

# FIVE MEDIEVAL CHESHIRE KNIGHTS

Sir Thomas Holme was a 15<sup>th</sup> century English herald who owned a collection of books and rolls of arms. One of these contains hundreds of illustrations of warriors in armour displaying their blazons and of these I have noticed that five are Cheshire men.<sup>i</sup> The book is in three parts, each having been originally a separate set of papers. Following some introductory pages, the first part (ff. 1-8), is a set of anonymous verses on the kings of England from William the Conqueror to Henry V and probably dates to the late 1440s.

The second part (ff. 9-40v), the 'Military Roll of Arms', created probably in the 1440s, is thought to be the work of Roger Legh (or Lee) who was Clarenceux King of Arms from 1435 until his death in 1460 and one of Holme's predecessors at the College of Arms. Legh is certainly a common Cheshire name and the first name, Roger, is certainly not uncommon, but it is likely that this Legh is not from Cheshire given that his coat of arms is dissimilar to any Cheshire Legh family. This section has coloured drawings of 248 knights in armour, four per page, in pairs, mounted on charging horses and either jousting or fighting with swords (ff. 9r-40v): one page has a single warrior labelled 'Willen cope of essex gentil man' and an unfinished drawing of a shield (f.23r). Each knight is labelled with his name and is depicted wearing an heraldic tabard and mounted on a horse with an heraldic caparison. It is this part which contains the Cheshire men.

The third part (ff. 41-112), made perhaps in the last quarter of the 15th century, has coloured drawings of 127 armoured knights, one per page, each wearing an heraldic tabard and holding an armorial banner. The name of each knight is written near the bottom of the page. Eleven folios are blank except for the name of the knight that was intended to be painted on these pages. None of these has a Cheshire connection.



*Sir Thomas Holme's arms as drawn in his 'Book of Arms'*

### **Sir Thomas Holme**

One of the first few pages of the book shows Sir Thomas' coat of arms surrounded by the Garter, he having been elevated to that Order in 1482. The arms displayed within the Garter are: *Barry of eight Or and Azure, on a canton argent, a chaplet of roses Gules, quartering Argent, a chevron Azure, charged with a crescent or, within a bordure engrailed Sable.* The next page depicts a knight in plate armour holding his sword aloft and wearing a tabard, displaying blue and white bars, disembarking

from a ship bearing the English royal banners and the ancient cross of St. George. He is being met by an unidentified armoured knight and one or the other is handing over a banner with similar coat of arms but within a *border componée Argent and Gules.* The similarity of the arms suggests that the page illustrates something from the Holme's family history but the actual event shown is not known.

From these arms it is apparent that Holme was a member of a family which originated at Holme in Lancashire, the main line of which became extinct in the late 17<sup>th</sup> century, a branch of which eventually settled in Cheshire, at Tilston and Coddington. From them descend Hugh and Thomas Holme, father and son, who both held the office of sword-bearer of Chester in Tudor times.<sup>ii</sup> The first two quarters of the arms of the Coddington branch are as those in Sir Thomas' arms. The Coddington branch were then ancestors of the Holme family of Tranmere from whom descend the three successive Randle Holmes of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, who were Sheriffs of Chester and learned in matters of heraldry, genealogy and history. The second and third of these became deputy to Norrey, one of the King of Arms.<sup>iii</sup> The Chester branch bore similar arms, the difference being that for their canton they bore *Ermine, a rose Gules, seeded Or.*<sup>iv</sup>

Sir Thomas Holme began his career as a herald as Falcon Pursuivant in the reign of Henry VI, then Rouge Croix Pursuivant in 1457, Windsor Herald in 1461 and was promoted to be a King of Arms as Norroy in 1467. Although appointed in 1476 as Clarenceux King of Arms he resigned his commission on 4 January 1485, but was re-appointed by Patent on 1 May 1487 and served until his death in 1493. He took part in a number of diplomatic missions to Scotland, Burgundy, France, Brittany and Denmark, and was godfather to Thomas Wriothesley, who became Garter King of Arms.<sup>v</sup> Sir Thomas, who resided in Essex, died in

1493 leaving a wife named Elizabeth, a member of the Garland family of Essex, the reason perhaps that he placed a *chaplet*, or garland, on the canton of his coat of arms.

## **The Knights**

What was the purpose of the roll of armorial bearings in the second part and what was the occasion that prompted its making?

The knights seem to be organized according to a particular county: Suffolk (ff. 9r-17v), Essex (ff. 18r-29v), Kent (ff. 30r-36v), and Yorkshire (ff. 37r-40v). This is somewhat perplexing as it is clear that many of the knights portrayed are not necessarily associated with those counties, e.g. Gargrave (f. 16v) is a Yorkshire family and yet appears under Suffolk; Toke of Kent appears on an Essex page (f.22r); Hastings of York appears on a Kent page (f.35v) and Peryant is from Hertfordshire yet appears on an Essex page (f.22v). The Cheshire men recorded come under the headings for Essex, Kent and Yorkshire. Clearly the pages do not reflect armigerous families of the stated counties.

Given that the men are shown jousting or fighting one another with swords one might suppose that the pages were celebrate combatants in a tournament. If that is the case, the county names probably refer to where the contests were held. Each page contains at least one knight from that shire, e.g. under Essex we find Brightmore of Essex versus Danvers of Oxford or Wiltshire (f.25r), and on the Kent pages, Septvan of Kent versus Clifford of Hereford (f.31v) or Diggs of Kent versus Manston of Kent (f.30v)

What then of the Cheshire men contained within the pages of the book? The first occurrence of a Cheshire name is that of **Frodsham** naming a warrior tilting against an Essex man named Morton, though for some unknown reason the name 'John ap Haversyge' is also written above the warrior (f.22r). The Frodsham family arms, *Argent on a cross engrailed Sable four estoiles Or*, are shown on the knight's coat and the horse's caparison. A likely contender for this warrior is William Frodsham of Elton who was born about 1410 and served in France in the 1430s: in 1436, he was a member of the garrison at Coutances with John Talbot, earl of Shrewsbury.<sup>vi</sup> Another, but less likely candidate is Thomas Frodsham, also born about 1410, who served in France in the more humble role of archer in the 1430s. On 14 January 1430/1, he was garrisoned at Rouen and served at the siege of Louviers. Six years later he served with John Talbot, earl of Shrewsbury at Chateau Gaillard. Thomas the archer

could have moved up to become a man-at-arms and therefore be represented here. John Frodsham of Elton, born 1395, cannot be ruled out.<sup>vii</sup>

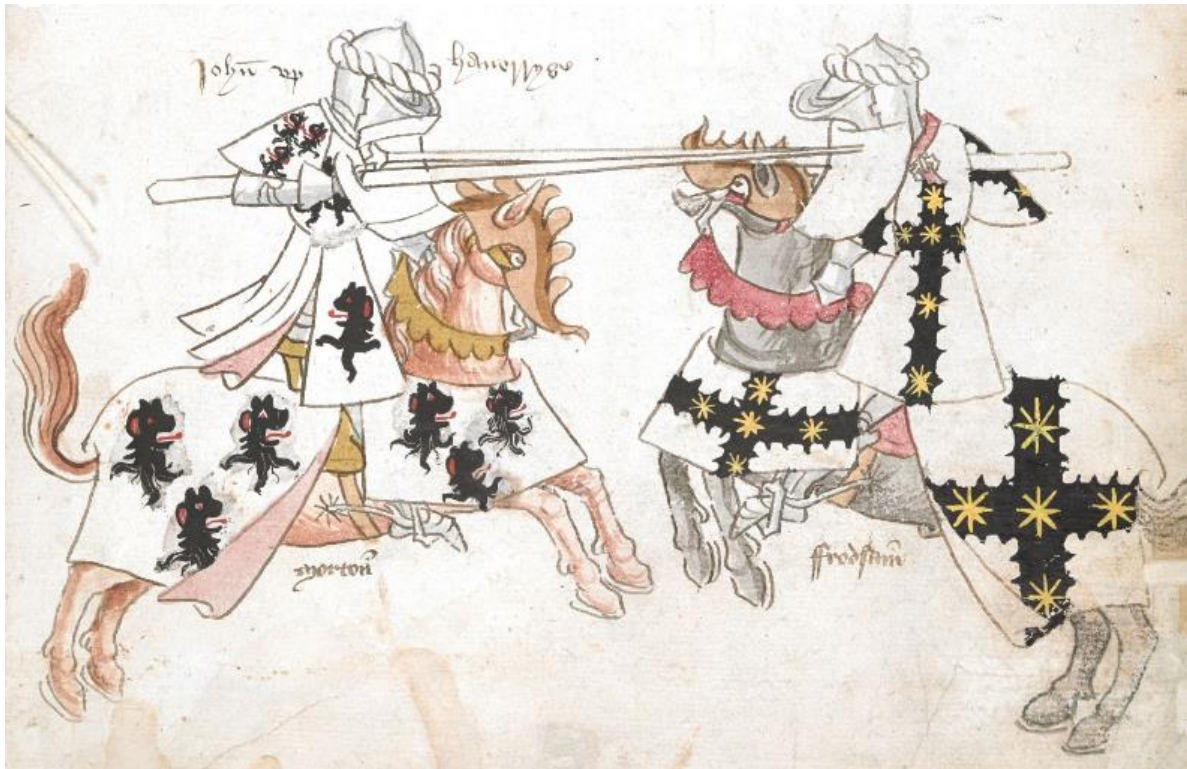
The next man of the county is a **Brereton** bearing *Argent two bars Sable*. He fights with a sword against a man named Hastings perhaps John Hastings from Yorkshire who was active in France in the 1430s (f.35v). The likely member of the Brereton family is Sir William, born about 1390, who was probably the 'Sir William Brearton, bailiff of Caen', who fought at the battle of Pontorson in 1425 under Lord Scales, and died at Harfleur that same year, or his son Sir William (c.1413 – 1485).<sup>viii</sup> Another, is John Brereton who was a man-at-arms in the personal retinue of John Talbot, earl of Shrewsbury, at the siege of Orleans in January 1429/30, and over the next five years served in the garrison at Harfleur.

On the same page, we have a **Helsby**, bearing *Or a saltire engrailed Sable*, jousting with Mauleverer of Yorkshire, perhaps Sir Thomas. This is likely to be either John, or his son Ranulph, Helsby both of whom were alive in 1450.<sup>ix</sup> Overleaf we have a **Davenport**, with *Argent a chevron between three crosses crosslet fitchee Sable*, fighting a member of the Lambton family of Kent (f.35r). This is likely to be one of two John Davenports, father and son, who were active during the middle part of the 15<sup>th</sup> century. John Davenport of Broomhall who was aged 21 in 1440 and served in France with John, duke of Somerset, in 1443, is also a possibility.<sup>x</sup>

Finally, in this section a member of the **Troutbeck** family (*Azure, three trouts fretted, Argent*) fight with a sword against a member of the Waterton family of Herefordshire. This is perhaps John who was garrisoned at Rouen in 1436 (f.37r), but in all likelihood, this is Sir John Troutbeck (1412-1458) Chamberlain of Chester who was killed at the battle of Bloreheath.<sup>xi</sup> A Sir William Troutbeck who had custody of French prisoners at Conway castle in 1422 and died in the 1460s is another possibility.<sup>xii</sup>

The pages of this heraldic book are fine examples of medieval art and heraldry. They are in my opinion a joy to behold and I never tire of looking at them. That they have some Cheshire significance is a bonus. The whole book may be viewed on the internet at:

[www.bl.uk/catalogues/illuminatedmanuscripts/record.asp?MSID=6579&CollID=8&NStart=4205](http://www.bl.uk/catalogues/illuminatedmanuscripts/record.asp?MSID=6579&CollID=8&NStart=4205)



*ff 22r. Morton v Frodsham*



*ff 35v. Brereton v Hastings*



*ff 35v. Helsby v Mauleverer*



*ff 35r. Davenport v Lambton*



*ff 37r. Troutbeck v Waterton*

## Acknowledgement

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<sup>i</sup> British Library, Harley MSs 4205, ff. i + 112.

<sup>ii</sup> *Visitation of Cheshire 1580*

<sup>iii</sup> For an account of the Holme family members see Hess, J.P., 'Backford's Memorial Boards: were they painted by a Randle Holme?', *Cheshire History*, vol. 47 (2007-8), pp. 34-9; Earwaker, J.P., 'The Four Randle Holmes of Chester, c1571-1707', *Journal of Chester Archaeological Society* (1892), p.142

<sup>iv</sup> Ormerod, G., *History of Cheshire*, ii, p. 453.

<sup>v</sup> Walter H Godfrey and Anthony Wagner, 'Clarenceux King of Arms', in *Survey of London Monograph 16, College of Arms, Queen Victoria Street* (London, 1963), pp. 74-101. *British History Online* <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/survey-london/bk16/pp74-101> [accessed 16 August 2017].

<sup>vi</sup> Unless otherwise stated, from hereon, references to soldiers and their exploits are from the AHRC-funded 'The Soldier in Later Medieval England Online Database', [dev.medievalsoldier.org](http://dev.medievalsoldier.org), 12 August 2017.

<sup>vii</sup> Ormerod, ii, p.30.

<sup>viii</sup> William Brereton's death at Harfleur is mentioned by Ormerod, iii, p.89. He died before his father who died in May 1426.

<sup>ix</sup> Ormerod, ii, p.72

<sup>x</sup> Ormerod, iii, p.68; iii, p.187

<sup>xi</sup> Ormerod, ii, p. 42.

<sup>xii</sup> 'Rymer's Foedera with Syllabus: July 1422', in *Rymer's Foedera Volume 10*, ed. Thomas Rymer (London, 1739-1745), pp. 225-232. *British History Online* <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/rymer-foedera/vol10/pp225-232> [accessed 16 August 2017].