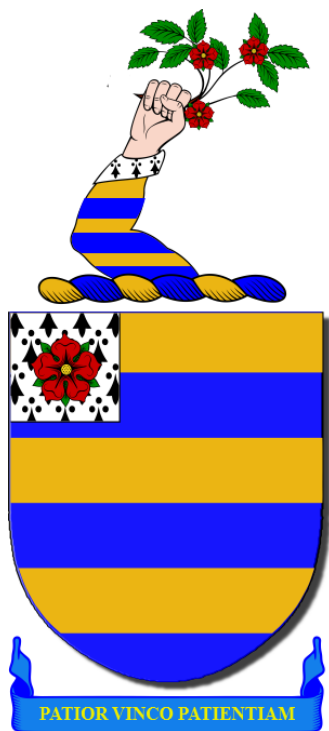


THE HOLME FAMILY OF CHESTER, HERALDIC PAINTERS



There were four successive generations named Randle Holme each of whom were 'paynters, heralds and antiquaries' who were regularly employed by the gentry, the city officials and church wardens to undertake heraldic art-work. The first Randle was born in 1571, fourth son of Thomas Holme of Tranmere, Wirral. In January 1587, he became apprentice to Thomas Chaloner, a herald painter of Chester, who was at one time also Ulster King of Arms, and went on to marry his master's widow in 1598, succeeding him as Deputy Herald for Chester answerable to William Segar, Norroy King of Arms, from March 1600/1.ⁱ

As a 'painter', Randle was admitted as a member of 'the Painters, Glaziers, Embroiderers and Stationers' of Chester. As a deputy herald, Randle arranged funerals for the gentry Cheshire, Lancashire and North Wales; recorded their funeral certificates, with details of the armorial bearings and family; and collected the fees due to the College of Arms. Randle's appointment was confirmed with the change of Norroy in May 1606.

At the Visitation of Cheshire in 1613, conducted by Randle's boss, Richard St. George who was then Norroy, his descent from the Holme family of Tranmere, Wirral, Cheshire, is recorded; at the time he was responsible for listing all those who disclaimed their arms.ⁱⁱ

In October 1615, Randle was elected to be one of the two sheriffs of the city of Chester. In 1625, he made a loan of £10 to the exchequer of Charles I as demanded, and six years later paid a fine of £10 for not receiving the order of knighthood at the time of the king's coronation.ⁱⁱⁱ

During the 1620s and 30s, Randle exchanged letters with the College of Arms in which he explained the problems he was having in obtaining the necessary fees from the gentry and of unlicensed painters offering to arrange funerals and to paint heraldic decorations for them at a reduced rate, thus undercutting the College's fees. On one occasion, about November 1630, he

wrote to Sir Gilbert Houghton of Houghton Towers, Lancashire, requesting that he send his father's funeral certificate and the appropriate fee of £6 13s 4d forthwith or else find himself in danger of appearing in the Earl Marshal's court.^{iv} Likewise, in March 1637/8, he wrote to Mrs Mainwaring desiring her husband's certificate and the fee of £3 6s 8d. This amount was due to the College of Arms because he had been a gentlemen buried with an armorial display, had the funeral not had such a display the fee would have been £2.^v In this letter he complains that the shields of arms had been prepared by a man named Dutton, when it ought to have been his business as a Deputy herald to have done them and he intended to take action against Dutton.

In October 1633 Randle was elected to be mayor of Chester. During his term of office he suffered an embarrassing situation leading to him being brought before Thomas Howard, earl of Arundel, the Earl Marshal, and made the subject of a severe and lengthy rebuke by him for not having been in the city to formally receive him when he arrived on 19 July 1634. The Earl of Derby who had accompanied Arundel, spoke up for Randle and assured the honoured visitor that Randle was genuine in not having known of their arrival. Nevertheless, Randle had to pay 10s for the warrant issued to bring him before Arundel and 13s 4d for the messenger's costs in delivering it.

During the Civil War Randle remained within the city of Chester and suffered the long siege from September 1645 to February 1646 and was suspected of being a Royalist supporter and accordingly fined £160.

He died on 26 January 1654/5, and, four days later, was buried in St Mary's church, where there was once a painted memorial board, similar to so many painted by the Holmes' family. His will does not survive though an abstract is within the Harleian collection.^{vi}

His son, Randle II (1601-1659) continued the business of heraldic painting, but on inheriting his father's papers and those of his grandfather, Thomas Chaloner, he began to amass a collection of local documents relating to heraldry. Like his father, he too became a Deputy Herald and, during his father's mayoralty, in 1633 was appointed as one of the two sheriffs of the city. He became mayor of Chester from 1642 for three years, a period which included the long siege of the city by Parliamentary troops. For several years from 1633 he was the city's treasurer. As mayor during the troubled times there are numerous letters between King Charles,

Prince Rupert and other Royalist commanders with the mayor all of which are in the Harleian collection. ^{vii}

Randle II died five years after his father in September 1659. He was 58 years old, not 63 as stated in the handsome monument to his memory on the north wall of St Mary's, church. The quartered arms at the head of the mural give Holme quartering Tranmere (*Argent, a cross engrailed Gules, over all a bend Azure*) and Lymme (*Gules, a pale fessily Argent*). The tablet also includes the impaled arms of relating to Randle II's two marriages: Holmes and Ellis (*Ermine, a lion rampant azure*) and Holmes and Dodd (*Argent, on a fess Gules, between two barrulets wavy Sable, three crescents Or*).

Randle III (1627-1700) was probably the most prolific of herald painters in the family and, arguably, the most distinguished. Like his father he amassed an amazing archive which included legal documents, genealogical material, observations on parish churches, and much more. The collection was purchased by Robert Harley, Earl of Oxford, and remains in the British Library among the vast Harleian Collection. He was the author of a large and very scarce heraldic work, entitled 'An Accademie of Armory, or a Store House of Armory and Blazon' printed at Chester in 1688.

He was appointed a 'Sewer of the Chamber in Extraordinary' to Charles II in December 1664, and as such was given freedom from arrest and exemption from serving on juries or from holding public office. So, although, like his father and grand-father, he held the official post of Deputy Herald for Cheshire, Lancashire and North Wales, he never held civic office in Chester.

This Randle was a somewhat controversial character. His desire to pursue business landed him in trouble on more than one occasion. In 1662, he tried to sue the churchwardens of St. Bridget's, Chester, for a breach of contract by alleging they had asked him to make a large table and frame to depict the Royal Arms in metal and oil colours and set it up in the church. He painted it and charged £6, but the churchwardens refused to pay and denied giving any such order. One of the churchwardens said that in June 1661, he met with Holme and told him they must have the king's arms made but made no agreement. Six months later Holme told the churchwarden he had had two "tables", one large and one smaller, which had not been made specially for St. Bridget's, but wanted him to see them. Due to the smallness and poorness of their parishioners the church could only afford four shillings for the work and no agreement

was made. The churchwardens asked the court to dismiss Holme's petition. Unfortunately, the result of the case is not known.^{viii}

He seems to have acted independent of the College of Arms and assumed duties on their behalf for which he had no authority. On 22 January 1667, he attended the funeral of Sir Thomas Myddleton at Chirck as 'Herald' and for his work on the arrangements and in providing the heraldry he was paid £59 10s.^{ix} He was sued by Sir William Dugdale, Norroy King of Arms, for having 'boldly invaded the Office of him the said Norroy, by preparing achievements for the funeral of Sir Raphe Ashton of Middleton, Kt'. The case was heard at Stafford Assizes in March 1667/8 and damages of £20 were awarded against Randle with costs. The case involving Ashton was possibly just an example and one of a number, for following the verdict Dugdale records in his diary during 1667 and 1668, that he visited several churches in the North West and pulled down or defaced the achievements of arms hung there by Holme: he did the same again in 1670. Also, it seems Randle had been arranging funerals for the gentry and painted their memorials without recourse to London and sending the appropriate fee of £40. Eventually Randle was reconciled with the heralds and retained his post as deputy herald.

Correspondence between Randle and the College of Arms survives. In December 1661 Randle wrote to Dugdale on behalf of a 'Gentlewoman liveinge in Chester' of an illegitimate line of the Aldersey family, who was about to be married. Being of an illegitimate line her father's arms had been marked with a baton and, as such a mark would be an embarrassment, he asked whether the colours of the arms and crest could be altered and all other marks of cadency or illegitimacy be removed. He suggested that the leopards' faces on the shield be changed from green to blue and the crest from red to blue and that a form of words accompany the approval to suggest that the grant had been made be to Thomas Aldersey, Alderman of Chester. He forwarded £5 as a 'reward' for this his 'first fruites of my endeavours for the advance of the Credit of the Office'. Some have seen this as an inducement, but I think not – a fee would normally have been due for such a service in any event. In a post script Randle added that he had been in correspondence with another alderman's son whose great grand-father had been base born and was endeavouring to amend his coat of arms for a cost of at least £10, but as the young man could only offer £5, he wished to know if that amount would be acceptable to Dugdale. The response to the letter has not been recorded.^x

On 9 May 1692, Randle wrote sending his publication and opens by saying that as he had not been in touch for such a long time he did not know who was who, until he saw the name of the registrar and Sir John Dugdale as Norroy. His *Book of Heraldry* 'of my own Labour and printing' he hoped would be placed in the library by the King of Arms. He stated that he had only printed a few copies for the local gentry as he was not licensed and the cost of doing so, but he the College where to licence the book he would pay the costs. The Chapter Books of the College make reference to this. Two copies of the *Academie of Armoury* were in the College of which one was described as a presentation copy with Holme's arms; *Barry of six Or and Azure, on a canton Ermine, a rose Gules*, and for crest *A cubit arm vested barry of six Or and Azure, the hand holding a branch of three roses Gules, leaved and stalked proper*. With the motto *Patior vinco Patientiam*. Beneath was written 'The Gift of Randle Holme of the city of Chester, Herauld Painter to the Worshopful Colledge of Heraulds, Ano MDCXCII.'

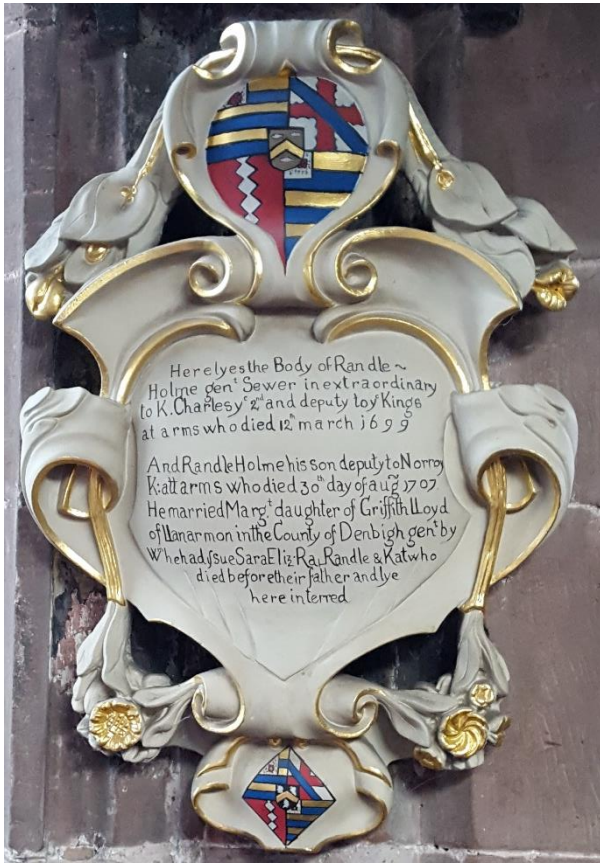
The College's chapter books, under the date 2 June, record Holmes' presentation and letter but referred it to the next chapter meeting. On 4 August, it was decided to reply to Holme and inform him that licensing was a matter for the Earl Marshall and that Norroy was out of town. Randle wrote again in August 1692 to Gregory King, Lancaster Herald, as he had not received a reply. It seems he never did and was probably still out of favour.

Randle III married three times. First, in 1655, he married Sarah Soley from Forton, Shropshire, by whom he had a son and four daughters before she died ten years later. Next, he married Elizabeth Wilson of Chester by whom he had seven sons and two daughters. Lastly, he married Anne Birkenhead. Randle III died on 12 March 1699/1700 and was buried at St Mary's three days later.

Randle IV (1659-1707) was not as prolific or distinguished as his predecessors. He went into partnership with his father in 1690 and became a member of the Stationers' Company. He was appointed sheriff of Chester in 1705 and was an alderman of the Company. He became Deputy to Norroy King of Arms.

This last Randle died on 30 August 1707 and buried in his parish church three days later – the entry in the registers reads: 'Mr. Randell Holme of Bridgstree Harreld of Armes'. His will dated 2 June 1707 survives at Chester Record Office.

Dying at the age of 48, without surviving children, he gave his ‘Books and Collections of Heraldry’ to his brothers, George and John, but it seems they did not continue with the business but were succeeded by Francis Bassino who had married a daughter of the family.^{xi}



Monuments to the Holme family, St Mary on the Hill, Chester

ⁱ Earwaker, J.P., "The Four Randle Holmes of Chester" *Journal of the Chester Arch. & Hist. Society*, NS IV (1890/1), pp 115/6

ⁱⁱ British Library, Harley Mss 1535 and 2161; Armytage, Sir, J.G, and Ryands, J.P. (eds.), *Pedigrees Made at the Visitation of Chester, 1613*, Record Society, vol lviii (1909), p.1

ⁱⁱⁱ Harley, 2022, f.36; 2022, f.36

^{iv} Harley, 2011, f.9

^v Harley, 2011, f.12

^{vi} Harley, 2022

^{vii} Harley, 2002

^{viii} *Cheshire Sheaf*, 3rd series, vol. xxi, (19240), p.

^{ix} *Cheshire Sheaf*, 3rd series, vol. xi, (1914), p. 100/1

^x *Cheshire Sheaf*, 3rd series, vol. xiv (1917) p.2

^{xi} *Cheshire Sheaf*, 1st series, vol. i (1878), p. 67