

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

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In an earlier article, published in *LAMAS Transactions*,<sup>1</sup> details were given concerning a now lost fragment of brass found in St Dunstan-in-the-West in 1832, showing a crown of thorns surrounding the letters 'Ihū' in black letter. Since the publication of that note, additional information about the discovery of the brass has been found in the notes and papers of Philip Hammersley Leathes, FSA,<sup>2</sup> now in the King's College Archives.<sup>3</sup>

Between 1829 and 1832, in order to allow for the widening of Fleet Street, the church was demolished, and rebuilt on a different alignment. It was while the base of the tower was being demolished that the fragment of brass was discovered, probably in late summer or early autumn 1832. In his notes Leathes records the discovery of the brass, and this is worth quoting verbatim:

The stone on which the monogram was inlaid with cement & riveted was found by the workmen on removing the foundation of the south-west corner of the old Tower of the Parish Church of St. Dunstan, is of Petworth<sup>4</sup> marble which is occasionally found in very old Buildings was about two feet square, & from three to four inches in thickness, but mutilated and broken in several pieces by the workmen in forcing off the plate for the purpose of purloining before it was noticed by the foreman, & it appears the stone itself was considered of some value as each of them secured a piece, it was about eighteen inches below the general level in the centre of the foundation so situate that no part was visible externally, it is therefore presumed

it could not have been placed there for the purpose of a monumental inscription to the memory of any departed individual from the appearance of the pieces of the stone that are preserved, & the information obtained from the workmen there is a strong probability that there was another plate attached which was removed and taken away by one of the men.

It does not appear that any more of the same kind of stone was observed, as the foundation [was?] several feet above the level was composed of flint & chalk, combined with rubble shells &c. the foundation was generally in good condition & required considerable labor [*sic*] to remove any part of it.

At a meeting of the Society of Antiquaries, held at Somerset House on Thursday, 22 November 1832, Leathes gave an account of the discovery to members of the Society, which was duly recorded in their Minute Book.<sup>5</sup> In March the following year he presented to the Society 'a few Impressions from the Brass Plate'.<sup>6</sup> It would appear that only one impression now survives in the collection of brass rubbings at Burlington House, in Red Portfolio C-K. At no point in the brief history of the brass is any mention made regarding ownership of the brass. In all likelihood it was probably in Leathes' possession. He certainly had no trouble procuring copies for the Society of Antiquaries. As the brass was found amongst stone work in the tower wall, it is evident that this was a slab that was re-used during a rebuilding of the tower. Whether the slab came from inside the church, or whether

it was brought from elsewhere cannot now be determined. Once Leathes had exhibited the brass it disappears from view, and it is with regret that in the intervening 175 years the fragment has not been found.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am grateful to the King's College Archives, King's College London, for permission to publish Leathes' original note on the brass.

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> *Trans London Middlesex Archaeol Soc* 52 (2001), 167–8.

<sup>2</sup> For a brief obituary notice see *Gent Mag* NS IX.i (1838), 442.

<sup>3</sup> Leathes 2/6.

<sup>4</sup> Purbeck marble would have been the more usual stone for a tomb slab in the 1460s.

<sup>5</sup> SAL Minute Book XXXVI 4 March 1830 to June 1835, 243–4.

<sup>6</sup> *ibid*, 284.