

# Two Monuments at Little Rollright, Oxfordshire: William Blower and the Dixon Family

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## SUMMARY

*Few studies have so far been undertaken of funeral monuments in Oxfordshire parish churches outside Oxford, although many notable examples survive. This paper examines two monuments at Little Rollright, commemorating William Blower (d. 1618) and the family of Edward Dixon (d. 1660). The history of the Little Rollright estate is traced, from its partial enclosure by Eynsham abbey to ownership by a branch of the Throckmorton family, its purchase by William Blower of London, and its inheritance on his death by the Dixon family of Kent who held the lordship for 150 years. Both monuments are shown to portray their subjects in ways designed to enhance the reputation of the Dixon family. It is hoped that this paper may encourage the study of monuments in other Oxfordshire parish churches, and of the families who erected them.*

Oxfordshire is a county rich in funeral monuments, but scholarly attention has so far focused almost exclusively on the monuments in Oxford college chapels. Outside Oxford the county was 'dense squire's country',<sup>1</sup> well supplied with gentry families and with local stone, and elaborate tombs and memorials survive today in many of Oxfordshire's parish churches. Some of them are notable works of craftsmanship, but they have a historical significance as well; each monument presents a carefully constructed image of its subject, and a study of the monument may throw an interesting light on the person commemorated. This paper will consider two funeral monuments in the chancel of the parish church of St Philip, Little Rollright. The subjects of both of them have usually been identified as members of the Dixon family, who were lords of the manor of Little Rollright in the 17th century. The later monument, to the west, does commemorate Edward Dixon (d. 1660), his two wives and his children, although he is not buried in the church. The reclining gentleman in armour on the monument to the east is not a member of the Dixon family, however, but William Blower (d. 1618), a Londoner from whom the Dixons inherited the estate. Very little is known of William Blower, although a plaque on the outside wall of the church records that he built the church tower in 1617. This paper aims to trace the people and the events which led to the construction of these two grand monuments in a small village church.

## LITTLE ROLLRIGHT AND THE THROCKMORTONS

In the Middle Ages Little Rollright was one of the estates of Eynsham abbey. Like many landowners in north-west Oxfordshire in the late 15th century, the abbey saw sheep-pasture as the road to riches, and in 1496 the abbot converted 200 a. of arable to pasture and allowed two messuages to decay, leading to the eviction of 20 tenants. A further 200 a. were enclosed in 1505 with the destruction of three messuages and the displacement of another 16 people.<sup>2</sup> Thereafter Little Rollright was little more than a hamlet, with its few remaining farmhouses

<sup>1</sup> N. Llewellyn, *Funeral Monuments in Post-Reformation England* (2000), 69. For a bibliography of writing on Oxford monuments see p. 385 n. 44. This paper owes much to Dr. Llewellyn's work and I am happy to acknowledge my debt to him.

<sup>2</sup> I.S. Leadam (ed.), *The Domesday of Inclosures, 1517-18* (1897), i. 328, 372.

and cottages, a manor-house and the parish church. Its location was less remote than it appears today, however, as the Great Road from London to Worcester passed close by, following the high ground at the northern edge of Little Rollright and bringing all kinds of travellers, vehicles and livestock past the village. John Ogilby's road-map of 1675 shows Little Rollright church as a landmark on the south side of the road. After the dissolution of Eynsham abbey in 1539 the manor passed rapidly through the hands of royal officials feathering their nests with monastic estates, until by 1559 it was held by Anthony Throckmorton, a gentleman seated at Chastleton three miles away.<sup>3</sup>

Anthony Throckmorton was the eighth and youngest son of Sir George Throckmorton of Coughton, Warwickshire.<sup>4</sup> Needing to make his own way in the world, he had made an advantageous marriage to Katherine, one of the daughters of William Willington of Barcheston, Warwickshire, a wealthy merchant of the Staple. She was already twice widowed, most recently by William Catesby of Chastleton. Katherine's son William Catesby was still a young child so Anthony moved into the old house at Chastleton, and he and Katherine produced a family of five sons and four or five daughters. He died in 1587,<sup>5</sup> followed by Katherine who was buried in the church at Chastleton in 1593 and is commemorated by a brass there.

Anthony Throckmorton's tenure of Chastleton had only been by right of his wife, and his eldest son John therefore inherited Little Rollright but not a great deal else. John had been admitted as a student at the Inner Temple in 1578,<sup>6</sup> a conventional step in the education of a gentleman's son, and like his father he had also realised the benefits of marriage to a well-endowed widow. In 1581 John Throckmorton married Julian, widow of Thomas Wye, a recently deceased gentleman and former sheriff of Gloucestershire. Thomas Wye had inherited several Gloucestershire manors once held by the Whittington family of Over Lypiatt in the parish of Bisley; his widow held a life interest in these estates, and after their marriage John Throckmorton bought out the reversionary interests of the Wye family, sold off copyholds and superfluous manor-houses, and eventually sold most of the manors themselves.<sup>7</sup> He adopted as his main residence his wife's house at Over Lypiatt, a large stone house with two courts, a gatehouse range, chapel, outbuildings and a park (the house was extensively remodelled in the early 19th century, and is now known as Lypiatt Park). He also contributed to the development of the nearby town of Stroud, building a stone market house for the town in about 1590.<sup>8</sup>

John Throckmorton also spent some of his time at Little Rollright as an Oxfordshire JP and landowner. If his legal adversaries are to be believed, he was a difficult neighbour, and his particular enemy was Edward Chadwell of Chipping Norton who was himself a quarrelsome and litigious man. In 1607 John Throckmorton and his servants allegedly kidnapped one of Chadwell's men and took him back to the manor-house at Little Rollright, where they kept him in a 'dark chamber' for several days and made him drunk in an attempt

<sup>3</sup> Throckmorton presented to the living in 1559 and had probably purchased the manor by that date. He was certainly at Little Rollright by 1571: The National Archives [hereafter TNA], C 2/Eliz. 1/C19/1.

<sup>4</sup> W.H. Turner (ed.), *Visitations of the County of Oxfordshire* (Harleian Soc. v, 1871), 120.

<sup>5</sup> TNA, C 142/364/73; PROB 6/4, f. 25v. There were at least two Anthony Throckmortons in the late 16th century and their lives have been conflated in the biography in P.W. Hasler (ed.), *The House of Commons, 1558-1603* (Hist. of Parl. Trust, 1981), 489-90. A second Anthony Throckmorton, a recusant London mercer, died in 1593, and his widow, also Katherine, died in 1594: TNA, PROB 11/82 quire 78; PROB 11/84 quire 69.

<sup>6</sup> W.H. Cooke (ed.), *Students Admitted to the Inner Temple 1547-1660* (1877), 87.

<sup>7</sup> *V.C.H. Glos.* viii, 276, 278; xi, 92, 111-12, 119, 236-7.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.* xi, 104, 112-13, 132.

to extract information about his master. On several occasions Throckmorton was said to have sent his servants to Chadwell's house to assault him and his household, and a fight broke out when the two men met by chance at Gray's Inn in London.<sup>9</sup> However, Edward Chadwell had the disadvantage of being deeply in debt, and in November 1608 he and his father Michael were forced to sell the manor of Chipping Norton and part of its land to John Throckmorton for £600, after the grant of a charter of incorporation to the town in 1607 had deprived them of much of the manorial income.<sup>10</sup> Throckmorton's Oxfordshire estate now comprised the manor of Little Rollright with 11 messuages, 11 gardens, 5 tofts, a watermill and a windmill, a dovecot, 400 a. of arable land, 340 a. of pasture and 300 a. of heath, as well as the rectory and the advowson of the parish church, the lordship of Chipping Norton with some closes, leys and meadows, and Over Norton Heath with a lodge and valuable rabbit-warren which he had first leased and then purchased from the Chadwells. All this property was to descend together for the next 50 years.

John Throckmorton and his wife had no children, and from about 1609 he sold off his wife's Gloucestershire properties one by one; perhaps he too was in financial difficulties. In 1611 he sold the manor of Little Rollright to William Blower esquire of the City of London for an unknown sum, with a further sale to Blower in 1612 of all his property at Over Norton and Chipping Norton for £1,700.<sup>11</sup> John and Julian Throckmorton left their Gloucestershire and Oxfordshire estates and moved to the fashionable new West End of London, where John was buried in the parish of St Martin in the Fields on 21 February 1615. His heir was his brother George, still living in north Oxfordshire at South Newington. Julian Throckmorton survived her husband and her will shows her 'aged and weake in bodye' in the London parish of St Giles without Cripplegate when she died in 1624.<sup>12</sup>

#### WILLIAM BLOWER

After half a century of ownership by the Throckmortons, an established gentry family, Little Rollright was now in the hands of a newcomer. Who was William Blower, what was the source of his wealth, and why was he interested in this corner of Oxfordshire? William himself remains something of a mystery, but it is possible to discover a few facts about his background. His father, also William Blower, had left his native Suffolk for apprenticeship to a London goldsmith. The archives of the Goldsmiths' Company record his career as apprentice in the 1550s, freeman in 1566, a liveryman of the Company, master of his own apprentice in 1590, and finally an Assistant in 1594.<sup>13</sup> In 1589 he paid subsidy on £80 in goods and was the most highly assessed taxpayer in the parish of St Olave Hart Street.<sup>14</sup> Just before he died in August 1597, William Blower the elder made his nuncupative will before witnesses, leaving all his goods, houses and leases to his wife and children: 'I meane all shalbe equallie devyded amongst them, and that the youngest shalbe as good as the eldest, and the eldest as good as the seconde'.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>9</sup> TNA, STAC 8/85/22.

<sup>10</sup> Oxfordshire Record Office [hereafter ORO], BOR/1/2/1D/2.

<sup>11</sup> TNA, CP 25/2/340/9 James I Easter; ORO, BOR/1/2/1D/4.

<sup>12</sup> *V.C.H. Glos.* viii, 276; ORO, MS Wills Oxon. 175/1/6 (inventory of George Throckmorton, 1635); TNA, PROB 6/9, f. 10; PROB 11/144 quire 73.

<sup>13</sup> Goldsmiths' Company, Court Minute Bk. K, pp. 11, 46, 302; Apprentice Bk. I, p. 82; Court Bk. N, pp. 28, 35. I am grateful to the Librarian of the Goldsmiths' Company for these references.

<sup>14</sup> S.W. Rawlins (ed.), *Visitation of London 1568 with a London Subsidy Roll 1589* (Harleian Soc. cix-cx, 1957-8), 149.

<sup>15</sup> TNA, PROB 11/90 quire 75.



Fig. 1. Church of St Philip, Little Rollright, showing the tower built by William Blower in 1617.  
(Photo: J. Timms)

William Blower the elder had settled in the south-east corner of the City near the Tower of London, an area noted for the number of aliens or foreigners resident there in the reign of Elizabeth – Italians, Dutch, Germans, Flemings, French, all jostling with the English population, most of whom (like Blower) were themselves immigrants from other parts of the country. Some of the foreigners were religious refugees fleeing persecution, others came in search of employment and fortune. There were tensions between English and aliens but for the most part the process of integration and assimilation made steady progress, as evidenced by the frequency of marriages between the communities.<sup>16</sup> Blower's first wife was a Frenchwoman, Catherine Hancourt,<sup>17</sup> and their only surviving child Peter was baptised at St Dunstan in the East in 1565. Peter was apprenticed to a scrivener and rose to become Master of the Scriveners' Company in 1622-3,<sup>18</sup> after which he left London for the life of a

<sup>16</sup> A. Pettegree, '“Thirty Years On”: Progress towards Integration amongst the Immigrant Population of Elizabethan London', in J. Chartres and D. Hey (eds.), *English Rural Society 1500-1800: Essays in honour of Joan Thirsk* (1990), 297-312; L.H. Yungblut, *Strangers Settled Here Amongst Us: Policies, Perceptions and the Presence of Aliens in Elizabethan England* (1996), 25-9.

<sup>17</sup> W.C. Metcalfe (ed.), *Visitations of Essex*, i (Harleian Soc. xiii, 1878), 351.

<sup>18</sup> E.W. Steer (ed.), *Scriveners' Company Common Paper 1357-1628* (London Record Soc. 4, 1968), 37, 56-7, 60.

country gentleman at West Ham (Essex), and endowed a charity at Lavenham in Suffolk, the town from which his family had originated.<sup>19</sup> The climb from country town to London to a gentleman's estate in three generations was a well-trodden route in the 16th and 17th centuries, and all three of William Blower's children were to end their lives as members of the landed gentry.

William Blower the elder's second wife was also a foreigner, and a woman of substance. Mary Bucat or Bewchet or Brancate – her name was evidently difficult for the English to pronounce – came from Eeklo in Flanders,<sup>20</sup> a small cloth-making town between Bruges and Ghent which was caught up in the revolt against Spain and the vicious religious strife of the mid 16th century. In 1571 she was listed in St Dunstan in the East in the returns of aliens required by the government as Mary Blower, 'wif to an Englishman', with her foreign maid Suzan, both of whom had been in England for seven years. She received letters of denization in January 1592 but was still listed as an alien in 1594, living in Billiter Lane off Fenchurch Street.<sup>21</sup> Many years later her son-in-law took pains to describe Mary as the daughter and heir of Zachary Bewchet of Eeklo, which suggests that she came from a wealthy family, but the source of Zachary's wealth is not known, nor whether he too migrated to England.

William and Mary Blower had two children, a son William and a daughter Mary, younger half-siblings to Peter. The young William (the future lord of Little Rollright) would have grown up in his father's prosperous household in London. Of his education, youth and training nothing is known. There is no evidence that he served an apprenticeship, and given the combined wealth of his parents perhaps he had no need to enter a craft or trade. Clues to William Blower's activities in London show him lending large sums of money, as most wealthy citizens did from time to time. Sir Everard Digby borrowed from Blower and others before 1605 to pay his mother's debts, and the earl of Hertford's creditors included Blower and some of the wealthy foreign merchants in London such as William Courteen, whose father, a Protestant refugee from Flanders, had witnessed Blower's own father's will.<sup>22</sup> Two more references place William in 1603 and 1605 at Geneva, one of the centres of European Protestantism. One of these documents bears the intriguing endorsement 'Concerning the contract of marriage of Mr. Blower', and refers to a cause heard by the Syndics and Council of Geneva between 'the Sieur William Blower of London' and one of their citizens,<sup>23</sup> but the marriage cannot have taken place as he died a bachelor. Taken together, these scraps of information suggest a man of considerable means (though we do not know if he engaged in any economic activity besides providing credit), a commitment to Protestantism, and ties to the immigrant community to which his mother belonged. Like many London citizens, Blower also collected property: a house called the Windmill in a corner of St Paul's churchyard, another called the White Lion in St Agnes Lane, three tenements in Cornhill and his dwelling house in Fenchurch Street, as well as the site of the dissolved college at Higham Ferrers in Northamptonshire and further property there.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Op. cit. note 17; TNA, PROB 11/200 quire 114 (will of Peter Blower, 1647).

<sup>20</sup> R. Hovenden (ed.), *Visitation of Kent, 1619* (Harleian Soc. xlii, 1898), 176.

<sup>21</sup> R.E.G. Kirk and E.F. Kirk (eds.), *Returns of Aliens Dwelling in the City and Suburbs of London* (Huguenot Soc. 10, 1900-8), ii, 131, 469; W. Page (ed.), *Letters of Denization and Acts of Naturalization for Aliens in England, 1509-1603* (Huguenot Soc. viii, 1893), 35.

<sup>22</sup> TNA, E 134/8 Jas. I/Trin. 4; Hist. MSS. Comm., *Seymour Papers 1532-1686*, iv, 212-14.

<sup>23</sup> *Cal. S.P. Dom 1603-10*, 17; Hist. MSS. Comm., *Salisbury (Cecil) MSS*, xvii, 303-4.

<sup>24</sup> TNA, C 142/378/131.



Fig. 2. Plaque on the west wall of the church tower, recording its construction by William Blower. (Photo: J. Timms)



Fig. 3. Church interior looking east with the two monuments on the north chancel wall. (Photo: J. Timms)

To this estate Blower added his purchase of Little Rollright, Over Norton and the manor of Chipping Norton in 1611-12. He took up residence in the manor-house at Little Rollright, and it seems likely that he intended to settle into country life. His mother Mary, widowed again in 1612 by the death of her second husband Sir Edward Darcy, came to live with him. A datestone inscribed 'WB/1616' on a barn is evidence of his investment in the estate.<sup>25</sup> Another major project was the building or re-building of the tower of Little Rollright church (Figs. 1 and 2), where a plaque records that '1617 William Blower esquier lord of this manor built this tower', a generous act consistent with a description of the new lord as 'a very religious man and... very true and upright'.<sup>26</sup> Inside the church, the remains of early 17th-century wall-paintings on the west wall above the tower arch presumably dated from this construction, though they have now disappeared under whitewash.<sup>27</sup>

William Blower's death at Little Rollright on 7 September 1618 took his relatives by surprise.<sup>28</sup> He had made a will – everyone later agreed on that fact – and had appointed as his executors and heirs his sister Mary and her husband Henry Dixon, a gentleman and lawyer. But William had left out of his will his half-brother Peter and his four children, and Peter objected. The two brothers had acted together in property transactions, and in 1615 when William was 'indebted by reason of a greate purchase' (presumably the acquisition of his Oxfordshire estate) Peter had agreed to buy two London tenements from him for £1,200. Peter claimed that he had spoken to William about the will, and that William agreed to alter it in Peter's favour and assured him that he had done so; Henry Dixon agreed that William mentioned making a new will, but said he did not know whether it was ever done.

On the day of William Blower's death, his mother took charge. She found the keys to the closet and study at Little Rollright, and the doorkeys of both the manor-house and the house in Fenchurch Street. An urgent message was despatched to her servant in London 'to come with all speed to her howse at Rolleright', and another messenger took the news of William's death to the Dixons. A thorough search was conducted, both at Little Rollright and in London, but no will could be found. Henry Dixon informed Peter of his brother's death and told him 'that the said testator had given all his lands to his the said Dixons Children'. Peter Blower was angry and suspected that his step-mother was concealing a revised will to ensure that her daughter inherited William's wealth, but there was little he could do. He did not attend the funeral. Mary Dixon was granted letters of administration on 23 September to settle William's estate<sup>29</sup> and an inventory of all his moveable possessions was compiled, with a total value of £2,321 2s. 7d.<sup>30</sup> A year later an inquisition post mortem was taken at Oxford, and it confirmed his sister Mary as William's heir.<sup>31</sup>

#### WILLIAM BLOWER'S MONUMENT

William Blower's monument in Little Rollright church (Figs. 3, 4, 5, 6) must have been commissioned by the Dixons. A life-size effigy of a man with short hair and a small beard and moustache, carved in smooth white stone, lies on his right side on a tomb chest, his head

<sup>25</sup> Oxfordshire Sites and Monuments Record [hereafter SMR], DoE, *Listed Buildings, West Oxfordshire District*, Bk. 122, 1/136.

<sup>26</sup> TNA, C 3/300/52.

<sup>27</sup> Oxon SMR, DoE, *Listed Bldgs., W. Oxon District*, Bk. 122, 1/139; A. Swaine, 'Quinquennial Report on Little Rollright Church' (1976).

<sup>28</sup> This account of the events surrounding William Blower's death is based on TNA, C 3/300/52. The document is blackened and torn and not all of it can be read.

<sup>29</sup> TNA, PROB 6/9, f. 187.

<sup>30</sup> TNA, C 3/300/52. The inventory itself has not survived.

<sup>31</sup> TNA, C 142/378/131.



Fig. 4. William Blower monument, upper portion. (Photo: J. Timms)



Fig. 5. William Blower monument, lower portion. (Photo: J. Timms)

resting on his helmet and his hand beneath his chin, the conventional pose suggesting contemplation of his mortality. He wears plate armour and holds a sword, and a broad plain collar and plain cuffs are visible at his neck and wrists, an appropriately sober style for a 'very religious' man in 1618. Jacobean monuments were commonly brightly coloured, and tiny traces of paint – brown in the hair, red below the collar and on the legs, green on the base, and red and grey on the feet – indicate that the effigy's original appearance was far more colourful than the restrained image it presents today.<sup>32</sup> On the tomb chest are the heraldic arms of the Blower family, granted to his brother Peter in 1597, and another unidentified shield of arms.<sup>33</sup> The panel between the shields is now empty, but the antiquary Anthony Wood, who visited Little Rollright church in June 1677 to take detailed notes on the monuments,<sup>34</sup> recorded the first four lines of an English verse which were all that then survived:

His body which now under lyes  
Was like this framed artifice  
Yet not was like, but rather is  
For this is livelie so is his...

The distinction between body and effigy, life and death, are deliberately blurred in the 17th-century manner, stressing the continuity between the two.



Fig. 6. William Blower monument, corner panel with name of John Dixon. (Photo: J. Timms)

<sup>32</sup> M.R. Eastham, 'Conservation Reports on the Dixon Monuments' (1993).

<sup>33</sup> W.H. Rylands (ed.), *Grantees of Arms* (Harleian Soc. lxxvi, 1915), 26. The unidentified arms were recorded by Wood as 'argent a chevron ingrailed between 3 panthers' heads erased gules'.

<sup>34</sup> Bodl. MS. Wood E.1, f. 125, published in F.N. Davis (ed.), *Parochial Collections of Wood and Rawlinson*, iii (Oxon. Rec. Soc. xi, 1929), 244-5. Neither Wood's notes nor Davis's edition are entirely accurate, and the entry for Little Rollright in Davis's edition is intermingled with notes on Great Rollright.

The wall behind and above Blower's effigy is divided into nine panels with black painted backgrounds. Four bear colourful designs of strapwork, flowers, fruit, cherubs, skulls and an hourglass. The main inscription on the large central panel has long since disappeared and even in 1677 was too 'defaced' for Wood to record the wording. The lettering on all four corner panels did survive in 1677, however, and parts of three of them are still legible. These corner panels are the most idiosyncratic feature of the monument and were certainly designed and ordered by the Dixons. Each bore a Latin verse extolling the virtues of William Blower and his claim to immortality, above the name of one of Henry and Mary's four eldest sons – Edward Dixon, William Dixon, John Dixon and Henry Dixon (Fig. 6). Even when the monument was new, the name 'Dixon' appeared more frequently than the name of William Blower himself.

Above the effigy is a canopy supported by two stone Ionic columns painted black, and the whole edifice – which reaches nearly to the chancel roof – is topped by a brightly coloured crest and two obelisks. It is an impressive sight, especially in a small church, and of course every aspect of the monument was carefully designed to create the desired impression on the viewer. This was the first monument to be erected in the church and it occupies the most prestigious position, not only in the chancel but within the sanctuary itself. Only the highest social status in life could confer the right to rest in so hallowed a place, and the 17th-century viewer would immediately have understood that the individual thus commemorated had been a person of importance. William Blower, and the Dixons after him, were not only lords of the manor of Little Rollright but lay rectors of its church and patrons of its living, and within this small world they reigned supreme.

But the monument is also designed to reinforce William Blower's status, both before and after death, as a member of the gentry. The choice of Latin rather than English for most of the inscriptions suggests learning and gentility, since only those who had attended a grammar school would be able to read the language and decipher their meaning; their message is not intended to be read by the lower orders. Similarly, the heraldry on the monument associates Blower with those qualified for arms and uses a visual language with which only the upper classes would be familiar. Above all, the effigy of Blower in armour portrays him as the descendant of medieval knights, the class entitled to bear arms, and thus a gentleman of honourable and ancient lineage. But how close to reality was this impression? In the words of Nigel Llewellyn, 'the post-Reformation monument was a powerful tool of fiction as well as history',<sup>35</sup> and the monument of William Blower is a prime example of this dictum. He did not come from a long line of gentry, his family coat of arms was a mere 20 years old, and his wealth was derived from trade. He was, in the modern phrase, 'new money', and had only very recently made the move from London to become a country gentleman and lord of the manor. But this was not the reality that Henry and Mary Dixon wished to portray. The Dixons were themselves relatively new to the gentry in England, though they claimed descent from a Scottish family 'of good account',<sup>36</sup> and like others of their class in the early 17th century they were acutely aware of the importance of lineage and reputation. If they were to claim kinship and continuity from William Blower – and the prominent

<sup>35</sup> Llewellyn, *Funeral Monuments*, 118.

<sup>36</sup> E. Hasted, *The History and Topographical Survey of the County of Kent* (1797-1801, repr. 1972), v, 222-4.

use of their own name on his monument shows that this was indeed their intention – then the affirmation of his gentility was essential, and the cost of an elaborate funeral monument was a small price to pay towards that end.<sup>37</sup>

### THE DIXON FAMILY

The Dixon family seat was at Hilden (now Hilden Park), just outside the market town of Tonbridge in Kent, where Henry Dixon's grandfather Humphrey had bought the manor and rectory in the mid 16th century. Henry Dixon was born about 1574, attended St John's College, Oxford, and progressed to Gray's Inn where he took rooms in 1597 and became a lawyer.<sup>38</sup> His marriage to Mary Blower must have taken place shortly after this; she had recently inherited a share of her father's wealth and could expect to receive half her mother's estate in due course, and brought with her 'a greate porcion in moneyes',<sup>39</sup> so the match was an attractive one. Between about 1600 and 1627, Henry and Mary Dixon had nine sons and ten daughters. Their growing family settled into Hilden Manor, a substantial house of 18 hearths in 1664,<sup>40</sup> and Henry became a JP in Kent. Rents and fines from the estates at Little Rollright, Over Norton and Chipping Norton went to the Dixons after William Blower's death but they had no need of the manor-house at Little Rollright and in the 1620s it may have been leased out, or perhaps lay empty. Mary's mother, Lady Darcy, moved to Hilden, and she was buried at Tonbridge in September 1619, just a year after the death of her son. Administration of her estate was granted to her daughter Mary Dixon.<sup>41</sup>

Between 1619 and 1621 the heralds of the College of Arms undertook a visitation in Kent. Families entitled to coats of arms were summoned, and those who attended – and who paid the substantial fee – had their pedigrees recorded and their arms and crests confirmed. Henry Dixon evidently thought it worthwhile to participate and he took great care to provide the heralds with information about his forebears and his own family.<sup>42</sup> Additional details of each male family member's place of residence or burial, distinguished positions held, the families of wives and the birth order of sons were all recorded. Henry Dixon himself is at the centre of this family tree, described as JP, and the six boys and nine girls born to him and his wife by 1621 are all listed by name, not forgetting the three children already deceased. But the family member about whom most information is given is Henry's wife Mary. Translated from the Latin, her entry reads:

Mary daughter of William Blower of London, sole heir of a maternal inheritance namely of Mary daughter and heir of Zachary Bewchet of Eeklo in the province of Flanders, see the inquisition post mortem of William Blower brother of the aforesaid Mary, wife of Henry Dixon, who died without issue.

<sup>37</sup> No evidence has been found as to who constructed the monument. Both local and London tomb-makers were working in Oxfordshire around 1619. Perhaps the closest parallel to Blower's tomb is that of Sir Edmund Fettiplace (d. 1613) and his forebears at Swinbrook, which Pevsner associates with the (probably local) maker of the Sylvester tombs at Burford. Since the Dixons lived in Kent, a local mason from that area is also a possibility.

<sup>38</sup> J. Foster, *Alumni Oxonienses 1500-1714* (1891-2), 406; Centre for Kentish Studies, U1823/1/T43.

<sup>39</sup> TNA, C 10/27/34.

<sup>40</sup> D. Harrington (ed.), *Kent Hearth Tax Assessment Lady Day 1664* (Kent Records, xxix, 2000), 151-2. The house was pulled down in the 18th century; Hasted, *History and Top. Survey of Kent*, v, 224.

<sup>41</sup> TNA, PROB 6/10, f. 39; for baptisms and burials at Tonbridge see parish reg. transcripts held at the Society of Genealogists' Library.

<sup>42</sup> *Visitation of Kent*, 1619, 176.

Was Henry feeling insecure about his wife's inheritance, so soon after the deaths of her brother and her mother? Peter Blower had accused the family of concealing William's will, and his lawsuit against the Dixons was heard in Chancery in May 1620.<sup>43</sup> The lengthy description of Mary's descent and connections looks like Henry's assertion to the world of his wife's right to her generous inheritance, using the heraldic visitation for the purpose.

A new episode in the history of the Little Rollright estate opened in 1632 with the marriage of Henry and Mary's eldest son, Edward. His bride was Cecilia, younger daughter of Sir James Whitelocke, an eminent judge and an old legal acquaintance and friend of Henry Dixon. Negotiations between the two fathers had begun in 1631 and were well advanced when Sir James died in June 1632, but the match was in the interests of both families and Cecilia's brother Bulstrode completed the arrangements. Bulstrode Whitelocke was to become a prominent lawyer, politician, diplomat and country gentleman, all recorded in detail in the diary which he kept throughout his life and which throws a personal light on the Dixon family in this period.<sup>44</sup> Whitelocke portrays Henry – 'old Mr. Dixon' – as a shrewd man with an eye on Cecilia's £2,500 marriage portion, but Edward found favour as 'a very honest gentleman, & Wh[itelockes] antient friend & acquaintance'. The marriage duly took place in the chapel at Fawley Court, the Whitelockes' country house outside Henley.<sup>45</sup>

The young couple settled at Little Rollright, though at first they spent long periods at Hilden and their first two sons were baptised at Tonbridge: Henry in March 1634, and James who lived for only a few days in June 1635.<sup>46</sup> The delay in establishing their own household in Oxfordshire was due to a substantial programme of building work. The house standing south-east of the church and now known as Little Rollright Manor, formerly Manor Farm or Lower Farm, bears a datestone of 1633. This was not the manor-house, however, for a late 17th-century estate map shows a much larger house south-west of the church, with an orchard laid out next to it, which can only be the manor-house<sup>47</sup>; it stood near a moated site close to the present Manor Cottages, which were perhaps part of its outbuildings. No. 2 Manor Cottages has 17th-century windows and a datestone inscribed 'D/EC/1635', the initials of Edward and Cecilia Dixon. The manor-house itself no longer stands so it is not possible to tell whether it too was re-built or renovated as part of this programme of work on the estate in preparation for Edward and Cecilia Dixon's arrival.

In the autumn of 1636 Bulstrode Whitelocke and his wife paid a visit to Little Rollright:

Whitelocke... went with his wife & company to little Rolleright the house of his brother Dixon, where they had excellent sport in hawking hunting & Coursing, for which pleasures that countrey is very proper.<sup>48</sup>

Edward and Cecilia Dixon returned the visit and spent Christmas 1636 at Fawley Court where the family was entertained with music, card-games and hunting. The following year saw another visit by the Whitelockes to Little Rollright:

<sup>43</sup> TNA, C 3/300/52. Peter Blower's father-in-law, Nicholas Blincoe, also brought a suit against the Dixons on behalf of his grandchildren: TNA, C 4/47/72; and C 4/28/17 which is unfit for production also appears to be part of this case.

<sup>44</sup> The diary has been edited and published by Ruth Spalding, and all quotations here are from this edition: R. Spalding (ed.), *The Diary of Bulstrode Whitelocke 1605-1675* (Records of Social and Economic History, new ser. xiii, 1990).

<sup>45</sup> *Diary of Bulstrode Whitelocke*, 68-9.

<sup>46</sup> Centre for Kentish Studies, U1823/1/E3A; *Diary of Bulstrode Whitelocke*, 77; Tonbridge parish regs.

<sup>47</sup> ORO, E/321/M/1.

<sup>48</sup> *Diary of Bulstrode Whitelocke*, 109.

He was with his wife att his brother Dixons att Rolleright hawking & hunting with great pleasure, & often gave to the Shepheards & their boyes, smalle pieces of single money which made them readier to help him in his hunting, & to tye up their dogges, then they were to their neighbour Gentlemen whose servants used to carry gunnes to shoot their dogges if they offended, butt he found courtesy the better way to deale with such people.<sup>49</sup>

Political events soon intruded on this pleasant social round. Bulstrode Whitelocke had sat in Parliament since 1626, and his diary reflects his increasing involvement in national politics in the years before the Civil War. Once war broke out local landowners were liable to be affected, regardless of their political sympathies. The Parliamentary county committee advised their man at Tonbridge in November 1642:

You know Mr Dixon, of Hylden, a notorious malignant, hath good coach-horses, and some others, if they be not at home you may help to enquire where they are bestowed. You have divers others in your town; I conceive, by some information given us, almost the whole town of Tonbridge.<sup>50</sup>

The war came much closer to the Dixons in the summer of 1643 when thousands of Kentishmen, led by many of the old-established gentry families and parish clergy, rose up against Parliament and its intrusion into local government and worship. The Kentish Rebellion culminated in a battle at Tonbridge by the bridge over the Hilden Brook, after which Parliamentary troops forced their way into the town, killed some of the rebels and took others prisoner, capturing weapons and horses, and chased some fleeing rebels to the River Medway where they drowned.<sup>51</sup> Henry Dixon was now almost 70 and it is unlikely that he took part in the rebellion, nor is there evidence that any of his sons was involved, but this was the family's local community and very close to home.

In 1644 Henry died, leaving no will; his personal estate was valued at £1,774 with a further £300 in plate, linen and jewels.<sup>52</sup> Mary survived him for only a short time and died in April 1646, and her will is a reminder of the inherited wealth she had brought to the Dixons. Her five younger sons received 'all my howses tennements and hereditaments in the City of London and elsewhere in the kingdome of England', while her three unmarried daughters were each to receive £500 from their elder brother Edward 'according to his faithfull promise made to his father in his lyfe time'. A featherbed with bedding was bequeathed to each child, and a chest of linen to all who had not already received one. Every daughter received 'a payer of blacke worked pillowbeers [pillowcases] worked with the Marygowld in the middle', the eldest to choose first and so according to their ages. Her most personal possessions went to her eldest daughter and namesake Mary – her wedding ring 'and the chest and those thinges in the chest in the matted chamber which were my mothers'. Finally, looking to the future, she left to Edward's 12-year-old son Henry 'the hangings chayres and stooles in the great chamber and a damaske table cloth and cupboard cloth which were made for that roome', as well as 'the bedd boulster two pillows one blanckett and the silke quilt thereto belonging in the matted chamber'.<sup>53</sup> A similar impression of wealth

<sup>49</sup> Ibid. 111, 116.

<sup>50</sup> R. Almack (ed.), 'Papers Relating to Proceedings in the County of Kent 1642-6', *Camden Miscellany*, iii (1855), 5.

<sup>51</sup> A. Everitt, *The Community of Kent and the Great Rebellion 1640-60* (1973), 186-200.

<sup>52</sup> TNA, C 10/27/34.

<sup>53</sup> TNA, PROB 11/196 quire 57.

and comfort emerges from the will of Henry and Mary's eldest daughter, Mary, who died unmarried in January 1649 leaving her grandmother's chest, much plate and jewellery, and bequests to all of her numerous brothers and sisters and their children.<sup>54</sup> She appointed as her executor 'Edward Dixon my loving brother', unlike her mother who had selected her second son William as executor, probably because he lived in Kent and was well established as a lawyer.

Edward and Cecilia Dixon and their family were living at Little Rollright during the 1640s, and like their relatives in Kent they were vulnerable when soldiers from either army passed through the area.<sup>55</sup> Two miles away at Great Rollright, the parish register recorded the burials of 'Mr William Sheppard esquire slaine by one of the King's souldyers' in October 1644, followed two months later by 'two of ye King's souldyers slaine by the parliament souldyers'. In the summer of 1647 the House of Commons voted to disband the New Model Army without paying the troops' overdue wages in full, and feelings were running high. Bulstrode Whitelocke was travelling home to Henley from London on 24 July when he heard the shocking news from Little Rollright:

Wh[itelocke]... by the way mett with one of Chipping Norton who told him the ill newes of his Sister Dixons death, the 20. of this Moneth att Rolleright; she was a good woman of a plain & tender heart, loving to her husband, children, & relations, carefull in her household affayres, kind to her neighbors & very religious.

She had great troubles living in the Country in the time of the War, the Soldiers on both sides being most injurious & insolent. A troupe of the Parlements quarterd att her house in her husbands absence, she then lying in, having bin brought to bed about 14 dayes before. Yett the barbarous domineering soldiers, would not admit this for an excuse, nor be content with their quarters, though fitt for better men, butt compelled her (though in that condition) to rise out of her bed, to make better preparations for them, with which, she tooke cold, fell into a feaver & dyed.<sup>56</sup>

Seven sons and three daughters had been born to Edward and Cecilia during their marriage. Many of the children had died in infancy, but Henry, John and Elizabeth survived their mother.

Edward and his family remained at Little Rollright for several years after Cecilia's death. His brother-in-law called on him in September 1647 and again the following March as he returned from the Assizes at Worcester:

Wh[itelocke] tooke with him Mr Hales & Mr Beverly, & they lay att his Brother Dixons house att Rolleright where they were kindly intertained, butt Wh[itelocke] missed his deare Sister.<sup>57</sup>

It may have been through Whitelocke's influence that Edward Dixon was appointed to several Parliamentary commissions for Oxfordshire between 1648 and 1652, in the company of other reliable gentlemen of the county.<sup>58</sup> His political allegiance did not prevent him from lending money to his neighbours the Chadwells of Chipping Norton. Edward Chadwell's

<sup>54</sup> TNA, PROB 11/208 quire 91.

<sup>55</sup> For examples of violence and damage to property see D. Eddershaw, *The Civil War in Oxfordshire* (1995).

<sup>56</sup> *Diary of Bulstrode Whitelocke*, 196.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.* 198, 210.

<sup>58</sup> *Acts and Ordinances of the Interregnum*, i, 1090; ii, 41, 306, 474, 672.

son Michael had compounded the financial problems left by his father by taking up arms for Charles I, and the remnants of Chipping Norton's manorial demesne land not previously sold with the manor were sold or mortgaged piece by piece. In 1649 Edward Dixon paid £300 to Michael Chadwell for a 99-year mortgage of the Boare Lands, a valuable parcel of arable, heath and meadow land in Over Norton and Chipping Norton, including common of pasture for a bellwether and 400 sheep known as the 'boare flocke'.<sup>59</sup>

By 1654 Edward had moved his household back to Kent, from where he wrote to invite Bulstrode Whitelocke to visit him at Hilden. He also remarried, and in December 1655 Whitelocke noted 'letters from my brother Dixons new wife for favour to her'. Edward and his wife Anne entertained the Whitelockes at Hilden in September 1657 when they visited the new spa at Tunbridge Wells to drink the waters.<sup>60</sup> When he died, 'sicke and weake in body' in March 1660, Edward's will betrayed some anxiety about his financial affairs. Much of his real and personal property was earmarked for the payment of his debts, annuities for his widow Anne and his unmarried daughter Elizabeth and £2,000 for Elizabeth's marriage portion. Edward did not make his son Henry his executor, nominating his daughter instead, and the hint of paternal disapproval is strengthened by a bequest of £10 to Dr. Thomas Walker, 'further desireing my sonne Henry Dixon... to bee advised by him uppon all occasions'.<sup>61</sup> On 15 March 1660 Edward was buried in Tonbridge church near his father, as he had requested, and a stone in the chancel floor commemorates him there.

#### THE DIXON FAMILY MONUMENT

A far more elaborate memorial to Edward and his two wives had already been erected in Little Rollright church (Figs. 7 and 8). The monument was placed there by Edward himself, as the inscription relates. It shows him as a gentleman in armour, kneeling at a prayer-desk, with a wife kneeling on either side on tasselled cushions. Ranged along the front of the tomb chest below them are the faintly etched outlines of Edward and Cecilia's ten children, also kneeling. There is just enough detail on their clothing to distinguish the three girls from the seven boys, but otherwise the children's figures are roughly drawn, perhaps sketches for more elaborate carvings never completed.

The main figures are set in an arched recess in the north wall of the chancel, possibly an Easter sepulchre in origin – a popular site for burials and monuments – although it is not in the sanctuary which was already occupied by William Blower's tomb. Above them the arch is patterned and decorated with stylised flowers, flanked by two Corinthian columns of black marble, and the monument is topped by a stone crest and two large stone balls. The effect of the kneeling figures in their recess is faintly theatrical, a tableau of the family at prayer, and above the arch a panel inscribed *Domus viventium* (the home of the living) provides a caption for the scene below.

Unlike the effigy of William Blower, the Dixon figures are of alabaster and therefore pure white; the fashion for brightly coloured painted figures and decoration had passed by the mid 17th century, and patrons now preferred a more restrained effect. Naturally coloured stones, alabaster and marble also conveyed an impression of expense and value, even where they were not of the highest quality.<sup>62</sup> In other ways, however, the Dixon monument was designed to be seen as a companion to that of Blower. Arranged side by side against the

<sup>59</sup> Bodl. MS D.D. Dawkins, C.2.A.5/1. I am grateful to Janice Cliffe for notes on the Dawkins papers.

<sup>60</sup> *Diary of Bulstrode Whitelocke*, 398, 419, 475.

<sup>61</sup> TNA, PROB 11/299 quire 116. Edward's son John was no longer living by 1660.

<sup>62</sup> Llewellyn, *Funeral Monuments*, 225-30.

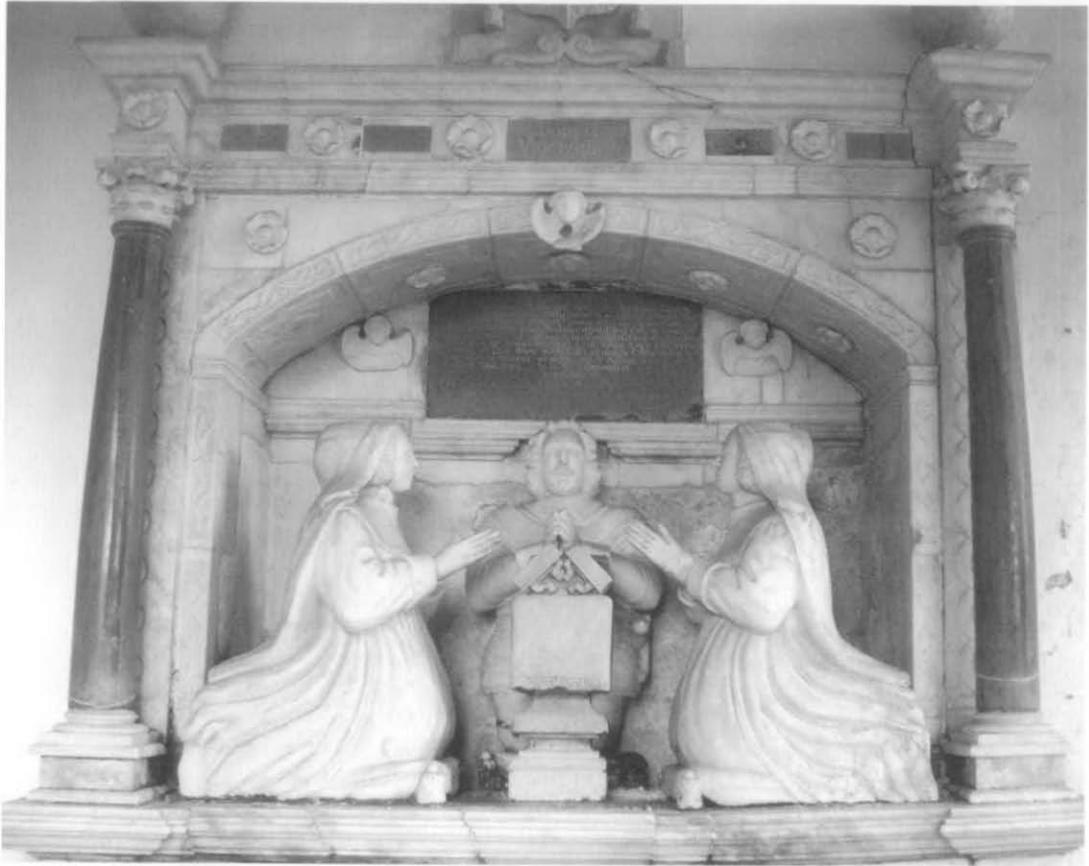


Fig. 7. Monument to Edward Dixon and his two wives. (Photo: J. Timms)



Fig. 8. Outlines of children of Edward and Cecilia Dixon etched on tomb chest of Dixon monument. (Photo: J. Timms)

north wall of the chancel, the monuments are placed so that the effigies, columns and the apex of each are at the same height, even though the base of Blower's tomb chest stands on a step within the altar rail. They are of uniform width, and black columns frame each monument. As on Blower's monument, many of the Dixon monument's features are designed to establish the family's gentility – the male effigy dressed in armour, tasselled cushions as kneelers, the use of Latin inscriptions and heraldry. Repetition and continuity in family monuments were considered highly desirable, emphasising the continuity of the family down the generations,<sup>63</sup> and Edward Dixon may have hoped that he and his uncle William Blower had founded a dynasty that would continue to erect monuments in the parish church at Little Rollright.

The most interesting and unusual aspect of this monument is the tableau of the three figures. The effigies represent Edward Dixon and his two wives, but the inscription dedicates the monument only to Cecilia, identifying her in the conventional manner as the wife of Edward and daughter of Sir James Whitelocke. It praises her piety and her devotion to reading the scriptures, her generosity to the poor and her friendship, and says that she died aged 40 in 1647. The wording emphasises her role as wife and mother: *Casti conjugis casta uxor, cui decem liberos peperit* (the spotless wife of a spotless husband, to whom she gave ten children). The heraldic arms on the shield above the monument are those of Dixon, Blower and Whitelocke, referring to Edward and Cecilia and their children. Evidently it was Cecilia's untimely death that prompted the monument's construction. Women were rarely commemorated alone, unless they were of noble or royal birth, and a deceased wife would normally be portrayed with her husband, either facing him across a prayer-desk or placed side by side. In this case, however, a third figure has been added, that of Edward's second wife. The two female effigies are identical in their features, pose, and costume, and there is no attempt to distinguish between them. The rule of primogeniture was strongly held in gentry families and convention would normally dictate that the first wife should be differentiated from her successors and take precedence as the mother of the heir, but no such distinction has been attempted here. The viewer cannot even be certain which effigy stands for Cecilia, though Anthony Wood assumed that the first wife was on the heraldic right (the viewer's left) which traditionally took precedence.<sup>64</sup>

Even more unusual is the position of the male figure. Seventeenth-century society placed men at the head of every social institution including the family; patriarchy was enshrined in custom, law and culture, and funeral monuments naturally reflected their patrons' view of the world, not only as it was but as it should be.<sup>65</sup> In this case, however, Edward Dixon's effigy is placed at the back of the group, behind his wives and half-hidden behind the prayer-desk. This must be the original design, for Wood described the figures in 1677 as 'a man in armour kneeling before a deske (looking forward) between his two wives kneeling also'.<sup>66</sup> The tableau would surely have struck contemporaries as a departure from convention.

The date of the monument's construction is equally problematic. Documentary evidence places Edward at Little Rollright until 1652, and in Kent from 1654. His second wife was referred to by Bulstrode Whitelocke as 'new' in December 1655. If Edward had the monument built in the immediate aftermath of his first wife's death in 1647, therefore, why did he include a second spouse? There are precedents for such a decision: Llewellyn cites

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.* 95-7.

<sup>64</sup> *Parochial Collections*, iii, 244.

<sup>65</sup> Llewellyn, *Funeral Monuments*, 282-4.

<sup>66</sup> *Parochial Collections*, iii, 244.

the monument of John Clavell (d. 1609) at Church Knowle (Dorset), for example, who 'took the opportunity offered by the death of a first wife (1571) to commemorate himself and his spouses'. The monument shows Clavell and two wives.<sup>67</sup> As a widower with young children, Edward Dixon may have assumed that he would re-marry, and perhaps the lack of any identification of the second wife indicates that she was as yet unchosen. Alternatively, the monument could have been ordered shortly before Edward left Little Rollright, with his second marriage already arranged. In either case the monument was erected during Edward's lifetime and many years before his death, a practice alien to modern sensibilities but relatively common in the 17th century. Patrons might commission their own memorials for fear that the heir would neglect his duty or spend too little, but even those with full confidence in the next generation often chose to commemorate themselves long before they died. The monument fixed a permanent image of its subject, not necessarily as he would be at the time of his death but as he would wish to be remembered.<sup>68</sup> Edward Dixon was by no means the only 17th-century gentleman who knelt at prayer in his own parish church each Sunday, watched by an alabaster image of himself.

The wording on the monument itself tells us what its patron intended:

*Hoc monumentum struxit Edwardus Dixon Armiger, sibi, uxoribus et liberis, ut quos vita separaret, tumulus sociaret.*

Edward Dixon, armiger, erected this monument, to himself, his wives and children, so that the tomb should bring together those whom life separated.

The Latin would allow the translation 'to himself, his wives and children' or 'for himself, his wives and children', and perhaps both meanings were intended. The purpose of the monument was not simply to commemorate the individuals it portrayed, but to assemble them in permanent communion as an image of virtue and to serve as a comfort to the living. This is a monument to a family, not in the sense of a lineage but as a godly community in which each member had his or her own place. Both of Edward's wives, past and future, would be part of this family and could be portrayed together even though in life they followed one another. It is possible, too, that the monument commemorates a happy first marriage. Husband and wife had worshipped together in the church, and Cecilia was probably buried at Little Rollright,<sup>69</sup> perhaps in the church itself. The 'separation' referred to in the inscription was brought about not only by her death but by Edward's departure when he returned to Kent. His family's life was about to move into a new phase, but he left behind him in Little Rollright a permanent memorial to the years they had spent in Oxfordshire.

#### POSTSCRIPT: THE LATER DIXONS

Little Rollright was already the home of another member of the Dixon family. John Dixon was Edward's brother, the third of Henry and Mary's sons, born about 1605. Like his father and several of his brothers he attended St John's College, Oxford, graduating with the degrees of B.A. in 1626 and M.A. in 1628, but instead of proceeding like most of his kinsmen from there to Gray's Inn and a career in the law, John went to Gloucester Hall (later to become Worcester College) to study medicine. John Dixon graduated from Gloucester Hall

<sup>67</sup> Llewellyn, *Funeral Monuments*, 55-6.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.* 53-8.

<sup>69</sup> Cecilia Dixon's burial is not recorded with others at Tonbridge in 1647, and Whitelocke's diary does not mention a burial at Fawley Court.

in 1634 as a Bachelor of Medicine, though whether he ever practised as a physician is not known. He appears to have remained in Oxford as part of the genteel academic community at Gloucester Hall,<sup>70</sup> but by 1649 he was at Little Rollright and was an active purchaser of land and property in Over Norton, leaving his mark with the construction of 'Dixon's barn and rickyard' at the southern end of the village.<sup>71</sup> John and Edward's unmarried sister Jane Dixon was also living at Little Rollright in March 1656 when she made her will, leaving everything she owned to 'my very affectionately loving brother Mr. John Dixon'.<sup>72</sup>

Like his brother, John Dixon was also drawn into the affairs of the hard-pressed Chadwell family at Chipping Norton. Though Michael Chadwell had paid the fines for delinquency imposed upon him as a Royalist, he was pursued by his creditors for the debts left by his father and had little prospect of paying them. In 1654 he mortgaged all his lands to a local attorney, John Crispe, with John Dixon and Richard Daunce, a Chipping Norton innkeeper, signing as trustees.<sup>73</sup> Two years later Chadwell died, and within a few months of his death his widow Alice was married to John Dixon. John was over 50, Alice evidently younger as she gave birth to a daughter in 1659.<sup>74</sup> John Dixon paid hearth tax for a house of 6 hearths at Little Rollright in 1662, but a larger house of 7 hearths was assessed to another taxpayer which suggests that the manor-house was leased out while the Dixons used Manor Farm. John also paid the tax for a 7-hearth house in Chipping Norton; he and Alice were living in the town in 1674 and they must have been the last members of the family to live at Little Rollright.<sup>75</sup>

The Dixon family at Hilden, too, was in decline. Edward's son and heir Henry was a wayward youth, though his sister Elizabeth recognised the value of an influential kinsman and Bulstrode Whitelocke recorded with approval in August 1661 'letters... from his Niece Dixon, full of respect, & resolution to follow his Counsell in all her concernes'. Whitelocke selected a suitable match for Henry but 'unexpectedly & indiscreetly his Nephew by ill Counsell brake it off', and instead married the daughter of a gentry family near Tonbridge in 1662<sup>76</sup>. In October 1662 Whitelocke's diary noted 'letters from his Nephew Dixon about selling his estate', and the manor of Chipping Norton and most of the land in Over Norton – but not the Little Rollright estate – sold for £530 in August 1663 to Thomas Chamberlayne, gentleman, of Gray's Inn and Oddington (Glos.).<sup>77</sup> Henry Dixon died in March 1669, aged only 35. His sister Elizabeth had died a year earlier.<sup>78</sup> Henry left two young daughters but no sons. Some of his property in Kent was mortgaged, and his estate was left to his wife for her life and then equally divided between his daughters Jane and Sarah. An inventory of his possessions at Hilden Manor with a total value of £1,091 15s. 8d. shows a mansion lavishly

<sup>70</sup> *Alum. Oxon.* 406-7; W. McMurray (ed.), *The Records of Two City Parishes* (1925), 176-7; J. Gibson (ed.), *Oxfordshire and North Berkshire Protestation Returns and Tax Assessments 1641-42* (Oxon. Rec. Soc. 59, 1994), 161: 'Mr. Dixon' was listed at Gloucester Hall though he was absent when the Protestation oath was taken in 1642, and the return for Little Rollright is missing.

<sup>71</sup> Bodl. MSS D.D. Dawkins, C.3.A.6/1, 6/3-6.

<sup>72</sup> TNA, PROB 11/278 f. 323.

<sup>73</sup> *Cal. Comm. for Compounding*, p. 2006; TNA, C.5/27/27.

<sup>74</sup> TNA, PROB 11/258 f. 325; Chipping Norton parish registers.

<sup>75</sup> TNA, E 179/255/3; ORO, E229/3/D/09.

<sup>76</sup> *Diary of Bulstrode Whitelocke*, 634-6, 645; ORO, BOR/1/2/1D/7.

<sup>77</sup> *Diary of Bulstrode Whitelocke*, 655; ORO, BOR/1/2/1D/8.

<sup>78</sup> Tonbridge parish registers, burials of Mrs. Elizabeth Barker, daughter of Edward Dixon esq. of Tonbridge and wife of Mr. William Barker of St James's Street, 13 Mar. 1668, and of Henry Dixon esq. of Hilden, 20 Mar. 1669.

furnished with hangings, rich fabrics, carpets, plate and silver. In the stables was the family coach. The family seat at Hilden still reflected the wealth of previous generations.<sup>79</sup>

The estate at Little Rollright was to remain in the ownership of Henry's descendants for another century, but no member of the family lived there and no further monuments were erected in the church. Jane Dixon, his elder daughter who inherited half the manor of Little Rollright, married Nathaniel Booth of Gray's Inn in 1699 but died childless; Little Rollright church owns a silver paten inscribed 'Jane Dixon 1730'.<sup>80</sup> Her sister Sarah, who received the other half of the manor, married Percival Hart of Lullingstone Castle in Kent in 1689, and it was their daughter Anne Dyke (d. 1763) who inherited both her mother's share and that of her aunt Jane, returning the estate to single ownership. Anne's son Sir John Dixon Dyke Bt. sold the manor of Little Rollright in 1767 to Sir John Reade Bt. of Shipton Court, Shipton-under-Wychwood, bringing to an end the Dixons' 150-year tenure of the estate.<sup>81</sup>

The story of William Blower, his sister's family the Dixons, and their connections with Little Rollright can be traced only in its outlines, and without personal papers or estate records many questions must remain unanswered. Even the little that is known, however, is sufficient to throw new light on their monuments in the parish church, while the monuments provide an insight into the people they commemorate. In many respects the story is a familiar one: the purchase of estates by moneyed Londoners aspiring to become landed gentry, the transmission of wealth between families by women, the fragility of gentry families' survival when many adults and children died young, and the use of parish churches as mausoleums for the families who owned them are all themes found throughout 17th-century England. The monuments these families left behind are an additional source to be used in our search to understand their lives and their impact on local history.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My greatest debt is to Joy Timms, who generously shared with me her own research on the history of Little Rollright, and who took the photographs which illustrate this paper. I am also most grateful to Malcolm Airs, Janice Cliffe, David Eddershaw, Lynne Hayes, Christine Jackson, Ralph Mann, Andrew Rosen and Diana Wood for their advice and for comments on earlier drafts.

<sup>79</sup> TNA, PROB 11/331 quire 138; PROB 4/10118.

<sup>80</sup> J.T. Evans, *The Church Plate of Oxfordshire* (1928), 148.

<sup>81</sup> ORO, deeds catalogued in 1960 as Stockton & Fortescue MSS, Box 123, A1, A4-9, A11, A13-14; some of these are now in ORO, P. Flick collection, box of Little Rollright deeds (uncatalogued). I am grateful to Joy Timms for a copy of the original catalogue. For Sir John Reade, see J. Howard-Drake, 'The Reade Family', *Wychwoods History*, 19 (2004), 33-4.