

Wriothesley [formerly Writhe], Sir Thomas

(d. 1534)

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Wriothesley [formerly Writhe], Sir Thomas (d. 1534), herald, was born at 'Colatford', Wiltshire, the elder son and second of four children of John Writhe, Garter king of arms (d. 1504), and his first wife, Barbara (d. 1480/1483), daughter of John or Januarius (Janvier) Castlecombe or Dunstanville. Colatford has not been identified, but was either near Castle Combe or, more probably, Cricklade, with which the family was already associated and where Wriothesley lived later.

In 1489 Wriothesley was made Wallingford pursuivant in the private service of Prince Arthur and continued as such under Prince Henry; in 1491 he accompanied his father to Brittany. On 26 January 1505 he was appointed Garter king of arms, over the heads of all the royal heralds-in-ordinary, at the suit of his father's old friend Roger Machado, Clarenceux king of arms. It was now that he became dissatisfied with his original surname of Writhe, and eventually settled on the grander one of Wriothesley, which he applied retrospectively to his ancestors. His brother William, York herald and father of Thomas Wriothesley, first earl of Southampton, joined him in this change [see Wriothesley, Thomas (1505-1550)].

As Garter, Wriothesley helped organize and took part in most of the great domestic ceremonies of the reign—the funeral of Henry VII, the coronation of Henry VIII, the Westminster tournament of 1511, the funeral of the young Prince Henry soon after, the creation of the king's illegitimate son as Henry Fitzroy, duke of Richmond, in 1525, the creation of Anne Boleyn as marchioness of Pembroke in 1532, and her coronation in 1533. In 1529 he gave evidence at the divorce proceedings of Katherine of Aragon. In 1513 he went on the Théroutanne expedition, and in 1514 he accompanied Princess Mary to France for her marriage to Louis XII. He was present at the Field of Cloth of Gold in 1520, and can be identified in the picture at Hampton Court. He took the Order of the Garter to Archduke Ferdinand of Austria in 1523, when he was knighted, and to François I in 1527.

Wriothesley appears to have been licensed under the privy seal or signet to carry out visitations (though no such 'proto-visitations' has survived) and entered into private agreements with his fellow kings of arms to grant arms and conduct funerals in their provinces. In London (where he was assessed at £40 for the forced loan of 1522) he lived at first in Red Cross Street, Cripplegate, and later built Garter House in nearby Barbican Street, whose chapel is mentioned by John Stow and can be seen in Wyngaerde's panorama of London. Garter House was not only a valuable base for the heralds in the years before their second charter, but was also where Wriothesley (himself able to paint and draw) maintained his workshop or studio. The latter's output was considerable, and includes large parts of a great armory and ordinary of all English arms. Several of its choicest manuscript productions—the Westminster tournament roll, the parliament roll of 1512, the additions to his father's *'Garter book'*, and his own *'Prince Arthur's book'*—include representations of Wriothesley. But if he was always keen

to promote his office, person, and dynasty in the favourable Henrician climate, this should not detract from his achievement. His collections are an essential link between the heraldry of the middle ages and that of the later College of Arms, while his drawings of monuments anticipate the work of later Tudor heralds. J. H. Round's aspersions on Wriothesley as a genealogist are unfounded; he continued his father's work of codification, and a number of his pedigrees are longer than the first visitation ones. The modern rectilinear form of pedigree is first found in his manuscripts.

A later Garter has called Wriothesley's Gartership 'active, prosperous and in many ways distinguished' (Wagner, *Heralds of England*, 147). His hopes of permanently asserting the primacy of his office over the other kings of arms were dashed in 1530, however, when Thomas Benolt, Clarenceux king of arms, following an audience before the king, managed to obtain a commission under the great seal to carry out visitations which expressly forbade interference by any other herald. Thenceforward Garters played no part in the visitation process.

Wriothesley's first wife, whom he married before 1500, was Jane (*d.* after 1510), daughter of William Hall of Salisbury; he had ten children with Jane, their only surviving son being Charles Wriothesley, Windsor herald, and the chronicler. His second wife was Anne (*d.* before 1525), widow of Robert Warcop and previously of Richard Goldesborough, and daughter of Sir William Ingleby of Ripley, Yorkshire, with whom he had a daughter who died in infancy. He may also have had a third wife, another Anne. 'Worn out with age' (Anstis, 2.393), Wriothesley died, probably in London, on 24 November 1534, and was presumably buried with his family in St Giles Cripplegate. No will of his has been found. His library may have stayed intact until the death of his son Charles in 1562; after that it was probably dispersed. Manuscripts of his are now to be found in the College of Arms, the British Library, and elsewhere.

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Likenesses

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See also

Writhe, John (d. 1504), herald

Wriothesley, Thomas, first earl of Southampton (1505–1550), administrator

Wriothesley, Charles (1508–1562), herald and chronicler