



THOMAS, EARL OF SALISBURY.

## THE BESAGUE OR MOTON.

By VISCOUNT DILLON, V.P.S.A.

The first of these words has so far defeated all attempts at explanation. In the instances where it occurs, it is clear from the context that it refers to a part of the military equipment and not to a weapon, but to what part of the armour it is not easy to decide. It will perhaps be best to work backwards from what we may consider the latest mention of it to instances of earlier occurrence, and to begin with John Rous' life of Richard Beauchamp, Earl of Warwick, contained in the beautiful Cottonian MS. Julius E. IV. This was written about 1490, and, according to Sir E. Maunde Thompson, K.C.B., illustrated by a Flemish artist, although the short descriptions of the pictures are in English. Plate xxxvi of Vol. II of Strutt's *Horda* gives a picture of a fight on horseback between the Earl of Warwick and "a famous knyght Sir Hugh Laundry calling hymself the Chevaler Blanke . . . at a certeyne day and place assigned, that is to sey the xii day of Christmase, in a lawnde called the Park Hedge of Gymes."

The text says "the erle smote up his visar thries, and brake his besagues and other harneys, all his apparaile saved." The Plate certainly shows the visor raised by the earl's lance, but no other damage to the Chevaler's armour is visible.

Going backward now a little we may refer to the Hastings MS. described in Vol. lvii of *Archaeologia*. Nowhere in this MS. is the word besague used, but we have in "How a man schall be armyd at his ese when he schal fighte on foote," a picture of the knight being armed. On the trestle table by him lies a piece of armour composed of some eight overlapping lames of metal, and attached to this arm defence is a hexagonal plate with invected margins. This arrangement of metal we may take to be the "rerebrasce" and "moton"

mentioned in the same MS. among the details of the "Abilment for the just of Pees." Here then we have the attached piece called a *moton*, and I suppose this is the authority for the term used by so many writers, though where the term "*palet*," also used by modern writers, came from I have not been able to discover.

Going yet farther back in date we may consider the MS. entitled "Johan Hyll's Traytese of the Poyntes of Worship in Armes that longeth to a Gentilman in Armes,"<sup>1</sup> which was evidently written before the year 1434, the date when died the "*Auctor*, Johan Hyll, Armoryer and Sergeant in th' office of Armorye with kynges Henry IV. and Henry V." In the arming of the Appellant in a "Battaile of Treasone sworne withinne Listes," we find at the completion of the armament "and tharne tye on hym a paire of besgewes." And in speaking of the weapons to be used by the Appellant, the following are mentioned, "A Spere, a Long Swerde, a Short Swerde, and a Dagger fastened upon hymself: his swerds fretted and beasgewed afore the hiltes and afore the handes, her pomelles nere her hiltes havynge noo maner of poyntes; for and ther be founden that day on hym moo poyntes of wepons thanne foure it shall tourne hym to greet reproof."

In the romance of Partonopex c. 1440 the Arsenal copy mentions that Sornegur had hanging at one side of his saddle bow his besague, while at the other side he had his misericorde. The English version of the romance written about 1390 says, "On each Shulder of Steele a besagew." Here we have the same locality given to the besagew as in the Ashmolean MS. of forty years later. It is true that the English version here widely departs from the French original, but evidently the English writer did not recognise the two-edged axe, and so he altered the text to what he did understand.

In the romance of Clariodes of the fifteenth century we again find the besagues localized

"Wambras with wings and rerebras thereto,  
And thereon sette were besaguys."

<sup>1</sup> This MS., No. 856, of the Ashmolean collection, has been printed in *Illustrations of Ancient State and Chivalry*,

by the Roxburgh Society, and was edited by the late W. H. Black, Esq., F.S.A., in 1840.

From these extracts it would seem as if the besagues were the *motons* and *palets* of modern writers.

In Lydgate's *Troye Booke* translated and written by him 1414-1420, and printed by R. Pinson in 1513, we have a distinct and interesting mention of the besagues. It occurs in the third book, and is so valuable that I must quote the portion of the poem referring to the Trojan knights arming for battle. The poet's apology in the latter verses is hardly needed considering what an interesting contemporary account he gives of the armament of a knight at the commencement of the fifteenth century.

“ The famous knyghtes arme them in ye place,  
 And some of them gan full streyte lace,  
 Theyr doublettes made of linnen clothe,  
 A certayne folde that about hym gothe,  
 And some also dempte<sup>1</sup> most sureste,  
 To arme them for batayle of areste,  
 And dyde on firste after theyr desyres,  
 Sabatons greues cussues with voydres,<sup>2</sup>  
 A payre breche alder firste<sup>3</sup> of mayle,  
 And some there were that eke ne wolde fayle,  
 To have of mayle a payre bras,  
 And ther withald as the custom was  
 A payre gussettes on a pety cote,  
 Garnysshed with golde up unto the throte,  
 A paunce<sup>4</sup> of plate whiche of the selfe behynde,  
 Was shet and close and theron as I fynde  
 Enuron was a bordure of smalle mayle,  
 And some chose of the new entayle,<sup>5</sup>  
 For to be surmyd of all their foos,  
 An hole breste plate with arere doos,<sup>6</sup>  
 Behynde shet or elles on the syde,  
 And on his armes rynged nat to wyde,  
 There were voyders frettyd<sup>7</sup> in the mayle,  
 With cordes rounde and of fresshe entayle,  
 Vambras with wynges and rerebras thereto,  
 And theron sette were besaguys also,  
 Upon the hede a basenet of stele,  
 That within locked was full wele,  
 A crafty syght wrought in the vyser,  
 And some wolde have of plate a baver,  
 That on the breste fastened be aforne  
 The canell pece<sup>8</sup> more esy to be borne,  
 Gloves of plate of stele forged bryght,

<sup>1</sup> deem it.

<sup>2</sup> small pieces of chain mail.

<sup>3</sup> first of all.

<sup>4</sup> belly defence.

<sup>5</sup> shape.

<sup>7</sup> interlaced.

<sup>6</sup> back plate.

<sup>8</sup> collar bone.

And some wolde armed be more lyght,  
 In thykkes Jackes covered with satyne,  
 Some wolde have of mayle wrought ful fyne,  
 An hauberion all of late wrought cassade,  
 That with weyghte he be nat overlade  
 Hymsefe to welde lyke a lyfty man,  
 And some wyll have of choce geseran,  
 On his doublet but an hauberion,  
 And some oonly but a sure gepon,  
 Over his poleyns<sup>1</sup> rechynge to the kne,  
 And that the sleuys eke so longe be  
 That his vambras may be cured<sup>2</sup> ner,  
 A prycking palet of plate the cower,  
 And some wyll have also no vyser,  
 To save his face but oonly anaser,<sup>3</sup>  
 And some wyll have a payre platys lyght,  
 To welde hym wele whan that he shall fyght,  
 And some wyll have a target or a spere,  
 And some a pavys his body for to were,<sup>4</sup>  
 And some a targe made stronge to laste,  
 And some wyll have dartes for to caste,  
 Some a pollax heded of fyne stele,  
 And pycked square for to laste wele,  
 And some a swerde his enemy for to mete,  
 And some wyll have a bowe for to shete,  
 Some an arblast to stande out asyde,  
 And some on foot and some for to tyde,<sup>5</sup>  
 Array themseffe their foomen for to sayle,  
 And many one was besy for to nayle  
 His felawes harneys for to make it stronge,  
 And to dresse it sytte nat wronge,  
 With poyntes tressshes and other maner thyng,  
 That in suche case longeth to armyng,  
 I have no connyng every thyng to telle,  
 And unto you were to longe to dwelle,  
 Where I fayle ye mot have me excused,  
 For in suche crafte I am lytell used  
 And ignorance doth my penne lette,  
 In theyr ordre my termys for to sette,  
 And ofte chaungeth suche harneys and devyse,  
 And ye that be therin expert and wyse,  
 Dysdayne nat that I speke in this place,  
 Of theyr armyng for all is in your grace,  
 Right at your lyst to correcte every dell."<sup>6</sup>

In the Wigmore Castle inventory of 1322 are mentioned three *paribus beseseus*.

This is perhaps an early date for the so-called *motons*, but in the brasses of a Bacon c. 1320 at Gorleston, St. John

<sup>1</sup> knee cap.

<sup>2</sup> never covered.

<sup>5</sup> ride. ?

<sup>6</sup> every part.

<sup>3</sup> nose guard. ?

<sup>4</sup> protect.

d'Abernon, 1327, at Stoke d'Abernon, and the Hastings brass at Elsing, 1347, in all of which we have plate defences for the (outside) of the upper arm, we see these discs of metal or rigid material, just at the armpit or shoulder, and similar ones at the arm bends. The "wambras with wings" of the Clariodes MS. may refer to these last which have been in modern times called fans. The "rerebras . . . and theron set were besaguys" of the same poem seem to refer to the former discs. In the Wigmore inventory there is "*uno pectorali alias breast-plate in ij partibus cum ij wynghes.*" Here the upper pair of discs would be attached to the breast-plate and not as in the Clariodes Romance to the rerebras.

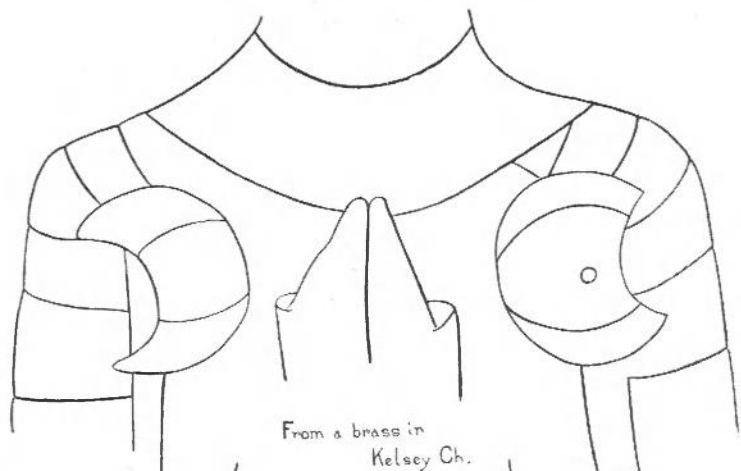
Coming to the arms and the mention of besagues in connection with swords it looks as though the word was applied to the roundels or discs seen on the swords used in foot combats. The fretting would apply to a lacing of cord, to give a firmer grip, such as we see on two-handed swords where the blade between the quillons and the lugs or projecting spurs<sup>1</sup> is covered with leather. With the estoc, or with the two-hand sword as used on foot, we see occasionally a disc of metal in place of the quillons. These discs or roundels of metal would be of about the same size as the motons or palets.<sup>2</sup>

Besagues are seen on many brasses and in different forms. The most usual are two circular plates such as are seen on the brasses of Lord Ferrers at Merevale, 1407, Drayton at Dorchester, 1411 (Fig. 4), Wylde at Codfield, 1422, Leventhorpe at Sawbridgeworth, 1433, and very many others of these dates. Oval plates on each side are seen in the brass of Freville at Shelford, 1405 (Fig. 8), and Wylcote at Great Tew, c. 1410 (Fig. 3). Oblong plates with rounded corners occur on the brasses of Phelip at Kidderminster, 1415 (Fig. 10) and Felbrigg at Felbrigg, 1416 (Fig. 9). In this last case the plates each bear the cross of St. George, as do the circular plates on the Swinburne brass of 1412. Shield-shaped plates

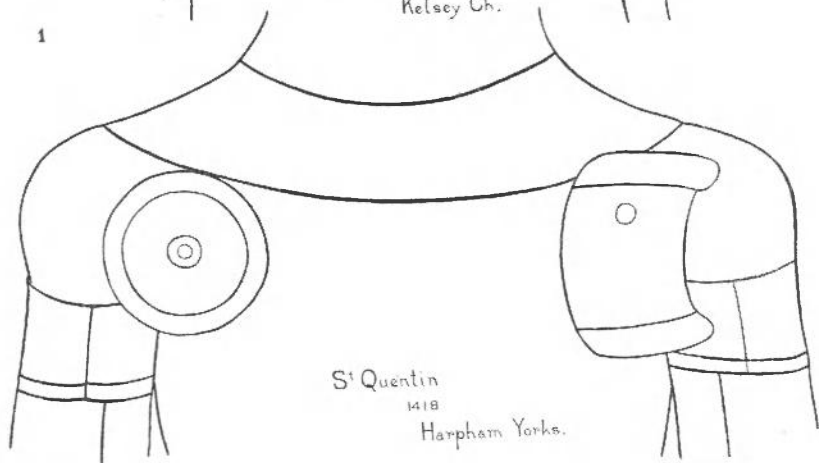
<sup>1</sup> Called in old Spanish inventories "falsaguardas."

<sup>2</sup> Unfortunately we have not found any definite mention of the word being

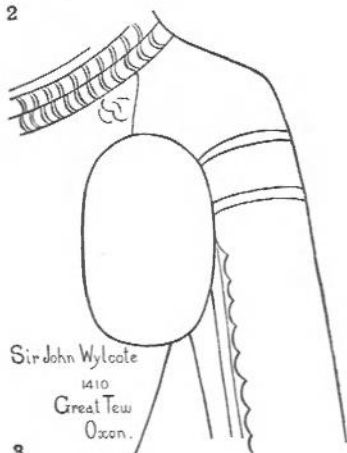
used for either of the above objects, but it seems probable that such was the term used in the fifteenth century, at least by English writers.



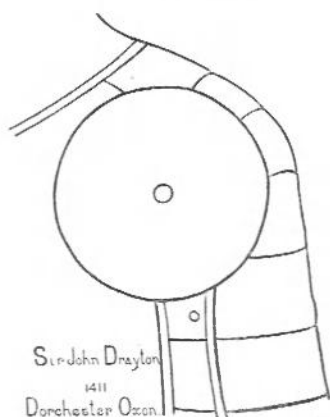
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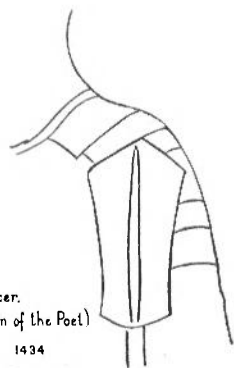


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EXAMPLES OF BESAGUES.

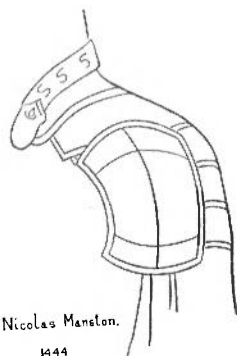


Chaucer.  
(Son of the Post)

1434

Ewelme  
Oxon.

5

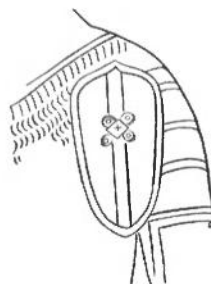


Nicolas Maneton.

1444

S<sup>t</sup> Laurence Kent

6

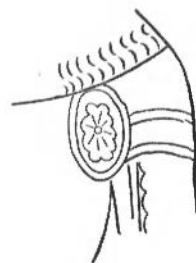


Nicholas Paris.

1425

Linton Cambs.

7



Freville.

c. 1405

Little Shelford Cambs.

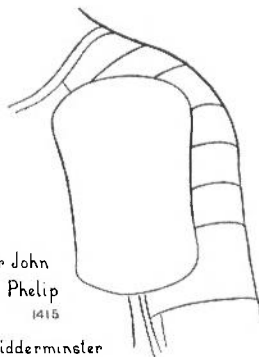
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Sir Symon de  
Felbrigge  
1416

Felbrigg Norfolck.

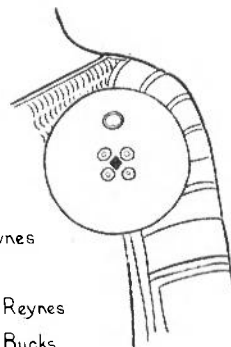
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Sir John  
Phelip  
1415

Kidderminster

10



Sir John  
Reynes

1498

Clifton Reynes  
Bucks

11

EXAMPLES OF BESAGUES.



with a central ridge are found on the Quartermaine brass at Thame, 1420, and on one at Linton, 1425 (Fig. 7). Somewhat similar plates are seen in the cases of the Chaucer brass at Ewelme, 1434 (Fig. 5), and Elmbrygge at Bedington, 1435. Another shape is seen on the Manston brass at St. Lawrence near Margate, 1444 (Fig. 6), where two plates in the form of shields with the upper and lower parts bent forward are employed. Then again in some cases we find different shapes used for the two arms. Thus the St. Quentin brass at Harpham, *c.* 1418 (Fig. 2), has a circular plate on the dexter side and a shield-shaped plate, like the Manston plate, on the sinister. A knight at Kelsey, *c.* 1410 (Fig. 1), has two different plates, somewhat resembling the Manston plates but more circular. The above are, of course, only a few of the varieties of shape to be seen on brasses. In a beautiful drawing in Harl. MS. 4826, representing Thomas Montacute, Earl of Salisbury<sup>1</sup> (Plate I), receiving from the poet Lydgate (habited like a pilgrim) a copy of his poem entitled "The Pilgrim" (written in 1426), the Earl, who is in full armour but bare-headed, has two besagues of similar form, shaped like shields but inverted, the base points being uppermost. The points or laces for attaching the besagues are clearly shown. In brasses the attachment is generally shown as a diamond-headed nut, but the attachment by points or laces just as the elbow caps are seen attached in various effigies would appear to be the more suitable, as giving more play for the arms. Of the size of these plates, we may judge by the life-size brass of Sir John Drayton, which has circular plates 4 inches in diameter.

As to representation in the round of these besagues there are not so many instances as in brasses. Of these we may note Sir John de Wittlebury in Marholm church, *c.* 1410, who has oval plates, as has Ralph Greene of Northants, 1419, while Lord Bardolph in 1439 has leaf-shaped plates with invected upper edges.

German effigies sometimes show these besagues as in Hefner, where Peter of Stettenburg, 1441, and Conrad of Weinsberg, 1446, have shield-shaped plates ridged, and

<sup>1</sup> The Earl died 1428.

John of Erschbach, 1496, has circular plates with crosses. This last instance is very late, for in England the besagues do not appear on brasses or effigies later than the first half of the fifteenth century. If we are right in supposing that the Rous life of the Earl of Warwick belongs to the latter end of the century, it shows that the word besague was in use by some long after its appearance on funeral monuments. No doubt the increased size of the left shoulder defence obviated the necessity for its use on that part of the body, while for the right shoulder and arm-pit the disc or plate, suspended by a short strap, allowed for the couching of the lance under the arm.

Allowance must be made in the case of brasses for the difficulty of the artist to show all he wished. As an instance of this, we may note the curious points shown on each side of the neck in the brass of St. Quentin in Harpham church, c. 1418, and the brass in South Kelsey church, c. 1410. The peculiarity is explained at once on looking at the side views by Stothard of the effigy of Michael de la Pole, Earl of Suffolk, Pl. 108, where we see that the points should not have been shown on the brass, not being visible from in front.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> All the illustrations given are reduced from actual rubbings. Both besagues are shown only when the two differ in shape.