

# THE BRASSES OF MIDDLESEX

## Part 21: ISLINGTON

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The brasses of St. Mary, Islington have suffered loss and destruction, as in so many of our churches. Weever<sup>1</sup> recorded the following in 1631:—

Here . . . John Fowler . . . 1538, on whose soule . . .

Here lieth Alis Fowler the wyff of Robert Fowler Esquire, who died . . . 1540

Behold and se, thus as I am so sal ye be,  
When ye be dead and laid in grave,  
As ye have done, so sal ye have.

Divers of this familie lie here interred, the ancestors of Sir Thomas Fowler, Knight and Baronet, now living, 1630.

Hic sepelitur Thomas Savil filius et heres apparens Johannis Savil Armig. et Margarete uxoris eius, qui in primo limine vite immature mortis celeritate matrem preveniens, ex hac luce migravit 14 die ctatis sue, Anno Dom. 1546.

He quotes also an inscription in English to Robert Midleton and his wife. He was servant to Sir George Hastings, Earl of Huntingdon, and died in 1510. Another inscription, in latin, commemorates Katherine Mistelbroke, here buried, and her husband, William Mistelbroke, Auditor, who died in 1492 travelling in the King's service at Denby in the Welsh Marches.

The old church was demolished as unsafe in 1751 and the present church was built and consecrated three years later. John Nelson<sup>2</sup> in 1811 describing the memorials in the old church quoted Weever and, in addition, recorded:—

Upon a brass plate: 'Mr. William Langham, late one of the prebends of Litchfield, parson of Thurbie, and Doctor of Physic, who died 16 September, 1603.'

On a plated grave-stone in the South aisle: 'Here lyeth the body of John Markham, esq. one of the Serjeants at Arms to our most gracious Sovereign Lord King James, & who dyed the 26th of August, 1610.

Another plated stone was thus inscribed: 'Thomas Draper, de Stroud Green, dum vixit Civis Londinens' . . . Ob. 23 Octobr. anno Dom. 1611.'

Upon a brass plate: 'Here lyeth Thomas Walker, citizen and grocer of London, and Ciccle his wife. Thomas deceased the 25th day of the month of July, the year of our Lord God a thousand CCCCLXXXVI. On whos sowlys J'hu have mercy. Amen.'

Nelson also quotes in full the inscription recorded by Weever to Robert Middleton mentioned above. Whereas Weever gives the date of his death as 1510, Nelson gives MCCCC. . . , indicating that the inscription was laid during Middleton's lifetime; also that Sir George Hastings was created Earl of Huntingdon in 1529.

There was in the old church, according to Nelson, a brass plate or plates commemorating numerous members of the Fowler family and their close relations. It starts with Gregory Charlet, citizen and tallow-chandler whose only daughter, Jane, married Thomas Fowler of Islington. Gregory died in 1593 at the age of 67. Jane had issue two sons, Thomas and Edmund. She was buried on 14 October, 1601. The record indicates that Sir Thomas Fowler then married Mary, widow of Sir John Spencer and she died in 1620, after which Sir Thomas married Dorothea Coape. He died on 14 January 1624. The account is somewhat inconsistent, which may be because the memorial was dedicated by Sir Richard Fisher, Bart. in 1678, 'to the honoured memory of his grandfather Sir Thomas Fowler.' Some pages later Nelson quotes the parish register. This reverses the order of the marriages. Thus: 'Thomas Fowler and Mary Mosse, married March 18, 1571. Mrs. Mary, wife of Thomas Fowler, Esq., buried April 25 1586, first wife of Sir Thomas Fowler the elder, not mentioned in any of the monumental inscriptions. Mrs. Jane, wife of Thomas Fowler, Esq., buried Oct. 14, 1601. Mary, the wife and lady of Sir Thomas Fowler the elder, buried Jan. 6. 1621, at night.' In the early years of the 17th century the register has many entries of baptism of the children of Sir Thomas junior, who was created a baronet in 1628. His younger brother, Edmund, inherited, but on his death the title became extinct. This rapid flowering and extinction of the family name is traced back only to the earlier part of the 16th century.

Nelson described and illustrated 'the boarding school near the bottom of Cross St. kept by Mrs. Clarke, formerly one of the most respectable edifices in the village; it was the mansion house belonging to the family of the Fowlers, Lords of the Manor of Barnesbury.' This manor was the property of Thomas Fowler in 1548 and continued in the possession of this family until 1656 when it passed to Sir Thomas Fisher who had married Sarah the daughter and heir of Sir Thomas Fowler Bart.

In 1842 Samuel Lewis Jr. also wrote a history of Islington. He quoted the monuments in the old church already given by Weever and Nelson, but adds further inscriptions which he found in the Lansdown MSS No.874, fol.73, taken from the Heraldic Collections of Nicholas Charles Esq., Lancaster Herald, of 1610.<sup>3</sup> How many of these are of brass is not stated, but, being mainly of the 15th century, it is likely that they all were.

They are:

'Stephen Hart, ob.1454

'Thomas Lambert, deceased 1470'

'Thomas Spencer, sonne to Sir Robert Spencer, knight and of Elenor his wyfe, daughter to Edward Beauford, late Duke of Somerset, that was slayne at St. Albans.'

'John Roger and Beatrix his wyff, w<sup>th</sup> John deceased 1478'

'John Whright and Elizabeth his wyfe, which John deceased 1482'

'Thomas Heyborne, who died 1485'

'Thomas Gore, parsonne of Isledon and Westhame, who died the 28th Deccember, Ano Dni 1499'

'Dyonis Ashxoll, decessed 1518'

Lewis described and, with line drawings, illustrated two brasses then in the new church; and these two remain there to-day. They represent members of the Fowler family. They were, said Lewis, 'until recently on the floor of the chancel, half covered by pews, and in danger of becoming still more mutilated than they at present are; but in 1836 they were removed to their present positions, against the walls of the north and south aisles, under the direction of John Nicholl Esq., then warden.'

In 1906 Mill Stephenson<sup>4</sup> reported the brasses as insecurely fixed. He learnt that 'at one time the brasses had been taken from their original slabs and fixed on the wall, but at a more recent restoration they had again been replaced in their original slabs; the work of refixing had, however, been so badly done that all were again practically loose.' 'The brasses were removed, cleaned and securely refixed by Mr. W. E. Gawthorp.' This work also revealed that both brasses were palimpsest, that is, they were made from metal sheets that had already been used for earlier memorials, some parts by adaptation and some by turning over and re-engraving on the reverse side.

I. A man of the Fowler family and wife, attributed by Mill Stephenson to Robert Fowler and his wife Alice.

This curious memorial (Fig. 1) represents a man and his wife engraved side by side on one piece of brass, the space between them hatched with short vertical lines. There is nothing remarkable about the figures which are of poor workmanship. He wears armour typical of the early Tudor period. His sword hangs from his left thigh across and behind his body; it is slung from a belt weighed down on the left side. By his right side is a long dagger. He is bareheaded, with nearly straight hair falling to chin level. His wife wears a dress with full sleeves just covering the elbows. The costume beneath has slashed sleeves ending in close-fitting wrist bands. She wears the pedimental headdress. From an ornament in the front of her belt hangs a long cord or chain with an ornament or pomander just above floor level. The date of these styles could be 1535-1545.

The single plate with these two figures is indented at the top edge between their two heads. Fitted into this is now a shield with arms on it. It is in outline evidently of much earlier date than the figures it accompanies and is too large in proportion to them. The figures and shield are beneath a single ogee canopy with four cusps below and crockets on the upper side rising gracefully to a single finial above. This is supported by simple side shafts the pinnacles of which are lost from the springing of the arch upwards. From its style this canopy must be a hundred years earlier in date than the figures, while the shape of the shield could make it contemporary with the canopy. This is clearly an example of the purloining and reuse of material from an earlier brass. It is no



Fig. 1. Man of Fowler family, and wife, c 1540

surprise therefore that the shield is engraved on an earlier shield that has been turned over and recut; or that the curious plate on which the two figures are engraved is also on earlier engraving turned over for reuse.

The overall height of the canopy is 47 inches, of the figures 18 inches and of the shield  $5\frac{3}{4}$  inches. The width of the canopy at the base of the shafts is 19 inches; between and below is evidence of the earlier existence of rectangular inscription plates, long since lost, while there are indents for four missing shields at the corners of the stone.

The one remaining shield has on the dexter side what are meant for the Fowler arms, *azure, on a chevron argent between 3 herons or 3 crosses paty gules*. The birds on this shield do not greatly resemble herons. These arms impale a coat now practically obliterated, but described by Charles early in the 17th century as *a chevron ermine between three birds*.

Mill Stephenson attributed this brass to Robert Fowler and his wife, Alice, who died in 1540. The date is certainly appropriate to its style, but, as Weever records, there were several members of the Fowler family who died around this time. Stephenson connected the brass with the inscription given by Weever, quoted earlier in this paper and with the tricking by Nicholas Charles of the impaled shield apparently against this inscription. If this is indeed their memorial it must have been prepared at his wife's death. Robert survived until 1543. In his will there is no mention of wife or children.<sup>5</sup> However, Weever couples with the factual inscription about Robert and Alice Fowler the lines:— 'Behold and se thus as I am so shall ye be. . .'. This sentiment was not uncommon on brass inscriptions, but is usually found accompanying a figure in shroud. The attribution of this brass to Robert and Alice Fowler is not, in my opinion, entirely convincing.

Mill Stephenson also records (without reference) that Robert Fowler purchased, in 1539, the manor of Barnsbury, in which he was succeeded by his cousin, William Fowler, who sold the manor in 1543 (that is, immediately upon inheritance) to Thomas Fowler.

II. Henry Savill Esq., in armour and wife, Margaret, daughter of Thomas Fowler Esq.

The two figures of Henry Savill and his wife (Fig. 2) are of markedly superior workmanship to the figures described above. They are the products of a well established workshop producing many brasses of great stylistic likeness to one another. Henry Savill is almost identical in detail to the figure of Gregory Lovell at Harlington, described in an earlier paper of this series.<sup>6</sup> The same pattern must have been used for both. Gregory died on 22 October 1545, Margaret Savill on 27 August 1546; the two brasses must have been executed very closely in time together. The facial expression, the posture of the figure and the headdress of Margaret Savill are exactly those of Anne Lovell. Both ladies have a large ornament suspended by a short chain from their girdle; the monogram IHS is inscribed on that of Margaret Savill. The headdress of both is the French hood, these being among the earliest examples of this style on



Fig. 2. Henry Savill and Margaret, his wife, ob. 1546.

brasses. In this respect Margaret Savill is recognisedly later in style than the Mrs. Fowler of the other brass, in her pedimental style headdress. The long suspension of the ornament in front is also of an earlier style than that of Margaret Savill. Yet in the dress worn by the two ladies at Islington there is noticeable similarity; the shape of the slashed sleeves of the main garment and the full and open sleeves just covering the elbows of the outer dress almost suggests that the same costume is depicted and that perhaps the rich garments were passed by will to the younger woman. Margaret's dress is not only much like her relative's, but completely different from that of her contemporary, Anne Lovell, who has large puffed shoulders, but more normal sleeves.

The design of armour did not change greatly for some years. If that worn by Henry Savill is identical with Gregory Lovell, it is also closely similar to that of Mr. Fowler. The only significant difference is that his head is lying on a helm. Otherwise the belt, the hand and placement of the sword and dagger are the same; the stance and attitude of the figures are the same, though the Fowler figure has feet splayed outwards in an ugly and unnatural manner.

Both the Savill figures are 21¼ inches high. Immediately below them is a rectangular plate 27 inches by 4½ inches on which, in blackletter, is a five line inscription which reads:—

Hic sepelitur Margareta Savill, nuper uxor Henrici Savill Armigeri filia Thome Fowler de hac parochia item Armigeri, que tum propter virtutū probitatem, tum propter morum integritatem, amicis charissima, quinto decimo die post plem editam, in ipso Juventutis flore, ex hac vita excessit, Anno etatis sue decimo nono, vicesimo septimo die mensis Augusti Anno dñi millesimo quingentesimo quadragesimo sexto.

By an error of the engraver 'millesimo' in the last line is actually spelt 'millesino' on the brass. Here we find recorded the unfortunate early death of a young woman in childbirth, after a short marriage. They were married on 3 May 1545<sup>7</sup> and at the age of nineteen, she died in August of the following year. It is no wonder that the inscription is tender and full of praises; or indeed that she wears the advanced fashion of the Paris hood. A small figure of the child, at whose birth she died, was below the inscription. Now lost, the indent, 6½ inches high, can still be seen. The child, Thomas Savill, survived but fourteen days, as was recorded (but incorrectly, as he says 'the son and heir of John and Margaret Savill') by Weever. There was evidently a separate brass inscription to this effect.

This brass is laid in a stone 6ft. long and 2½ft. wide. At the corners near to the bottom of the stone are the indents for two missing roundels, while at the top of the stone are two shields (identical in outline to the shields on the brass at Harlington) still preserved, each 7¼ inches high. The dexter shield has on it the arms of Savill quartering Wyatt: *1 and 4, argent on a bend sable 3 owls argent, a mullet in chief for difference (for Savill); 2 and 3, quarterly 1 and 4, per fess azure and gules a horse barnacle argent (for Wyatt); 2, . . . on a fess or 3 lions rampant (gules?) (another coat for Wyatt?); 3, . . . on a bend . . . 2 cinquefoils (roses) or, a bordure engrailed . . . charged with plates or.*

The sinister shield above Margaret has these same arms for Savill, impaling

Fowler, described earlier, but here the birds are correctly shown as herons.

Also on this stone are two curious markings, hardly indents for brass, being two interlocking rings. One of them is above the two figures and the other below the indent for the child.

Following the Dissolution of the monasteries many of the brasses in the monastic churches were torn up. Much of the metal was no doubt melted up and reused for other purposes, but some of the plates found their way to contemporary brass engravers for further use as monuments. This was either done by simple adaptation, as is seen with the canopy associated with brass No.I here at Islington, or more commonly by turning the plate over and engraving it anew on the reverse side. Such palimpsests occur frequently among brasses engraved during the decade or so following the Dissolution. Both brasses at Islington are completely palimpsest (as was the brass at Harlington, mentioned above).

No.I On the reverse of the plate with the two figures is part of a large brass, showing the upper sinister portion of an early 14th-century straight-sided canopy, with beautiful tracery (Fig. 3). The principal feature is an angel, with halo but without wings, swinging a censer high and above the remaining fragment. The style is reminiscent of early French work known to us through the drawings of Gaignières and this piece has long been regarded as a unique remaining piece of French origin.

The shield inserted between the heads of the figures on the above plate has on the reverse another shield, being *lozengy or and . . . , on a fess . . . 3 birds or*.

The canopy has no engraving on its reverse. As described above it has been taken from another brass of early or mid 15th-century date without modification.

No.II The two figures, inscription and two shields comprising the Savill memorial are all palimpsest, coming from five different earlier brasses (Fig. 4). On the reverse of the figure of Henry Savill is a major part of the figure of a priest in cassock, surplice, almuce and cope—from the neck to the feet. The orphrey on the cope is of lozenges containing alternately a quatrefoil and a fylfot cross. A row of buttons decorate the underside of the tight-fitting sleeves of the cassock. The date of this engraving was set at about 1370 by Mill Stephenson, perhaps because of this rather unusual adornment. Behind the lady's figure is the major part of another ecclesiastic, also headless. He wears cassock, surplice with very full sleeves, and a mantle over this. The mantle is drawn together at the neck by a cord from which hangs a long cord ending in a cross and a wheel-type badge of the Order of St. John of Jerusalem.<sup>8</sup> Fragments of other figures with this badge have been found engraved on the reverse of other brasses more or less contemporary with the Savill brass. Thus two pieces of the brass at Harlington, one from a brass at Lambourne, Essex and no fewer than five pieces from Ellesborough in Buckinghamshire, all of date *c.* 1546, have on the back fragments of a similar ecclesiastic with this badge. A fragment of yet another ecclesiastic with this badge has been found, in 1973, on the reverse of a brass to Sir Richard Catesby, *ob.* 1553, at Ashby St. Legers, Northants.<sup>9</sup> It seems not unlikely that the brasses of these various members of this Order were





Fig. 3. Reverse of Fowler brass

taken from their church of St. John, Clerkenwell after the Order was suppressed by Statute in 1540. This fragment at Islington must date only from the early years of the 16th century.

On the back of the Savill inscription is another inscription, virtually complete, also in blackletter, which reads:—

pray for the soules of Clement Byrd and John Skypper & Agnes  
their wyf the whiche John decessed the xxvi day of Novembre the  
yere of o<sup>r</sup> lord m<sup>v</sup> & xix on whose soules ihū have mercy Amen.

The shield with the Savill arms is cut from another inscription, the lettering of which is much like that of the Byrd inscription. The following words remain:—

. . . ołl Citezein and . . .  
. . . is wyf whiche . . .  
. . . march the yer of . . .  
. . . ihū have mercy . . .

The other shield has on the reverse the lower corner of a lady's figure, with the hind legs and tail of a small dog. It could be Flemish work of the early 16th century.



man for the soules of Clement Wynd and John Skypner & Agnes  
their wyf the whiche John decessed the xxij day of November the  
yere of o lord m c lxxv on whole soules you have gyven Dureu

Fig. 4. Reverse of Savill brass



Fig. 5. Head of nun, c. 1380, Kilburn St. Mary.

#### KILBURN, ST. MARY

I. There is fixed to the south wall a fragment of a brass, being the head of a nun of late 14th-century date (Fig. 5). This piece was discovered late in the 19th century and was first described in an earlier number of these *Transactions*.<sup>10</sup> J. G. Waller, in an account of the Tybourne and the Westbourne, including the Priory at Kilburn, gave an illustration of this head which had been found 'amongst some human remains near the site of the Priory during recent excavations for some additions to the railway at Kilburn'. Whether the person represented was a prioress as Waller suggested or one of the nuns it is impossible to say from this fragment; it is certainly amongst the earliest of the monastic pieces that remain. Waller pointed out a curious feature; there is a small cord attached to the veil for the apparent purpose of holding up the wimple, a garment usually held up independently.

#### NOTES

1. Weever *Ancient Funerall Monuments* (1631) 538.
2. J. Nelson *History of the Parish of St. Mary, Islington* (London 1811).
3. S. Lewis Jr. *History of the Parish of St. Mary, Islington* (London 1842), 197.
4. M. Stephenson *Trans. Monumental Brass Soc.* 5 (1906) 165-170.
5. P. C. C., 3. Pynnyng.
6. H. K. Cameron 'Brasses of Middlesex - Part XIII - Harlington' *Trans. London Middlesex Archaeol. Soc.* 22, pt.2 (1969) 48-52.
7. Foster *London Marriage Licenses, 1521-1869* (1887) 1190.
8. J. Page-Phillips *Palimpsests* (1980) I, 18; II, 39.
9. B. Egan *Trans. Monumental Brass Soc.* 12 (1975) 101-104.
10. J. G. Waller 'The Tybourne and the Westbourne' *Trans. London Middlesex Archaeol. Soc.* 6 (1890) 276.