

Notes on Three Palimpsest Brasses recently discovered in Norfolk.

COMMUNICATED BY

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The first brass¹ to be described is in the Church of St. John de Sepulchre, Norwich, and was originally fixed in a very large Purbeck marble slab now lying at the east end of the nave, close up to the chancel step. The matrices indicate that the original composition comprised the figures of a man and his wife, each about 21½ ins. high, with an inscription 18 ins. by 5½ ins. at their feet. The dimensions of the slab are 104 ins. by 52 ins., and the disposition of the various parts is shewn by fig. 1. The slab appears to be in its original position, in which case the matrices shew that interment took place with the feet to the west. At a later date this slab has been appropriated as a memorial for another man, since below the matrix of the original brass inscription there is now the following incised on the slab itself in large lettering:—

HERE L(IE)TH INTEARE^D Y^E BODY OF
THOMAS CO(R)RINTON WHO DEPARTED
THIS LIFE Y^E 2TH(?) OF DĒC A° DNĪ.

1653.

¹ *Norf. Arch.*, vol. xi., p. 372.

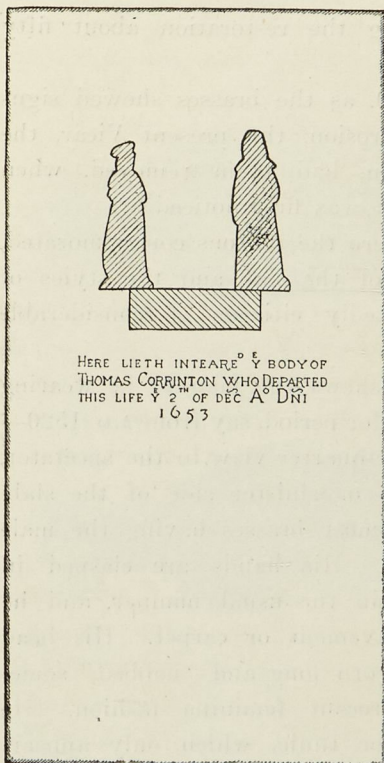


FIG. 1.

This inscription is now much worn in places, and unfortunately the surname is on this account rather doubtful, and also the second figure of the day of the month. This is the stone incorrectly given by Blomefield, vol. iv., p. 143, as for T. Corrington.

Owing to the exposed position of the brasses it was decided in 1919 to remove the figures, which were already somewhat loose, and refix them on the plastered wall of the north transept, where are also to be seen

the very interesting brasses shewing John Browne, A.D. 1597, in complete armour of the Elizabethan period, and his sister Winifred in a ruff and brocaded petticoat, each with a long inscription at the foot, also a brass inscription plate to Joan Cok without date, but about A.D. 1460, and another to John Chapman dated A.D. 1621.

The figure of the man is almost as fresh as when new, but the lady's figure is very much worn, especially the upper portion, and the inscription is now lost. It appears that originally this brass was only partially covered by one of the old high-backed pews, and the upper portion of the lady being in the footway received the wear from countless feet. This old seating was

apparently removed during the restoration about fifty years since.

In the summer of 1920, as the brasses shewed signs of deterioration from corrosion, the present Vicar, the Rev. Alexander Henderson, had them removed, when the engraving on the back was first noticed.

It is not known who were the persons commemorated, but from the magnitude of the slab and the styles of dress they were undoubtedly citizens of considerable wealth and standing.

The male effigy, fig. 2, shews the man to be wearing civilian costume of the Tudor period, say from A.D. 1520—1540. He presents a three-quarter view to the spectator, and is on the right-hand or sinister side of the slab. This is not at all usual, most brasses having the male figure on the other side. His hands are clasped in prayer across the breast in the usual manner, and he stands on an elaborate pavement or carpet. His head is bare, and his hair is worn long and "bobbed," somewhat reminiscent of a recent feminine fashion. He wears an undergarment or tunic, which only appears at the neck and wrists, and shews considerable ornamentation. Over all he wears a long fur-lined gown with sleeves which can only be described as huge.

The sleeves are of that curious class which came into vogue in the early part of the sixteenth century, wherein the arm could be carried right through to the wrist, as shewn on the brass, or alternatively could be carried through an opening left at about the height of the elbow, the remainder of the sleeves act as pendants or liripipes, somewhat like those shewn on the Braunche and Walsoken brasses at Lynn and elsewhere. On a slab in Rolleston Church, Staffordshire, is a figure dated 1550, shewing similar sleeves, but with two openings in each for the hands, thus giving three alternative arrangements

as most convenient at the moment to the wearer. It should be remembered that this was the period when fashions in sleeves were many and varied. Often they were detachable and fastened at the shoulder to the doublet or cloak, and contemporary documents and wardrobe accounts frequently mention "pairs of sleeves" as separate articles of dress.

This gown has a large turn-down collar and is divided down the front, where the long edges are turned outwards to display the fur. The lower edge and the ends of the sleeves are also edged with fur. He wears curious half boots or shoes, strapped over the instep, with grotesquely square toes. These shoes reflect the military fashion of the time when the long-pointed sollerets had given place to the ugly square-toed sabbatons.

This is a typical civilian costume of the period, and there is nothing civic about it. Many instances are to be found locally, *e.g.*, St. John Maddermarket, St. Swithin, St. Lawrence, etc. The civic or mayoral gowns of this period in this district are of quite a different pattern, being usually fastened over the right shoulder by several buttons, generally three, and many examples might be mentioned, *e.g.*, Rugge and Terri at St. John Maddermarket, and others at St. Andrew, St. George Colegate, St. Giles, etc.

The worn condition of the lady, fig. 3, makes it somewhat difficult to determine exactly what the upper half was originally, but comparison with other local and dated examples permits the following description being offered. She is shewn on the dexter or left-hand side of the slab, about three-quarter view, similar to her husband; the figures are turned to face each other. On her head she wears a veil, which envelops the back of the head and sides of the face and falls over the shoulders. Her head-dress is too much worn to describe

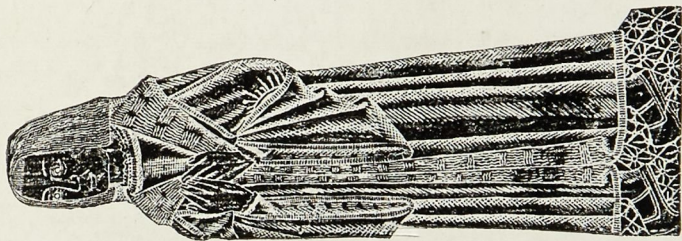


FIG. 2.

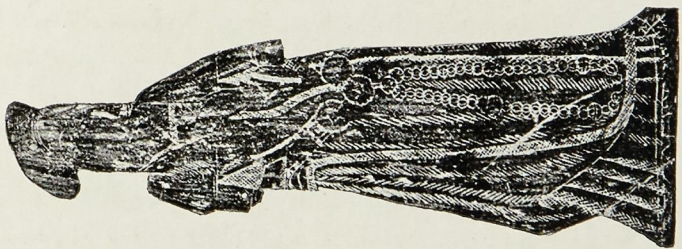


FIG. 3.

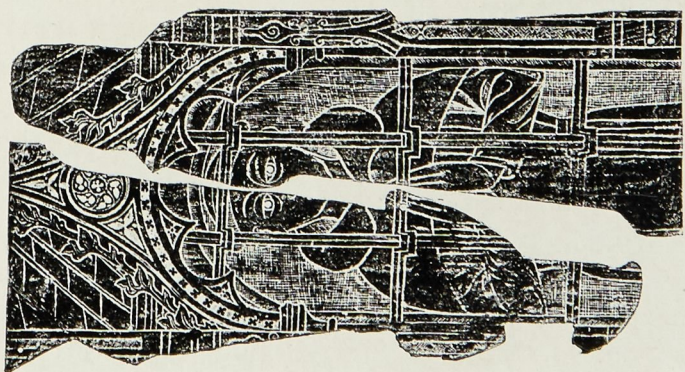


FIG. 4.

definitely, but it appears to have been of the nature of a broad-brimmed, low-crowned hat, and is unlike anything met with on brasses locally, although somewhat resembling the tam-o'-shanter occasionally found on brasses in Essex. Or perhaps it may be the rolled turban head-dress as can be seen on the palimpsest brass to Alice Swane at Halvergate.¹ Her arms and hands are in the same devotional attitude as her husband's. Her gown has tight sleeves and is very full in the skirt, and long, which for convenience in walking is looped up over the right hip, a common practice to be seen on various local brasses, *i.e.*, the Terri and Rugge brasses at St. John Maddermarket, Whyte at Shotesham St. Mary, etc. The bottom of the skirt is fur bordered, as is the neck opening, and there is also a further narrow band of fur down the front. Beneath this gown appears the skirt of the kirtle, which is very long and completely covers the feet. Round her hips is a massive girdle fastened by a device formed of three medallions or rosettes, as commonly to be seen on city brasses. From the lower and centre medallion depends a large and somewhat clumsy rosary of five "tens" of beads.

Altogether these two figures are typical specimens of a local school of designers and engravers which produced about this period a large quantity of plates for the more wealthy citizens, and specimens are to be found in most of the city churches.

The reverses of these two figures are shewn on fig. 4, from which it will be seen that both were cut from a much larger brass of earlier date, and the engraver shewed considerable skill in cutting both brasses from the one plate with a minimum of waste. The remaining portions shew the larger part of a fine canopy of the

¹ *Norf. Arch.*, vol. x., p. 218; vol. xv., pp. 65 and 66.

late Decorated or early Perpendicular period, with the internal cusping, external crockets, square flowered border, geometric wheel tracery in the sprandril, and other ornamentation pointing to the period A.D. 1400—1450. Sufficient of the plate remains to shew the two side shafts with canopied niches. Above the canopy there is an attempt to shew by means of diagonal and horizontal lines a tiled or slated roof, and the underside of the canopy has a suggestion of vaulting. The panel contained between the canopy and the two side shafts is closed by a grille, consisting of two square metal bars, arranged vertically, and an unknown number, probably four, of horizontal members, each in duplicate, the outer members of which are joggled to secure the uprights.

Behind the grille appears about three-quarters of the effigy of a man in the habit of a monk, and with his hands clasped across the breast in the usual devotional manner. He wears the tonsure and also a cowl, *i.e.*, the sleeved gown with hood combined and girded at the waist. Owing to the absence of colour, and also due to the fact that most monks wore approximately the same dress, it is impossible to say to what monastic order he belonged, but the whole figure is very like the brass to Brother William Yarmouth on the reverse of the palimpsest brass at Halvergate.¹ He was certainly not a Franciscan, as he has not the knotted cord for a cingulum.

The question naturally arises as to how this brass came into the possession of the engraver, and whence. It is almost certainly not a workshop reject, as there is no sign of unfinished or bad work about it. We must therefore conclude that it is the deliberate re-use of earlier material. The brass undoubtedly was originally

¹ *Norf. Arch.*, vol. x., p. 218; vol. xv., pp. 65 and 66.

made for a monastic house, and as these were finally dissolved and destroyed in A.D. 1539, we shall be fairly safe therefore in describing this one as spoil from some abbey or priory. There is no means of judging from which house this particular plate came, but it is known that much plate from St. Benets came to Norwich, some of which was used for brasses now in St. John Maddermarket. These brasses are of the same date as this one at St. John de Sepulchre, and are so alike in form and execution that the probability is they came from the same workshop. Might not, therefore, our plate have a similar origin?

It will be noticed that the background is not cut away from around the figure and the other principal parts of the composition, as is usual in the English type of brass, so that from a rapid glance we might think it to be of foreign workmanship; but excepting this point, all the rest of the design is typically English. The management of the canopy as a whole and in detail, the conventional treatment of the face, the arrangement of the dress, are all essentially English and utterly unlike the continental style.

The grille is an unique feature on brasses, and its meaning is obscure, the only explanation which suggests itself is that it typifies the life of seclusion led in the stricter monastic houses, wherein the inmates spent most of their lives shut out from the outside world.

It is very difficult to know what is best to be done with a loose palimpsest brass, or, for the matter of that, any loose brass. If the old stone is available, then it should be refixed in its original matrix. In this case a good rubbing should be taken of the reverse, which should be properly mounted and exhibited somewhere in the church, together with any other information concerning the brass which may be known.

In cases where it is impossible or undesirable to refix the brass on its original stone, or where the stone itself is lost, other arrangements must be resorted to. At Halvergate they have been mounted in hollow oak frames, which allow of both sides being examined, but they are very portable and might tempt the unscrupulous collector. A better way would be to fasten these frames to the wall with pivots on one edge, by this means the brasses are secured, and at the same time are quite accessible on both sides. Another plan is to mount the brass on a wood or stone mural tablet, with a good rubbing of the reverse alongside with an account of the removal.

It may not be out of place here to record a protest against the undesirable practice of rearing gravestones against the wall. What worse anachronism can be imagined than to see engraved on a thin slab the words:—"Sub hoc marmore," or "Hic jacet"? The removal of stones from the floor should not be allowed, even if it involves interference with the "shiny steam laundry" designs of paving so loved by some architects and church officers.

At St. John de Sepulchre the Vicar, the Rev. A. Henderson (who has been of great assistance in the preparation of this note), has had the male figure and the reverse side of the lady fixed to a neat oak tablet in the north transept, east wall. These two sides were selected as being the two best pieces of engraving representing the two dates. Rubbings of the covered sides of these two plates have been mounted, along with some explanatory remarks, in a glazed frame alongside.

The second brass now to be described is in the Norwich Castle Museum, and is a small inscription plate measuring $9\frac{1}{4}$ ins. by $2\frac{3}{8}$ ins., which was for many years

in the possession of Mr. David Clabburn, of Norwich, who, upon the antiquarian value of the plate being pointed out to him, with very proper feeling, desired to have it replaced in its proper stone, or, failing that, to have it exhibited in the Castle Museum.

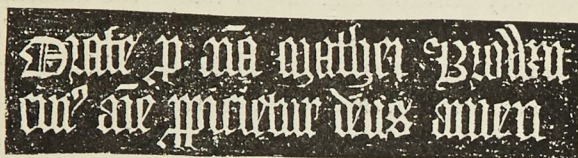


FIG. 5.



FIG. 6.

The plate, on the reverse or earlier side, fig. 5, bears the following inscription in Latin black letter:—

Orate p̄ aīa Mathēi Brown
cū aīe ppicietur deus amen

(Pray for the soul of Matthew Brown.
On whose soul Lord have mercy, Amen.)

On the obverse or later side, fig. 6, it bears the following inscription, also in Latin black letter:—

Orate p̄ aīabz Joh̄is
Rynhā & M'garate br̄is ei

(Pray for the souls of John
Rynham and Margaret his wife.)

Originally the brass was laid down for Matthew Brown somewhere about 1475—1500, as nearly as one can judge from the style of the engraving, and was subsequently turned over and re-engraved for the Rynhams about 1520, or maybe later. It is possible that the original plate was not to the liking of the Brown family, in which case the engraver would put it into stock to be re-used as occasion offered. The other alternative would be that Brown's plate was deliberately abstracted and sold to the engraver who made Rynham's plate. Brass being a valuable metal would always offer a temptation to unscrupulous church officers, and possibly the "cujus animæ" might have offended a reforming divine, in which case the date of the brass would be later than A.D. 1520, say about 1540.

The inscriptions are both of the type technically known as "Orates" and are of a style typically East Anglian. Similar inscriptions abound and can be counted literally by the hundred in Norfolk.

Mr. Clabburn was of opinion that the plate may have come from either St. John de Sepulchre or St. Saviour, Norwich, but in neither of these churches can the matrix now be found.

The brass is now housed in the Norwich Castle Museum on a wooden stand along with a rubbing of the reverse side. Both inscriptions (with translations) are neatly typed out and affixed to the exhibit.

The last brass, fig. 7,¹ to be described is in the Church of St. Andrew, East Burlingham, the first of the two churches on the road from Norwich to Yarmouth. It is now fixed on a neat oak tablet on the north wall of the north aisle and towards the east end. The plate

¹ *Norf. Arch.*, vol. xiii., p. 193.

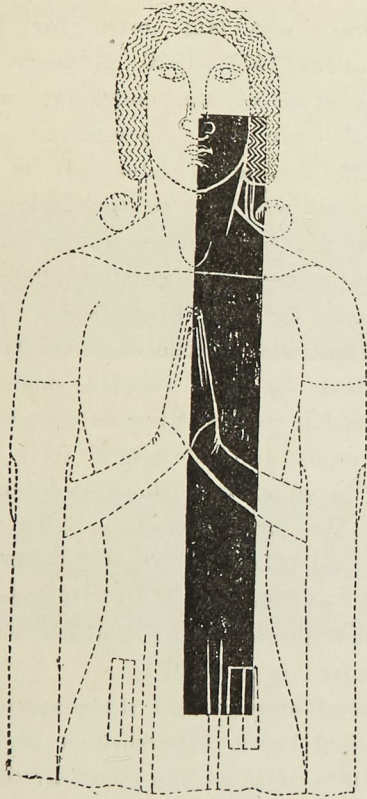


FIG. 8.



FIG. 7.

measures $20\frac{1}{4}$ ins. by $2\frac{3}{8}$ ins., and the obverse or later side bears an inscription in Latin black letter as follows:—

Hic iacet Elizabeth Framlingham, filia Francisci Framlingham.
Armigeri, que obiit 22 die Aprilis Anno dni 1559. (Scroll).

(Here lies Elizabeth Framlingham, daughter of Francis Framlingham, Esq., who died the 22nd day of April, A.D. 1559.)

This is an exceedingly well-designed and executed piece of lettering. The composition is properly punctuated and the "i's" are dotted, an unusual refinement

of the mediæval craftsmen. Another noticeable feature is the figures, which are of the Arabic form at a time when Roman characters were almost universally employed.

The reverse shews that our brass was cut out of the figure of a lady, and sufficient remains to shew with certainty the style of dress and date. To make this more clear the writer has completed the design, as shewn by the dotted outline on fig. 8, the existing portion being left black. The lady wears what is known as a zig-zag head-dress, in which the hair is strained into cauls or nets surrounding the face and of the peculiar shape shewn; over the back of this head-dress is a veil, which can be seen falling down over the shoulder. The visible wearing apparel comprises a kirtle, a gown with tight-fitting sleeves, and over this a cote-hardi with pockets in front, a feature seldom seen on brasses, but perhaps best shewn on a sculptured effigy to an unknown lady in Bangor Cathedral.¹ The date is about A.D. 1370—1390, and similar figures may be seen in Norfolk, at

Necton²—Ismayne de Wynston - - 1372

Felbrigg³—Elizabeth de Felbrig - - c. 1380

South Acre²—Lady Katherine Harsyk - 1384

The engraving is well executed and still sharply cut. The plate probably being out of the beaten track, or possibly on a tomb, would account for the slight wear. There is nothing to say where this plate came from; but the date of the inscription (A.D. 1559) suggests that it is most likely to be spoil from some church or monastic house dissolved and destroyed in the religious disturbance during the latter years of the reign of Henry VIII. Now that this brass has been found to be palimpsest a rubbing with translation has been exhibited close by.

¹ *Archæological Journal*, vol. xxxvii., p. 206.

Norf. Arch., vol. xiv., p. 244.

³ *Norf. Arch.*, vol. xiv., p. 243.