

NOTES

This series of notes is used to provide a place to publish important individual objects or finds that would otherwise remain unpublished. *Editor.*

A PALIMPSEST BRASS AT THE MUSEUM OF LONDON

by
Robert Hutchinson

The Museum of London has in its possession a fragment of a monumental brass measuring 143mm by 90mm.¹ Broken into three pieces, it forms the upper half of a shield, said by Mill Stephenson² to have been found 'in the City'. The fragment is palimpsest—or used on both sides—the obverse dated *c.* 1550 and the reverse *c.* 1475.

Obverse (Plate 1). Probably from the brass to Sir James Wilford of Hartridge, Cranbrook, Kent, who died 1550 and was buried in the now demolished church of St. Bartholomew-by-the-Exchange,³ in the old Broad Street ward. He married Joyce, daughter of John Barrett, of Aveley, Essex.⁴ The shield shows two coats impaled—that at dexter is certainly Wilford and may be blazoned *Gules a chevron engrailed between three leopards heads Or overall in chief a label Azure*.

The impaled coat is, however, difficult to identify and if the whole shield is said to represent the arms of Sir James, then it would be: *Quarterly 1 and 4 Barry of six per pale Argent and Gules counterchanged, 2 and 3 Argent three lions rampant 2 and 1 Gules and as many cross crosslets 1 and 2 sable* (Bellhouse).

The Wilford family is recorded in visitations both of Surrey and Essex. It apparently originated in Devon and various branches spread around London, Surrey, Kent and Essex. In Stratford-le-Bow church is an inscription, dated 1551, and two shields in a freestone tablet with crocketed and traceried heads⁶ to Grace, daughter of the merchant tailor John Wylford who was elected a City alderman in 1538 and was the son of James Wilford, Sheriff of the City in the late fifteenth century.⁷ Judging from the competence of the engraving, the Museum of London fragment comes from the same workshop as this memorial. Another indication is the use of a copper rivet, still in its hole (Plate 1) which is one of the hallmarks of what has come to be called the *Fermer* style of brass engraving. (See Appendix.)

Reverse (Plate 2). An inscription:

..... ? Civis et Pu
[ux]or ei(us) qui quid(e)m Ric[us obijt]
[men]tis Septembris Anno [Domini]
[qu]orum a(n)i(m)ab(us) p(ro)piciet(er) d[eus Amen]

(Letters inside brackets omitted in the original by abbreviation. Letters inside square brackets conjectural.)

Translation:

'. . . . citizen and (name)
 his wife, which Richard died
 month of September in the year of our Lord
 on whose souls may God have mercy. Amen'.

Judging from the capitals A, S and R, this inscription is typical London work of *c.* 1475. It apparently commemorates Richard citizen and P his wife. The first line is partially obliterated by the sixteenth century workman's filing down of the plate to enable a lead 'wipe' to join this to another forming the lower half of the shield on the obverse.

It would seem that the plate forms the right hand portion of the original inscription, save for a piece of metal about 25mm in width which has been sliced off the right hand margin edge for some purpose. The complete brass must have measured only about 300mm in width, surely precluding associated figures of a man and his wife.

What is certain is that this fragment forms one tiny part of the vast bulk of plate torn up during the Reformation which found its way back to the brass engravers' workshops for re-use. Unfortunately, this particular palimpsest does not appear to link with any piece or pieces as yet discovered 'behind' any other Fermer-type brasses.

APPENDIX: FERMER BRASSES

Economic factors and the distribution of brasses forms plausible evidence which points quite clearly to London as the main centre of manufacture in England throughout the 400 years 1300–1700 that brasses of the 'medieval tradition' were laid down in the British Isles.

In the middle of the sixteenth century, two main figure styles were produced in London. The first, classified as the Fermer style,⁸ was more prolific and in terms of engineering and artistic merit vastly superior.

Some 59 brasses identified as products of this workshop are listed below. This total indicates a surprisingly high level of productivity for the decade or so that the design flourished—taking into account the limited technology and transportation resources available in the mid sixteenth century. It must be stressed that this total mostly represents only *extant* brasses; it seems a reasonable assumption that some of the memorials dating from this decade which have now disappeared but are mentioned by such writers as Stow could have emanated from this workshop.

LIST OF FERMER BRASSES

Key: P = Palimpsest or reused plates.

SR = Appropriated or reused stonework or slab.

County boundaries take no account of recent municipal changes but follow those used by Mill Stephenson.⁹

No.	Date	Location	Type	Comments
1	1545	Harefield, Middx. ¹⁰	Civilian and wife	P SR
2	1546	Sonning, Berks. ¹¹	Civilian	P
3	1547	Aldenham, Herts.	Shroud	P

No.	Date	Location	Type	Comments
4	1547	Private possession ¹²	Inscription	
5	1548	Greystoke, Cumberland	Girl	P
6	1548	Blewbury, Berks.	Military and wife	P SR
7	1548	Braunton, Devon.	Lady	P SR
8	1550	Sessay, Yorks.	Priest	P
9	1550	Isleham, Cambs.	Inscription	
10	c. 1550	Museum of London	Fragment	P
11	c. 1550	Crowan, Cornwall	Military and wife	P
12	c. 1550	Holdenby, Northants.	Inscription	
13	c. 1550	Holdenby, Northants.	Inscription	
14	c. 1550	Holdenby, Northants.	Inscription	
15	c. 1550	Holdenby, Northants.	Inscription	SR
16	c. 1550	Holdenby, Northants.	Inscription	
17	c. 1550	Swyre, Dorset	Inscription	
18	c. 1550	Swyre, Dorset	Inscription	
19	c. 1550	Acton, Cheshire	Military and wife	Indent
20	c. 1550	British Museum	Fragment	
21	c. 1550	Derelict ¹³	Fragment	P
22	c. 1550	Society of Antiquaries	Lady	
23	1551	Ossington, Notts.	Military and wife	P
24	1551	Winchester St. Cross	Inscription	P
25	1551	Stratford-le-Bow, London	Inscription	
26	1551	Greystoke, Cumberland	Civilian	P
27	1551	Dinton, Bucks.	Military and wife	P
28	1551	Dinton, Bucks.	Military and wife	P
29	1552	Stoke Charity, Hants.	Inscription	P
30	1552	Beckenham, Kent	Military, two wives	
31	1552	Somerton, Oxon.	Military and wife	P
32	1552	Easton Neston, Northants.	Military and wife	P SR
33	c. 1552	Ludford, Salop.	Military and wife	P
34	c. 1552	Horseheath, Cambs.	Civilian	
35	c. 1552	Twyford, Bucks.	Military	P SR
36	c. 1552	Dry Drayton, Cambs.	Military and wife	P
37	c. 1552	All Hallows, Barking, London	Fragment	P
38	1553	Penshurst, Kent	Inscription	
39	1553	Littleton, Middx.	Inscription	
40	1553	Milton, Cambs.	Judge and wife	P
41	1553	Gillingham St. Mary, Norfolk	Inscription	
42	1553	Hainton, Lincs. ¹⁴	Military, two wives	SR
43	1553	Ashby St. Legers, Northants.	Military	P SR
44	1553	Great Hampden, Bucks.	Military, two wives	P
45	1553	Kirtling, Cambs.	Civilian	
46	1553	Halton, Bucks.	Judge and wife	P
47	1553	Shorne, Kent	Inscription	P LOST
48	1553	Northiam, Sussex	Inscription	P
49	c. 1553	Blatherwyck, Northants.	Military and wife	P

No.	Date	Location	Type	Comments
50	c. 1553	Willesdon, Middx.	Lady (Remnant)	
51	c. 1553	St. Mellion, Cornwall	Military and wife	P
52	1554	Chilton, Bucks.	Inscriptions, shields	P
53	1554	Warminghurst, Sussex	Civilian and wife	
54	c. 1554	Banwell, Somerset	Civilian and wife	
55	c. 1554	Charlwood, Surrey	Military and wife	SR
56	c. 1555	Clapham, Sussex	Military and wife	
57	c. 1555	Woodchurch, Kent	Military, two wives	
58	c. 1555	Hitcham, Bucks. ¹⁵	Military, sons only	
59	1555	Chelsea, Middx.	Lady, etc.	

It will be noticed that the great majority of these memorials are made up of reused metal: others have not yet been investigated. Many have palimpsest links and these are discussed in John Page-Phillips' *Macklin's Monumental Brasses* (2nd edition, London 1972).

It is the palimpsest aspect that provides a possible clue to the identity of the craftsmen who may have been responsible for this class of memorial. Churchwardens' accounts for St. Faith's for 1553 state:¹⁶

'Item the twentyth of ffebruarye solde to Roger Syluester and Aleyne Gaulyn, marblers, seven score pounds of olde and broken lattyn for syxe and fortie shillinges and eight pence.

Item. Lykewyse solde a lytle awterstone for three shillunges and fower pence.

Item solde the tenth daye of ffebruarye aforesayde to Mistress Crooke wydowe a marbell stone for a tomble for tenne shillinges'.

The theory that Syluester and Gaulyn were responsible for the Fermer series (marbler = brass engraver) is lent some weight by the fact that an inscription to Richard Tabbe, 1490, found 'behind' a Fermer brass at Great Hampden (No. 44) is traceable back to St. Faith's and the year of the memorial is the same as the sale of metal (1553). Unfortunately the reference to 'Mistress Crooke' in the same month cannot apply to the brass to John Croke at Chilton (No. 52) as his death post-dates the sale of the 'marbell stone for a tomble' by a year.

Points of comparison for identifying a Fermer brass are the curious 'bulging' eyes shown on all the effigies, a peculiar and somewhat graceful attention to detail and a conservative approach to design; for example, the figure of John Latton at Blewbury (No. 6) stands on a lion which one would normally expect to find on brass of the first half of the fifteenth century.¹⁷

Interestingly, in several cases the script normally associated with this figure style is dropped and that found with the workshop's contemporary rival substituted. Examples of this practice (perhaps a case of sub-contracting) are found at Blatherwyck and Charlwood (Nos. 49 and 55).

This second workshop produced rather primitive and naive figures with the armoured

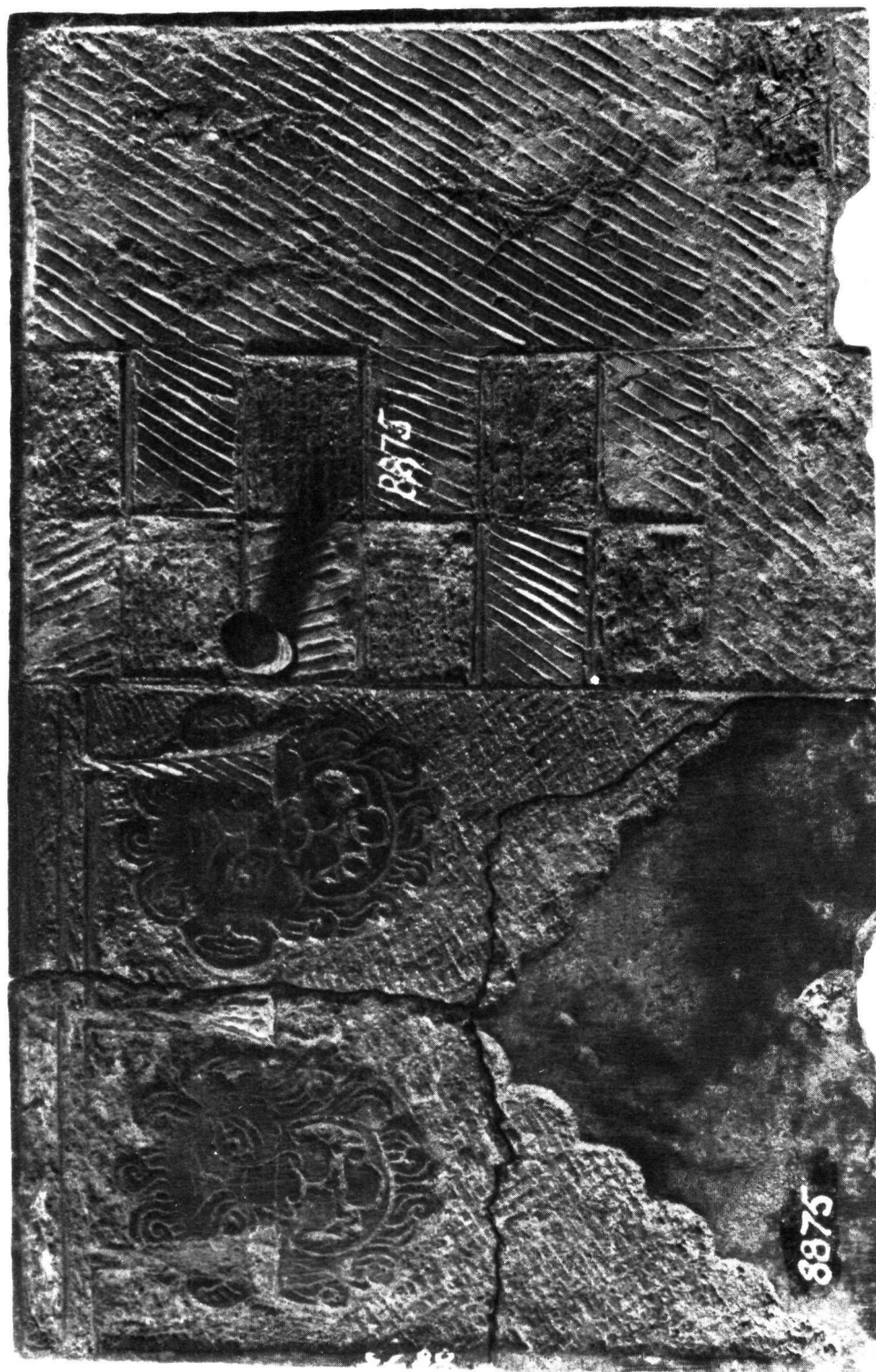


Plate 1. Palimpsest Brass, obverse. Fragment of a shield belonging to the lost brass of Sir James Wilford, died 1550, St. Bartholomew-by-the-Exchange, London.



Plate 2. Palimpsest Brass, reverse. Portion of an inscription, c. 1475.

effigies wearing heavily seriffed harnesses and cod-pieces. Examples are at:

Cobham, Surrey	c. 1560	P
Isfield, Sussex	1558	P
Willingdon, Sussex	1558	
Margaretting, Essex	c. 1550	?P
Standon, Herts.	1557	

The script is easily distinguished from that of the Fermer, having a capital S bearing a double-bar similar to the American dollar symbol.

NOTES

¹ Accession No. 8875.

² Mill Stephenson *A List of Monumental Brasses in the British Isles* (London 1926) 578. *Catalogue of the Collection of London Antiquities in the Guildhall Museum* (London 1908) 336, No. 220 gives no details of provenance.

³ John Stow *A Survey of London*, ed. C. L. Kingsford (Oxford 1908) I, 185. The Wren church was demolished in 1891.

⁴ Stephenson op. cit. 578.

⁵ Barrett is normally *Barry of four per pale Argent and Gules counter-changed*. My thanks to A. Colin Cole, B.C.L., M.A., F.S.A., *Windsor Herald*, for his invaluable help for heraldry.

⁶ Illustrated: H. K. Cameron 'Brasses of Middlesex' *Trans. London Middlesex Archaeol. Soc.*, NS II, Pt. 3 (1954) 48 and in Royal Commission on Historical Monuments, *East London*, Pl. 103.

⁷ Stow records the burial in St. Bartholomew-by-the-Exchange of James Wilford, tailor 'one of the sheriffs, 1499, appointed by his testament a doctor of divinity, every Good Friday for ever to preach there a sermon of Christ's Passion from six of the clock till eight before noon in the said church'. Stow also mentions the burial of John Wilford, merchant-tailor, alderman, 1544.

⁸ Named after the brothers whose brasses are at Easton Neston, Northants., and Somerton, Oxon. In the past, some writers have referred to the figure style as Fermour—although at Somerton, the name is *Fermour* and at Easton Neston, *Fermer*.

⁹ Stephenson op. cit.

¹⁰ Illustrated: Cameron op. cit. 21, Pl. 4. (facing p. 105). John and Anne Newdegate are interesting examples of a transition between two figure styles. The female effigy clearly belongs to the Fermer designs which at this time were superseding an earlier style which had originated c. 1525–30. Dr. Cameron draws attention to noticeable contrasts in the two figures of this brass (*ibid.* 103). I have noted this memorial as palimpsest

(although the reverse has not yet been examined) because of evidence of incised lines on the back of the figures.

¹¹ In the process of being repaired at the time of writing. (April 1976.) During a visit to the church, I noted that the inscription was loose and had a portion of another inscription ? c. 1450 on the reverse.

¹² This is the only example of a secular brass produced by the Fermer workshop so far noticed. The Society of Antiquaries has in its collection of rubbings one of an inscription measuring 295mm by 107mm recording the erection of a 'brygg' by Humfrey Pakyngton Esquier in 1547. The rubbing is endorsed 'Brass plate in the possession of Sir Thomas Winnington Bart, Stamford Court, Worcester'. I am now informed by Sir Thomas' descendants that the plate was probably destroyed in a fire which burnt Stamford Court to the ground in about 1890.

¹³ This fragment, thought by some to be from Quarrendon, Bucks., has on its reverse, a 'link' with the reverse of one of the Dinton brasses. It may possibly belong to this brass.

¹⁴ Upper half of Sir Thomas Henneage is a passable restoration of the original design. Other parts of the brass have also been restored.

¹⁵ The effigy of Nicholas Clarke (which I have redated from 1551 to c. 1555) belongs more probably to what John Page-Phillips terms the *Lytkott* figure style which superseded the Fermers. *Macklin's Monumental Brasses* (2nd Edition, London, 1972). I have classified it as a Fermer product as the sons are clearly on this design.

¹⁶ H. B. Walters *London Churches at the Reformation* (London 1939) 277. My thanks to John Page-Phillips for drawing this reference and its implications to my attention.

¹⁷ Illustrated: R. Hutchinson and B. S. H. Egan 'A Palimpsest Find at Blewbury, Berks', *Trans. Mon. Brass Soc.* XI (June 1975) 414.