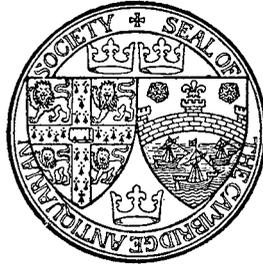


PROCEEDINGS
OF THE
Cambridge Antiquarian Society,

OCTOBER 1936-DECEMBER 1937



VOLUME XXXVIII



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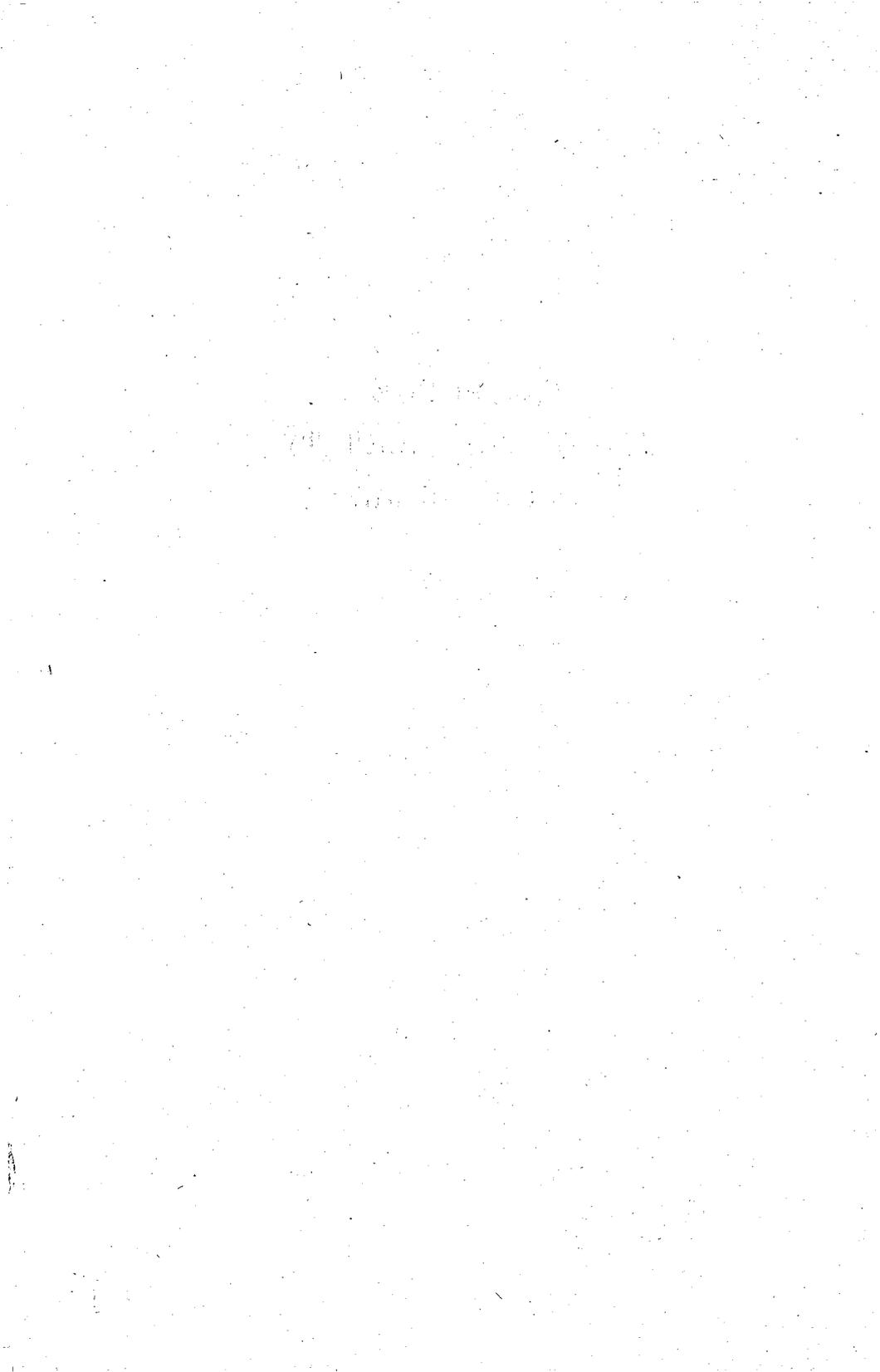
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PROCEEDINGS



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MONUMENTAL BRASSES

WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE CAMBRIDGE
ANTIQUARIAN SOCIETY'S COLLECTION IN
THE MUSEUM OF ARCHAEOLOGY AND ETH-
NOLOGY

By G. A. E. RUCK, B.A.

JUST over ninety years ago at a meeting of the Cambridge Antiquarian Society held on February 28, 1848, there was reported by the Rev. J. Smith an excursion to Little Shelford church in the latter part of the year 1847. The report, after describing Mr Smith's visit to Little Shelford with some others who were interested, continues: "under the floor of the pew of the Lord of the Manor it was traditionally believed that two monumental brasses existed and upon removing the boarding they were discovered in a beautiful state of preservation. They are of about the date 1420 and commemorate members of the Freville family formerly Lords of the Manor of Little Shelford. . . . Both are quite new to observers of monumental brasses. . . ."

It is not known whether or not that was the first occasion upon which the Society turned its attention to Monumental Brasses, but the report has some points of interest. It was only eight years after the inauguration of the Society, and it is the first record that appears in the Society's publications of any interest being taken in the subject. Moreover, it gives an early example of the keenness always displayed by members of the Society in their thirst after knowledge. That enquiring turn of mind shows itself amongst those who have been engaged in making the Society's Collection of monumental brass rubbings as it does in all other branches of the Society's work, for, nearly eighty years later, in the summer of 1926, a party under the guidance of Mr Ralph Griffin, F.S.A., the Honorary Curator of the Collection, during a tour of the West Country, also removed several pews in a church in order to discover and take a rubbing of a brass. This brass unfortunately was not "quite new to observers of monumental

brasses", but the party found six others on the walls of the church which were.

To return to the early records of the collection, at the subsequent meeting of the Society on May 15, 1848, Mr Franks showed rubbings of these brasses from Little Shelford and Mr Babington and Professor Willis at the same meeting called attention to "the desirableness of ascertaining the existence of brasses under the floors of pews in Churches".

At the General Meeting in 1849 there is recorded amongst the gifts for 1848 "Rubbings of three brasses at St Mary le Crypt, Gloucester, also others from Lewes and Carnarvon from Mr Franks". Mr C. E. Sayle, in his report on the Library in 1919, records the first gifts of rubbings to the Society as having been in 1847; but I have not been able to trace this record.

That the Collection had grown considerably by the year 1889, we can see from Mr Sayle's admirable report on the Library in 1919, for he records that in 1889 a cabinet for the Collection was made which undoubtedly saved it from inevitable destruction.

Though it had grown, the Collection had till then evidently received little attention, but, from that time until the year 1920, it was looked after and gradually put in order by Mr H. F. Bird. Mr Sayle records that Mr Bird spent a considerable time in an attempt to reduce the Collection to order and was assisted in this by Mr J. C. Crofts, a Clifton College schoolboy. It is difficult to give an adequate appreciation of Mr Bird's invaluable work on the Collection. He broke the preliminary ground in sorting and arranging it, and his catalogue, to which I shall refer later, was the first record the Society had of the contents of the Collection. In fact from Mr Bird's work dates the beginning of the fine modern collection the Society has to-day.

In the year 1920 the Society was given a large collection and Mr Ralph Griffin, F.S.A., then Secretary of the Society of Antiquaries, was asked to undertake its arrangement, classification and incorporation into the Society's Collection and to become the Honorary Curator of the Collection. In that year Mr Griffin also read a paper to the Society on

Monumental Brasses in general, which was the first recorded to have been read to the Society on that subject.

In the succeeding four years Mr Griffin spent much time in arranging the new Collection and in carrying on Mr Bird's work of arranging the Society's Collection as a whole, with the assistance of a number of undergraduates and others whom he had gathered round him as helpers. From time to time new rubbings were made by them and added to the Collection, but the real growth in the Collection that has continued to the present time dates from 1925, when most of the re-arrangement had been completed.

As has been mentioned, a part of Mr Bird's work of arrangement had consisted in the preparation of a catalogue, based on the Rev. Herbert Haines' list—then the standard work—bound in a parchment-covered volume. This catalogue, with Mr Griffin's additions to it, was, until 1925, the working catalogue of the Collection. In that year, however, it became clear that the number of additions and alterations which had become necessary would be more than that volume could contain. (During a brass rubbing tour of Norfolk in the summer of that year over 300 alterations had been made to the Rev. Edmund Farrer's list of that county, many of them already known to the Society of Antiquaries but new to this Society.) Accordingly, by the kindness of the late Mr Mill Stephenson, F.S.A., with whom he was working in close collaboration, Mr Griffin was able to obtain a set of the galley proofs of Mr Stephenson's *List of Monumental Brasses in the British Isles*, which was then in preparation and was published in 1926, and is now the standard list of the monumental brasses in these Islands. These galley sheets were mounted on one side of large sheets of thick paper and were bound into two volumes in half calf and buckram, the index being similarly mounted and bound in a separate volume. These three volumes now constitute the complete record of the Society's Collection both of perfect and imperfect rubbings and also record the most valuable rubbings of brasses either lost or partly lost. They also contain a complete and very valuable series of notes of all brasses which have been discovered, or lost, or removed to other parts of the

church in the twelve years since the publication of Mr Mill Stephenson's *List*.

It would not be right to mention Mr Mill Stephenson's *List* without stating that it is still, and will always remain, the standard record of monumental brasses in the British Isles, and the Society is therefore most fortunate in having had the opportunity of using it as the basis for the catalogue of its Collection. Such alterations and additions as have been made since the publication of the *List* are small in number and of minor importance in comparison with the size and value of the *List* itself.¹

In the next year (1926), after the work of marking up the new catalogue with a record of all rubbings then in the Society's Collection had been completed, it was thought advisable to prepare a summary of all brasses of which rubbings were then required, in order than anyone wishing to work for the Collection might speedily be able to find out what was needed. This Book of Wants was completed in the year 1926 and is still in use, though much of its contents have been deleted since that time as Mr Griffin and others have carried out many expeditions and tours throughout the country to make rubbings for the Collection.

A record of all these tours would be tedious, and a clearer impression of the growth of the Collection in the last twelve years can be gained by a comparison of the numbers of rubbings shown by the Book of Wants to be required in 1926 with those shown in 1938. Although statistics are often dull, the present is a good opportunity of taking stock of the Collection and of placing on record the achievement that has been carried out under Mr Griffin's guidance.

In round figures, there are in the British Isles 8250 known monumental brasses, apart from fragments in Museums and private possession. Of these the Book of Wants recorded in 1926 that rubbings were required of 6100 brasses from approximately 2570 churches. At the beginning of 1938 it recorded that rubbings of only 1870 brasses from 810

¹ Since the paper was written, these alterations and additions have been printed by Mr Griffin and Mrs Giuseppi in the form of an appendix to Mr Stephenson's *List*, as a memorial to the author.

churches were required, indicating that rubbings of 4230 brasses from 1760 churches had been acquired during the period of twelve years between those two dates. That means that rubbings of nearly seven brasses a week from nearly three churches a week, or rubbings of nearly one brass a day (including Sundays) have been added to the Collection throughout a period of twelve years. To complete the picture it may be recorded that at the end of 1925 the Collection had rubbings considered satisfactory from a Museum point of view of 2150 brasses, while at the beginning of 1938 there were 6370 of such rubbings.

It can thus be seen that since 1925 the Collection has been nearly trebled in size, and we now have in Cambridge a collection containing satisfactory rubbings of over three-quarters of all the recorded monumental brasses in the British Isles. This is second only to the collection of the Society of Antiquaries, and no private person or public body apart from that Society has so complete a collection of rubbings of brasses in the British Isles or even of any one county therein. It is hoped ultimately to make it entirely complete.

Rubbings have also been taken of the indents of many fine lost brasses. As will be seen in the illustration (Pl. I) of the rubbing of the indent of the brass of Elyas de Beckingham, 1298, the celebrated upright Judge, in Bottisham church, Cambridgeshire, these indents well repay careful study. It is only comparatively recently that any great interest has been taken in them. The illustration shows that nearly the whole of the inscription (in single Lombardic letters let into the stone) can still be read. This observation applies only to the indents of brasses of the thirteenth and very early fourteenth centuries in good preservation, since the use of single Lombardic letters for inscriptions in this way was discontinued early in the fourteenth century in favour of marginal inscriptions on strips of brass or plates at the feet of the figures. The outline of the figure and the very beautiful slender shafted canopy with its top finial projecting into the marginal inscription can also be clearly seen. Canopy and outline of figure are naturally common to the best of the later indents and from their outlines their date can often be



Bottisham, Cambs. Elyas de Beckingham. 1298

deduced with fair accuracy, whilst the outline of the figure (if a man) will generally disclose his profession, and it may happen that from these two, coupled with local or national records, the name can be fairly accurately surmised. Pl. I, also shows one other interesting point. It will be noticed that there are two broad bands on the figure, one near the top and the other near the bottom, which are rather more deeply recessed than the rest of the indent. It is possible that this shows the method of fixing the brass in the stone.¹ The fixing was probably by means of studs at the back of the brass sunk in pitch at these two points only, and this is of interest as later brasses (probably from the beginning of the fourteenth century) were generally set wholly in pitch and this earlier method was discontinued.

In addition to the complete rubbings referred to there is a very large number of rubbings in the Collection which, for one reason or another, are not considered entirely satisfactory from a Museum point of view. Some are cut out and mounted, others are not entirely complete, lacking shields and the like, and yet others are rubbed in such a way that they do not show accurately the relative positions of the various parts of the monument—a remark which applies equally to rubbings cut out and mounted, since it is known only to the moulder whether the component parts have or have not been placed in their correct relative positions.

Many of these imperfect rubbings will be entirely superseded by new rubbings in time to come, but very many of the older rubbings are extremely valuable and will be retained since they show pieces of the brass which have since been lost, or show the brass in its original condition before it was relaid or restored, or both. The Collection has a great number of these, and also a number of rubbings of brasses that have now entirely disappeared, and others made by such well-known brass rubbers as (amongst others) the Rev. Herbert

¹ Another example of this arrangement has lately been discovered on an indent dated c. 1310, in Saltwood Church, Kent. The recessed bands are clearly shown on a drawing done by T. Fisher in 1801, and reproduced by Mr Griffin in a pamphlet entitled "Some Indents of Lost Brasses in Kent", 1914.

Haines and Sir Wollaston Franks. All these, which have come from a number of sources and many of which were part of the Society's original collection, constitute a most valuable part of the Collection.

The cabinet built in 1889, referred to in Mr Sayle's report, is still in use. In 1924 it was still the only case and was not yet full. Since then no less than six cases of six or more drawers have been added and the Collection is now housed in these in the Keyser Hall of the Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology. The rubbings are arranged according to counties, and in alphabetical order of places within the county, each county having one or more folios. There are now seventy-five.

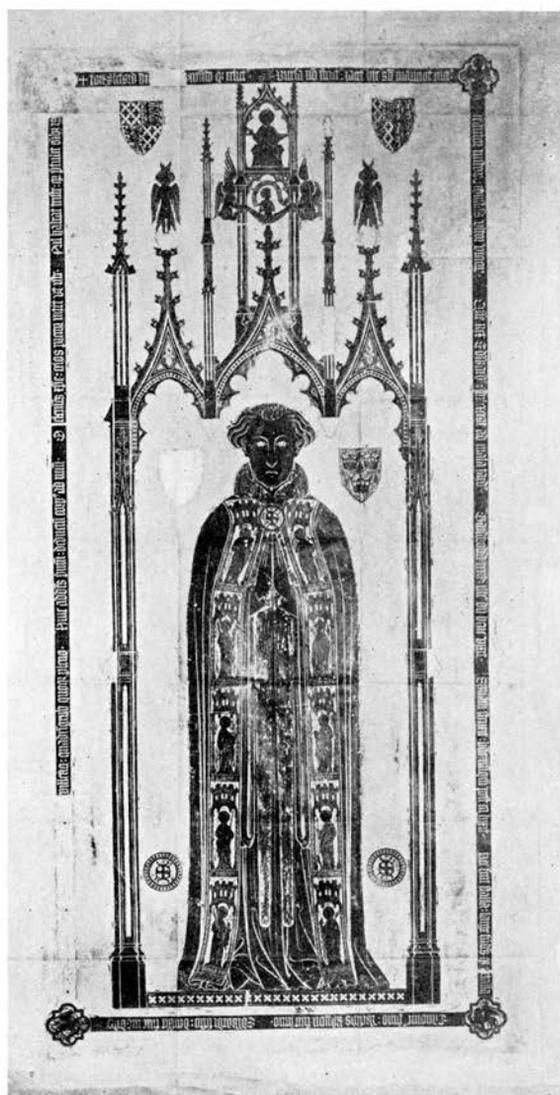
The numerous journeys throughout the country have given an opportunity of studying what steps are taken to preserve brasses, and a few comments based on the observations made may not be out of place.

In the past these monuments not only received little care but at many periods they were the objects of wanton and wholesale destruction, evidenced by the fact that the present 8000 odd are only a tithe of the brasses originally laid down.

It would be expected that in the present more enlightened times brasses would receive better treatment and on occasion this is so. But it is regrettable to have to record that there are still many cases where they receive neither treatment nor protection. In many other instances there is even active ill-treatment either by covering them with coconut matting (the best-known harbinger of abrasive grit), by polishing them with metal polish, by removing them from their original stones and placing them on walls, often in plaster where they are rapidly corroded, or, lastly, by covering them by some new erection in the church, such as an organ. There are still far too many records of brasses being "covered or lost".

The two most serious of these offences may be briefly considered. Polishing is one of the worst examples of misplaced enthusiasm. It is well known that a brass door plate after some years of polishing loses all traces of its lettering. The same applies to monumental brasses, although they

PLATE II



Balsham, Cambs. John Sleaford. 1401

are of harder metal. There are many cases where practically all trace of an inscription has disappeared as a result of constant polishing, though it is satisfactory to be able to say that a few words of explanation have often stopped the practice. But irreparable harm has generally been done already.

The absurdity of the habit of relaying brasses, particularly on walls, may perhaps best be illustrated by one extreme example. An inscription (for example under a figure) placed on a pier and reading (say) "Hic jacet Johannes Jones. . ." is a living lie, since it is not, nor ever has been, our habit to bury our relations in the pillars of our churches.

The only attention required by a brass is a soft mat to protect it from tramping feet if it is on the floor, and an occasional wipe with a paraffin rag to clean it and preserve its surface. The fragments of the church clock—found in one church in the Midlands—are *not* an efficient substitute for a soft mat. The stone in which the brass is set is in most cases of Purbeck or Bethersden marble, and it needs treatment in order to avoid disintegration. It should first be cleaned with soap and water; then if necessary benzene may be used. Then polish with beeswax and turpentine, and if necessary a little putty powder on a cloth; you can use a paste made of ceresine wax and toluene. This method is due to the Rev. E. G. Benson and is approved by Mr Griffin.

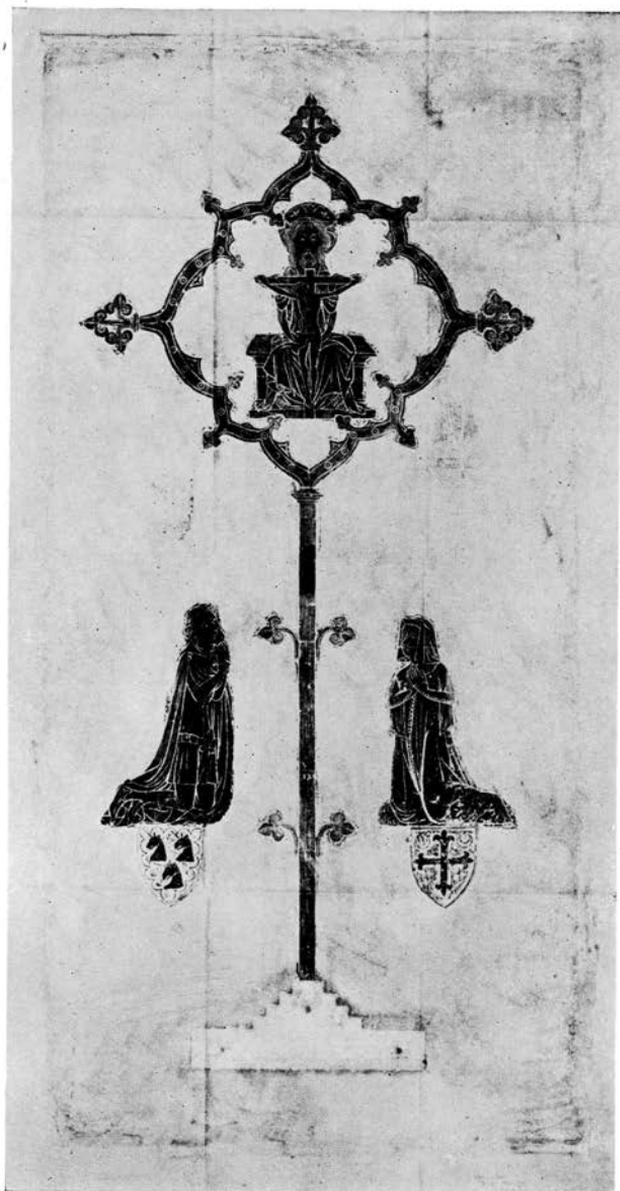
The three further illustrations (Pl. II) John Sleaford 1401, from Balsham church, Cambridgeshire (a priest), (Pl. III) Robert Parys, 1408 and his wife Eleanor Busteler, from Hildersham church, Cambridgeshire (a civilian) and (Pl. IV) Sir Robert Swynborne (1391) and his son Sir Thomas Swynborne, 1412, from Little Horkesley church, Essex (military figures) are chosen particularly to show the modern methods of taking rubbings. They also show brass engraving at its best at the beginning of the fifteenth century and give something of a cross-section of the community at the period.

Space does not permit of more than a very brief description of these brasses. John Sleaford (Pl. II) was Rector of Balsham, Master of the Wardrobe to Edward III, Chaplain to Queen Philippa, Prebendary of St Stephen's, Westminster, Archdeacon of Wells, and Canon of Ripon and Wells. He

rebuilt the church and erected the stalls and is seen here habited in surplice, almuce, and cope. The fine orphreys of the latter show figures of B.V. Mary and Child, Saints John the Evangelist, Katherine, Paul, Mary Magdalene, John the Baptist, Audrey, Peter, Margaret, and Wilfrid. The morse is ornamented with his initials "J. S." in monogram which are repeated on two separate roundels. The splendid triple canopy shows the Holy Trinity at the top and, beneath, the naked soul being carried up to Heaven in a sheet borne by two angels, whilst two seraphim are shown at the sides. The symbols of the four Evangelists are shown at each corner of the marginal inscription, that of St John being lost. Finally, the Arms of England and of Queen Philippa and of the See of Ely are shown on the shields.

Robert Parys and his wife (Pl. III) at Hildersham is the earliest of a series of brasses to members of that family in that church and at Linton, Cambridgeshire. It is surmised that the family name of his wife "Busteler" may still survive in the manor of Bustlers in Duxford, Cambridgeshire. The figures are shown kneeling in profile (a comparatively uncommon arrangement on brasses) before a fine floriated cross having in its centre a representation of the Holy Trinity, the Dove being in this case omitted. The figure of the man is dressed in a close-fitting tunic or cote-hardie buttoned up the front, with long sleeves reaching the knuckles. He wears a bawdric and anelace, close fitting hose and pointed shoes with straps. Over all he wears a cape buttoned at the shoulder and a hood. His hair is worn long and he has a short beard and a moustache. The lady wears a veil over her head falling to her shoulders, a kirtle tightly buttoned down the front with long tight sleeves reaching her knuckles and buttoned underneath. Over this is worn a long sleeveless gown partly open at the side.

The brass of Sir Robert Swynborne and his son Sir Thomas at Little Horkeley (Pl. IV) shows two fine examples of armour of different periods. The father is wearing the camail common to the latter part of the fourteenth and the beginning of the fifteenth century and a pointed bascinet. His body is protected by a hawberk over which is a jupon. His arms, thighs, legs, and feet are encased in plate, but



Hildersham, Cambs. Robert Parys and wife. 1408

PLATE IV



Little Horkesley, Essex. Sir Robert and
Sir Thomas Swynborne. 1412

gussets of mail appear at the armpits and near the ankles. The bawdric is worn horizontally and the sword hilt is octagonal. The wearer's initials should be noticed on the bawdric. The son shows the change from mail to plate armour. The camail is covered by a gorget of plate, the jupon is discarded for breast and back plates to which is attached a skirt of six plates having a small fringe of mail attached to its foot. The armpits are protected by roundels of plate. The bascinet is less pointed, and the bawdric is narrow and worn diagonally, whilst the sword hilt is pear-shaped and smaller. Round the neck is worn an SS collar. The brass is completed by a fine double triple canopy and marginal inscription and is set on a low altar tomb. The son was Lord of Hammys, Mayor of Bordeaux, and Captain of the Castle of Fronsac, and the brass was laid down at his death.

These illustrations show that modern rubbings of larger brasses are still made with heelball on thickish paper. The paper now used is Architect's Detail paper instead of lining paper. The former can be obtained as wide as five feet, which is sufficient to take all but the largest brasses on one sheet, and it is hoped that it will prove more durable than lining paper. Dabbings of smaller brasses are made on tissue paper with pads of wash-leather covered with a mixture of powdered graphite and salad oil. The tissue paper used is obtained from a special mill and is tougher and rather larger than the average; it has been found sufficiently strong to take a rubbing with heelball in extreme cases where the brass is very lightly engraved. Finally, as the illustrations show, the "dabbing" and "rubbing" methods have been combined for large brasses, the stone being shown with the dabber and the brass with heelball. This results in a rubbing of the complete monument, stone and all, and includes the indents of all pieces lost. The dabbing method on detail paper for taking rubbings of the indents of lost brasses has been applied with some success.

It is hoped that with the application of these methods and the continuation of the work done in the past, the Collection will ultimately be completed and will then rank as the most complete and up-to-date collection in the British Isles.

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