

ON A BRASS FORMERLY IN THE CHURCH OF SAINT DUNSTAN-IN-THE-WEST

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During the removal of the church tower of Saint Dunstan-in-the-West in 1832, prior to its rebuilding, a small, irregular-shaped piece of brass measuring 104 by 92mm was found (Fig 1). It comprised a crown of thorns surrounding the letters 'Ihū' in black letter. The fragment is

known only from a reverse impression, now in the possession of the Society of Antiquaries.¹ It seems likely that the brass was lost shortly after its discovery, although Charles Spence² is known to have produced a wood-cutting of it in 1848, which he exhibited before a meeting of the

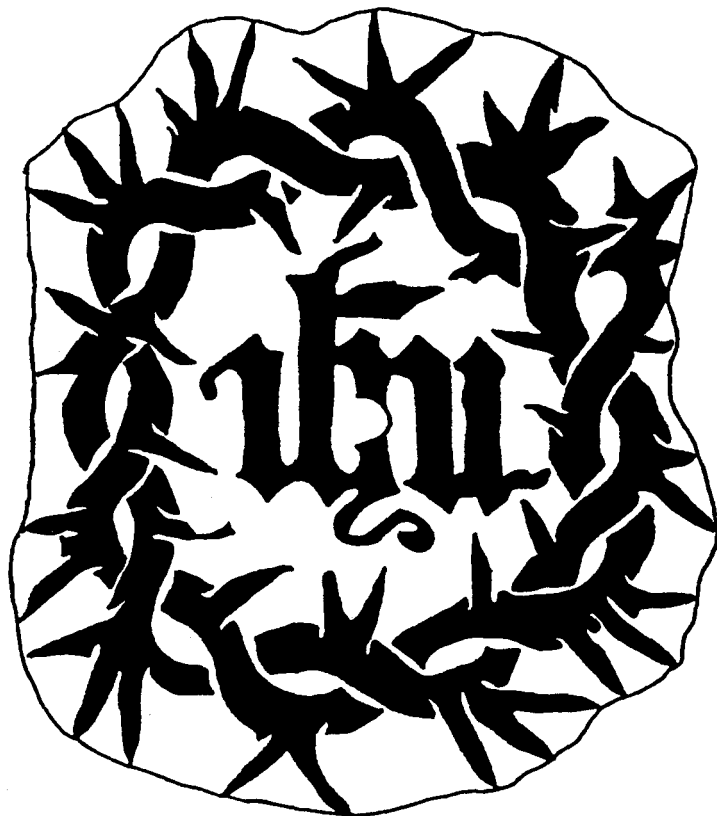


Fig 1. Brass from the church of Saint Dunstan-in-the-West. (Reproduced by courtesy of the Society of Antiquaries of London)

Plymouth branch of the Exeter Diocesan Architectural Society. The Reverend Herbert Haines fails to mention it in the Private Possession section in his 1861 *Manual of Monumental Brasses*.

Placing the fragment in context is difficult. It may be that the slab in which the brass was set was powdered with small plates, some bearing 'Ihu', while others bore the word 'mcy' or 'mercy'. The fragment is very similar to the wreath of intertwined ivy stems with berries that forms part of the brass to John Fortey, 'wolman', 1458, at Northleach, Gloucestershire.³ This brass has six wreaths on the marginal inscription, one at each corner, and one in the middle of each of the two longer sides. Robin Emmerson has assigned this brass to London Series B;⁴ possibly the fragment from Saint Dunstan's also belonged to this series. The plate is difficult to date, but a suggested date is c.1460.

Stow⁵ mentions a number of 'plated stones' in the church that are of a date similar to that suggested for the now lost fragment. However, there seems little likelihood of identifying the person commemorated by the brass.

NOTES

¹ Red Portfolio C-K.

² *Transactions of the Exeter Diocesan Architectural Society*, III pt II, 69.

³ *Monumental Brasses: The Portfolio Plates of the Monumental Brass Society* (1988), pl 179.

⁴ See Robin Emmerson, 'Monumental brasses: London design c.1420-85' *JBA* 131 (1978), 71.

⁵ Strype's edition of Stow's *A Survey of the Cities of London and Westminster* I (1754), 734-6.