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Remembering the Dead: Postmortem Guild Membership in Late Medieval England

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Abstract

As in many areas of pre-Reformation devotion, the dead were a conspicuous presence in English religious guilds of all sizes. Members joined in the expectation that the guild would say prayers and perform masses for their souls after death, and previous members and benefactors would be commemorated with regularity. This article, however, investigates a new avenue of the fraternal relationship with the dead: the practice of enrolling people *after* their death. Doing so shifts the paradigm of our understanding of the multidimensional functions of pre-Reformation society, commemoration, and guilds, privileging the experiences of both the dead and living equally, while highlighting the interplay of the spiritual and socioeconomic. Taking the extensive membership records of England's "great" guilds as its basis, this article reveals that postmortem enrollment was a practice both common and widespread, and it addresses questions of practicalities and motivations. As such, the richness of commemoration in late medieval society is demonstrated, and the importance of postmortem membership brought to the fore.

Keywords: Guilds; commemoration; death; religion; medieval

It is by now accepted that the pre-Reformation Church possessed the capacity to offer a multitude of options for the benefit of the souls of its members. Recent historiography has, indeed, demonstrated the endless flexibility of commemorative innovation in the two centuries prior to the Reformation.[1] The resources of cathedral churches, religious houses of every order, parishes, and lay-run guilds could all be deployed to relieve the suffering of souls in Purgatory.[2] Guilds (also known as fraternities) drew their efficacy from the fact that they offered a combination of masses and prayers performed by guild priests and the prayers of a much wider community of brothers and sisters, sometimes numbering in the

[1] Clive Burgess, "Obligations and Strategy: Managing Memory in the Later Medieval Parish," *Monumental Brass Society* 18, no. 4 (2012): 289–310; Clive Burgess, *The Right Ordering of Souls: The Parish of All Saints' Bristol on the Eve of the Reformation* (Woodbridge, 2018), chs. 6–7; Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England, 1400–1580* (New Haven and London, 2005), chs. 9–10; Christian Steer and John S. Lee, eds., *Commemoration in Medieval Cambridge* (Woodbridge, 2018); Anne Leader, ed., *Memorializing the Middle Classes in Medieval and Renaissance Europe* (Kalamazoo, 2018).

[2] Clive Burgess, "'A Fond Thing Vainly Invented': An Essay on Purgatory and Pious Motive in Later Medieval England," in *Parish, Church and People: Local Studies in Lay Religion, 1350–1750*, ed. Susan J. Wright (London, 1988), 56–84; Helen Foxhall-Forbes, *Heaven and Earth in Anglo-Saxon England: Theology and Society in an Age of Faith* (Farnham, 2013).

hundreds or thousands. After their deaths, guild members could expect to receive succor generated by the actions of their fellow brethren, with whom they had feasted, celebrated, and socialized during life.

In considering the relationship between the dead and guilds in late medieval England, historians have tended to concentrate on individual bequests made in last wills and testaments, unusual, high-status observances (such as chantry foundations), or on the practical provisions associated with burial and masses as set out in guild ordinances.[3] Yet there was another active and strong connection between the living and the dead that has received only brief mention: among the larger guilds in late medieval England, there is evidence of the practice of enrolling men and women *after* their death.[4]

This article highlights the distinctly medieval phenomenon of the enrollment of deceased individuals in England's large guilds—men and women who had not joined a specific fraternity during their lifetimes, meaning that their postmortem enrollment represented a particular kind of fraternal relationship. At first glance, this may not seem like such an innovation, but the distinction between the commemoration of a guild member who had died and that of a dead person who was subsequently entered into the guild is important. Focusing on the membership of those who died *before* entering the guild shifts our conceptual paradigm of the multidimensional functions of pre-Reformation society and guilds, privileging the experiences of both the dead and living equally. The dead influenced the actions of the living (and vice versa), and both were participants in the other's respective (after)lives. This approach also highlights the interplay of the spiritual and the socioeconomic. Taking care of the dead in medieval society—as at other times—had economic, material, and spiritual costs. That postmortem guild membership was an important element of the intercessory strategies of many medieval men and women is underscored by the sincerity with which it was undertaken and the evidence of it being particularly widespread, both in geographic and social terms. As such, we ought to take it seriously as an aspect of pre-Reformation lay religious practice, viewing it alongside more traditional forms of devotion.

Given that late medieval religious guilds concurrently fulfilled cultural, economic, political, and religious functions in society, historiography has been accordingly holistic and, in recent years, has been drawn towards highlighting the worldly benefits of these associations.[5] But religious guilds held an inherent spiritual value in medieval Europe and were arguably one of the most important expressions of lay piety. A fraternity's *raison d'être*

[3] Caroline M. Barron, "Parish Fraternities of Medieval London," in *The Church in Pre-Reformation Society: Essays in Honour of F. R. H. Du Boulay*, ed. Caroline M. Barron and Christopher Harper-Bill (Woodbridge, 1985), 13–37, at 24; Ken Farnhill, *Guilds and the Parish Community in Late Medieval East Anglia, c.1470–1550* (Woodbridge, 2001), 36. Gervase Rosser talks about spiritual provisions (masses) from guild ordinances: see Gervase Rosser, "The Town and Guild of Lichfield in the Late Middle Ages," *Staffordshire Archaeological and History Society Transactions* 27 (1985/86): 39–47, at 43.

[4] It has only been considered very briefly by Gervase Rosser and Robert Swanson: Gervase Rosser, *The Art of Solidarity in the Middle Ages: Guilds in England, 1250–1550* (Oxford, 2015), 132; Robert N. Swanson, "Books of Brotherhood: Registering Fraternity and Confraternity in Late Medieval England," in *Durham Liber Vitae and its Context*, ed. David Rollason, Alan J. Piper, Margaret Harvey and Linda Rollason (Woodbridge, 2004), 233–46, at 240. See also Robert N. Swanson, "A Medieval Staffordshire Fraternity: The Guild of St. John the Baptist, Walsall," in *Staffordshire Histories: Essays in Honour of Michael Greenslade*, ed. Philip Morgan and A. D. M. Phillips (Keele, 1999), 47–65, at 52.

[5] For a sociocultural approach, see Rosser, *The Art of Solidarity*, chs. 1–3; for politics, see Rosser, "Big Brotherhood: Guilds in Urban Politics in Late Medieval England," in *Guilds and Association in Europe, 900–1800*, ed. Ian A. Gadd and Patrick Wallis (London, 2006), 27–42; for networks and identity, see Rosser, "Solidarités et changement social. Les fraternités urbaines anglaises à la fin du moyen Âge," *Annales. Économies, Sociétes, Civilisations* 48, no. 5 (1993), 1127–43; Rosser, "Party List: Making Friends in Medieval England Guilds," in *London and the Kingdom: Essays in Honour of Caroline M. Barron*, ed. Matthew Davies and Andrew Prescott (Donington, 2008), 118–34; Rachael C. Harkes, "Joining a Fraternity in Late Medieval England: The Case of the Palmers' Guild of Ludlow, c. 1250–1551" (PhD diss., Durham University, 2021). The social implications of guilds in regard to women has been explored in Katherine L. French, "Maidens' Lights and Wives' Stores: Women's Parish Guilds in Late Medieval England," *Sixteenth Century Journal* 29, no. 2 (Summer, 1998): 399–425. The recent favoring of the social, cultural, political, and economic elements of guilds is not confined to studies of England: see Christopher E. Black, "The

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was to bring together a group of lay men and women with a particular devotional focus, usually dedicated to a saint or a religious observance, such as Corpus Christi or the Blessed Virgin Mary. Guild activities permeated all communities (both urban and rural), often as part of a symbiotic relationship with the parish church in which they were based.[6] Indeed, while social aspects of guilds, like feasting, were imbued with religious significance, devotional activities likewise possessed important social implications. In order to appreciate fully the intersection of late medieval society, piety, and remembrance, we must look to deceased members of these voluntary associations alongside the living.[7] Guilds—especially "great" guilds—are revealed here, for the first time, to have played an intrinsic role in the "commemorative culture" of late medieval popular piety, simultaneously supported by and, in turn, bolstering the doctrines of Purgatory, intercession, and salvation. Late medieval Catholicism impressed upon its community of believers that in order to reduce time spent in Purgatory (the transitional state of spiritual cleansing endured by most believers before being admitted to Heaven), then action must be taken before death, or otherwise one had to rely on the living to intercede on one's behalf after death. Enrolling the deceased in one—or several—of England's great guilds was an important part of the laity's commemorative repertoire and helped foster a sense of community between the living and the dead.

England's "Great" Guilds and Their Deceased Members

Not all guilds were created equal. Gervase Rosser's oft-recited statistic that around 30,000 guilds were in existence in late medieval England includes bodies that ranged from a handful of people maintaining a single light on an altar to a smattering of so-called "great" fraternities with grandiose chapels and guildhalls.[8] Many thousands lay somewhere in between these two extremes. The term "great" is, of course, a retrospective appellation, but it is nevertheless a useful conceptual tool for historians. The designation of a guild as "great" refers to those bodies whose membership consistently extended beyond their immediate locale in great numbers, as far as the surviving records are able to demonstrate. Of this group, three might be categorized as having a national reach: the Palmers' Guild of Ludlow (Shropshire); the Guild of St Mary, Boston (Lincolnshire); and the Jesus Guild based in St Paul's Cathedral (London).[9] Other well-known or important guilds might be better termed as "regional," the membership reach of which was not so far or, when it was far-reaching, was without the same consistency or numbers. This list includes those dedicated to Corpus Christi at York (Yorkshire), the Holy Trinity at Luton (Bedfordshire), the Holy Cross at Stratford-upon-Avon, Holy Trinity at Coventry, and St Anne at Knowle (the latter three all in Warwickshire).[10] Over their lives, each of these guilds developed impressive administrative

Development of Confraternity Studies Over the Past Thirty Years," in *The Politics of Ritual Kinship: Confraternities and Social Order in Early Modern Italy*, ed. Nicholas Terpstra (Cambridge, 1999), 9–29.

[6] For example, they might contribute money to church building, and guild priests often assisted parish priests and vice versa. Gabriel Byng, *Church Building and Society in the Later Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 2017), 53–54, 59–61, 82–83; Gervase Rosser, "Communities of Parish and Guild in the Late Middle Ages," in *Parish, Church and People*, ed. Wright, 29–55, at 40–44.

[7] For guild feasts as "paraliturgical," see Gervase Rosser, "Going to the Fraternity Feast: Commensality and Social Relations in Late Medieval England," *Journal of British Studies* 33, no. 4 (October, 1994): 430–46, at 435.

[8] Rosser, "Going to the Fraternity Feast," 431.

[9] For the reach of each respective guild, see Harkes, "Joining a Fraternity," 6–8; Robert N. Swanson, *Passports to Paradise? Indulgences in Late Medieval England* (Oxford, 2007), 375–80; Elizabeth New, "The Cult of the Holy Name of Jesus in Late Medieval England, with Special Reference to the Fraternity in St Paul's Cathedral, London, c. 1450–1558" (PhD diss., University of London, 1999), 209–216; Elizabeth New, ed., *Records of the Jesus Guild in St Paul's Cathedral c. 1450–1550: An Edition of Oxford, Bodleian MS Tanner 221, and Associated Material* (Woodbridge, 2022), 25.

[10] A potential candidate for this status might also be Boston's Corpus Christi guild as it did enter members from outside of Boston, especially London, but its numbers are low in comparison with the Coventry, Knowle, and Luton guilds and therefore does not meet the specification used here: Register of Admissions with calendar of obits, fifteenth century, Harley MS 4795, BL.

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machinery in order to encourage membership and to collect fees. In the following discussion, the guilds at Boston and London are necessarily omitted thanks to the lack of surviving admission registers, which precludes study of the practices of enrolling the deceased, and those at Coventry and York are likewise excluded because of difficulties in identifying dead members resulting from particular scribal choices.[11] Comparisons will therefore be drawn between the guilds at Knowle, Ludlow, Luton, and Stratford, based on the range of surviving admission registers for each guild. While each possesses an uneven combination of admission registers, accounts, property deeds, charters, and incorporation documents, a picture can be constructed of how men and women engaged with these guilds in relation to the deaths of family and friends. Focusing on these guilds offers the opportunity to study a wide range of medieval society: between them, they capture a variety of individuals across a significant geographic reach (encompassing almost every English county), as well as a diverse mix of social and economic backgrounds.

After offering an initial overview and brief statistical impression of the frequency of post-mortem enrollment in these guilds, the focus of this article will turn to those whom we might term "facilitators," both human and corporate (family, friends, and the guilds themselves), to uncover the social practices and mechanisms involved in caring for the dead in this way. Finally, the motivations of these facilitators—and the dead themselves—are discussed in detail. Throughout, the questions of why enrollment of the deceased happened at all and the relationship between the living and the dead remain central to the discussion. By drawing attention to the popular phenomenon of deceased membership of medieval guilds, two key preoccupations of pre-Reformation society are clear: a sustained concern for maintaining the memory of individuals, long deceased, and for the salvation of souls.

Enrollment

Deceased guild members may be found easily in the enrollment lists that are the essential sources for this inquiry. In the surviving registers for the guilds at Knowle, Ludlow, Luton, and Stratford, a total of 27,241 men, women, and children were formally admitted into their respective communities. Of this number, 3,434 were enrolled after they died (Figures 2, 4, 6, 8). Aside from a brief list dating to 1412/13, the Knowle guild's membership records begin in earnest in 1450 and continue until 1538. They are not complete, and several years are missing. Throughout this eighty-eight year period, 8,536 men and women became members of the fraternity alongside 1,079 dead (Figure 2).[12] Luton, with a similar degree of surviving registers—totaling seventy-one years—enrolled a smaller number of members, with 5,501 living brethren and 723 deceased brethren (Figure 4). Stratford's registers cover 132 years and record 6,530 living members, accompanied by 1,184 dead (Figure 6). Ludlow, meanwhile, possesses only twenty-four years of surviving records—sporadically between 1412 and 1516—consisting of 3,240 living members with 448 dead members (Figure 8).[13] We can perhaps assume that in all guilds, enrollment of the deceased also occurred in years for which documentation does not survive, meaning that the numbers

[11] In Coventry, the records are unclear regarding the specific years that members joined, as they preferred to keep a rolling list of members, without denoting the year. Therefore, it is difficult to make direct comparisons for year-to-year enrollment with other guilds. Geoffrey Templeman, ed., *The Records of the Guild of the Holy Trinity, St. Mary, St. John the Baptist and St. Katherine of Coventry* (Oxford, 1944). The Corpus Christi guild at York, a large and popular fraternity, only notes four members with the descriptor '*mort*' beside their name. Robert H. Skaife, ed., *The Register of the Guild of Corpus Christi in the City of York* (1872).

[12] W. B. Bickley, ed., *The Register of the Guild of Knowle in the County of Warwick, 1451–1535* (Walsall, 1894).

[13] This number only accounts for those individuals who completed the full membership fee, as related in the registers of admission, *debitoria*, clerks' receipt books, and riding books. What appear to be several membership lists dating from the fourteenth century survive, but they are informal and it is not entirely clear for what purpose they were created nor exactly what information they preserve. In total, the guild records (mainly in riding books) that over 17,000 people began membership payments. As I have argued elsewhere, commencing an

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provided by extant admission registers are only a glimpse of the full extent of this trend of postmortem provision.[14]

Within the limits imposed by the years for which records survive, the percentage of deceased members within each of the guilds lies between 13 and 18 percent: Stratford at 18 percent, Ludlow at 14 percent, and Luton and Knowle both at 13 percent. Deceased membership was, therefore, a notable (if minority) feature of each of the large guilds of medieval England. It is immediately striking that each guild recorded a similar overall percentage of deceased membership within its brethren. In fact, it is the common denominator across the great guilds: each of the guilds experienced spikes in both living and dead membership, but none at similar moments in time. Neither do these surges in deceased membership correlate with increases in living membership, nor necessarily with years in which there were known outbreaks of pestilence (Figures 1, 3, 5, 7).[15]

Before exploring the identities of the men and women that were enrolled in the great guilds after their decease, the issues with the source material must be addressed. Many fraternity registers consist simply of a list of names, created for the purposes of commemoration and prayer, and difficulties are therefore presented when attempting to identify individuals named, or to discern their relationships to other members. Those deceased at Knowle, for example, are only sometimes referred to by their relation to the individual enrolling them (such as "mother of"), but names of living members are frequently accompanied by the note "and for the souls of...," without providing further details on relationships or locations. The relationship is only made explicit in terms of parental or marital ties and, even then, not consistently. On the other hand, the existence of a relationship is sometimes the *only* information offered: for example, John Kilbye and his wife, Margaret, joined the Knowle Guild in 1504 with the souls of their parents, yet the scribe did not record the names of the latter.[16] The omission of names for deceased members occurs with some regularity across the guilds at Knowle, Luton, and Stratford. But, despite the issues that the intermittent lack of names present, taking a long-term view of the registers, coupled with surviving guild accounts, offers the opportunity to appraise trends and practices of deceased membership.

Those who were entered into a religious guild after death varied in status and location. Deceased members included those who could undoubtedly afford a multitude of post-obit provisions, like John Wenlock, Baron Wenlock and Knight of the Garter, who was entered into the guild at Luton in 1475, four years after his death at the Battle of Tewkesbury, by his surviving widow.[17] A similar case in point is Margaret, late wife of the knight Henry

association with a guild in this way brought benefits prior to full admission, meaning that the discrepancy between these figures is not indicative of the guild struggling to maintain numbers: Harkes, "Joining a Fraternity," 5, 31.

[14] For example, membership for the souls of a member's parents can be found in the late thirteenth century, by way of a rent-charge gifted to the Ludlow guild: "List of Grants to the Guild," c. 1275, LB/5/2/1443, Shropshire Archives (hereafter SA).

[15] Ludlow experienced an outbreak of illness in 1502—often noted in discussions of Prince Arthur's death—and it has been suggested that the dead in the Ludlow guild increased that year: Judith Bailey, "'Fleecing the Pious: The Palmers' Guild of Ludlow in the Central and North Welsh Marches 1400–1530" (PhD diss., University of Adelaide, 2020), 164. Twenty-eight deceased entrants were enrolled in 1502/03, followed by twenty deceased entrants in 1503/04. It is worth being cautious about the claim that there is a spike in deceased membership as most of the riding books only survive in partial form and are certainly missing folios from the original manuscripts. Additionally, extant documents suggest that the guild kept separate records of Ludlow membership and therefore the riding books may not include all members. For 1502/03 and 1503/04 riding books, see LB/5/3/4 and LB/5/3/5, SA. For payment by Ludlow members outside of the riding books, see Steward's memorandum book, 1512–1530, LB/5/3/36 and Clerk's receipt account, n.d., LB/5/3/41, SA. A lack of correlation between localized outbreaks of sickness and increases in deceased membership has been observed in the Stratford guild: see Mairi Macdonald, ed., *The Register of the Guild of the Holy Cross, St Mary and St John the Baptist, Stratford-upon-Avon* (Bristol, 2007), 10.

[16] Bickley, ed., *The Register of the Guild of Knowle*, 152.

[17] Henry Gough, ed., *The Register of the Fraternity of Guild of the Holy and Undivided Trinity and Blessed Virgin Mary in the Parish Church of Luton* (London, 1906), 19. During his lifetime, Wenlock had patronized the construction of an

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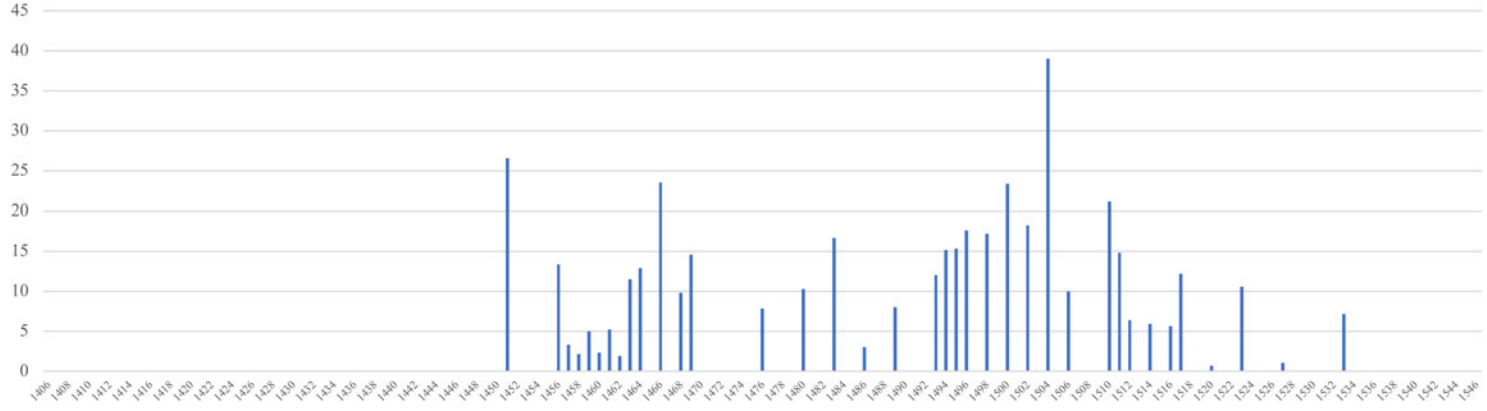

Figure 1. Knowle Guild, deceased enrollment (percentage by year).

Figure 2. Knowle Guild, living and dead members (numbers by year).

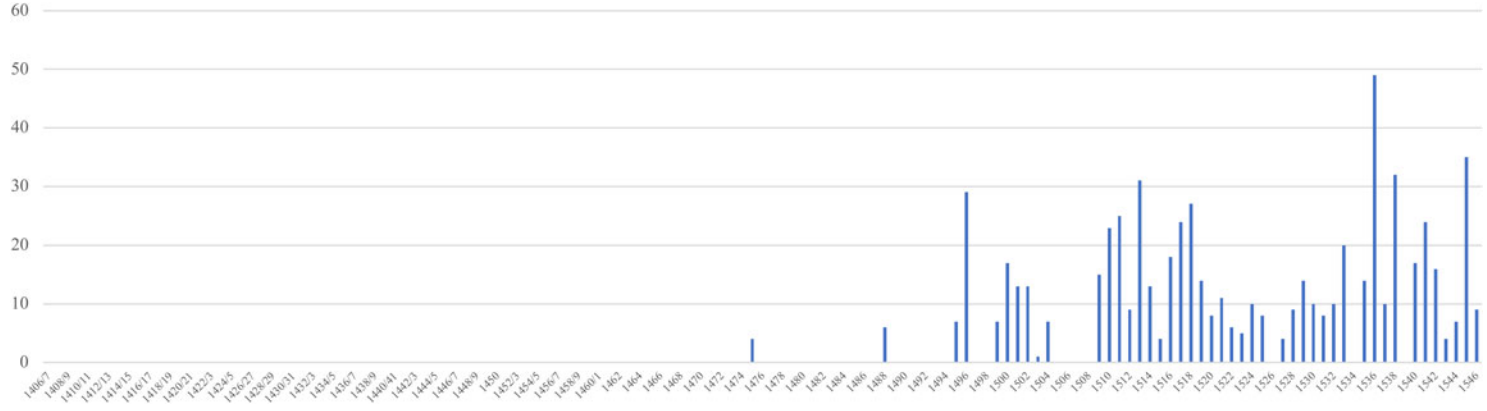

Figure 3. Luton Guild, deceased enrollment (percentage by year).

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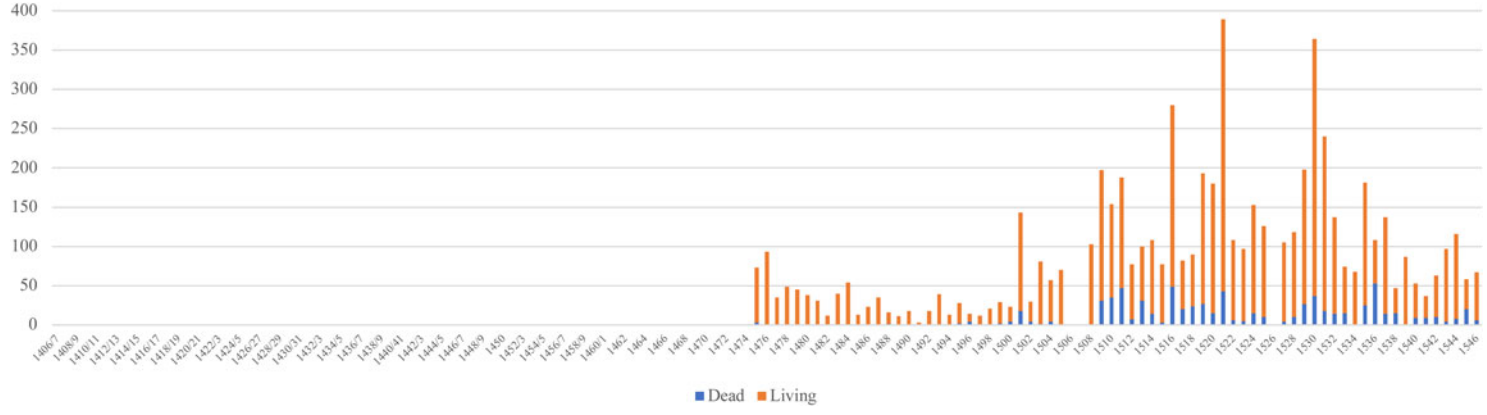

Figure 4. Luton Guild, living and dead members (numbers by year).

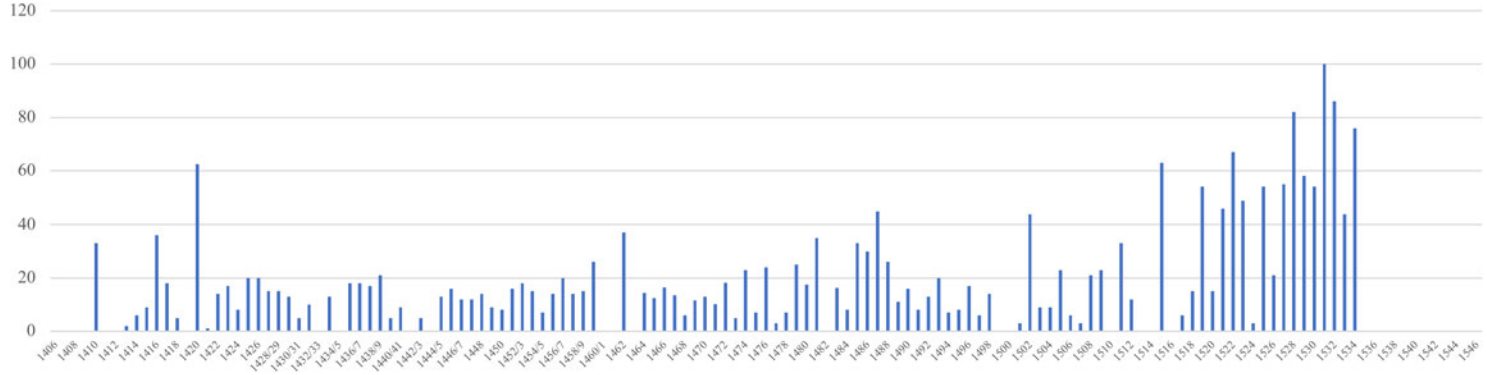

Figure 5. Stratford Guild, deceased enrollment (percentage by year).

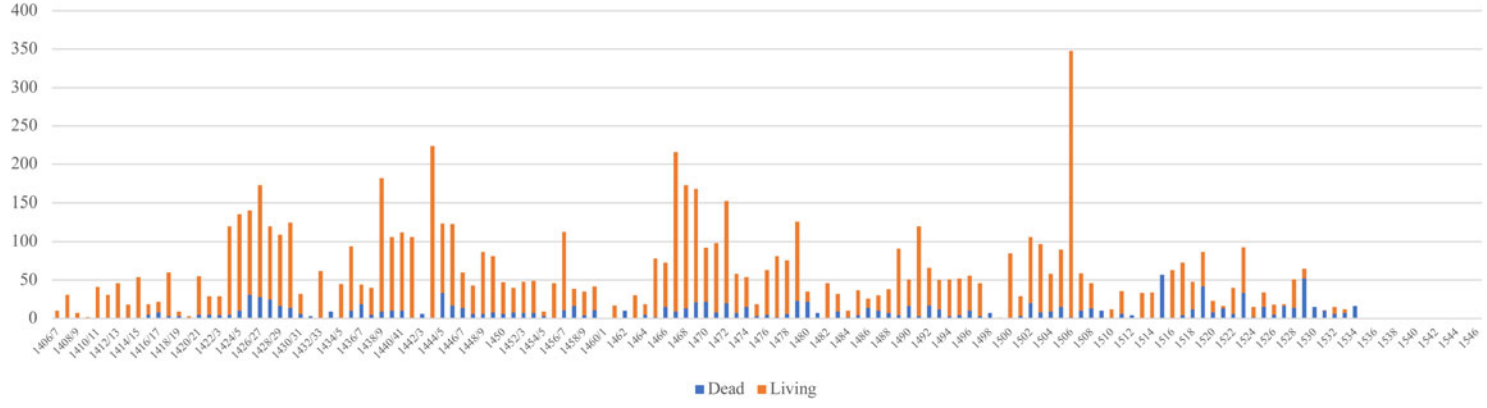

Figure 6. Stratford Guild, living and dead members (numbers by year).

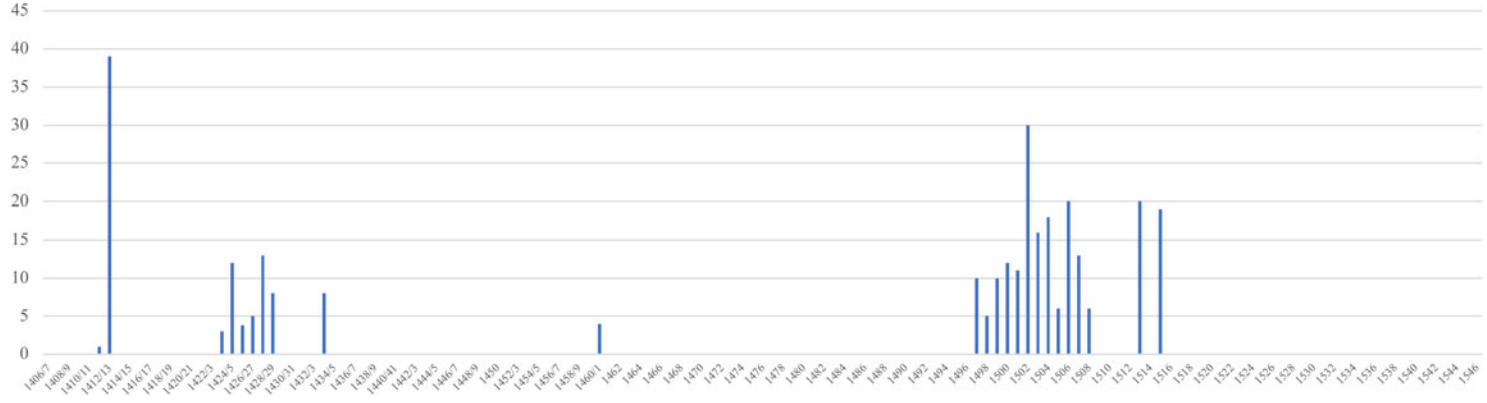

Figure 7. Ludlow Guild, deceased enrollment (percentage by year).

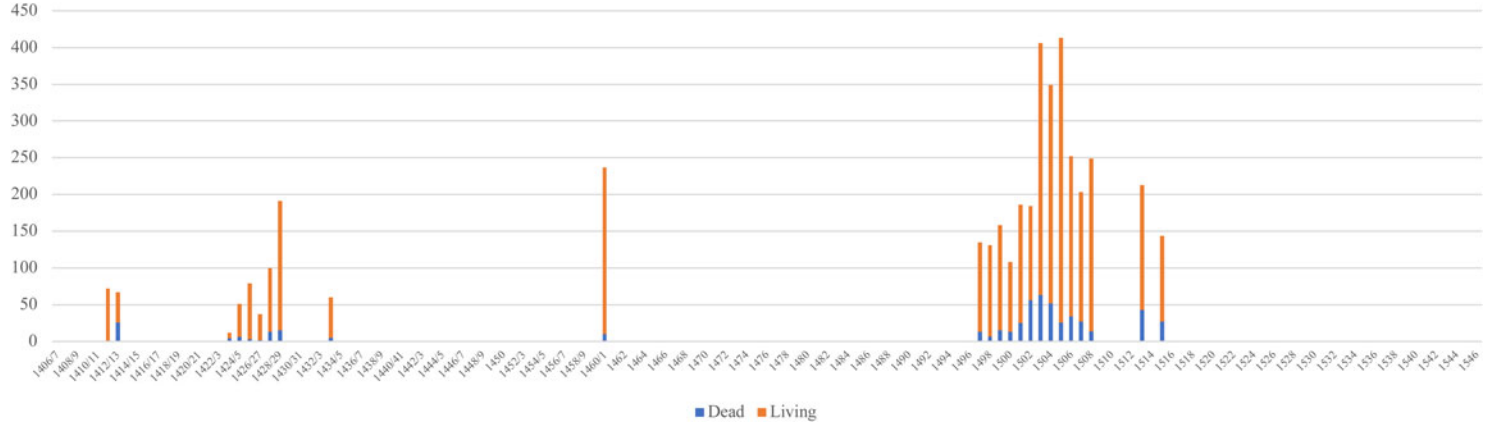

Figure 8. Ludlow Guild, living and dead members (numbers by year).

Wogan, who was enrolled in Stratford's guild in 1457/58 by her widower.[18] Although enrollment after death was not, therefore, the resort of those unable to afford more elaborate provisions, these examples are also joined by others with smaller coffers to draw on. Take, for example, the enrollment of John Broke (1486/87), laborer, or Thomas Griffith (1507/08), roper, into the Ludlow guild after their respective deaths.[19] It is worth noting that guild membership, and by extension *pro anima* prayers, were not sought after solely by local men and women. The deceased from as far away as Eton (Berkshire), such as master Robert Pevesley, and Kendal (Westmorland), such as Thomas Rowlonson, were enrolled in great guilds, respectively joining Ludlow and Stratford.[20] The locations of deceased membership were as extensive and varied as those of living members.[21]

Facilitators

The responsibility for enrollment of this type lay, naturally, on living facilitators. Even if the impetus did not originally lie with the living (for instance, if they were carrying out verbal or testamentary instructions), it remained to them to coordinate the payment of fees with guilds. Some were likely, as will be seen, to have been acting on their own accord in arranging guild membership, out of a concern for the soul of the deceased. For while the most basic guilds might maintain a single light at an altar, the majority of fraternities performed masses for their members' souls. For those who could not afford anything more elaborate, parish guilds might offer appropriate funeral services, and members might swell the ranks of mourners at the obsequies of their brethren. Such activities relating to death were common among religious guilds in the later Middle Ages.[22] From the surviving records, three groups of facilitators can be identified, although there is frequently overlap between them. First were family members: husbands, wives, children, and parents; second were executors, those appointed to enact the provisions of the deceased's will; and third were the guilds themselves.

Facilitators I: Family

Of these facilitators, family members appear as the strongest drivers behind enrollment of the dead, a perception that is no doubt partly influenced by easily identifiable relationships in the records. Guilds were an avenue through which kin could attend to the welfare of deceased family member's souls suffering in Purgatory. There was the potential to enroll a whole host of deceased family members, and Alice Denys, gentlewoman of Bristol, certainly endeavored to do so. Alice, alongside her own entry, paid for the membership of no fewer than eleven of her relatives—all of whom were deceased. Included within that number were her parents, who had died more than fifty years previously, and her own husband,

elaborate chapel in Luton church and, although he does not have a surviving will, it is likely that further post-obit observances took place there. For his association with Luton and the suggestion that he may have been buried there, see Nigel Saul, *Lordship and Faith: The English Gentry and the Parish Church in the Middle Ages* (Oxford, 2017), 325.

[18] Macdonald, *Register of the Guild of the Holy Cross*, 238.

[19] Register of Admissions, 1485–9, LB/5/1/2, membrane 3; Register of Admissions, 1507–9, LB/5/1/4, membrane 1, SA.

[20] Register of Admissions, 1507–9, LB/5/1/4, membrane 1, SA; Macdonald, *Register of the Guild of the Holy Cross*, 390.

[21] For the reach of the Ludlow guild, see Harkes, "Joining a Fraternity," 6–8; for the Stratford guild, see Macdonald, *Register of the Guild of the Holy Cross*, 22–25; for the Luton guild, see Barbara Tearle, ed., *The Accounts of the Guild of the Holy Trinity, Luton, 1526/7–1546/7* (Woodbridge, 2012), xxii; and for the Knowle guild, see Bickley, ed., *Register of the Guild of Knowle*.

[22] For institutional studies that include numerous examples of these activities, see Virginia Bainbridge, *Gilds in the Medieval Countryside: Social and Religious Change in Cambridgeshire c.1350–1558* (Woodbridge, 1996); Ken Farnhill, *Guilds and the Parish Community in Late Medieval East Anglia, c.1470–1550* (Woodbridge, 2001); Claire Kennan, "Guilds and Society in Louth, Lincolnshire, c. 1450–1550" (PhD diss., University of London, 2018). I am grateful to Dr Kennan for permitting me to read a copy of her thesis while it was under embargo.

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who had died thirty-seven years earlier.[23] This was an unusual case, in some respects: paying for the membership of eleven other people, along with her own, amounted to a significant financial burden, but Alice's decision to enroll deceased kin was not an exceptional act.

A common practice was the enrollment of deceased husbands or wives by their surviving spouse. Alice Cresseham, widow of Walsingham (Norfolk), began payments for herself and her deceased husband William for membership of the Ludlow guild in the early sixteenth century.[24] Thomas Auncell became a member of the Luton guild in 1519/20 and enrolled the soul of his late wife Joan at the same time.[25] Men and women who enrolled in a guild therefore took the opportunity to satisfy their spiritual obligation to their deceased spouses. Upon remarriage, it was common for the deceased first husband or wife to be enrolled alongside the new couple: Thomas Haull, draper of Alcester, joined the Stratford guild in 1505/06 with his current wife, Margaret, and his deceased first wife, Alice.[26] Likewise, John Alye of Coventry joined the Ludlow guild in 1503/04 and enrolled both a living and a dead wife.[27] Similar examples can be found in almost every year of admission for each of the great guilds.[28] The enrollment of multiple deceased partners also occurred with regularity: Agnes Cooke of Charlecote (Warwickshire), joined the Stratford guild in 1435/36 with the souls of both her deceased husbands, John Cooke and Thomas Cardemaker.[29] Registration of deceased spouses in a guild was clearly an important method by which husband and wives continued to care for the souls of their loved ones.

Of equal importance and regularity was the enrollment of deceased parents alongside their children. Sir William Uvedale, comptroller for Prince Arthur's household, enrolled his deceased parents, Thomas and Margaret, in the Ludlow guild in 1499/1500.[30] John Tybbynnys, his wife, and their son joined the Stratford guild in 1501/02, concurrently paying the fee for the souls of both of John's parents.[31] Children similarly fulfilled their obligations to their parents' souls in Knowle and Luton, as Thomas Hacoke enrolled his dead parents William and Isabel at Knowle in 1504/05,[32] and when Isabel Leche, singlewoman, joined the Luton guild in 1518/19 she paid to enlist the souls of her parents Stephen and Marion.[33] Moreover, the obligation and care between parents and children was not one-sided. Henry Underwood and his wife Joanna joined Knowle in 1457 and paid for the entry of the souls of Henry's unnamed children.[34] The names of a series of deceased children might be listed within an entry in the register, as is the case with John Whityngton's six children who were enrolled in the Stratford guild in 1529/30 for a total fee of 10s.[35] Ludlow's inhabitants also frequently used their local guild to enroll their deceased sons and daughters, as when Thomas Clompton (a future

[23] Steward's Riding Book, 1503/4, LB/5/3/5, fol. 55v, SA. For the Poyntz and Denys family trees, see John Maclean and William C. Heane, eds., *The Visitation of the County of Gloucester* (London, 1885), 50, 128–29. A brass commemorating Maurice Denys (Alice's husband) survives at Olverston church, Gloucestershire.

[24] Steward's riding book, LB/5/3/12, fol. 2r, SA. This document is dated to the fifteenth century in the archive catalogue but in fact dates from after 1512 by virtue of its inclusion of the entry of John Wells, abbot of Crowland between 1512–1539 that provides a *terminus post quem*.

[25] Gough, *The Register of the Fraternity of Luton*, 84.

[26] Macdonald, *Register of the Guild of the Holy Cross*, 388.

[27] Steward's riding book, 1503/4, LB/5/3/5, fol. 27v, SA.

[28] Small parish guilds may reflect different patterns, although not enough research has been conducted to determine how universal this is. In the parish guild at Walsall, late husbands and wives were equally as likely to be enrolled without their living counterpart. Swanson, "A Medieval Staffordshire Fraternity," 52.

[29] Macdonald, *Register of the Guild of the Holy Cross*, 143.

[30] Steward's riding book, 1497–1507, LB/5/3/2, fol. 148v, SA.

[31] Macdonald, *Register of the Guild of the Holy Cross*, 379.

[32] Bickley, *The Register of the Guild of Knowle*, 151.

[33] Gough, *The Register of the Fraternity of Luton*, 80.

[34] Bickley, *The Register of the Guild of Knowle*, 19.

[35] Macdonald, *Register of the Guild of the Holy Cross*, 452.

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guild steward) paid the entry fees for the souls of five deceased children at different times between 1500 and 1504.[36]

Facilitators II: Executors

Taking extra steps to bolster the prayers said for a soul, through the medium of guild membership, was not a uniquely familial endeavor, despite this being the most apparent method by which we see deceased enrollment in the great guilds materializing, thanks to descriptors provided by clerks or common surnames. A great many of these family members probably shouldered the additional responsibilities of executorship, a more formal obligation that may have encouraged guild membership. In the absence of any surviving will, or its confirmation in guild documents, this can only ever be speculation.[37] The imbrication of family and guild in death, then, is more apparent than that of executorship, but one often accompanied the other.

Executors are not always obvious in setting up guild membership as a form of caring for the deceased's soul but the glimpses we have demonstrate how they could be a key player in the commemoration of the dead through guilds. Executorial involvement in postmortem guild membership might occur through one of two channels. The first was by direct testamentary instruction, whereby the testator left a bequest to a guild (although without necessarily specifying it was for membership). For example, in a straightforward testamentary bequest, Thomas Eyton of Aylesbury left 6s. 8d. (equivalent to the standard entrance fee) to the Ludlow guild in his will of 1504 and was duly entered in the register of admissions the same year.[38] The second was by extra-testamentary action on the part of the executor, commonly referred to in wills in terms of their "discretion"—in some cases (especially if there were no heirs for which provision had to be made), the testator might leave the residue of their estate to be distributed for the health of their soul at their executors' discretion.[39] However, if no guild was mentioned in a will, and if there was no charge to distribute the residue, but the testator was nevertheless enrolled, executors might have been acting either on verbal premortem instructions or of their own accord.[40] For example, John Williams of Ludlow wrote his will in March 1511, but gave no indication of any desire to join the Ludlow guild.[41] He appointed as his executors his wife Agnes and his brother Geoffrey, and his will was proved in the Prerogative Court of Canterbury in June 1513. Shortly thereafter we see Geoffrey pledging the membership fee of his deceased brother; as Williams had left the residue of "my goodes above not bequeathed" to Agnes, the executors may have taken it upon themselves to apportion a small amount of this sum towards membership

[36] Steward's riding book, 1497–1507, LB/5/3/2, fol. 88r; Steward's riding book, 1501/2, LB/5/3/3, fol. 2r; Steward's riding book, 1502/3, LB/5/3/4, fol. 1r; Steward's riding book, 1503/4, LB/5/3/5, fol. 12v, SA. Often the first folio of a "riding book" contains a number of deceased daughters and sons from Ludlow, and receipts for deceased membership for children can be found in the steward and warden's memoranda book. It should be noted that for the Ludlow guild, the ages of these "children" are not clear. They are described as "daughter of" and "son of" but this does not mean that they were underage—they may simply have been unmarried.

[37] Given the vagaries of source survival and contemporary trends in will-making, the majority of those listed in guild registers cannot be ascribed an extant will. For issues surrounding the survival of wills, see Shona Kelly Wray and Roisin Cossar, "Wills as Primary Sources," in *Understanding Medieval Sources: Using Historical Sources to Discover Medieval Europe*, ed. Joel T. Rosenthal (Abingdon, 2012), 59–71, at 70.

[38] Will of Thomas Eyton of Ashbury, 1504, The National Archives (hereafter TNA): PROB 11/14/169. The location has been mislabeled in the catalogue as "Ashbury" but it is in fact Aylesbury. For his entry into the Ludlow guild, see Steward's riding book, 1503/4, LB/5/3/5, fol. 80r, SA.

[39] Richard M. Asquith, "Piety and Trust: Testators and Executors in Pre-Reformation London" (PhD diss., University of London, 2022), ch. 3.

[40] The accounts of late medieval executors make plain that testators and executors discussed arrangements verbally that were omitted from the last will and testament. Asquith, "Piety and Trust," 166–71.

[41] Will of John Williams of Ludlow, Shropshire, 1513, TNA: PROB 11/17/406.

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of the local guild, no doubt motivated by a sense of familial duty and care.[42] Further afield, John Payne of Worcester, draper, died in 1503, and his will was similarly silent on guild matters—nor does it contain a clause for his executors to use the residue of his estate for the good of his soul.[43] Yet he was enrolled in the Ludlow guild by Anne, his widow and executrix, in 1507 when she joined with her new husband.[44] Anne evidently continued to take measures to facilitate care for Payne's soul years after his death on her own initiative. As Clive Burgess has argued, widows often implemented important post-obit provisions for the souls of their deceased husbands, and the latter were content not to commit detailed arrangements to writing.[45] This probably accounts for many instances of otherwise-unexplained spousal membership initiated by widows.

If no will survives, it is often impossible to tell from which source the impulse originated. Yet the prominent role of the executor is occasionally clear from incidental details in receipts of membership. Take, for example, the enrollment of John Pers and his wife Joan of Chelmarsh into the Ludlow guild in 1517/18: it is clear that Pers' executor, John Dowde, had approached the guild with the intention of enrolling both husband and wife after their deaths, but there was some uncertainty as to whether or not they had begun membership payments during their lifetimes. A note was made to search for evidence of any contributions in the riding books, which recorded anyone who began and made subsequent payments for membership, and, if found there, the guild was to "sende hym [Dowde] worde and he will pay the rest if any."[46] If they had not begun membership payments, which seems to have been the case, they were to be entered as "bothe ded" in the current year's riding book. Other examples abound: the Stratford register records that the unnamed executor of William Benet, rector of Binton (Warwickshire), paid 6s. 8d. for William's soul in 1449/50,[47] while Eleanor Comber's bequest to the Ludlow guild—presumably received from her executor—was noted in a clerk's receipt account within a list of hundreds of membership fees.[48]

Whether family members and executors were exercising their testamentary discretion, enacting specified bequests, or simply fulfilling their multifaceted duties and obligations as living members of the Church Militant (the term ascribed to living members of the Catholic Church who were God's "soldiers" in the battle against sin), postmortem guild membership was evidently a common method to aid the repose of the deceased's soul. But the names of those who paid for the deceased are not always provided in our sources. In the 1513/14 receipts of the Ludlow guild, the names of the deceased William ap Madoc and Gwenlean, his wife, of Welshpool (Montgomeryshire) were accompanied by a note instructing the steward to "loke in the leger for them if thei be brethren or no / if not enter them" followed by a receipt for the full payment of 6s. 8d.[49] This payment, like many others, originated from an unknown source. Who, for example, paid for the enrollment of the French "hardwareman" named John into the Ludlow guild, after he died in the town in 1514/15?[50] In some instances, we might make tentative suggestions as to who or what encouraged particular enrollments. Geoffrey Blythe, Bishop of Coventry and Lichfield and President of

[42] Steward's memorandum book, 1512–1530, LB/5/3/36, fol. 3r, SA. William's other post-obit provisions centered upon Ludlow: he requested burial inside the parish church and he left a tenement in Broad Street to his son, William Williams, "willyng that the seid William kepe on obite yerely for my soule And all xpen soules within the Churche of Ludlowe aforsed." Will of John Williams of Ludlow, Shropshire, 1504, TNA: PROB 11/17/406.

[43] Will of John Payn or Payne, Draper of Worcester, Worcestershire, 1503, TNA: PROB 11/13/599.

[44] Steward's riding book, 1507/8, LB/5/3/9, fol. 49r, SA.

[45] Burgess, *The Right Ordering of Souls*, ch. 4.

[46] Clerk's receipt account, 1511–1521, LB/5/3/40, SA. This manuscript is unpaginated and therefore references to it throughout the article do not contain folio numbers.

[47] Macdonald, *Register of the Guild of the Holy Cross*, 214.

[48] Clerk's receipt account, 1511–1521, LB/5/3/40, SA.

[49] Clerk's receipt account, 1511–1521, LB/5/3/40, SA.

[50] Clerk's receipt account, 1511–1521, LB/5/3/40, SA. The clerk evidently Anglicized his name in the accounts.

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the Council of the Marches, was a great instigator of Ludlow guild membership among the living and it appears that his influence extended to the dead.[51] Ralph Longford, knight, was enrolled into the guild in 1513/14 after his death in 1513. The receipt does not detail who paid for his enrollment and there is no request for enrollment in his will.[52] Yet we might wonder if this was a result of Blythe's involvement with Longford's estate after his death: Longford had bequeathed "the warde custodie and marriage of the heyres apparent" to the bishop.[53] It may have been, then, the relationship between Blythe and Longford that caused Longford's postmortem enrollment—either through Blythe's suggestion to Longford's executors or by enrolling Longford himself.

Like Longford, many of the deceased found in the registers of the great guilds were entered immediately upon or soon after their deaths. This pattern evidently reflects concerns surrounding the suffering of their souls in Purgatory, with a desire to begin guild-based intercession as quickly as possible. Other examples have previously been discussed, and can be multiplied across all guilds: Stephen Jenyns, ex-mayor of London, for instance, enrolled himself and his late wife Margaret in the Luton guild in 1521, the year of her death.[54] In the Ludlow guild, the living tended to wait for—or were perhaps prompted by—the arrival of the guild stewards in their town or village to sign up for membership. But the urgency for intercession that accompanied death meant that the bereaved sometimes took it upon themselves to seek out the services of the Ludlow guild for their deceased relatives and friends. The warden, who kept his own memoranda book, noted instances of members delivering their fee to Ludlow to pay for dead children's membership. This was the case with Robert Spencer of Worcester, who sought out the Palmers to complete the enrollment of his deceased daughter Elisabeth. Elisabeth had initially been noted as a new (deceased) member in the 1512/13 clerk's receipt account at the guild's annual collection in Worcester, with her membership pledged by one Katheryn Parsons.[55] In the same year, the warden's memoranda book noted receipt of 2s. 6d. in full payment by Robert Spencer for his daughter.[56] Robert's payment was made at a different time to the annual steward's visit to Worcester, and most likely took place in Ludlow: the note of payment is found in a memoranda book whose function confined it to the town, unlike the other guild manuscripts that specifically travelled with guild officers across the country.[57]

Another facet of this urgency for intercession apparent in the Ludlow guild records is that the living prioritized the enrollment of deceased kin over their living counterparts and, indeed, over their own membership. This trend is especially clear in cases of familial membership, wherein multiple members—both living and dead—of the same family joined the guild. Hugh Parsons of Bosbury (Herefordshire) was deceased when his name was entered into a receipt book in 1513/14, alongside his wife, Joan, and their son, William.[58] Hugh's fee of 2s. 6d. was paid in full immediately, but Joan and William did not complete their fees of 6s. 8d. at the same time, choosing instead to take advantage of the guild's system

[51] Blythe joined the guild in 1503 and a very large number of his servants joined during his tenure as President of the Council of the Marches. For Blythe's entry and his servants, see Steward's riding book, LB/5/3/5, fol. 79v; LB/5/3/40, SA.

[52] Will of Ralph Longford, knight, 1510/11, Crutchley Muniments, CRU/240, University of Manchester Library.

[53] Will of Ralph Longford, knight, 1510/11.

[54] Gough, *The Register of the Fraternity of Luton*, 91; Wriothesley heraldic collections, Add MS 45131, fol. 87v, British Library. The latter source—a contemporary heraldic compilation by Thomas Wriothesley, Garter King of Arms—preserves an account of her funeral and records the date as "In the yere of our lord M^{l} v^{c} xx^{ti} the xv day of marche." In the old style of dating, this was ten days before the new year on Lady Day (25 March), and therefore has been adjusted for modern dating in the text above.

[55] Clerk's receipt account, 1511–1521, LB/5/3/40, SA. A later hand noted the receipt of 2s. 6d. in payment and *sol. reg.* (paid, registered) was duly noted in the margin.

[56] Steward's memorandum book, 1512–1530, LB/5/3/36, fol. 3v, SA.

[57] Harkes, "Joining a Fraternity," 19–26.

[58] Clerk's receipt account, 1511–1521, LB/5/3/40, SA.

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of payment by instalments, thus allowing for protracted payment over time.[59] Many examples mirror the Parson family's route to enter the Ludlow guild, such as that of Elizabeth Cheyne, widow and gentlewoman of Fen Ditton (Cambridgeshire), who committed her name in 1499/1500, along with William Cheyne and William Adlington, both deceased.[60] Elizabeth contributed 12d. to each man's membership fee but failed to make any contribution to her own, putting funds first and foremost towards the deceased's entry fees—yet another indication that late medieval men and women keenly felt the responsibility to care for the souls of the departed over and above the benefits they would incur from completing their own membership. The nature of this prioritization of the deceased payments was two-fold. First, an urgency to enact purgatorial provisions, presumably more forcefully driven for those with fewer expensive provisions available to them. Second, facilitators understood that their prioritization of the deceased's enrollment (and therefore spiritual benefits) would (hopefully) likewise be prioritized by their family and executors when their own death came—either in the form of postmortem guild membership or an alternative provision.

The character of guild membership was not heterogenous. Although some membership was driven by a sense of urgency, others used membership as an avenue through which they fulfilled their catholic obligation to think of, pray for, and support the dead, even decades after decease. Remembrance of souls languishing in Purgatory never left the living's sphere of reference and obligation in medieval Catholicism, with sermons, material culture, and eschatological tracts working in tandem to remind the living of the existence of Purgatory.[61] Death, and its existing community of the dead, were a continual concern. Certainly, the case of Alice Denys of Bristol, whose enrollment of family members several decades after their deaths was cited above, was not unique in her decision to wait some time before enrolling her deceased kin. In the clerk's receipt book for the Ludlow guild, a payment of 3s. from Roger Gerves of Stanton (Shropshire) was recorded with the note that it related to John Gerves, "decessid in ludlowe xxiiij yeres passid."[62] The scribe was evidently unsure if any payments had been made towards John's membership in the past and, if it was found that none had, he was to be entered "as anew broþer." The foundation of the Luton guild in 1475 was evidently notable and presented the opportunity for men and women to access further intercession for the souls of their loved ones. New entrants included those who had died years earlier: alongside the previously cited example of Sir John Wenlock, the deceased Thomas Hoo, Baron Hoo and Hastings (d. 1455), his deceased wife Elizabeth (d. before 1445), his living daughter Anne (d.1482), and her deceased husband Geoffrey Boleyn (d.1463), mercer and ex-mayor of London, were all enrolled in the guild's first year, alongside several other members of the Hoo family.[63] It is unclear from the records where the impetus for this large-scale enrollment came from, but it is perhaps notable that Boleyn had appointed his widow as one of his executors, and that evidence from the probate accounts of one of his other executors—Sir Ralph Verney, a fellow mercer and mayor—demonstrates that provisions for the mayor's soul had been continually carried out for decades after his death.[64]

[59] The nature of the clerks' receipt accounts means that any payments made by instalment are neither tracked nor consolidated as they are in the guild riding books—and no riding books survive for this time, meaning that we do not know how long Joan and William took to pay (if, indeed, they completed) their fees.

[60] Steward's riding book, 1497–1507, LB/5/3/2, fol. 85v, SA.

[61] For examples, see Duffy, *Stripping of the Altars*, 338–43.

[62] Clerk's receipt account, 1511–1521, LB/5/3/40, SA.

[63] Gough, *The Register of the Fraternity of Luton*, 19. The so-called "Hoo Chapel" in Luton church does not seem to have been named for the Hoo family directly, but rather takes its name from its association with the later owners of the nearby manor of Luton Hoo that had been owned by the family in the Middle Ages. Henry Cobbe, *Luton Church: Historical and Descriptive* (Bedford, 1899), 302, n. 1.

[64] Will of Geffray Boleyn, Mercer and Alderman of Saint Lawrence Jewry, City of London, 1463, TNA: PROB 11/5/12; Asquith, "Piety and Trust," 105–07.

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Continued financial commitment for the souls of the deceased was particularly prominent in the Ludlow guild that allowed members to pay as little as they wished each year.[65] For instance, Lucy Chapman of Shrewsbury enrolled herself and her late husband, William, in the guild in 1504/05.[66] Chapman took advantage of the guild's system of payment by instalments, contributing between 4d. and 20d. annually for a period of eleven years. At this point her "debt" to the guild was satisfied, and she and her husband were both entered in a list of brethren on the official register of admission. The staggered payment plan, however, while undoubtedly financially easier to manage, did not always benefit the payee and the deceased involved. A fellow widow of Shrewsbury, Rose Bist, signed up both herself and her deceased husband William to the Ludlow guild at the same time as Lucy Chapman. Every year following, for a period of twelve years, Rose diligently paid 4d. to the stewards when they arrived in Shrewsbury for the annual collection of membership fees.[67] Yet Rose did not complete the fee required for her and her husband, paying only a total of 4s., and therefore presumably neither were entered on the register—the records certainly lack the customary "*sol. reg.*" that accompanied the entries of those who completed payments. Death was a long-lasting concern of family, and the flexibility of the Ludlow guild uniquely allowed a greater number of men and women to enroll—or at least to initiate the enrollment of—their family, friends, or acquaintances into a community of the living and the dead that numbered thousands.

Facilitators III: Guilds

The success of these guilds in recruiting such large numbers of both the living and the dead was, then, in no small part based upon their sophisticated administrative structures and strategies.[68] Guilds were instrumental in making sure the structures and opportunities were in place for there to be another avenue of communing between the living and the dead beyond chantries, obits, and anniversaries. As such, it is hardly surprising that each guild employed methods that seem particularly geared towards the recruitment of dead members. In this sense, they can be considered the third and final group of facilitators. For a start, where entry fees are recorded, deceased members were often admitted at a lower rate than the living. At Stratford, the stabilization of fees in the 1430s saw deceased membership being charged at 3s. 4d.—half that of their living brethren—and in 1502 this was further reduced to just 20d.[69] For deceased members of the Ludlow guild, arrangements were almost identical to those at Stratford (3s. 4d. entry fee compared to 6s. 8d. for the living), but there was further differentiation: deceased inhabitants of Ludlow were charged only 2s., while those from slightly further afield—within Herefordshire, Worcestershire, Shropshire, and Monmouthshire—were occasionally charged 2s. 6d. Guild officers, however, exercised discretion in the application of discounted fees, and in some instances members from locations outside these catchment areas can be found paying reduced fees. For example, one particular member from Sheen (Middlesex), just outside of London, was enrolled for 2s., and Hol ap John ap Harry of Forden (Montgomeryshire) paid the 2s. 6d. fee.[70] Some deceased brethren in Hereford (as opposed to the surrounding county), however, were charged 3s. 4d.[71] Even

[65] Payment could range from 1d. upwards, and payments could be paused for years before being resumed. Steward's riding books' 1497–1516, LB/5/3/2-10, SA.

[66] Steward's riding book, 1504/5, LB/5/3/6, fol. 7v, SA.

[67] Steward's riding book, 1504/5, LB/5/3/6, fol. 7r, SA.

[68] For example, both the Ludlow and Stratford guilds adjusted their payment structure over time: the former introduced a flexible system of payment by installment (as discussed above) and utilized stewards' rides to collect fees, while the latter changed their fees (settling at 6s. 8d. in the 1430s) and from the 1480s allowed limited payments by installment. Harkes, "Joining a Fraternity," 26–29; Macdonald, *Register of the Guild of the Holy Cross*, 20–21.

[69] Macdonald, *Register of the Guild of the Holy Cross*, 21.

[70] Steward's riding book, 1497–1507, LB/5/3/2, fol. 147r, SA.

[71] Steward's riding book, 1497–1507, LB/5/3/2, fol. 1v, SA.

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those in Shropshire itself might pay the 3s. 4d. fee, as was the case for a deceased member from Wistanstow, only ten miles from Ludlow.[72] But, despite these variations, the point remains that membership fees for the dead were significantly lower than those for the living, and that these guilds were employing clear tactics to encourage deceased enrollment. It is possible that the same practice also operated in other great guilds, but no evidence for this survives.[73]

The Ludlow guild also allowed for a delayed form of repayment, based on sureties and pledges, that seems to have been particularly suitable for the enrolling of deceased brethren. In a single extant memoranda book compiled during the wardenship of Richard Downe (1508–34), two folios relate to debts paid to the guild and "Detters for Brebern Departid," covering the years 1511–13.[74] These unique lists reveal that individuals frequently stood surety for deceased brethren, and we can probably infer that this practice was more widespread. Of twenty-one entries relating to fees for the dead, thirteen were pledged with the promise of later repayment, or accepting an item as a security for a loan of the membership fee.[75] In some instances, it was evidently the kin of the deceased who pledged: John Stone offered surety for the entry of the deceased Alice, wife of William Stone, probably his mother.[76] Sir Thomas Walker pledged the 2s. fee for Anne Dale (alias Walker) and this debt was duly noted as complete when a later hand marked that 2s. had been received by the hand of the guild steward and Anne's name had been transferred to the register of admission.[77] More notable, however, are the instances in which an identifiable guild official stood surety—this occurred on seven out of the thirteen instances of pledging. For instance, the entry fee of 2s. for "The moder of John Pike ded" was pledged by "Maister Warden."[78] On one occasion, it was recorded that the debt for which the warden stood surety was repaid with a towel worth the 2s. fee.[79] As these payments suggest, pledges were generally made not only for the dead, but specifically for the *local* dead, as indicated by the 2s. fee.[80] It was a system based on personal and localized knowledge and trust, created by regular attendance at guild feasts and through adjunct relationships forged though the guild's role as a local landlord with an extensive rental portfolio.[81] The creation and maintenance of local networks was an important by-product of membership of religious guilds, and the benefits of those networks are demonstrated through guild officers providing an advance on membership for those without the ready cash. This practice also speaks to the urgency with which intercessory prayers for the dead might be cultivated: pledging presumably ensured that the guild would undertake some form of commemoration for the deceased even before

[72] Steward's riding book, 1497–1507, LB/5/3/2, fol. 120v, SA.

[73] It may be that deceased were enrolled at a 12d. charge for the guild at Knowle but there is insufficient evidence to say this with any certainty. It is unknown what the fees (for living or dead) were for the Luton guild. Bickley, *The Register of the Guild of Knowle*, xiv; Tearle, ed., *Accounts of the Guild of the Holy Trinity*, xxix.

[74] Steward's memoranda book, 1512–1530, LB/5/3/36, fols. 1r.–3v, SA.

[75] Religious guilds in England could take on the form of proto-banks, issuing loans: Rosser, "Communities of Parish and Guild," 38; Swanson, "A Medieval Staffordshire Fraternity," 51. In the case of the Ludlow guild, surviving evidence outlines securities in the form of pots, towels, and girdles to beads and brooches, with notation when the pledges were fulfilled. Steward's memoranda book, 1512–1530, LB/5/3/36, SA.

[76] Steward's memoranda book, 1512–1530, LB/5/3/36, fol. 3r, SA.

[77] Steward's memoranda book, 1512–1530. The guild steward in question was Walter Rogers.

[78] Steward's memoranda book, 1512–1530, LB/5/3/36, fol. 3v, SA.

[79] Steward's memoranda book, 1512–1530, LB/5/3/36, fol. 3r, SA. Paying for membership in the form of material goods occurred with regularity in the Ludlow guild and other fraternities: Harkes, "Joining a Fraternity," 176; Swanson, "A Medieval Staffordshire Fraternity," 58–59.

[80] Although this was not always the case—the unusually high 6s. 8d. fee for William Glover, "ded," was pledged by Thomas Clonton, one of the guild's stewards, and suggests that even if Glover was not local he may have been personally known by Clonton. Steward's memoranda book, 1512–1530, LB/5/3/36, fol. 3r, SA.

[81] For the importance of feasting in creating bonds and relationships, see Rosser, "Going to the Fraternity Feast," 430–46. See also Richard Goddard, "Medieval Business Networks: St Mary's Guild and the Borough Court in Later Medieval Nottingham," *Urban History* 40, no. 1 (February 2013), 3–27.

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their full membership payment had been made. This might have been especially prudent in instances where executors had yet to receive ready cash from the estate but wished to begin the intercessory process.

The Attractions of Postmortem Guild Membership

Enrolling the dead into guilds—a phenomenon that this article has demonstrated was both widespread and of great importance—was one aspect of a vibrant late medieval commemorative culture. Predicated on concern for a soul's state in Purgatory, medieval women and men sought to secure as many provisions for their souls and those of their loved ones as was feasible or as befitted their status. Sustained and multiplied intercession through both prayers and the performance of masses was an effective means of mitigating the pains of Purgatory, although there were a multitude of avenues to prepare for life after death. The strategies that individuals took were varied and extensive, demonstrative of the flexibility of the late medieval Church. Membership of a guild was one piece in the jigsaw of purgatorial preparation, but has been overshadowed in historical literature by a focus on the more obvious funerals, obits, anniversaries, and masses and—in relation to guilds specifically—the provisions set out by guild ordinances.[82] Yet these provisions, to which we might automatically turn when considering the reasons why men and women enrolled their deceased kin and friends, do not hold the answer to understanding this distinctly late-medieval trend of deceased enrollment. Where they survive, ordinances generally focus on the deaths of *existing* guild members (in the form of regulations for funerals, vigils, and masses) and make no mention of how they supported members who predeceased their entry into the guild.[83] The only applicable ordinance for those who were already deceased is the common decree that guild priests would perform masses for the dead.[84] The obits, chantries, and anniversaries required additional expenditure and were only infrequently combined with deceased enrollment.

The main attraction encouraging the enrollment of the deceased in these regional and national guilds was undoubtedly the expansive network of members who represented potential 'pray-ers' for the souls of new brethren. Although the numbers presented in the first section, above, relate to the total known membership of each guild over decades, it is clear that at any one time each guild would have been comprised of thousands of members. The geographical spread of brethren within great guilds did not negate their obligation to pray for their fellow brethren, and neither did the relative lack of interaction with the guild that must have accompanied it. Semi-regular encounters with the guild—such as at the annual feast, or upon the visitation of guild officers if a system like Ludlow's annual "rides" was in place—or even connections to the guild's location in secular dealings (such as through trade or commercial investment) would have served to remind brethren, no matter where they resided, of their duty to pray for those facing purgatorial suffering in death. The universality of the duty to pray for the dead, moreover, and of purgatorial imagery in medieval England (for instance in the ubiquitous images of the Last Judgement in ecclesiastical decorative schemes), needed no geographical homogeneity to bind brethren together in obligation.

For a modest entry fee or an annual subscription, therefore, medieval men and women hoped to secure the perpetuation of their kin or friends' memory, bolstered by the collective

[82] See above, n. 3.

[83] Guild ordinances usually survive in the form of returns to Parliament, as decreed by Richard II in 1377/78. This is the manner in which the Ludlow and Stratford guild ordinances survive. Ludlow: guild of palmers of St Mary, 1388–1389, TNA: C 47/45/392; Stratford: guild of the Holy Cross, 1388–1389, TNA: C 47/46/440. There is an additional, later set of ordinances from 1442/03 for the Stratford guild that was printed in Thomas Fisher, "Gilde of Holy Cross at Stratford," *Gentleman's Magazine* Part 1 (1835): 165.

[84] Ludlow: guild of palmers of St Mary, 1388–1389, TNA: C 47/45/392; Fisher, "Gilde of Holy Cross at Stratford," 165.

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prayers of current and future members; even their predecessors, in fact, languishing in Purgatory, might be expected to intercede on their behalf. Thomas More, in his *Supplication of Souls* (1529) and reflecting a widely held belief, stressed how those within Purgatory prayed for the souls of those on earth, with angels carrying "vp our prayers to god & good sayntes for vs," all for the benefit of the living: "our prayer ys for you [the living] so feruent / that ye can nowhere fynde eny such affeccyon vppon erth."[85] At any one time it seems likely that deceased members outnumbered the living, with each of the three states of the Church working in collaboration: the Church Militant and the Church Suffering collaborating to harness the intercession of the Church Triumphant.[86] That the universe was thus ordered was an established theological notion in late medieval Europe, in part grown from discussions by leading theologians in the thirteenth century, such as Robert Grosseteste, but that by the fifteenth century had been more widely adopted.[87]

Guild masses would also have been performed daily by employed chaplains for the benefit of all souls—past and present—that were members of the guild. In an example that is unusually explicitly in referring to this practice, Isabel Porter paid the entry fees of Thomas and Alice Knyght to the Stratford guild in 1416/17, "to be in the prayers of the chaplains forever."[88] Additional commemoration for deceased members was likely performed by the guild priests through the regular reading aloud of the names of brothers and sisters long since deceased from the organization's register or bede roll—ostensibly a form of prayer. This type of commemoration, which is noted for a number of other guilds, leaves little surviving documentary evidence among the great guilds, but it is likely that the admission registers, which as we have seen listed brethren both living and dead upon enrollment, acted in this manner.[89] This audible recitation of names would have fixed the plight of the deceased in the minds and prayers of anyone present in the church or guild chapel, and it may even have been accompanied by a special commemorative service.[90] Such communal prayers must have been a great draw for friends and family wishing to ease the suffering of their loved ones' souls.

In Luton, commemoration took a more individualistic approach, with the guild providing a *dirige* (a service of matins for the dead) for named guild members who had recently died. This practice is unusual, in some respects, as the *dirige* was usually performed on the morning before a funeral (and for month minds—a commemorative service held a month after death—and anniversaries), whereas here the Luton guild provided these services for those already deceased and buried, but not on their anniversary.[91] Notably, this was a benefit that was open to all members: the listed *diriges* include those who had enrolled in their lifetime as well as those who were entered in the year of their decease. Over 1,350 of these services were recorded in a twenty-one year period in the early sixteenth century.[92] Most of the dead recorded as being commemorated in this way were from Luton and the surrounding region, but several notable cases included seventeen from London and a handful from

[85] Frank Manley, Germain Marc'Hadour, Richard Marius and Clarence H. Miller, eds., *The Complete Works of St. Thomas More*, Volume 7 (New Haven and London, 1990), 227. The best discussion of concepts on late medieval Purgatory in a parochial setting is to be found in Burgess, "'A Fond Thing Vainly Invented'", 56–84.

[86] That is, the living who were engaged in a constant battle against the wiles of the Devil, the souls languishing in Purgatory, the college of saints in Heaven.

[87] For example, see works by Robert Grosseteste on the ordering of the universe. He uses the language of the Church Militant in addresses, commentaries, and letters, such as Grosseteste's letter to Hugh of Pattishall in 1235/36 and his draft address to the Archbishop of Canterbury in 1239: see F. Mantello and Joseph Goering, *Letters of Robert Grosseteste, Bishop of Lincoln* (Toronto, 2009), 128, 241. His address to the papacy in 1250 references this ordering, including the Church Militant: see Jennifer Jahner, *Literature and Law in the Era of Magna Carta* (Oxford, 2019), 148.

[88] Macdonald, *Register of the Guild of the Holy Cross*, 66.

[89] For examples of guild bede rolls, see Rosser, *Art of Solidarity*, 220–23.

[90] Such as the "General Mind" celebrated at All Saints', Bristol: Burgess, *The Right Ordering of Souls*, 196–201.

[91] Nicholas Orme, *Going to Church in Medieval England* (New Haven and London, 2021), 209.

[92] Tearle, ed., *Accounts of the Guild of the Holy Trinity*, xxxviii.

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Boston (Lincolnshire), Colchester (Essex), and Kendal (Westmorland).[93] The guild at Luton was paying for these services—not the members—and therefore, although the initiative to notify the guild of a member's death was in the hands of the executor or family, the guild itself shouldered the financial and salvific burden of its own accord, presumably funded from membership payments or rental incomes. Given the potential for hundreds to be performed each year, services of this nature were probably "low" or spoken *diriges*, as most masses celebrated by guild priests would have been, but it seems likely that they remained an attractive incentive to enroll the dead in the guild.[94] *Diriges* for individuals must have been attractive: they were services where the entirety of the attending clergy and laity were united in prayer for a single individual, harnessing that spiritual power for one instead of many. Luton's finances were healthy, with minimal outlay (especially compared to the Ludlow guild, whose recruitment rides required not insignificant expenditure): with the cost of *diriges* low (between 2s. 3d. and 2s. 7d.), it was evidently an expense the guild was able to shoulder without it being a significant drain on their resources.[95]

There were further reasons that deceased enrollment proved so evidently popular; of these, there are three that blended practical worries with more personal desires. First, it was quite clearly a route that ensured the longevity of care for loved ones' souls. Guilds, by the fourteenth century, were firmly established as an integral facet in the lay-initiated developments of the medieval Church. By the fifteenth century, some guilds had been around for several hundred years (or at least claimed to be of such antiquity) and the durability and stability of such institutions, particularly the "great" guilds, was an important consideration in employing membership as part of a strategy of perpetual commemoration.[96] Both the living and the dead required their commemoration to be "regular and failsafe," and established guilds were a safety net for individual commemoration if the stability of less well-secured forms of commemoration was a concern.[97] This, moreover, serves simultaneously to explain the continued influx of deceased brethren into England's large guilds right up to the Reformation and puts paid to assertions of stagnation preceding their official dissolution: the longevity of guilds ensured intercession for decades, sometimes centuries, and was perceived to be a stable investment for both the living and the dead. Not only were individual guilds viewed as reliable, but the *practice* of using guilds to care for the deceased was one of some antiquity: the English had been using guilds to pray for the dead since the Anglo-Saxon period.[98]

[93] Tearle, ed., *Accounts of the Guild of the Holy Trinity*, xxxviii.

[94] Orme, *Going to Church in Medieval England*, 51. High *diriges* were more expensive and of a longer duration, requiring significant funds: Vanessa Harding, *The Dead and the Living in Paris and London, 1500–1670* (Cambridge, 2002), 189.

[95] For the years in which guild accounts survive, Luton always brought a substantial sum forward from the previous year, indicating a very healthy reserve of ready cash. For a breakdown of their income and expenditure see Tearle, ed., *Accounts of the Guild of the Holy Trinity*, lxiv–lxv. For the Ludlow guild, in some years the expenses of travelling to collect membership fines was almost half of the total collected from members: see, for example, Warden's account, 1540/1, LB/5/3/33, SA.

[96] For example, the Ludlow guild claimed to be founded in the time of Edward the Confessor, although this has been described as "an invention of the donor's [of the main window in the guild's chapel] imagination": Christian D. Liddy, "The Palmers' Guild Window, St. Lawrence's Church, Ludlow: A Study of the Construction of Guild Identity in Medieval Stained Glass," *Transactions of the Shropshire Archaeological and Historical Society* 72 (1997): 26–37, at 31. The extant documentary evidence suggests a more conventional date of the mid-thirteenth century: "Lists of grants to the Guild," c. 1275, LB/5/2/1443, SA.

[97] Burgess, "Obligations and Strategy," 294. It has been suggested that the lesser gentry of Warwickshire joined the guild at Stratford as an insurance policy in case chantries in small parishes met with failure: Christine Carpenter, "'Town and 'Country': The Stratford Guild and Political Networks of Fifteenth-century Warwickshire," in *The History of an English Borough: Stratford-upon-Avon 1196–1996*, ed. Robert Bearman (Stroud, 1997), 62–79, at 74.

[98] See ordinances for the Anglo-Saxon guilds, and discussions in relation to their role in supporting dead members, in Gervase Rosser, "The Anglo-Saxon Gilds," in *Minsters and Parish Churches: The Local Church in Transition, 950–1100*, ed. John Blair (Oxford, 1988), 31; Rory Naismith, "Gilds, States, and Society in the Early Middle Ages," *Early Medieval Europe* 28, no. 4 (November 2020), 649–50; Victoria Thompson, *Death and Dying in Anglo-Saxon England* (Woodbridge, 2004), 112–13.

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Enrolling the dead in guilds may also have been a matter of practicality, as it was evidently one of the cheaper forms of commemoration. The admission rates for English guilds varied considerably, from 4d. to £5. While the exclusivity of guilds has been maintained in scholarship, there is no doubt that joining a guild was significantly less expensive than other forms of commemoration, such as founding a chantry that might have cost as much as £7 *per annum*.[99] This sum either had to be set aside up front (in the case of fixed-term foundations) or had to be funded from a lucrative landed endowment (if envisioned as being established in perpetuity). While evidently opening up forms of intercession for those of limited means, the lower cost of guild membership also made it a feasible choice to "add on" to more elaborate provisions. It could form one strand of a multipronged commemorative strategy and would no doubt have been an attractive and sensible option for executors charged with distributing the residue of a testator's estate for the health of their soul. As such, membership of multiple guilds was a distinct feature of medieval society, for both the living and the dead —a repercussion, no doubt, of the affordability of guild membership for deceased enrollment. For example, William and Joan Honscote of Stratford joined the Stratford guild in 1466/67 with William's father (living) and mother (deceased). In 1486/87, they all four are found joining the Knowle guild, with William's father having by now joined his wife (William's mother) in death.[100] William and Joan were evidently enrolling deceased parents in the guilds that they chose to join in their lifetime and in doing so continued their familial relationship after death.

Behind the financial payments lay a series of interactions that informs us of the priorities and beliefs of medieval society in regard to remembering the dead. The contribution of a sum of money towards deceased kin's guild membership was, at each installment, an act of commemoration itself.[101] While not recognized with the same theological or spiritual significance as an obit or anniversary, it was an annual act of remembering, socially and personally, the death of a loved one. And, crucially, it encouraged both the individual paying for the deceased and the guild officer collecting the fee to reflect upon the death of the individual and no doubt say a prayer for their soul. The occurrence of paying a fee annually (or quarterly, depending on the guild) gave the payee an opportunity to renew their relationship with the guild. The renewal of that relationship led to a more personal remembrance; a single lump sum led to the entrance of the soul on a register or bede roll, while multiple interactions between the payee and the guild officer(s) over a period of time reinforced the bond between family and institution.[102] The regular nature of payment for the deceased's membership provided an additional sense of purpose for those grieving the deceased.

Conclusion

As is the case today, death caused a rupture in medieval society. It may have been one potentially lessened by the promise of rebirth and salvation, but this was not without its

[99] The Ludlow guild's surviving archive challenges the notion that large guilds were indeed exclusive in nature, as has been suggested by Duffy, *Stripping of the Altars*, 152–53; Bainbridge, *Gilds in the Medieval Countryside*, 137; Farnhill, *Guilds and the Parish Community*, 131. While some were limited, we cannot apply a broad brushstroke of exclusivity to all medieval guilds: Harkes, "Joining a Fraternity," 33–36; Barbara A. Hanawalt and Ben M. McRee, "The Guilds of *Homo Prudens* in Late Medieval England," *Continuity and Change* 7, no. 2 (August 1992), 163–79, at 166–69. For the average costs of chantries, anniversaries, commemorative windows, and aisles, see Burgess, "Obligations and Strategy," 298, 304–05.

[100] Macdonald, *Register of the Guild of the Holy Cross*, 258. Bickley, *The Register of the Guild of Knowle*, 92.

[101] There is an exception, of course, for the Ludlow guild, in that it was not *always* an annual act: payment could be skipped for a year or series of years and resumed. It was still an act of commemoration when it was performed, however, even if it was not on an annual basis. In Stratford, installments were usually paid throughout the year so remembrance had a shorter timeframe than for those paying for membership of the Ludlow guild.

[102] This is a feature of both early and late medieval England where individuals and families worked to maintain relationships with religious houses over decades: Foxhall-Forbes, *Heaven and Earth*, 243.

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impediments. Much ink has been spilled in attempts to reconstruct the methods by which medieval men and women mitigated the suffering they would invariably face in Purgatory, and this article is not the first to emphasize the role played by the friends and family of the deceased—those who were "left behind." But it has brought to light an as-yet barely recognized—and important—facet of this commemorative culture in the form of postmortem enrollment in national guilds across the kingdom. In a way, the voluntary nature of medieval guilds, which has been stressed so much in recent decades of scholarship, loses its conviction for it only considers the living when it is evident that guilds were as much organizations of the dead as the quick.[103] For many of the dead, the enrollment of their souls into guilds was not their own decision, but the decision of those left behind.

The purpose of this study has not been to argue for the vitality of the late medieval Church (although the evidence provided can be used to support such an interpretation), but rather to emphasize the key role that guilds played within the medieval Church. In the membership patterns of the deceased in England's great guilds, the theological idea of the tripartite Catholic community—Triumphant, Militant, and Suffering—working as one body was realized: a clear embodiment of medieval ideas of faith and practice. Although perhaps only a small contribution (at least in financial terms) towards easing the suffering of a soul, the networks of brethren both living and dead offered by these guilds, and their place within late medieval society, means we should consider seriously the contemporary importance of deceased guild membership. After all, the pre-Reformation Church worked on the principles of accumulation and collaboration—and in this guild membership sat squarely alongside more "impressive" forms of commemoration.

Over this, the present study has sought to delineate precisely the methods by which this was undertaken, concurrently revealing the interplay of both individual concern and organizational initiatives. In doing so, the relationships that the living maintained with the dead crystallizes as an ongoing, often decades-long, attachment. Late medieval guilds were a conduit through which the living and dead maintained their cycle of obligation to care for each other, echoing trends in both the early and late medieval English regular Church, where grants to monastic institutions were made for the benefit of family members' souls, not solely the benefactor—and likewise a feature of late medieval chantries in parish churches.[104] In the context of late medieval England, remembering the dead was both a personal and communal responsibility—a dichotomy resolutely illustrated by the widespread and important phenomenon of postmortem guild membership.

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[103] Rosser, "Communities of Parish and Guild," 35.
[104] Foxhall-Forbes, *Heaven and Earth*, 228.

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