

## Memorials to a Medieval Family: Part 1 by Michael Goddard

There are several monuments in Tickhill church which are connected with different generations of the de Estfeld or Eastfield family who were prominent benefactors of the church as it stands today. The earliest of them whose memorial still exists was a **Willelmus Estfeld** whose **tomb** stood on the north side of the altar until it was moved in the 1881 restoration to where it is now in the north-west corner of the church. Its side panels are decorated with the same quatrefoil pattern found elsewhere in the church (e.g. in the tower frieze) and, with one plain end and side, it was almost certainly designed to stand in its original position of prominence beside the altar. The **commemorative brass** that refers to this tomb-chest is not attached as we might expect, but is mounted on the north wall of the chancel. The chest may be closer in date than the brass to the time of his death. The abbreviated Latin inscription on the brass informs us that this William was formerly the Seneschal or Steward of the demesne or lordship of Holderness and of the honour of Tickhill together with the Lady Philippa, Queen of England, and of the demesne or lordship of Hatfield with Edmund, Duke of York. The brass also commemorates his wife, Margaret. It gives the date of his death as 24<sup>th</sup> December, 1386.

Tickhill and Holderness were two of the four huge groupings of manors called **honours** created across Yorkshire by William the Conqueror in the 1070s after his **harrying** of the north followed the rebellions against Norman rule in Durham and York. In each case a castle, which was supported by a large number of landholdings, was placed conveniently for the administration of its huge estate. The manors of the honour of Tickhill were scattered through Yorkshire, Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire. The honour was held by Queen Philippa from 1331 until her death in 1369, after which it was transferred to her third son, John of Gaunt, in 1372. The Queen was popular and well-regarded, but has sometimes been viewed as a spendthrift (the King took over her responsibilities in 1363). Her finances were always in deficit and much blame was placed on her officials. Nevertheless, although it probably was William de Estfeld the Seneschal who, with John de Holand, acknowledged a debt of 40/- to Queen Philippa in 1359, it had been a **William de Estfeld the elder** who was commissioned, with others, to **certify** the king of the whole truth touching the alleged waste and destruction in the castle and honour of Tickhill in 1347.

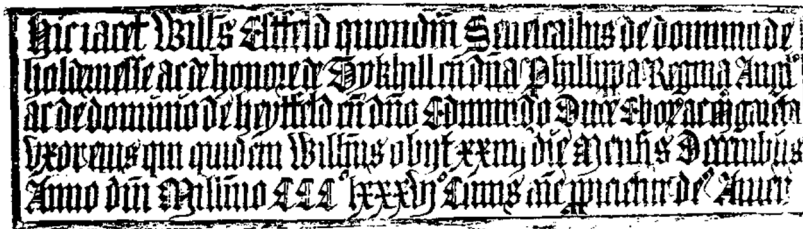
At the time of the Conquest, Hatfield was part of Earl Harold's jurisdiction of Conisbrough, and was transferred with it to John de Warenne. Its chase was a vast private hunting ground akin to a royal forest that then belonged to the Warenne earls. It became the greatest chase of red deer that the kings of England had, containing in all limits above 180,000 acres where herds of wild deer roamed until the 17th century. On the death of the last of the Warenne earls in 1347 it reverted to the crown and was granted to Edward III's fifth son, Edmund of Langley. However, because he was only six years old, the lands were temporarily entrusted to Queen Philippa. The manor of Hatfield was finally granted to him when he came of age in 1358. He was created Earl of Cambridge in 1362, but was not made Duke of York until August 1385. He held Hatfield until his death in 1402 when it passed to his son, Edward, Duke of York, who died at Agincourt and who, significantly, translated a book on hunting, *The Master of Game*.

Understandably, disputes arose around claims of various rights that were said to have been held under the Warennes and were now being withheld by the Queen's officers. **William de Estfeld the younger**, with others, was appointed by royal decree in 1348 and again in 1364 to enquire into such matters; to enquire into banks and ditches there in 1367 and into the breaking of park boundaries in 1367 and 1368. He was also commissioned in 1351 and 1353 to investigate **trespasses** against the Statute of Labourers in the West Riding (which was an attempt to limit the wage rises that were resulting from the labour shortage following the Black Death), and in 1358 to investigate the avoidance of duty on cloth processing by **the machinations of merchants** in Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire. From 1360 to March 1386, as well as more inquiries into the breaking of parks, closes, warrens, turbaries etc. in many places in south Yorkshire and north Nottinghamshire, he was commissioned with others to hear and determine a number of other property disputes (as well as a couple of deaths) and a siege at Sheffield castle. From 1364 he was much occupied with commissions of banks and ditches in Holderness, Hatfield and the Isle of Axholme, areas which suffered drainage and flooding problems throughout the Middle Ages. He also acted as one of the

coroners for Yorkshire from 1377 to 1382 (a post with responsibility for a wider range of investigations than today).

In 1379 Edmund of Langley promoted Robert de Moreton, (whom he had appointed Chief Bailiff of the manor and lordship of Hatfield in 1369) to Steward for life of his lands in Yorkshire on £20 a year, an appointment confirmed by the new king Richard II in 1383. The liberty of Holderness was granted to Edward III's daughter, Isabella, in 1356. She held it (jointly with her husband, Enguerrand de Coucy, from 1365 to 1377, when he forfeited his English lands) until her death in 1379.

William Estfeld's position would have made him an important representative of the law and the royal administration throughout large areas of south and east Yorkshire and north Nottinghamshire that were held directly by prominent members of the immediate royal family. A sense of his importance can be conveyed by the fact that one of his contemporaries, William Finchdean, who served John of



Gaunt as Steward of Pontefract, became Chief Justice of Common Pleas when the previous holder of that office, Robert Thorpe, replaced William of Wykeham to become Chancellor of England.

His commemorative brass is mounted on a slab of ashlar that contrasts with the surrounding thirteenth century stonework on the north wall of the chancel. Although it records the date of the Seneschal's death as 24th December 1386, it was recently dated - from the London B+style of its high quality inscription - as unlikely to be earlier than 1420, probably forty years after the death it records. Although no doubt cheaper than a figured brass, such a full inscription with its fine close black letter script in relief represents a considerable outlay on the part of the family, in keeping with the quality of the other aspects of the church with which they and other patrons were associated. Its relatively late date of production, at least thirty five years after William Estfeld's death may indicate something of how far the rebuilding of the church had progressed by then. Its wording is interesting. It stresses the high rank of the members of the royal family with whom the Seneschal was associated. (Edmund of Langley was only created Duke of York in the year before William Estfeld died, but he served as regent three times before his own death in 1402.) The nature of the Seneschal's connection with them implied by the word 'cum' (together with), is suggestive of equal status. It demonstrates clearly his descendants' pride in his standing, which the church being rebuilt around him was also intended to enhance.

*Michael Goddard made the above rubbing of William Estfeld's commemorative brass sited on the north wall of the chancel in St Mary's.*

Part 2 of Michael's article dealing with two more Eastfield monuments will be published in the Summer Newsletter.