

17TH CENTURY HERALDIC FUNERALS IN CHESHIRE

One of the duties of the heralds and their regional deputies was to conduct the funerals of the nobility and the gentry – those who bore arms. In his *Academie of Armory*, Randle III Holme of Chester set out the instructions and orders of processions for such occasions.¹ The information contained in these descriptions is particularly interesting as often the names of the mourners, those who participated in the ceremonies and friends are often given. The order in which people processed shows how strictly the occasions were conducted. In Harleian MS 2129 are many documents collected by Randle Holme giving details of funerals he or his predecessors had organised.

It was the responsibility of the College of Arms to organise and facilitate the funerals of the gentry and nobility. This was exercised by the heralds themselves or by their regional deputies. The four generations of the Holme family were deputy heralds of Chester who often arranged funerals for the gentry of Cheshire, Lancashire and North Wales; recorded their funeral certificates with details of the deceased's family and armorial bearings; and collected the fees due to the College of Arms.

Heraldry was a significant part of the funeral procession, for the shield of arms, crest and motto all served to identify the deceased and his rank in society. Particularly noticeable would be the fluttering flags - heraldic banners, standards and pennons. If a non-armigerous gentleman died then he could be buried with the arms of any company, corporation or guild he might be a member of, being displayed instead of personal arms.

The Procession

A funeral procession which made its way from the deceased's home to the church, had two distinct parts – first, what one might call the official and heraldic part, celebrating the deceased's status, in which his 'achievements' would be displayed, and, second, the personal part of the parade with the corpse immediately followed by the chief mourner, other mourners, family members and friends. The status and number of participants within the parade and the nature of the heraldic display were all determined by the deceased' rank – gentleman, esquire, knight, or peer. The 'achievements' in this sense were his coat of arms, helm, crest, sword, shield, gauntlets and spurs.

The basic funeral procession - that of an ordinary gentleman – comprised of the following: first, the conductor in a black gown; next the poor people of the parish, in twos, each in a black gown and carrying a pencil with the deceased's name and year of death; then various individuals carrying items of the 'achievements'; then the officiating minister; the body escorted by men of the same degree as the deceased; finally, the mourners, family and friends walking in pairs. The carriage carrying the coffin was draped with a large black linen or velvet cloth- the 'pall' - on which were displayed the arms of the deceased. The escutcheons would have been painted on paper, buckram or leather and sewn to the fabric.

The funerals of other ranks were somewhat similar so far as the rear section of the procession but differed in the front, 'official' section. For an ordinary esquire the poor would be dressed in black, though in Wales they were in white with the deceased's name sown on the front and back. Next came the persons' servants wearing black. After them came the pennon carried by a gentleman, the helmet and crest by another gentleman, the motto carried by another gentleman and the coat of arms - a tabard - carried by an esquire. The body would be escorted by men of the same rank and borne in to the church by them.

¹ R. Holme, *An Academie or Store House of Armory and Blazon*, Book IV, pp 486 - 496

There were varying degrees of esquire and each had a subtle difference in the way the first part of the procession was ordered. For example, a person who was an esquire by virtue of the office he held, such as a deputy lieutenant of the county. The lead was taken by two conductors with staves dressed in black; then the poor in white coats each holding a pencil; two yeomen; six or eight servants; a servant holding a pennon of green taffeta; a horse with a groom; a servant carrying the deceased's rapier; another carrying his spurs; a gentleman with a pennon of blue taffeta; another with his motto; a pennon of red taffeta; his helmet and crest; and then his coat of arms held by an esquire.

An esquire who had served in war with a commission as a captain or colonel had a dramatic procession. After the poor came a soldier carrying a green pennon; then a drummer or trumpeter sounding a doleful tune; next his corselet and headpiece carried by a gentleman; then his back and breastplates; his shield; his gauntlets; a horse 'furnished for warre'; his sword; his truncheon or commanders staff; a motto carved onto a board; a red pennon carried by a gentleman or a colonel; his helmet and crest carried by a knight; and his coat of arms carried by a baronet. If he died on active service, his funeral procession would be accompanied by a company of foot or horse or both, with both trumpets and drums being sounded. 'Fire men', presumably musketeers or riflemen. Would carry their muskets with the butt foremost under their right arms, with their left arms behind their backs holding the barrel. Pikemen would trail their pikes along the ground behind them. Following internment the trumpets would be sounded and the drums beaten whilst the 'fire men' would give two or three volleys.

Some examples make these arrangements somewhat clearer.

Thomas Venables died on 8 December 1605. His funeral procession from Kinderton to Middlewich church was an elaborate affair. The procession was led by the conductors of the funeral in black coats and carrying black staves. They were followed by the poor people, in twos, dressed in gowns and carrying pencils. Then, two more conductors dressed in black carrying staves. Next came local yeoman in coats and in the midst of them Sir Thomas' standard carried by Thurstan Colier; his motto carried by Richard Colier and then his pennon carried by Peter Mainwaring. Then followed a Mr Coney, on his own, William Venables and Geoffrey Bromfield; Robert Venables and Hugh Venables; John Venables on his own; John Gargrave and Robert Gargrave; John Legh of Booths and Geoffrey Shakerley; Richard Egerton of Ridley and Thomas Wilbraham of Woodhey, Next, came the knights, in twos: Sir Richard Ashton from Lancashire, Sir Thomas Smith, Sir Thomas Holcroft and Sir William Brereton. They were followed by Robert Mainwaring holding the deceased's crest, Roger Mainwaring with the shield and Hugh Mainwaring with the heraldic tabard. The preacher was accompanied by a herald, presumably Randle Holmes, Then came the coffin and at the corners of the carriage banners displaying the last four marriages of Cotton, Needham, Brereton, and Gargrave born by Mr. Daniell, Richard Ashton, Edward Leigh and Peter Leigh. Immediately behind the coffin walked Sir Peter Leigh as the representative of the chief mourner and as guardian of the two years old Peter Venables, and four assistants, Richard Gargrave, Robert Needham, Mr Marbury and Mr Mainwaring of Kermincham.²

The funeral of John Legh of Booths who died whilst serving as High Sheriff in 1650 is used as an example. First the porter with a long staff; next the 'Gwydon' (banner); up to thirty of the sheriff's men in livery; his pennon, crest and motto; his horse carrying his escutcheons; his motto, spurs and gauntlet; a pennon of his paternal arms; the sheriff's horse 'richly furnished and trapped'; his sword; his helmet and crest; his coat of arms with all quarterings. This first part was then followed by the minister in front

² *Cheshire Sheaf*, vol. III (1883), p.20.

of the hearse with a velvet pall adorned with escutcheons; the chief mourner; then ten relations wearing black, and lastly knights, esquires, gentlemen, neighbours and others.

When a knight died his body would lie in state in a room specially prepared and draped in black with escutcheons around the room. His achievements would be placed around the room with wax candles for visitors to admire. The funeral of Sir Hugh Calveley of Lea (Newbold) was used as an example of a knight's funeral. First, the porter with his staff; then his tenants wearing his livery; a trumpeter; his standard; his horse 'in mourning' led by a groom; his lance carried under a man's arm with the point behind; gentlemen, in pairs, dressed in black; his Gwydon; his war-horse; his motto 'Ung Dieu: Ung Roy'; esquires walking in pairs; his pennon; his spurs, his gauntlets; his helmet and crest; his sword; his shield; his coat of arms; the chaplain; the body on a coach with four horses adorned with a velvet pall adorned with escutcheons; the chief mourner; the heir's guardian; the chief mourner's 'assistants'.

The arrangements for Sir Randle Mainwaring, who died in 1612, are also given, but this time the names of those present is included. First there were two conductors with black staves; then the poor in black holding pencils; two more conductors with black staves; yeomen in black; a trumpeter; his standard borne by Mr. Hulton; his great horse led by 'the groom of the stable'; his lance trailed by Mr. Glegge; his pennon borne by Mr. Hurleston; Mr. Davenport and Mr. Calveley; Sir Thomas Smith and Sir Thomas Holcroft; his spurs carried by Mr. Mainwaring of Marton; his gauntlets carried by Mr. Baskerville; his helmet and crest borne by Mr. Edward Mainwaring; his sword by Mr. Cotton; his shield by Mr. Wise; the coat of arms carried by Captain Mainwaring; the minister; the body carried by six esquires; Sir Randle Mainwaring as chief mourner; then Mr. Leicester, Mr. Smith; Mr. Edmund Mainwaring and Mr. Thomas Mainwaring in assistance. The rear of the procession included friends and others.³

A similar procession is recorded for Sir Hugh Beeston who was buried in 1608.⁴ Harleian. Mss. 2129 states:

'The order of the funerall of Hugh beston of
beeston in the County of Chester, Esqr., buried at
bunbury in may 1608 :-
first tow yeomen in black cotes, w'th staves
black, for conductors for the poore
then the piore 2 & 2 w'th pencells in their hands
then 2 yeomen more w'th black staues
then the yeomen in ootes 2 & 2
the penon, Carried by Mr. Wich in a Blooke
cloak
then the gent' and Esqrs. in black clokes 2 & 2
the helme and crest borne by Mr. peter bressey
the cote of Armes borne by Mr. Whitmore
the preacher
the Corpea
the head mourner alone
assistants 2, vi'l'zt
Mr. Wilbram Mr. Egerton
others of blood in black
Kts, Esqrs., & ge't', & others not in black.'

³ There is an account of Mainwaring's funeral in *Cheshire Sheaf*, 1st series, vol. III (1883), p. 66.

⁴ *Cheshire Sheaf*, 1st series, vol. ii .366.

Sir Thomas Egerton, son of the Lord Chancellor Egerton was buried on 26 September 1599. He had died in Dublin Castle but was brought back to Cheshire for internment in Dodleston church. His cortege was led by two conductors in black and the Bellman of Chester. Twenty-four poor people wearing gowns carried pencils and were followed by eight servants in coats. Two drummers and a fife played doleful music. Next came a number of soldiers trailing their pikes and his ensign trailed by Captain Phillips. Four servants; a trumpeter; his standard borne by Mr. David Holland; his horse in black; sixteen esquires; twelve knights; Thomas Holcroft, then High Sheriff of Chester; his pennon borne by Thomas Ravenscroft; his spurs carried by Captain Salisbury; gauntlets by Richard Brereton; helmet and crest by Mr. Hope; his shield by Mr. Marbury; his sword carried by John done; his coat of arms carried by Norroy, King of Arms; the Bishop of Chester; the corpse borne by esquires; John Egerton as chief mourner; four assistants; the mayor of Chester and aldermen with other knights, esquires and citizens.

Sir Robert Grosvenor of Eaton was not just a knight but a baronet. In essence, the funeral of a knight and a baronet were the same, but the latter had the addition of a square banner. Sir Robert's body lay in state in his chapel, draped in black for a number of days with all his achievements about him. The order of procession was as follows: a trumpeter; two conductors with black staves; four servants; a pennon of arms carried by a gentleman; two servants; his standard carried by an esquire; his horse draped in black; his lance trailed by a gentleman; two servants; his motto carried by a gentleman; a pennon; a trumpeter; two servants in black cloaks; his spurs carried by an esquire; his gauntlets carried by an esquire; his sword carried by the mayor; his shield carried by an esquire; his square 'Banner of Honor' carried by a baronet; his helmet and crest carried by an esquire; his coat of arms borne by an esquire; his doctor and the herald; the preacher; a gentleman usher, bareheaded; the body, with a bareheaded foot-boy on each side and four pennons at each wheel carried by esquire; Sir Thomas Grosvenor, baronet, grand-child and chief mourner; his sons; his kindred and others.

Sir George Booth of Dunham Massey was another baronet whose funeral details are recorded. He died in 1652 and had been deputy Lieutenant of Cheshire, a Justice of the Peace and Keeper of the Rolls. His funeral was led by his tenants, some of whom wore his livery. A trumpeter played dolefully. There were two conductors dressed in black who held a stave in one hand and a handkerchief in the other. A total of eighty people represented the poor and they wore gowns and held a pencil with the deceased name and year of death. Two more conductors followed and another trumpeter. Next came the standard he had when knighted which bore a red cross his crest and motto carried by an esquire. His horse was draped in black down to its feet and decorated with escutcheons. The lance, with a pennon was trailed along in the traditional fashion. A number of servants of gentlemen, esquires and knights came next. Being a commander of horse, cavalry, his 'Gydon' or horse banner had a skit in the end and displayed his crest in a laurel wreath and his motto. A war horse, richly trapped ridden by a page wearing rich clothes to represent the deceased's armour, who carried a lance with a banner with his crest. His motto 'or word of war' was carried by a gentleman. His steward and 'clarke of the kitchen' came next carrying white staves. Then gentlemen in cloaks. Next his 'Great Banner of Honor' with his quartered arms showing his rank of banneret. His pennon showing his gentlemanly status. His achievements came next – spurs, gauntlets, shield, sword, helmet and crest and coat of arms. These were followed by his doctor and lawyer and the herald. The minister and preacher and gentleman usher preceded the body which was on a carriage drawn by six horses. Alongside each wheel a pennon-rolls or banner-rolls bearing his arms and those of his wife's parents, grandparents and great grandparents impaled. The chief mourner, four assistants; knights, esquires and gentry. The procession went from his home to the church, a distance of about one and half miles.

Flags

There were rules governing the style and size of the various flags. The standard would be four and a half yards long, split at the tail end, of two colours, divided horizontally, representing the principle tinctures of the coat of arms, and fringed with the same colours. On it would be displayed the badge of St. George, the red cross, at the head, which had to be a yard square, and then the man's badge, crest and motto.

The pennon (pennon) would be pointed or swallow tailed at the fly, coloured as the field of the arms and fringed. The quartered arms would appear at the head and the tail would be decorated with flourishing; for an ordinary gentleman this would be two ells long – about 90 inches.

The banner was to be seven yards long by 1¾ yards deep and contain his whole armorial bearings.

The 'banner rowle' (bannerol, a small banner) was to be a yard square with the arms of allied families. The bannerol might display a single coat, a quartered coat or impaled arms. These could be his own arms and those of his wife's family, those of his parents or grandparents.⁵ Their number was regulated according to rank so that an earl might have up to six and a baron up to four, whereas a knight or gentleman did not generally have them.

The 'Gydon' (guidon) is a form of standard which tapers to a round, unsplit end at the fly. This would normally just display the motto, though in Calveley's procession the cross of St George appears in the top corner of the head.

The Funeral Service

Irrespective of rank the religious ceremony was the same and finished with a sermon after which was the 'offering', the conduct of which depended on status. In essence this was the official 'handing over' of the 'achievements' to the heir.

The chief mourner would be conducted by the herald or deputy from his seat in the church to the High Altar, or Communion Table, along with his 'assistants', two, four or more, determined by rank. Here they make a money offering. Then two of the assistants go to the corpse, which lay in the body of the church, take the pennon, return to the chief mourner and present it to him 'with a low obedience'. He then presents the pennon to the herald who lays it on the Altar. The assistants, or two others then collect the helmet and crest and offer them to the chief mourner, and likewise the rest of the achievements are offered. It is then that the chief mourner returns to the body and accompanies it to the grave.

Following the funeral service for Sir Robert Grosvenor the achievements were presented to the heir as was the usual procedure but then the herald who was in attendance took the standard and faced the heir and the body of the church and made this proclamation:

'Whereas our most Gracious Sovereigne Lord King James of happy memory did by his letters patent dated 23 of February: in the 19 yeare of his raigne, create Sir Richard Grosvenor of Eaton Knight with the title and honour of a Baronett, to him and his heires males for ever, by virtue of which grant it came to his sone and heire Sir Richard Grosvenor, Bartt: now deceased, and is to descend to his grandchild and heire Thomas the sone of Roger: who is from henceforth to have the place and title of a Baronett

⁵ J.P.Rylands (ed.), *Cheshire and Lancashire Funeral Certificates, A.D. 1600 to 1678*, Record Society, vol. VI, (1882), pp. xvi - xviii.

according to his Ancestors grant, by he name of Sir Tho: Grosvenor Bartt: whose family God grant long to flourish. God save the King'

After Sir George Booth's service and sermon the chief mourner went up to the altar with his assistants. There the achievements were delivered to him and placed on the communion table by the herald. Next each of the servants in office came to bow, kiss his staves and hand them over to the chief mourner thus surrendering their office. Lastly the chief mourner was taken by the knights and esquires to the coffin which was then taken to the place of internment.

The Hearse

After all the ceremonial, the herald would be responsible for setting up over the grave a 'hearse', a form of tent made from black linen or velvet, which was decorated with 'hatchments' – the armorial bearings. The black cloth sides would be decorated with escutcheons of his and his lady's coats of arms and on the top of the roof would be placed his crest. Inside the achievements, which had previously been 'offered' on the altar, would be placed around the walls.

Like everything else in the funeral process, the size of the hearse depended on rank. A gentleman would have a narrow rectangular tent two yards long by one yard wide and 1¾ yards high and having a long ridge. The sides and roof would be decorated with escutcheons of the deceased's arms, with pennons along the ridge and edges of the roof. An esquire's hearse would be of a similar size but the roof would be pyramid shape surmounted by the crest. A knight bachelor would have a frame two yards long and wide by two yards high to the top of the pyramid shaped roof.⁶

A Lady's Funeral

Following her husband's death Anne Venables married Sir Edward Bushell of Worcestershire.⁷ Bushell was a servant to Ferdinando Stanley, Earl of Derby, in 1591, a gentleman usher to Robert Devereux, second Earl of Essex, had been knighted at Whitehall on 19 December 1604, and became an equerry to James I and Charles I. She bore him two sons, John and Thomas. Anne, continued to live at the marital home on the Kinderton estate, presumably with her new husband, caring for her young son. She died at Northwich on 11 September 1634 and her funeral procession was no less elaborate than her late husband's (*see above*). The cortege left her home at 'the Lodge' and made its way to St. Michael's church. At the head walked William, Herbert, Rafe Holbrooke, John Culcheth, Gawen Duncalf. They were followed by Mr Oldfield carrying the heraldic pennon, and he was followed by Randle Vernon and Rafe Carter. Just in front of the coffin were the preacher, Mr. Shenton, and the family doctor, Dr Bentley from Northwich. Mrs Venables carried two children, Mary and Sara Venables, immediately followed by Jane Kettill, the maid. The baron, Peter Venables came next followed by John and Thomas Bushell, and then grandsons Thomas and Gilbert Venables. Next, Messrs Waterhouse and Fenwick followed by friends and relations who were not dressed in black.⁸

⁶ *Academie of Armory*, p. 488. In *Funeral Certificates*, p. xviii, the size is given as 2 yards by one yard.

⁷ *Funeral Certificates*, p. 55

⁸ *Cheshire Sheaf*, 1st series, vol. III (1883), p.2.

The Funeral Certificate

Following the funeral there was the matter of issuing a funeral certificate. From 1568, it was a legal requirement for the herald who officiated at a funeral to supply the College of Arms ('the library or office of Armes') with a certificate detailing the name of the deceased, date and place of death and burial, age, marriage, children and their spouses if appropriate. The certificate would then be signed by the heir or the executors. The certificate also includes a drawing or blazon of the deceased's coat of arms.

Very few of these documents remain in existence those that do are preserved in the British Library catalogued as Lansdowne MS 879; Harleian MSS 2041 and 2180. The Harleian manuscripts are two books which contains the certificates of Randle I Holme begun in 1616 and carried on by his son and grandson to 1680; the latter also contains some details of funeral processions. Some Cheshire certificates have been printed in J.P.Rylands (ed.), *Cheshire and Lancashire Funeral Certificates, A.D. 1600 to 1678*, Record Society, vol. VI, (1882), and in various editions of the *Cheshire Sheaf*.

Costs

Sir George Beeston, one of the heroes of the Armada, was buried at Bunbury on 13 October 1601, having died a month earlier. It is likely that a funeral procession made its way from Beeston Hall to the church where ringers were paid to toll the bells. Whilst his will does not survive an inventory of his goods and chattels does.⁹ It is dated four days after he died and comes to £177 12s. The inventory also contains an itemised list of the cost of Sir George's funeral which came to £157 8s 5d.

The funeral procession would have made its way from Beeston Hall to the church at Bunbury, where ringers were paid to toll the bells. A carpenter was paid to construct the coffin, bier, hearse and staves to carry the 'cheivements' – his coat of arms, helm and crest. Iron workmanship were also costed in connection with his achievements of arms. A painter was also paid the enormous sum of £18 for his 'funerall worke'.

Following the funeral, it seems that there was much feasting at his wake with cooks being brought in from neighbouring houses. Dozens of calves, pigs, turkeys and hens were ordered as well as prepared mutton, veal and beef. These were cooked along with eggs, sugar, currants raisons and prunes, and flavoured with herbs and spices such as pepper, cloves, maze, thyme, nutmeg and ginger. Claret, wine and sack were drunk, and, judging by the amount of malt purchased, good quantity of ale. Cloth was purchased for covering the hearse and to make gowns for the bishop, Mrs Beeston and the poor of the parish. The bishops gown was to be made from ten yards of 'perpetuana' then a new fabric – a glossy woollen material. The procession would have included members of his family, neighbouring gentry families, yeoman tenants and the poor. His coffin would have been preceded by gentlemen carrying his coat of arms, his helm and crest, whilst others will have carried pennons painted with badges, coats of arms and illustrations depicting his life.

⁹ CRO: WS 1601, Sir George Beeston



The funeral procession of Sir Hugh Calveley of Lea, Cheshire, 1648.
An Academie or Store House of Armory and Blazon, facing p. 488



[The Funeral Order, apparently, of Thomas Savage, of Rock-Savage, Viscount Savage, buried at Maxfield, co. Chest. 16 Dec., 1635. It was probably intended to be inserted on p. 495 after the words "The Funeral Order of a Viscount."]

The funeral procession of Viscount Thomas Savage, 1635.
 The description of this funeral is not given. (Note: the procession is shown 'back-to-front').
An Academie or Store House of Armory and Blazon, facing p. 494