his mother of the noble family of Howards'.<sup>106</sup> This material depiction of a fully physical resurrection occurs in a powerful memorial space packed with Rodney monuments stretching back into the late fifteenth century.<sup>107</sup> The demise of the long-standing Rodney line is offset by this hopeful eschatological vision of eternal life: Sir Edward's construction of the monument merged his personal grief with the hope of a family reawakened.<sup>108</sup>

## X Conclusion

The baronets of Somerset, their wives and children consciously planned their burial locations. Whether or not their designs were carried out depended upon their executors' conscientiousness and financial means to do so, but the parish registers indicate that most desires were met. Despite the changing structure of wills, especially the increasing disappearance of the religious preamble, testators felt burial instructions were important enough to include them, though they began to move near the ends of the testaments. Will-makers pointed both to spaces and people within their parish churches in their requests. In doing so they articulated their affinity to previous generations, most frequently through making references to their

<sup>105</sup> TNA, PROB 11/130, Sir Maurice Berkeley, 28 July 1617.

<sup>106</sup> Rodney Family Chapel, St. Leonard's, Rodney Stoke, Somerset.

<sup>107</sup> Nikolaus Pevsner, *North Somerset and Bristol*, 7th ed., (London, 2001), p. 252.

<sup>108</sup> Sir Edward's will was surprisingly short. He named his wife as sole executrix and included no religious preamble. TNA, PROB 11/266, Sir Edward Rodeney, 24 May, 1657, PROB 11/267, Sir Edward Rodeney, 1 August 1657.

family vaults and ancestors. Spousal affection also motivated burial aspirations. But as the Somerset wills have demonstrated, those that did not include any burial references were not always indicative of indifference towards a deceased's final resting place. Tracing burial requests within single families over multiple generations illustrates the rhetorical and intentional development of a collective space of identity, power and affection. Furthermore, some testators invested their place of burial with deep eschatological meaning binding their biological family to their view of the eternal. Their temporal familial relationships so valued in life would be recognised and celebrated at the general resurrection.

These Somerset-based findings show us that in contrast to areas of Yorkshire, Essex and London elite testators within particular rural regions maintained conscientious interest in burial locations well into the eighteenth century. While previous studies have claimed that post-Reformation testators quickly grew indifferent to their place of burial, this study of twelve Somerset baronet families illustrates that this indifference was not universal. The wealthy of Somerset continued to dictate burial instructions through the seventeenth and well into the eighteenth century. The leading gentry families had to demonstrate their local hegemony through their memorial habits and these post-mortem assertions were a political necessity peculiar to large landholders. This study also shows that using the preambles of wills and testaments as the barometer for measuring early modern interest in burial locations is an incomplete methodology. A notable minority of testators made arrangements at the end of their wills, but further evidence can be found in personal letters or references to verbal and informal arrangements, where such material survives. The instructions for burial given by these Somerset testators paints a picture of rural-based gentry families who prioritised burial within their local community and among their kin over burial and commemoration in the metropolis at a time in which many leading English families were spending more time in London at the expense of their local communities. Elite Somerset wills between 1610 and 1785 show that the 'indifference about the place of burial', had not yet become 'conventional'.<sup>109</sup>