



**Bawtry Heritage Group**

Preserving our Past for the Future

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# **ROBERT DE MORTON**

**c.1339 – 1396**

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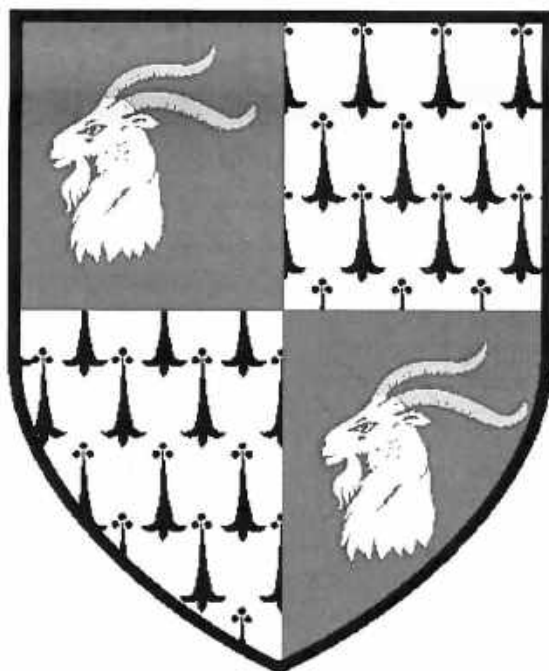
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Tickhill & District Local History Society

# Robert de Morton

c.1339-1396



History Profile Paper 2

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## **Note**

Although Robert de Morton was called a 'knight of the shire' in his capacity as a member of several parliaments in the reigns of Edward III and Richard II, the Calendar of Patent Rolls, the Calendar of Fine Rolls and John of Gaunt's Register described him as an 'esquire' not a knight. Nor did Robert refer to himself as a knight. Consequently this Paper does not add a title to his name.

## **Acknowledgements**

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Page 5: photograph of Peveril Castle © Martin Skidmore

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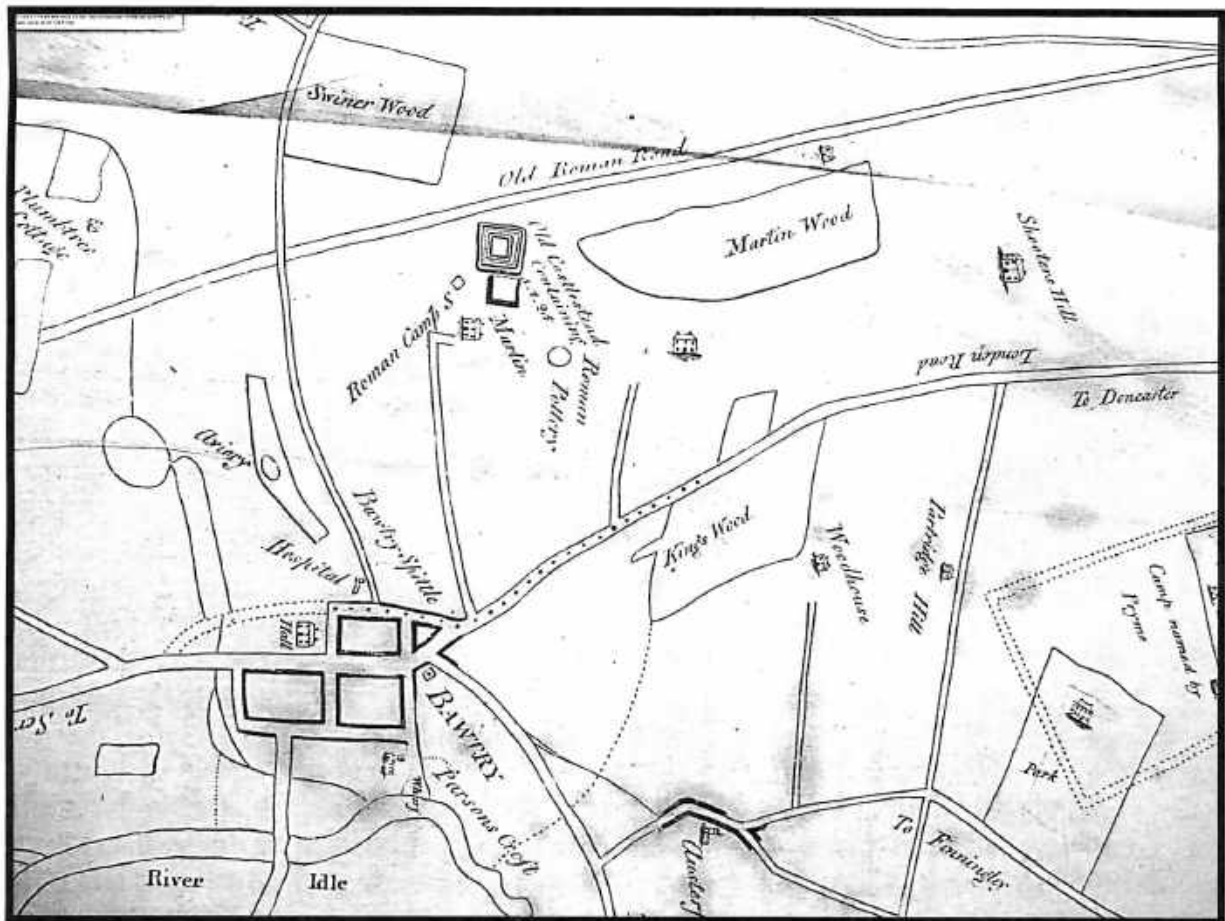
Page 10: photograph of the effigy of Cardinal Morton, source and © Canterbury Historical and Archaeological Society website: <http://www.canterbury-archaeology.org.uk/>

**Cover illustration:** Coat of arms of the Morton family with a goat's head in silver on a red background in the first and fourth quarters and ermine in the second and third quarters.

## Introduction

This Paper explores the career of Robert de Morton, an influential and wealthy royal official who lived in Bawtry where his ancestors settled in the mid-13th Century. He owned a great deal of land, some of it in Bawtry, Harworth and Tickhill. He served Edward III and his grandson Richard II as well as John of Gaunt, son of Edward III, much of his work being in Yorkshire, Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire. Through the orders, commissions and permanent responsibilities given to Robert de Morton it is possible to see how the royal family ran its affairs, obtaining funds and goods, maintaining control of its properties and ensuring good order, for example in keeping rivers navigable. The power wielded by Robert is also apparent, from appointing and sacking people to imprisoning them without trial. Apart from his responsibilities outlined in this Paper, he was also a Justice of the Peace, Sheriff of Nottingham and Derby in 1362 and 1376-7 and a Member of Parliament for Nottinghamshire in several parliaments in the reigns of Edward III and Richard II.

Robert was a benefactor in his local community, some donations being for the Hospital of St Mary Magdalene near the centre of Bawtry. The Paper concludes with brief details of some of Robert's descendants who followed him into government service, as he had followed his father, Thomas, who was Secretary to Edward III. The Morton family is remembered in Bawtry through the use of the name Martin, a later version of Morton, as shown in the map of Bawtry below.



*This map is taken from Peck's "Topographical history and description of Bawtry and Thorne" published in 1813. It shows the Morton (Martin) home near the former Roman Camp and the site of the Hospital at Bawtry Spittle which received funds from Robert de Morton.*

## Work for Edward III and Richard II

One of Robert's first commissions for Edward III came in 1358. The King had learned that in many counties, including Yorkshire, he was not receiving income from cloth which had been dyed. This cloth was supposed to carry a seal showing that money had been paid by the dyers to the King. Robert was one of seven men in Yorkshire tasked with ensuring that money was collected and that cloth was not to be moved until sealed and the money owed paid in full.

Robert received a series of orders, recorded in the Calendar of Patent Rolls, to assist in obtaining services or goods on behalf of the King. For example: on 25 March 1360 he had to pay the expenses of a master miner and two workmen sent from the Peak (the Castleton area) 'to survey the mines of lead in Richmond'; on 20 July 1362 he had to purvey in the counties of Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire sufficient lead for the King's works at the Palace of Westminster and other places and 'to arrest and imprison until further order all persons found contrariant or rebellious therein'. Robert continued to supply lead as recorded in a receipt sent to him by William de Sleaford, Clerk of the Works at Westminster for 20 fothers of lead (almost 20 tons of lead) dated 25 January 1369-24 January 1370. On 1 June 1368 along with Stephen Romylowe (Constable of Nottingham Castle) Robert had to survey the purchase of 1,200 sheaves of arrows which the King lately ordered the Sheriff of Nottingham and Derby to buy in his bailiwick and bring to the Tower of London and 'to testify as to the cost incurred about the said buying and certify the King thereof in the chancery'.

*The illustration of an archer, right, shows a barbed arrow. In the Middle Ages non-barbed arrows were also used in warfare to pierce plate armour. It is not clear from the above order which type of arrow was to be supplied to the Tower of London*



Ensuring waterways were kept navigable on behalf of the King is also listed in orders recorded in the Calendar of Patent Rolls. Robert was one of four or five men who had joint responsibility for the following commissions :

- River Idle (1363 and 1373) - to make an inquisition into the River Idle so obstructed with herbage and filth that nearby crops and fields have been inundated. Those who will benefit have to do the cleaning. The river enabled goods such as wool and lead to be shipped from Bawtry to Grimsby.
- Fossdyke (1365) - to survey the dyke and find who is bound to cleanse and repair it and compel them to do this.
- River Trent (1371) - to investigate obstructions in the Trent, including weirs, dams, mills, and stakes for catching fish between Nottingham and Keneldferye (Kinnard Ferry, now known as Owston Ferry).
- River Don (1382) - to investigate a complaint that John de Doncaster and others had not cleared the river of obstructions, such as bridges and weirs, leading to a reduction in the width of the river (which should have been 16 feet and a barleycorn ( $\frac{1}{3}$  inch)) between Merskland (marshland) and the Isle of Axholme preventing the passage of ships to the Trent. Robert and colleagues had to cause the removal of the obstructions at 'the expense of the men of those parts'. John de Doncaster had been appointed in 1343 to a commission to investigate and remove obstructions in the River Don between Thorne and the Isle of Axholme. (The River Don split in two after Stainforth; one channel went east via Thorne to the Isle of Axholme to join the River Trent. The other branch went north and entered the River Aire near Snaith.)

One special commission issued on 12 July 1373 when Robert was deputy Constable of Nottingham Castle was to receive two sons of Charles de Blois who had been held prisoner in Devizes Castle. Robert was to keep them 'at his peril' in Nottingham Castle. Other tasks involved checking on episodes of trespass, theft and damage suffered by several royal estates. For example, on 10 November 1373 following a complaint by John of Gaunt to the King, Robert was one of seven men to investigate damage at High Peak in Derbyshire where trees had been felled and removed, deer stolen and the Duke's men assaulted.

Apart from one-off commissions, Robert was granted several permanent posts by Edward III and Richard II or had other posts confirmed by them:

- 28 January 1366 grant for life for Robert of the keeping of the Sherwood Forest, the parks of Clipston and Beskwod, the manor of Clipston, the King's lodge in the park of Beskwod, taking yearly for parkers and palisers all money from the lawing of dogs (cutting several claws on the front paws of dogs in the forest to stop them running at deer) and from cheminage (a toll paid for passage through the forest especially for carts and pack animals) within the said forest and also £10 yearly of the farm and manor of Arnall in the said forest with as much dry wood for fuel as he shall require for his stay in the said forest. Two years later as part of these responsibilities Robert had to repair the King's chapel at Clipston and the chapel of St Edwin in the forest.
- 28 October 1371 Constable of High Peak Castle and Chief Forester for life.
- 27 October 1383 confirmation of appointment made in 1379 by Edmund, Earl of Cambridge, for life as Chief Bailiff of the manor and lordship of Hatfield and Steward of the Earl's lands in Yorkshire (including Conisbrough Castle where Robert had been Steward for more than a decade), granting Robert £20 yearly. Edmund became 1st Duke of York in 1385.
- 28 April 1388 confirmation of Robert's appointment by Alexander Neville, Archbishop of York 1374-1388, as Steward and Bailiff for life of his lands in the county of Nottingham. Robert could appoint and remove ministers and servants of the Archbishop in Nottinghamshire and even appoint a deputy if unable to carry out these duties. He was to be paid 20 marks a year and no one should 'intermeddle or disturb him in his work'. The former archbishop died in 1392.



*Pevelevil Castle, left, formerly known as High Peak Castle, now in ruins on a ridge above Castleton. The castle was granted to John of Gaunt with other properties in exchange for Richmond Castle in 1372. John of Gaunt had little use for High Peak and had some material, such as lead, removed and taken to Pontefract Castle in 1374. However, the keep, built by Henry II, was retained to serve as a court house.*



## Work for John of Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster

From 1370 Robert was appointed as receiver in Yorkshire for John of Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster. This considerable responsibility involved collecting all the monies due to the Duke from his estates and then paying for repairs to his properties, making payments to his retainers, paying for provisions, such as red wine for the Duke's household and delivering communications from the Duke. The balance had to be submitted to the receiver general or the treasurer of the Duke's household. Robert's responsibilities also involved being surveyor of all the works at the Duke's properties. This emphasises that Robert was a trusted, senior official.



*John of Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster*

John of Gaunt's Register provides a record of all the orders issued by him, as well as giving the places where the orders were issued by this very peripatetic son of Edward III. Tickhill Castle first features in the Register in 1374, two years after it came into John of Gaunt's possession. On 1 May while staying at his London home, The Savoy Palace, John wrote to Robert. John noted that he understood that the walls and tower of Tickhill Castle as well as rooms, houses and the bridge were very ruinous and in great need of repair. He ordered that the tower, the room known as the garret and the room above the gateway should be covered with lead and all the other faults should be repaired as Robert saw fit. (1524) (Numbers in brackets refer to the paragraphs in the published transcriptions of the Register.)

Almost five months later John of Gaunt made a brief visit to Tickhill Castle en route from Wentbridge, where he was on 21 September 1374, to Gringley where he arrived on 22 September 1374. This might suggest that he was checking that repairs to the castle had been completed during the summer. It is possible that he stayed at Tickhill Castle on the night of 21 September. Before moving to Gringley, he issued several orders from Tickhill Castle on 22 September to officials, for example, in Pontefract and Knaresborough. (1519-1523)

Other examples of Robert's involvement with building work on behalf of the Duke include:

- On 5 May 1373 at The Savoy: Order to Robert de Morton, esquire, receiver in the county of York, to undertake repairs to the bridge, towers and walls at Knaresborough Castle. (1280) On 26 June 1373 John of Gaunt repeated his order about repairs to Knaresborough Castle and also added that repairs were needed to the mills and fences at Knaresborough. (1287)
- 26 September 1381 at Rothwell: Order ....to pay all reasonable expenses for the erection of new rooms between the gate and the kitchen in the manor of Cowick, as the duke has 'devised' to master John, his chief carpenter there....(598)

A range of orders sent to Robert related to making payments to the Duke's staff, such as:

- On 15 April 1380 at Kenilworth: Order .... to pay what is due of fees, annuities, pensions and wages granted by the duke to knights, squires and others, and to continue to do so until further orders, receiving sufficient letters of acquittance from those to whom he makes payments (233).

- On 2 February 1381 at The Savoy: Order ....to pay to Sir Richard Baldirston 20 marks a year promised him for life from the seignory of Tickhill, for being in the duke's service, in equal portions at Easter and Michaelmas....(442)
- On 18 June 1381 at Berwick-on-Tweed: Order ....to pay till further notice reasonable wages for himself and his men to Sir Walter Urswyk, constable of the castle of Tickhill, or his lieutenant, whom the duke has ordered to stay in the castle to guard it with twenty men-at-arms and archers; to buy victuals detailed in the enclosed bill to stock the castle, and deliver them to the constable or his lieutenant, making indenture between them....This letter to be his warrant for the payment of these wages. (535)

An example of Robert receiving payment on behalf of the Duke:

- On 25 July 1381 at Pontefract: Letter of obligation by which John Dypre, Robert de Swylington and Walter Urswyk, knights; William de Bughbrigg, John de Yerdeburgh and William Oke, Clerks; Thomas de Hesulden and William Baillay, esquires, and each of them singly are bound to pay Robert de Morton or his attorney 1,000 marks sterling (a mark was worth two thirds of one pound) at Pontefract, in the feast of the Purification following. To which payment the aforesaid bind themselves, their heirs and executors, and affix their seals. (931)

Robert also had to pay for provisions, in particular red (vermeil) wine, for the Duke:

- On 23 July 1381 at Pontefract Castle: Order....to pay Walter Frost of Hull £31 6s 8d for that sum which he has spent for three barrels of vermeil wine, bought by him and given away by the duke, not charging the treasurer of the household nor the butler...(574)
- On 2 April 1382 at Hertford Castle: Order....to pay £18 sterling to Walter Frost of Hull for two barrels of vermeil wine bought of him for the duke's use.....(708)

(On 28 October 1383 Walter Frost was appointed deputy in the port of Hull to the King's chief butler John Slegh. On 9 June 1388 Walter Frost was one of two collectors of duty from all ports between Grimsby and Scarborough: 3 shillings for each tun of wine (a tun was a large cask containing 252 gallons of wine) imported and 12d on every pound of other merchandise granted to the King in the last parliament.)

Robert also forwarded correspondence from the Duke:

- On 4 September 1380 at Leicester: Order ....to deliver to various abbots and priors in the county and elsewhere, the letters sent to him, so that the duke may be duly certified of their replies at his next coming to the castle of Pontefract, reasonable expenses allowed. (368)

An example of Robert's power and influence can be seen in a petition to Richard II dated c.1377 in which Alexander and Alice Martyn of Hatfield requested assistance in their dispute with Robert. They claimed that Robert had committed various offences against them. Even though they had letters of protection from Edward III, Robert had among other things ousted them from their lands, imprisoned Alexander in Conisbrough Castle for one week and destroyed and wasted other lands. The Martyns felt unable to get justice as no one dared oppose Robert and royal letters sent to him under the privy seal had been ignored. This petition had no detrimental effect on Robert's career with John of Gaunt. Indeed, in 1380 Robert was listed as a member of the Duke's retinue and in June 1383 rather than stay at Tickhill, John of Gaunt visited Bawtry. It is likely that he stayed with Robert.



## Acts of charity

The Poll Tax Return of 1379 shows that Robert was one of the wealthiest men in the region. He and his wife Joan paid 20 shillings in tax compared to the 4 or 6 pence paid by the great majority of other inhabitants listed in the Return. Robert made a series of donations in his lifetime and as part of his will, some reflecting a desire to help clerics, religious houses and those in need, others concerned to ensure that prayers were said for his soul and the souls of his immediate family members and his ancestors, to ensure a speedy passage through purgatory then entry into heaven.

Among the gifts made in his lifetime was: 'Know present and to come, that I Robert de Morton of Bawtre, have given to Richard de Chesterfield, clerk and prebend of the monastery of Southwell, all my lands etc with the appurtenances in Cunisburgh etc. Dated at Bawtre in the feast of the conception of St Mary, 6 Richard II'. (Miller, p. 304) In 1384 Richard de Chesterfield not only received a gift of goods and chattels but was one of nine men to receive a share of Robert's lands in Yorkshire and Nottinghamshire as witnessed by 18 people in a document listed in the Calendar of Close Rolls. It is possible that at this stage, 12 years before his death, Robert was in poor health. In 1386 he was excused by the King from summoning men-at-arms in Nottinghamshire 'as he is too aged to travail without great hurt'. (This was recorded in the Calendar of Close Rolls on 6 July 1386.)

In 1390 Robert gave the then enormous sum of £250 to the Prior and Convent of St Oswald at Nostell so that they could make an annual payment of 8 marks to the Chaplain (and his successors) of the Hospital of St Mary Magdalene at Bawtry Spittle. The Chaplain was required to pray for Robert's and Joan's well-being during their lifetimes then for their souls and the souls of their family after they died. The annual payment was confirmed on 5 December 1390 in the Calendar of Patent Rolls: 'Licence for 20 marks paid to the King by Adam prior and convent of St Oswalds, Nostell Priory, of the Augustinian Order, for the [payment] by them of a yearly rent of 8 marks to Robert de Strete, chaplain of a chantry in the Chapel of St Mary Magdalene called the Spytell by Bawtry, in augmentation of his maintenance for celebrating divine service daily for the good estate of Robert de Morton and Joan his wife, for their souls after death and the souls of their parents and benefactors and others, with proviso that if the rent be a term in arrear it shall be lawful for the said chaplain to enter upon the prior and convent's manors of Tickhill, Wilsic, Swinton and Hollewell and distrain for arrears (seize goods to cover the debt).'

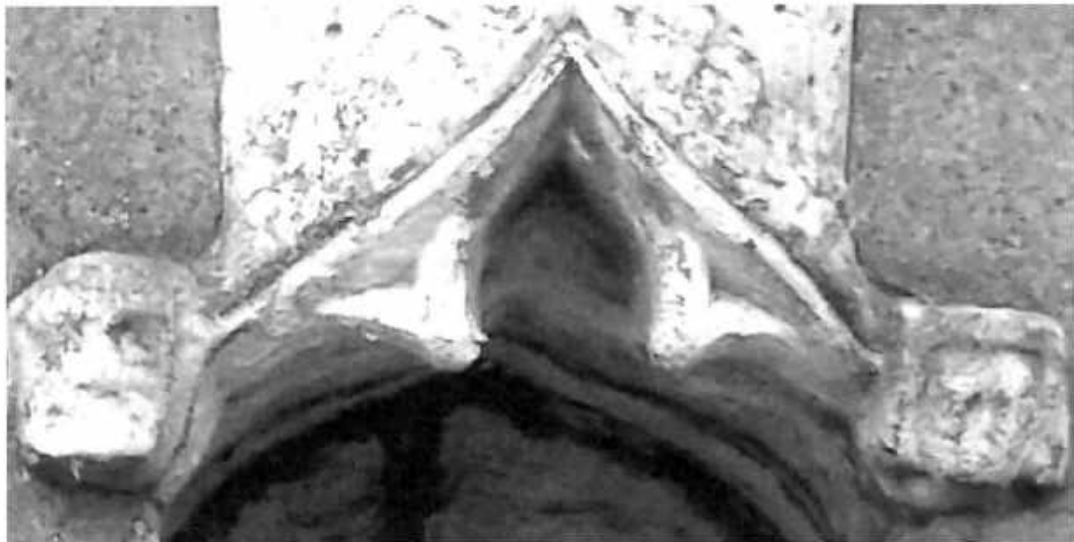
Robert's will, dated 25 August 1396, listed many bequests. They included 5 marks to friars in each of the following places: Doncaster, Nottingham, Pontefract and Tickhill with instructions to pray for him in the year after his death. Various clerics were named, such as: the Prior of Worksop was given silver dishes and £20 to share with Worksop Convent, the Vicar of Blyth received 5 marks while the Prior of Blyth 20 marks, the Vicars of Everton and Harworth each received 40 shillings. Many other individuals were remembered including some servants. A key charitable donation was the allocation of 100 shillings to be distributed to the poor of Blyth. In addition to the funds allocated to the Hospital of St Mary Magdalene in 1390, Robert gave the Hospital a further 40 shillings and cattle and corn to the value of £10 for the master, William Myrfyne. Robert also expressed a wish that his wife should give the Hospital cooking utensils and other necessaries to the value of 40 shillings.

In the Archbishop of York's Register which recorded the will, the term 'Bonae memoriae' was used by the scribe. This phrase was used for no one else below the rank of nobleman, indicating the estimation in which the memory of Robert de Morton was held. (Raine, p.210)



Above, the chapel of the Hospital of St Mary Magdalene and two associated almshouses seen from the east, left, and from the west. The almshouses, rebuilt in the 17th Century, were demolished in 1930. The chapel was completed in the 15th Century but extensively repaired and rendered in the 19th Century. The window at the east end and the niche, left, on the outside wall to the left of this window could have been built in Robert de Morton's lifetime.

Heads either side of the niche canopy, shown below, could very likely represent Robert de Morton on the left and his wife Joan de Morton on the right, who is wearing a cylinder caul headdress typical of that worn by upper class women in the later 14th Century. The stonework on the niche is suffering from erosion, particularly evident on the right-hand head which has deteriorated in the last ten years.



Apart from the chapel and the almshouses, the original complex of buildings included an infirmary and chaplain's house as well as such service buildings as stables, barns and a dovecot. Recent excavations of the graveyard to the south and east of the chapel showed no signs of leprosy in the remains, but the patients, including children, no doubt suffered from a range of illnesses and accidents. The Hospital, dedicated to helping the poor, would have provided basic nourishment and care. The chapel is now a Masonic Hall.

## Descendants of Robert de Morton

Robert and his wife Joan had a son and heir, also called Robert de Morton, who held a number of commissions and posts from the royal family. Like his father, he was recruited to a commission of enquiry into obstruction of the River Idle and two years later, in 1398, he had to audit the accounts of a former Archbishop of York. In 1399 Richard II confirmed a grant for life to Robert and his wife Ofca of the reversion on his father's death of £23 a year from Arnall and Edwinstowe within Sherwood Forest. Robert's other appointments included Sheriff of Nottingham and Derby 1397-9 and Bailiff and Master Forester of the manor and Lordship of Hatfield (for Edmund, Duke of York).

Robert's support for a plot to overthrow Henry IV led to his imprisonment in 1405 but he received a full pardon for 'treasons, insurrections, rebellions, felonies and misprisions'. However, it was not until 1412 that he was given another official position - escheator of Yorkshire (a post to oversee property that fell to the King for lack of heirs). His career then prospered, becoming Keeper of the Royal Falcons in 1413, then Master of Ordnance for Henry V 1418-23. He died in 1424 and was buried in St Cuthbert's Priory Church, Worksop, where his father was also buried. (When Richard Fitzwilliam of Sprotbrough made his will - he died in 1399 - he expressed a wish to have a stone placed over his grave in Sprotbrough church like the one over the body of Robert, senior, who was buried three years earlier.)



Later descendants included Cardinal John Morton who died in 1500 and was buried in the crypt of Canterbury Cathedral. His alabaster effigy is shown, left. His earlier career was dominated by opposition to the House of York. He was captured after the Battle of Towton in 1461 but escaped to France where he became Keeper of the Privy Seal for the Lancastrian government in exile. He made his peace with Edward IV and received a royal pardon in 1471. He was appointed Master of the Rolls in 1472 and then church appointments followed culminating in Henry VII making him Archbishop of Canterbury in 1486 and Lord Chancellor in

1487. Six years later he became a Cardinal. Cardinal Morton is remembered for 'Morton's Fork' - anyone with an affluent lifestyle could afford to pay taxes to the King, but at the same time anyone living frugally must have been thrifty and saved money therefore still being able to pay taxes. The Cardinal's nephew Robert was Bishop of Worcester from 1487 until his death in 1497.

At the time of the Reformation the Mortons continued to be staunch supporters of the Roman Catholic faith. This makes the contrast with the Puritan faith of another Morton all the more surprising. George Morton was one of the Scrooby congregation of separatists in the reign of James I. He lived briefly in York before joining his fellow separatists in Leyden in 1612. He did not sail in the 'Mayflower' in 1620 when the Plymouth Colony was established in Massachusetts, but sailed in the 'Anne' in 1623 with his wife and children. His death the following year left William Bradford, Governor of Plymouth Colony, to look after the Morton children. The eldest child, Nathaniel, became Secretary of the Colony from 1645-1685. Another descendant, Perez, became Governor of Massachusetts, while Levi P. Morton, right, was the 22nd Vice President of the USA (1889-1893) and 31st Governor of New York (1895-1896).



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