

'A Kind of Silent Rhetoric': the Significance of the Worthies of Chillingham Castle

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Abstract

This paper examines the political, cultural, and religious context of the Jacobean statues of the Worthies of Chillingham castle. This is established through an examination of the contemporary political importance of Chillingham. In addition, contrasts between the Jacobean and earlier Elizabethan use of the Worthies in works by Beaumont and Shakespeare are suggested. The many-layered meanings of these Worthies can be elucidated when they are considered both as part of the English fashion for conceit, and as an aspect of Renaissance self-fashioning.

In the Borders region between Scotland and England, in a remote area once known as the Scottish Marches, lies the castle of Chillingham. Surrounded by fields, and on no main route, the 'tide in the affairs of men'¹ has passed it by. However, in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries it was a centre of political events. One sign of its importance, which can still be seen today, is the group of six statues of the Nine Worthies, seen in Figure 1 below.



Figure 1. Composite photograph of the Worthies of Chillingham. Tom Parnell.²

The presence of these statues, looking down over the inner courtyard, raises several questions: when were the statues put there, and by whom? And what was the significance of the statues in the context of both the culture and the politics of the time? This short paper will attempt to answer these questions.

The 'set' of Worthies was made up of a usually consistent set of three Christian Kings, three Classical Worthies, and three Old Testament Worthies. Although very much a medieval concept, the Nine Worthies continued in popularity into the Renaissance: sets of prints of the Worthies had been published in Europe by Burgkmair in 1516, Lucas Van Leyden in 1520, and by Virgil Solis in 1530. Their continued use can be interpreted as part of that Europe-wide fashion for conceit – secret meanings hidden in emblem or

¹ William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, IV. iii. 218.

² Photograph by Tom Parnell. <<https://www.flickr.com/photos/itmpa/8646660946/>> Licensed under CCPL. [accessed 15 March 2015].

allegory, often used to symbolise certain moral qualities – that was especially embraced in England in the early modern period.

The symbolism of the Worthies to the contemporary viewer is made clearer using Richard Lloyd's *A brief discourse of the acts and conquests of the nine worthies*.³ In Lloyd's text, a print of each Worthy is accompanied by a verse outlining the virtues associated with each figure. These virtues include strength, courage, good judgement, ability in battle, and in addition to these, the essential attributes of courtly life: wisdom, and, of course, courtesy. It is clear then that in the Renaissance, the Worthies continued to be symbolic of the virtues associated with the aristocracy, and, as will become clear, were often associated with ideals of kingship.

In his poems Lloyd takes great pains to individualise each figure, giving 'A Description of the bodily proportions of the Nine worthies'. For example, Joshua 'was of good stature'; 'Hector was indifferent tall'; 'Judas Machabeus was...bigge of limbes, square and long' and Arthur was 'of visage grim and full of haire'. In addition, as in the medieval tradition, each Worthy could be identified by the armorial bearings on the shield. Lloyd outlines 'what Armes everie one of them gave'. The use of such impresas demonstrates the continuing importance in the English Renaissance of 'figuring of them with their proper symbols'.⁴ Using this evidence, it is possible that some of the Chillingham Worthies, despite their poor state of preservation, can be tentatively identified.



Figure 2. The Shield Devices. Tom Parnell.⁵

For example, the side view of the Worthies (Figure 2) seems to show part of the emblem of Charlemagne (fleurs-de-lis).

³ Richard Lloyd, *A brief discourse of the acts and conquests of the nine worthies* (London: R. Ward, 1584) <http://ezproxy-prd.bodleian.ox.ac.uk:2176/search/full_rec?SOURCE=pgimages.cfg&ACTION=ByID&ID=V20330> [accessed 8 December 2014].

⁴ Andreae Alciati, *Emblematum flumen*, ed. by Henry Green (Holbein Society, A. Brothers: Manchester, 1871), p. 7.

⁵ Photograph by Tom Parnell. < <https://www.flickr.com/photos/itmpa/8646661830/in/photostream/>> Licensed under CCPL. [accessed 12 January 2015].

Using Burgkmair's print, the emblem of the second figure in Figure 2 could be based on that of Godfrey of Bouillon (the large cross surrounded by four smaller ones, which is the emblem of the city of Jerusalem itself, signifying the Crusades; (see Figure 3)).



Figure 3. Charlemagne. Detail, 'Drei Gut Cristen' ('Three Christian Kings'),
Woodcut. Burgkmair. 1516-19. © Trustees of the British Museum.

Having outlined the allegorical symbolism of the Worthies in general terms, the next question to answer is why they are here at Chillingham? According to the current owner of the Castle, Sir Humphrey Wakefield, the sculptures form part of a series of improvements made to celebrate a visit of James the First. The fact that King James visited this remote place then raises the question as to why he chose this particular castle to visit. The political importance of the castle and its then owner, Ralph Grey, during the time leading up to James' coronation, can be traced looking at primary sources, including letters. These hint at a troubled time during the final years of Elizabeth's reign; she had not named an heir, and as a result secret negotiations were taking place between the Scottish court of James, and one of Elizabeth's courtiers, Robert Cecil, Earl of Salisbury, using various intermediaries. One of these intermediaries was a distant Scottish relation of Ralph Grey, who (somewhat confusingly for our story) was known as 'The Master of Gray', James' ambassador to England since 1584.⁶ The political uncertainty of this period is made clear in a letter from Robert Cecil to the Master of Gray, written in 1608, and looking back to these unsettled times. In it he describes Elizabeth's court as 'that fountayen, from whence this kingdome was to expect that peace and safetye only' but which instead 'ran such a hazard in the declynge adge of the late Queen'.⁷ Cecil goes on to emphasise that he himself could not state his preference for James openly: 'I durst scarce take hould of any way or meanes, directly or particularly, to express my innocent affections to the highest there, for feare to be suspected here.' This letter hints at how important the negotiations between James and

⁶ *Letters and papers relating to Patrick, master of Gray* (Edinburgh: Bannatyne Club, 1835), p. 9.

⁷ *Letters and papers relating to Patrick, master of Gray*, p. 197.

Cecil must have been in enabling a straightforward transfer of Royal power from Elizabeth to James.

What was the role of Chillingham in this political uncertainty? The answer is that the owner, Ralph Grey, had secretly played host to the Master of Gray several times, during the latter's journeys to and from Scotland to England.⁸ There are several contemporary references to this.⁹ Ralph Grey's own importance to King James in this role is reflected in the fact that, during James' progress south in 1603, Ralph Grey was one of the first men to be knighted by James:

the 8th of Aprill...after dinner his Hignesse mounted on horseback and tooke leave of Berwicke, where, near the bridge, he knighted Mr Ralph Gray, a Gentleman of great command and possession near the Borders.¹⁰

The political importance of Chillingham to James has been established. However, the exact dating of the statues is more problematic as papers from the castle itself have been lost in a fire. There are several reasons to suggest the dating of the statues to James' one return visit to Scotland in 1617, rather than to his progression south in 1603. If James had stayed at Chillingham in 1603, it would be expected that Sir Ralph Grey would have been knighted there, rather than on the bridge at Berwick; the volumes which describe his progressions, *The progresses, processions, and magnificent festivities of king James the first*, do not mention the King staying at Chillingham on the journey south in 1603. Instead, there is a reference to James visiting Chillingham in 1617: on 9 May 'the Royal Traveller rode to Chillingham...and there knighted Sir Edmond [Edward] Grey (brother of Sir Ralph) the same afternoon'.¹¹

Having established the reason for the presence for the statues and a possible date, another layer of meaning of the Worthies can be gleaned by a brief analysis of their use in the court of Elizabeth (in this case it was the set of matching female Worthies that was used). It could be suggested that these female Worthies were used especially during periods of religious tension. For example, in 1558, when Elizabeth became queen (following on from the Catholic Queen Mary), the final pageant performed during her entry to London depicted 'Deborah the judge'. Later, in 1578, when problems included both recusant and non-recusant Catholicism, and what to do with Mary Queen of Scots,¹² the pageants put on for her progression to Norwich used similar imagery.¹³ One contains the Old Testament heroines Deborah, Judith and Hester, and each of these Worthies in turn makes a speech outlining how they had overthrown tyrants and threats to Israel.¹⁴ These examples demonstrate how the Old Testament figures protecting the Israelites served as a symbolic allegory of Elizabeth, the Protestant monarch, protecting England from the Catholic threat: the symbolism of the Worthies here takes on a subtle form of anti-Catholic rhetoric. This analogy was especially relevant after the threat of the Spanish Armada had been overcome, when Elizabeth was depicted as Ester in several

⁸ <<http://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1604-1629/member/grey-sir-ralph-1552-1623>> [accessed 3 January 2015].

⁹ *Letters and papers relating to Patrick, master of Gray*. This volume contains a series of letters between 'Sir Robert Cecyll' [Lord Salisbury] and Patrick Master of Gray, several of which mention the latter staying at Chillingham; see for example p. 202.

¹⁰ Thomas Millington, *The True Narration of the Entertainment of his Majestie from Edinbrough to London 1603*, in *Stuart Tracts*, ed. by Charles Harding Firth (London: A. C. Harding, 1903), p. 24.

¹¹ John Nichols, *The progresses, processions, and magnificent festivities of king James the first*, 4 vols (London: J. B. Nichols, 1828) III, p. 297.

¹² Patrick Collinson, *This England: Essays on the English Nation and Commonwealth in the Sixteenth Century* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011), p. 123.

¹³ Saralyn Ellen Summer, 'Like Another Esther': Literary Representations of Queen Esther in Early Modern England' (unpublished PhD thesis, Georgia State University, 2006) p. 36.

<http://scholarworks.gsu.edu/english_diss/3> [accessed 9 December 2014].

¹⁴ Sir Robert Wood, *The ioyfull receyuing of the Queenes most excellent Maiestie into hir Highnesse citie of Norrvich* (London: Henry Bynneman, 1578) <http://ezproxy-prd.bodleian.ox.ac.uk:2176/search/full_rec?SOURCE=pgimages.cfg&ACTION=ByID&ID=V132195> [accessed 15 December 2014].

poems and prayers.¹⁵ For example, Oliver Pigge's *Meditations Concerning praier to Almighty God for the saftie of England, when the Spaniards were come into the narrow Seas* draws analogies between the reprieve of England and that of the Israelites under various of the female Worthies, such as 'Deborah....Hester,.....and other of the Jews'.¹⁶ Even at Elizabeth's death this imagery continued: John Lane, in his elegy, wrote

The royall daughter of that royall King....
Ester our Queene, whose fame (with triumph crownd)¹⁷

However, it seems clear that by the end of Elizabeth's reign the male version of the Nine Worthies were often ridiculed, as is epitomised by Shakespeare's use of the Worthies. That a low character such as Doll Tearsheet can say to Falstaff that he is 'as valorous as Hector of Troy, worth five of Agamemnon, and ten times better than the Nine Worthies'¹⁸ demonstrates how knowledge of the Worthies had moved down through the social scale. Another example is the pageant of the Worthies which ends *Love's Labour's Lost*, which serves as a foil for the disparaging wit of the Royalty present, the Princess, and the King of Navarre. The fact that the pageant is performed by characters such as the clown, the boy, and the pedant (who, it has been suggested, is based on Richard Lloyd himself),¹⁹ contributes to this satirical impression. It is worth remembering, however, that both these plays, *Henry IV* and *Love's Labour's Lost*, deal with the concept of the necessary virtues for kingship.

In contrast to this, in James' reign the use of the male Worthies seems to revert to their more solemn significance. This could be due to the fact that when James became King, he brought with him the fashions and traditions of the Scottish court. Here the use of the Worthies can be traced back to the Scottish ballad, 'Ane Ballet of the Nine Nobles' (1440) which has a verse on each Worthy in turn, but includes the Scottish figure Robert the Brois (Bruce) as the final Worthy.²⁰ This Scottish tradition continued into the sixteenth century. In 1508 the court poet Dunbar used the Worthies in a poem of welcome to Sir Barnard Stewart on his arrival at the court of James IV. Sir Barnard is described as 'moste worthi wyse and wight' and is compared to several worthies, including Hector, Arthur and 'Julius'.²¹ Later in the century George Buchanan (later to be James' tutor) wrote a pageant for the marriage of Mary and Darnley, 'Pompae Deorum in Nuptiis Mariae', 'Pompae Equestres' in which 'knights of virtue...all offer allegiance to the couple'.²²

How would James have experienced the Worthies in the pageantry of his own time? As stated above, in contrast to the humorous Elizabethan Shakespearian references, the Worthies seem to revert to their more solemn significance in James' reign. One example of this can be seen in *The Masque of the Inner Temple and Grayes Inn* (Beaumont), performed in 1613 for the marriage of James' daughter Elizabeth to Frederick V, the Elector Palatine. Although the figures in it are not named specifically as Worthies, a

¹⁵ Summer, p. 51.

¹⁶ O. P (Oliver Pigge), *Meditations concerning praier to almightie God* (London: By R. R[obinson], 1589) <http://ezproxy-prd.bodleian.ox.ac.uk:2176/search/full_rec?SOURCE=pgimages.cfg&ACTION=ByID&ID=V12240> [accessed 10 December 2014].

¹⁷ John Lane, *An Elegie upon the death of the high and renowned Princesse, our late Sovereigne Elizabeth* (London: W. White, 1603) <http://ezproxy-prd.bodleian.ox.ac.uk:2176/search/full_rec?SOURCE=pgimages.cfg&ACTION=ByID&ID=V176320> [accessed 13 December 2014].

¹⁸ William Shakespeare, *Henry IV Part ii*, ed. by Norman N. Holland (New York: Signet, 1965), II. iv. 178-180.

¹⁹ Felicia Hardison Londré, *Love's Labour's Lost: Critical Essays* (New York: Routledge, 2001), p. 105.

²⁰ 'Ballet of the Nine Nobles' in *The Parlement of the Thre Ages: Select Early English Poems*, ed. by I. Gollancz, 2 vols (London: OUP, 1915), II, Appendix x.

²¹ William Dunbar, 'The Ballad of Lord Bernard Stewart' <<http://digital.nls.uk/firstscottishbooks/page.cfm?folio=173>> [accessed 3 January 2015].

²² Sarah Carpenter, 'Performing Diplomacies: The 1560s Court Entertainments of Mary Queen of Scots', *The Scottish Historical Review*, 82 (October 2003), pp. 194-225 (p. 221).

subsequent description of the event by James Maxwell makes clear this link between the Worthies and Elizabeth (James' daughter); verse 19 of Maxwell's poem begins,

Come nobles all, come Worthies, Beauties bright
With your best things adorne Eliza's day.²³

In Beaumont's masque, the description of the costumes of the dancers makes plain how they were to be portrayed as statues coming to life,

attired in cases of gold and silver close to their bodies, faces, hands and feete,
nothing seene but gold and silver, as if they had been solid images of mettall.
Tresses of haire as they had been of mettall imbossed, girdles and small
aprons of oaken leaves as if they likewise had been carved or molded out of
the metal.²⁴

It could be suggested that the Worthies in Beaumont's masque contribute a similar political and religious rhetoric as was evident in their earlier use as imagery praising Queen Elizabeth. James' daughter, the daughter of a Protestant King, was marrying into another Protestant state, this time in Europe. The combination of the two could have been seen as a bulwark against Spanish Catholic expansion.

What do these examples contribute to the search for the underlying symbolism of the Worthies for James' visit to Scotland in 1617? There seem to be several layers of meaning which could be interpolated, both religious and political. Firstly, it is worth noting that the theme of the Worthies seems to have been part of the rhetoric of the speeches made to James throughout his Scottish tour. These speeches, in English, Latin, and Greek, are all preserved in *The Muses Welcome to the High and Mightie Prince James*, of which there is a beautifully bound copy in the Bodleian.²⁵ For example, in the speech made at Stirling, James is referred to as Augustus Caesar and Alexander; in Perth several of the figures are referenced, including Alexander, Caesar, and two of the three Old Testament Worthies, David and Josia (Joshua); in Paisley (23 July) he is referred to as the Roman Caesar. In addition, in a poem by Sir William Mure the Younger, read at Hamilton (28 July), he is referred to as Caesar, Alexander, and Joshua. The presence of the Worthies at Chillingham could have been a part of the inherent planning of the whole of the 1617 Scottish visit, and Ralph Grey, with his Scottish connections, could have been aware of this.

What could the religious significance of the Worthies have been here? The clue could be in the fact that one of James' main aims in his visit to Scotland was to impose the five articles, including confirmation by Bishops, on the Scottish Church.²⁶ Perhaps the threat, as perceived by James, was now the recalcitrant Calvinist Kirk.

Another level of meaning can be suggested from the symbolic position of the Worthies as almost heavenly bodies. In Beaumont's masque the statues appear from behind stage scenery suggesting a cloud, implying their descent from the heavens. It could be suggested that the positioning of the sculptures at Chillingham echoes that suggested in Beaumont's masque – nearer the heavens than ordinary mortals. On arrival, James could have ascended a staircase to the same level as the Worthies: he would rise to this more heavenly sphere, and would take on the mantle of such virtue, becoming a Tenth

²³ James Maxwell, *A monument of remembrance erected in Albion* (Nicholas Okes, London:1613)

<http://ezproxy-prd.bodleian.ox.ac.uk:2176/search/full_rec?SOURCE=pgimages.cfg&ACTION=ByID&ID=V12855> [accessed 18 December 2014].

²⁴ Francis Beaumont, *The Masque of the Inner Temple and Grayes Inn* (London: Felix Kingston, 1613)

<http://ezproxy-prd.bodleian.ox.ac.uk:2176/search/full_rec?SOURCE=pgimages.cfg&ACTION=ByID&ID=V177598> [accessed 17 December 2014].

²⁵ John Adamson, *The Muses welcome* (Edinburgh: A. Hart, 1618), pp. 123, 259.

²⁶ L.A.M Stewart, 'The political repercussions of the five articles of Perth', *Sixteenth Century Journal*, 38 (2007), pp. 1013-1016 (p. 1013).

Worthy in the process.²⁷ The effect here could have been similar to that seen in the Worthies in the ceiling bosses of Stirling castle, where James spent most of his childhood, where the roundels include an image of King James V (James' grandfather) amongst several of the Worthies.²⁸

This presentation of James' elevation to the level of the Worthies could also be interpreted on a political level. It would have been a reminder to the viewer of James' own opinion of the divine right of kings: that kings were literally nearer the heavens. In 1609 James had told parliament that 'Kings are justly called Gods for that they exercise a manner of resemblance of Divine power upon earth'.²⁹ This same view is seen in a rhyming couplet he himself wrote:

Kings Walke the Milkye heavenly way
But you by bye paths gad astray.³⁰

In addition, the extensive use of the rhetoric of the Worthies during the Scottish visit, signifying the virtues of kingship, could have subtly emphasised how James was still able to rule without a parliament (the last of which had met for only eight weeks in 1614). Indeed, the importance of such imagery to James, in the display of Kingship, can be traced right back to the beginning of his reign. In his accession medal (see Figure 4), which was struck to be distributed at his coronation, James is portrayed in the persona of Julius Caesar, one of the three classical Worthies. Apparently this is the first time an English king had been displayed as a Roman emperor.³¹ This reference is emphasised in the inscription, the translation of which reads 'James I, Caesar Augustus of Britain, Caesar the heir of the Caesars, presents this medal'.³²



Figure 4. James the First. Accession medal. © Trustees of the British Museum (G3, EM.316).

²⁷ Professor Sally Rush, Glasgow University. E-mail to the author.

²⁸ To see the bosses restored:

<<http://www.stirlingcastle.gov.uk/home/experience/palaceproject/stirlingheadszoom.htm>> [accessed 15 March 2015].

²⁹ R. Malcolm Smuts, *Court culture and the Origins of a Royalist Tradition in Early Stuart England* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), p. 231.

³⁰ A. F. Falconer, 'Review of *The Poems of James VI of Scotland, Vol. II*, ed. James Craigie', *The Review of English Studies*, New Series, 43 (1960), pp. 325-326 (p. 326).

³¹ Kate Aughterson, *The English Renaissance: An Anthology of Sources and Documents* (London: Routledge, 1998), p. 121.

³² <http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/collection_object_details.aspx?objectId=952770&partId=1&searchText=James+I,+Caesar+Augustus+of+Britain,+Caesar+the+heir+of+the+Caesars,+presents+this+medal%25u2019.&page=1> [accessed 15 March 2015].

In conclusion, it has been suggested that the statues of the Worthies of Chillingham Castle embody the early modern fashion for hidden allegory or conceit, and as such they can be read on many levels. An examination of the political context suggests that they were created to celebrate a visit of James the First (possibly in 1617), a visit which could have been an acknowledgement of the importance of Chillingham as a centre of negotiations for James' own successful accession as king of England. Their role could have been part of a welcoming display presenting James as a symbolic Tenth Worthy, with his position nearer to the Worthies suggesting a subtle link to his own view of the elevated position of kings. In addition, the Worthies could have served as an allegory of the Virtues required for kingship, suggesting James' own belief in his ability to rule without a parliament. The religious context hints at a continuation of one aspect of their use in Elizabeth's reign, as a symbol of the monarch's role in preserving the values of the Church of England. The Worthies can also be seen as one element of James' continued interest in 'self-fashioning' as a Roman emperor, also alluded to in the verbal rhetoric of the Scottish visit. All these meanings are suggested by the statues' simple presence as 'a kind of silent rhetoric'.³³

³³ Thoinot Arbeau, *Orchésographie* (1588), quoted in Carpenter, p. 206.

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