

Monumental Brass Society

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BULLETIN 160

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Hon. Treasurer's notice

On 1st January all subscriptions for 2026 become due. Our volunteer bookkeeper, Judy Hodgett (accts.mbs2024@gmail.com), will be very grateful if members can pay their subscriptions online and not by cheque. Many members already pay by Standing Order. Online payments of £25.00 (associate/student £12.50, family £35.00) should be made to: Monumental Brass Society, Barclays Bank PLC, sort code 20-41-41, Account no. 10660957. When doing so, please give your surname as a reference. Payment can also be made using the *PayPal* system via mbs_brasses@yahoo.com. Many thanks to all those members who have completed Gift Aid forms. Any U.K. tax-paying member can enable the Society to reclaim tax on their subscription. The appropriate form can be downloaded directly from www.mbs-brasses.co.uk. U.S. members preferring to pay in dollars can send a cheque, payable to 'Monumental Brass Society', for U.S. \$45.00 to Shirley Mattox at 1313 Jackson Street, Oshkosh, Wisconsin 54901, U.S.A.

Editorial

At the A.G.M. in July there was a request for more information about what Council is doing. In response, this issue of the *Bulletin* contains two reports of recent activity. The first is about the results of the Membership Survey. The second is about the inclusion of much more metadata (index terms, if you like) about past issues of the *Transactions* in the Bibliography of British and Irish History (B.B.I.H.). Further reports will be included in future issues of the *Bulletin*.

Much of what Council deals with is well known or can be guessed. Ours is a small Society, with no paid staff, and Council only meets three times a year. Most of the agenda is taken up with regular items: planning future meetings; publishing the *Transactions* and *Bulletin*; maintaining the list of members; maintaining the website; monitoring the money; controlling expenditure; allocating conservation grants; and preparing the annual accounts. A relatively new element is the Ali Prize, which will be awarded for the third time in 2026. The call for entries was included in a recent email circular.

It is worth mentioning here that the Conservation Fund is currently underspent. There are thousands of churches in the U.K., and hundreds of them contain brasses or incised slabs. It is impossible for members of Council to know what is going on in more than a few of them. Society members can be the Council's eyes and ears. If you know of a brass or incised slab that is at risk (coming loose or otherwise vulnerable), please notify our Conservation Officer, Martin Stuchfield. He would welcome more reports.

Still on the subject of conservation, I have one piece of good news: the recovery of an inscription lost over thirty years ago from a church in Huntingdonshire. Further details will be given in due course.

Stephen Freeth

Personalia

We welcome as new members:

David Darwent, 12 Ansell Road, Ecclesall, Sheffield S11 7PE.

Clifford Johnson, 27 Woodpecker Drive, Creekmoor, Poole, Dorset BH17 7SB

Cover: Upper part of the figure of William Kesteven, d.1361, at North Mymms, Hertfordshire (LSW.I).
(photo: © Martin Stuchfield)

Diary of events

Saturday, 11th April 2026

GENERAL MEETING

AMERSHAM, BUCKINGHAMSHIRE

The afternoon meeting will commence at 2.00p.m. There are brasses of 15th- and 16th-century civilians and their wives, and a charming brass for John Drake, who died in 1623 at the age of four. **Hugh Guilford** will talk about the brasses and conservation work. **Barney Tyrwhitt-Drake** will then explain the Tyrwhitt-Drake family history and the family mausoleum, now known as the Drake Chapel.

Tea and cakes will be provided. During tea, there will be an opportunity to view the church, the Drake Chapel (normally kept locked) and the brasses. This will be accompanied by medieval music, performed by Amersham Music Group. The music will aim to be contemporary with the brasses.

The church building is mainly 14th and 15th century. The Drake Chapel is the former 17th-century vestry. In 1728 there was no room left in the chancel for a memorial to the recently-deceased Montague Garrard Drake. The Bishop of Lincoln allowed the family to convert the vestry into a private mausoleum on condition that a new vestry was built on its north side. The floor of the mausoleum was raised higher than that of the chancel, to allow for a burial vault beneath. In 1811 the mausoleum



*John Drake, d.1623,
Amersham, Buckinghamshire (LSW.VI).
(rubbing: © Lack, Stuchfield and Whittemore,
Buckinghamshire)*

was extended east, to allow for a new vault. In 1966-7 the family converted the mausoleum into a chapel and presented it to the parish.

Please email Caroline Metcalfe if you plan to attend the meeting, events@mbs-brasses.co.uk. She needs to know how much cake to bake!

The postcode for satellite navigation is HP7 0DB. What 3 words: attendingpassions.shorter. Parking may not be easy; there is a paying car park at Tesco nearby. There is a toilet in the church.

The nearest station is Amersham, 35 minutes from London Marylebone (Chiltern Railways) and also the terminus of the Metropolitan line (Zone 9). The church is some way off, and it may be advisable to travel to and from the church by taxi. The station has a taxi rank, or cabs can be booked in advance with local companies such as A to Z (01494 722722), Amersham Cabs (01494 727727), or Hyrons (01494 786486).

Saturday, 11th July 2026

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

STOKE D'ABERNON, SURREY

The Annual General Meeting will take place in the Hall room in the morning at 11.00a.m. The General Meeting will start in the church at 1.30p.m. **Please note the earlier time.** It will include talks from church guide **Stephen Chater** and from our Vice-President **Nigel Saul** about the brasses.

Saturday, 12th September 2026

GENERAL MEETING

ST. OLAVE HART STREET, LONDON EC3

This meeting will include talks by our Vice-President **Nicholas Rogers**, 'But the plates of memory are gone': visualising the church of St. Olave Hart Street on the eve of the Reformation, and **Mike Harris**. The churchwarden **Penny Ritchie Calder** has also agreed to speak about the restoration of the Capponi monument, which includes a recycled incised slab. This restoration was partly funded by the M.B.S.

There are many other interesting churches and brasses to explore or even revisit. If you know of a church that would be suitable for the M.B.S. to visit, please let Caroline Metcalfe know about it.

Annual General Meeting

North Mymms, Hertfordshire – 19th July 2025

The formal business of the Annual General Meeting took place in the morning. Following the lunch break for viewing the church and the brasses, our President, **Kelcey Wilson-Lee**, welcomed members and local people, including the Team Vicar, **Ruth Barr**, to an afternoon of fascinating talks.

The weather when we arrived was awful. Nicholas Rogers walked the last mile and was splashed so comprehensively by a passing car that the driver actually stopped to assist! Nicholas was wetter than the rest of us, but none of us were dry.

Local church historian **Michael Allen** began with a very helpful talk entitled *St. Mary's: a Different View*. North Mymms (but not

South Mimms, a spelling dating from the 1930s) can be found in the Domesday Book and a priest can be traced as far back as 1237. In 1328 Simon de Swanland began to build St. Catherine's Chapel, the start of the church. Building continued in the 14th century, with the addition of a tower in the 15th century. We were given many fascinating details of the church fabric and the monuments. As well as the various brasses, there is a fine alabaster incised slab for a lady of the Beresford family who died in 1584 (Fig.1). There is also an impressive memorial in the chancel for John, Lord Somers, Lord Chancellor, who died in 1716. Part of this monument forms the vestry door, of solid marble!

David Lepine then spoke about *William Kesteven (d.1361), Squarson of North Mymms and his Brass*. The brass to William Kesteven, priest, who died in 1361, is an Anglicised version of a Flemish-style brass, probably made by a Flemish craftsman in the London 'A' workshop of John Ramsey III (Fig.2). The inscription is missing, but the heraldry, *A saltire cross between four crosses bottonny fitchy*, identifies Kesteven, whose heraldic seal is preserved in the archives of Westminster Abbey.

David's talk expanded on his recent detailed discussion of Kesteven's brass in our *Transactions*. Kesteven was in royal service as a King's Clerk from the 1320s to 1342, then came to North Mymms. He died in 1361, possibly of plague. David used the 19th-century term 'squarson' to describe Kesteven, who led a minor gentry lifestyle, living at a farm on a moated site, and as rector being entitled to tithes.

The brass is a very fine piece of craftsmanship. Kesteven is depicted in mass vestments, all richly embroidered. Other details include the figure of God the Father with the waiting soul in the lap of God, and six Apostles in the shafts of the canopy. There is also much microarchitecture: canopies, pillars, arches, gables, flying buttresses and pinnacles. The Flemish brass to Abbot de la Mare at St. Albans, only eight miles away, engraved c.1355, may have provided the inspiration for



Fig.1. Alabaster incised slab for Elizabeth or Mary Beresford, d.1584, North Mymms, Hertfordshire. Greenhill described it as one of the best pieces of work by the Royleys of Burton-on-Trent in this period. (photo: © Stephen Freeth)

Kesteven's brass. As David explained, the recent *Siena 1300-1350* exhibition at the National Gallery has provided much of the brass's artistic context through parallels in other media, including textiles, wood carvings and gold artefacts. The Kesteven brass when new would have been dazzling.

Richard Asquith then spoke on the subject, *Between London and North Mymms: the Commemorative Strategies of the Knolles Family in the Later Middle Ages*.



Fig 2. William Kesteven, d.1361,
North Mymms, Hertfordshire (LSW.I).
(photo: © Martin Stuchfield)

The brass to Robert Knolles, d.1458, his wife Elizabeth and two daughters (LSW.II) is now mural in a new slab on the south wall of the chancel. The brass is badly damaged; the effigy in armour of Robert himself is missing, and the daughters are headless. There is little surviving information about Robert, but much more about his grandfather Thomas Knolles I, d.1435, a grocer and alderman of London, and father Thomas Knolles II, d.1445, another grocer. Thomas I was a veteran of the Hundred Years' War and had nineteen children. His role in rebuilding the London Guildhall and Guildhall Chapel, and the establishment of a public library at Guildhall using the vast fortune of Dick Whittington, can be traced in detail. Thomas Knolles II was also involved in this project: a foundation stone for the Guildhall Chapel has been discovered through excavation, painted with his name. Thomas II died relatively young and endowed a perpetual chantry for his family. Prayers for the soul were important. The brass for his son, Robert, marked a lack of male heirs, so remembrance was also important. This talk captured brilliantly the City of London in the early 15th century, and the links of the merchant class to lands outside the city.

Stephen Freeth then spoke about *Brasses Lost from North Mymms*. A watercolour of 1839 shows the church with box pews (described as 'abominations of a puritanick age' by the Rev. John Mason Neale, 1818-66). The Habershon brothers reordered the church in 1858 but made a mess of the brasses. Fortunately some now lost had been rubbed in the 1840s. In 1973-6 conservation work was carried out by Bryan Egan, assisted by Derrick Chivers, and the surviving brasses were mounted onto new slabs on the walls of the chancel. At about the same time a slab was uncovered in the north chapel with indents for the brass, now lost, of William de Bakthone, formerly butler to Edward, the Black Prince. This comprised an inscription and three shields. The inscription is known from old rubbings. Nigel Saul has traced Bakthone in the Black Prince's Register at The National Archives: he was alive in 1359, but dead by 1362. The brass must therefore date from those years. This makes it one of the earliest brasses from the London 'B' workshop that can be securely dated. Initially this workshop produced brasses with inscriptions and sometimes shields, but not effigies. We don't know if the three shields on Bakthone's

brass showed his own arms or those of the Black Prince. Bakthone was a near contemporary of William Kesteven, and their two brasses could not be more different.

Other brasses lost from the church include a figure and inscription for Thomas, son and heir of John Leucas of Kent, gentleman, who died 'yother' (young) in 1531. The boy's figure is now in the Cambridge Museum of Archaeology. Details of all the lost brasses are given in Lack, Stuchfield and Whittemore, *The Monumental Brasses of Hertfordshire* (2009). Two shields, believed to have been lost from North Mymms, were returned to the church from private ownership in 1955 and are also now fixed to the chancel wall. One of these may in fact come from another church.

It was wonderful to learn so much about the church building, its important monuments and the lost brasses. Thank you to the Team Vicar and to members of the church for making the M.B.S. so welcome, and to our four excellent speakers for an enthralling afternoon. [*And thank you, Caroline, author of this report, and Rosemary Fitchett, for the wonderful snacks and cakes which are such an enjoyable feature of our meetings, especially when we arrive cold and wet!* – Editor]

Caroline Metcalfe

Further Reading

B. Egan, 'A Repair at North Mymms', *M.B.S. Trans.*, XII, pt.1 (1975), p.46.

J. Bertram, 'The Tournai Trade: Flemish Brasses and Slabs for British Clergy', *M.B.S. Trans.*, XXI (2020), pp.5-37.

D. Lepine, 'Flemish Sophistication in Rural Hertfordshire: The Brass of William Kesteven (d.1361)', *M.B.S. Trans.*, XXIV (2023), pp.1-18.

A.G.M. formal business

The 2025 Annual General Meeting was held on 19th July at North Mymms in Hertfordshire. Apologies were received and the minutes of the last A.G.M. on 20th July 2024 were approved by the meeting and signed. The Report and Accounts for 2024 were approved. The meeting also agreed to discontinue Independent Examination of the accounts, the Charity Commission having relaxed its requirement for small charities. Paul Larsen was thanked for his work as Independent Examiner.

The meeting then proceeded to elect the Hon. Officers en bloc: Kelcey Wilson-Lee as President; Nigel Saul, Martin Stuchfield, Nicholas Rogers, David Meara and Stephen Freeth as Vice-Presidents; Penny Williams as Hon. Secretary; Andrew Ling as Hon. Treasurer; and Lucia Diaz Pascual as Hon. Editor.

John Lee retired from the Executive Council by rotation. Rosemary Fitchett and Dirk Visser having been duly nominated were elected to serve on the Executive Council.

Ben Elliott was elected an Honorary Member of the Society. He joined in 1955 when he was sixteen years old.

The President reported on the Jonathan Ali Prize 2026, following a year in abeyance. The current judges will serve for one more year while replacements are sought. Applications are invited for articles or single chapters published in 2023-5. Foreign language articles will be welcome but must be accompanied by an English translation

At the Executive Council meeting held on 18th October 2025 the following appointments were approved:

Hon. Assistant Secretary: Caroline Metcalfe

Hon. Bulletin Editor: Stephen Freeth

Hon. Conservation Officer: Martin Stuchfield

Hon. Heraldic Adviser: Sir Thomas Woodcock, formerly Garter Principal King of Arms.

Hon. Communications Officer: Challe Hudson

Hon. Technical Editor: Matthew Sillence

Penny Williams
Hon. Secretary

General Meeting

Geddington, Northamptonshire – 13th September 2025

Members of the Society gathered on a bright late-summer day in Geddington, where one of three surviving Eleanor Crosses stands to mark the overnight pause of Eleanor of Castile's funeral cortege on its way from Harby near Lincoln to Westminster Abbey in 1290. The adjacent church dedicated to St. Mary Magdalene contains a wealth of interesting monuments, including an unusual 14th-century inscription in Lombardic capitals that runs around the base of the raised chancel, and an elegant and recently-conserved 15th-century reredos. The church's bare stone interior allows the viewer to trace its development from the 10th century onwards.

The afternoon programme began with an overview of the church from local historian **John Bennett**. The building was initially a narrow pre-Conquest church dedicated to St. Andrew, set within a royal manor that seems always to have formed part of the queen's estate. Traces of the original arcading and windows are still visible. In the second quarter of the 12th century, however, Henry I erected a royal lodge on land immediately north of the church. Over the next century, the church was rebuilt on a grander scale befitting its royal connection, but after Eleanor of Castile's death, Edward I never returned to his lodge at Geddington, and this rapidly fell into ruin. In 1356, the right to appoint priests at St. Andrew's was granted to Pipewell Abbey nearby.

After the Reformation the church came into the patronage of the Tresham family, Catholic recusants whose sympathies may have supported the retention of medieval detail. They were certainly responsible for the fine 17th-century chancel screen that was later relocated to the south aisle. The Treshams inherited their interest in Geddington from the Mulso family, whose story was told in the second talk (see below). The church's later history included a reorganisation by George Gilbert Scott and some of the earliest extant work by Sir Ninian Comper, including vibrant panels on zinc set within the reredos and two prominent windows, the first completed when he was only 24.

The second talk was from historian **Edward Coulson** on *Families in the Landscape: the Mulsos and Jarman in Late Medieval Geddington*. Geddington's

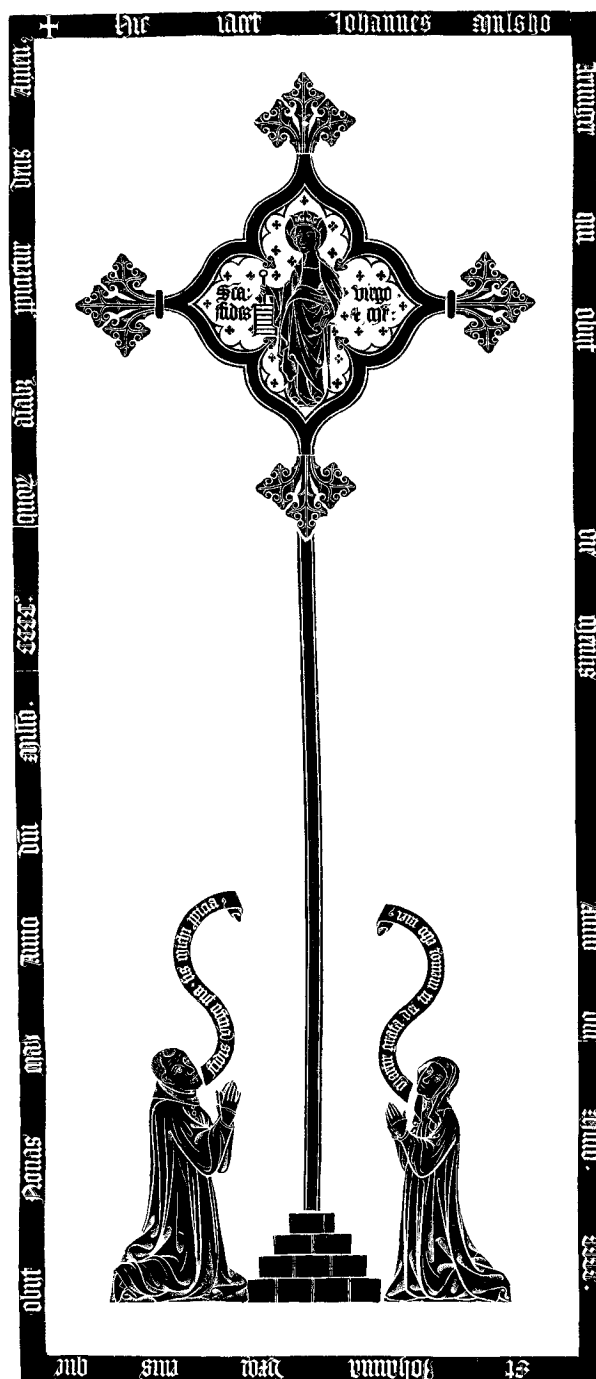


Fig 1. John Mulso and wife Joan, d.1400, formerly Newton-by-Geddington (M.S.I), now Geddington, Northamptonshire.

(rubbing: © M.B.S. Portfolio, I, pt.9, (June 1898), pl.1)

history as a royal manor meant that, in place of one strong local gentry lord, the village in the early 14th century was home to over a dozen local tenants paying rents for small holdings held directly from the king. Over the course of a century the Mulso family, who held the adjacent manor of Newton, acquired an increasing number of these holdings so that by the 16th century their descendants were predominant in Geddington. One prominent member of the family was John Mulso, a lawyer with connections at the court of Richard II. He was commemorated alongside his second wife Joan on a brass in the church of St. Faith in Newton. This brass was moved to Geddington in the early 1970s when Newton church was converted for community use; it is now a private house. The brass, of the London B series, depicts John and Joan kneeling in prayer at the base of a floriated cross in the centre of which St. Faith holds the gridiron associated with her martyrdom (Figs.1 and 2).

Two generations later, the family had increased their share of local lands rented to around

two-thirds of Geddington Manor. John's grandson, Thomas Mulso II, d.1460, was a soldier rather than a lawyer, and appears to have been a violent man, associated with assaults, rapes, and at least one murder. He was, however, well connected: he was a member of the retinue of Richard, Duke of York, who likely arranged a pardon for Mulso in 1441. Thomas repaid the debt by fighting (and dying) in the Yorkist cause at the Battle of Northampton. It was through his daughter and heiress Alice that Newton and much of Geddington passed to the Tresham family.

Despite the Mulsos' consolidation of Geddington lands, some smaller holdings remained. The Jarman family, comparatively recent arrivals in Geddington, were less significant local players but nevertheless had enough status and money for commemoration inside the church. Henry Jarman and his wife Anne are commemorated on a Coventry-made brass now in the south aisle. His will dated 1486 records that he owned hundreds of sheep. He was probably a successful drover.



*Fig.2. St. Faith in the head of a cross on the brass of John Mulso and wife Joan, d.1400, formerly Newton-by-Geddington (M.S.I), now Geddington, Northamptonshire.
(photo: © Kelcey Wilson-Lee)*

The Jarman brass probably occasioned the most exclamations of delight from the audience during the third talk by **Challe Hudson**: *Dressed to Express: How Fashion on Memorials Reflects Piety, Profession, and Social Status* (Fig.3). This was a tour-de-force exploration of the clothing depicted in the Geddington monuments, not just the Jarman and Mulso brasses, but also the 16th-century incised alabaster slab to Richard and Isabelle Tresham and a brass to Margaret Tresham (d.1604). By highlighting subtle cues of wealth and propriety in the detailed costume worn by the effigies – down to the pin that held Anne Jarman’s kerchief in place – Challe demonstrated elements of projected sophistication not previously apparent to this historian. She also convincingly argued that the Tresham incised slab had

been rather haphazardly restored by later carvers, thus calling its wider appearance into question. We hope to hear more about how the study of costume can enrich our field in the future!

As ever, the day was extremely well organised. We thank the speakers for offering their time and knowledge; Caroline Metcalfe for planning the day and for her superb baking; Rosemary Fitchett for publicity and other support; and the church and clerical team at Geddington, who were so generous with their time and lovely space throughout the day, and were also very helpful with the publicity and the catering.

Kelcey Wilson-Lee



*Fig.3. Challe Hudson addressing the meeting at Geddington, Northamptonshire.
(photo: © Stephen Freeth)*

Report on the recent membership survey

In 2024 and early 2025 Council sought feedback from members via an online survey. Most responses were positive, but they also suggested improvements or shared concerns. Council will take these comments into consideration as it plans future events and publications.

Over 20% of individual members answered the survey. They ranged from those who have supported the M.B.S. for nearly 70 years to those who have only just joined. Three-quarters of them had participated in Society events within the past five years. Keeping up with the latest research, and promoting the study and preservation of brasses were the most popular reasons to be a member. Over half the respondents enjoyed site visits with others, and many others mentioned an interest in rubbing brasses or a broader interest in churches and monuments. Other subjects of interest included conservation; palimpsests; engravers' workshops; family histories of the depicted; incised slabs; non-U.K. brasses; symbolism; medieval life; heraldry; and the relationship of brasses to both the church furnishings that surrounded them and to broader social history. Many people expressed their preference for the medieval.

The scholarly nature of both the *Bulletin* and *Transactions* was praised by many, as were the knowledgeable speakers at events. Events were highly regarded, but some members expressed disappointment at the difficulty of attending events due to distance, lack of public transport, cost, or time required. Two frequent requests were for more meetings outside Greater London/ the South East, and for joint events with societies with similar interests, such as the Church Monuments Society.

Few members who responded are active on social media platforms other than WhatsApp. Even fewer use social media to post or learn about brasses or slabs. Some suggested increasing online offerings, although they seemed to recognise that the suggested ways of doing so would require significant support from many members to be successful. Many respondents expressed concern about recruiting new members, especially those from younger

generations, but there was little consensus about how this might be achieved.

Other requests from members included the following, in no particular order:

- Hold online lectures
- Offer coach tours
- Publish shorter articles
- Publish more book reviews
- Invite younger scholars to speak
- Approach graduate students in relevant fields with information about the Society
- Contact people in similar organisations who might have an interest in brasses
- Place leaflets in churches
- Host local educational initiatives
- Teach brass rubbing
- Recruit younger members to Council.

Council deeply values members' feedback, and is already planning to respond to common requests. Council is working to develop a five-year strategy that will draw heavily from the Membership Survey. Work on this is in hand, and will be shared at the A.G.M. in 2026.

Please reach out if you can help with any of the proposals. The Society is run by a small group of volunteers, some of whom have full-time jobs and/or family commitments. There is a limit to what they can achieve alone. To assist with event planning, contact Caroline Metcalfe (events@mbs-brasses.co.uk). Arranging meetings in more diverse locations is much easier with a local contact; please get in touch. For online activities or social media, contact Challe Hudson (webmaster@mbs-brasses.co.uk). All other offers of assistance or suggestions for strategic direction should be directed to Penny Williams (membership@mbs-brasses.co.uk).

We thank everyone who completed the survey. We look forward to working with you on informative events and quality publications in the years to come. Together, we can make the Society stronger for the years ahead.

Challe Hudson

Monumental brasses in the Bibliography of British and Irish History

In the spring of 2024, as part of the Society's commitment to 'promote the study of, and interest in, monumental brasses, indents and incised slabs', the Editor of the *Transactions*, Lucia Diaz Pascual, and Technical Editor, Matthew Sillence, began a project to improve the discoverability of our journal's past and current articles online. Lucia and Matthew have worked with Jenny Lelkes-Rarugal, editor of the Bibliography of British and Irish History (B.B.I.H.), to catalogue articles as a complement to the journal's own periodic index.

B.B.I.H. is one of the most accurate and comprehensive resources available for studying, teaching and researching the domestic and global histories of Britain and Ireland, from 55 B.C. to the present day.

An academic partnership between the Institute of Historical Research and Brepols, B.B.I.H. provides up-to-date information on over 670,000 history books, articles, chapters, edited collections (mainly published from the early 1900s to the present), and history theses submitted since the late 1990s. The Bibliography is updated three times a year, with c.10,000 new records annually.

The Bibliography's editorial team consulted physical copies of the *Transactions* held in Senate House Library in London, and volumes freely available on the Society's website to create new records that were missing from B.B.I.H. and update its existing records. In addition to bibliographical information, a wealth of subject information has also been added to each article:

- **Subjects.** B.B.I.H.'s unique subject tree contains over 8,000 entries. With relevant subjects now added to articles, historians have a powerful way of finding resources and are no longer dependent on the appearance of words in titles or in keywords provided by authors.
- **Places.** B.B.I.H.'s place-names tree enables historians to conduct granular place-based

searches in the U.K., Ireland and internationally.

- **Period covered.** With this information now added to articles, historians can specify a precise date or set a chronological range to find relevant resources.
- **People as subject.** This initiative has highlighted how monumental brasses commemorate individuals and families from all walks of life. These details have been added where mentioned prominently in articles. In some instances, historians will see links to the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, The National Archives (U.K.) catalogue and *Who's Who* and *Who was Who*.

Volumes 1-9 (1887-1962) and 15-25 (1992-2024) are complete, with the new and updated articles now searchable in B.B.I.H. Where volumes are freely available to read on the Society's website, links have been added to B.B.I.H. Volume 26 (2025) was added in October 2025, with the remaining volumes due to be added in 2026.

B.B.I.H. is a subscription service, available remotely via university and research libraries worldwide. Individual subscriptions are also available for personal use including substantially reduced rates for:

- I.H.R. Friends and Fellows;
- Royal Historical Society Fellows and members; and
- Members of the British Association for Local History and Historical Association.

You can find out more about subscribing by contacting B.B.I.H.

Jenny Lelkes-Rarugal
and **Matthew Sillence**

The brass of Sir John Porte, d.1557, and two wives at Etwall, Derbyshire

Back in the 1970s I was in my early twenties, newly married and living in the ex-British Protectorate of Lesotho in southern Africa, when my mother came from England with a belated wedding present. Inside the cardboard tube was a brass rubbing that she had done while on holiday in Derbyshire, and Sir John Porte, his two wives and five children became honorary members of the family. Living 120 miles from the nearest library and long before the internet I had no means of discovering his history, but I had him framed and the Porte family hung on the wall in our sandstone colonial house, giving our hallway an air of borrowed grandeur way beyond that of the previous Resident Commissioner (Figs.1 and 2).

I should mention that Sir John was framed in Bloemfontein and drew great admiration from the Afrikaaner who worked on him. He said it was a welcome change from the endless Tretchikoffs and rugby teams that were his usual line of work, but his imagination simply could not take him

back to 1557. His grandfather had been on the Great Trek and had fought the British in the Boer War and any history prior to that was lost on him, but he did think that the armour might have come in handy when his grandfather was doing battle with the Zulus.

After spending twenty years being dusted by our faithful household staff, Sir John was tenderly wrapped in a Basotho blanket, loaded onto our old Landcruiser and moved across the border to the derelict South African farm that we had purchased. Once we had cleared the sheep manure out of the sitting room and painted the walls, I would look at him on his bended knees, and know how he felt after dealing with a never-ending series of problems.

Sadly, after eight years with the worsening security situation, we sold the farm and Sir John was bubble-wrapped and shipped to England. For three years he graced our home in West Sussex



*Fig 1. The much-travelled rubbing of Sir John Porte.
(photo: © Kate Fagalde)*

before being stored in the dark while we moved for five years to Florida. Happily we moved to France in 2008 and he was brought back into the light and hung on the walls of the 15th-century Château de La Fare in the south of France.

On long loan to Australian friends who had given both Sir John and ourselves a home at the château, he shared the ancient walls with photos of the late Queen Elizabeth and her Australian senior coachman, while my French husband and I travelled back and forth to Australia visiting family and house-sitting extensively. And now, fifteen years later, we have finally found a home of our own an hour from Nîmes, and Sir John has left the château and moved back in with us. I must give credit to my husband who has drilled into yet another wall, and once again has installed a strong enough hook to ensure that Sir John and the family are level and secure.



Fig2. The author at home in South Africa, c.1995.
Part of Sir John Porte can be seen in the top left.
(photo: © Kate Fagalde)

At last I have had the time to look into his background, and have discovered that he was High Sheriff of Derbyshire, funded the construction of almshouses in Etwall and was the founder of Repton School. I have a feeling that generations of young pupils must have found the conditions of his will somewhat onerous:

‘And I will that the Scolers of the said Scole everye mornynge at their commynge to the said Scole and also at after none at and upon their departing from the Scole to pray for my parentes soules, my soule, the soule of Elizabeth Porte my late wife, the soules of Walter Porte and Thomas Porte my children [and others]. . .’ – The will of Sir John Porte, made 9th March 1556/7, proved 26th June 1557 (TNA, PROB 11/39/245).

His first wife Elizabeth gave him five children, all of whom can be seen on the brass. Their two sons died young, but the three daughters survived and married well. Having been widowed, Sir John re-married to Dorothy, but no further

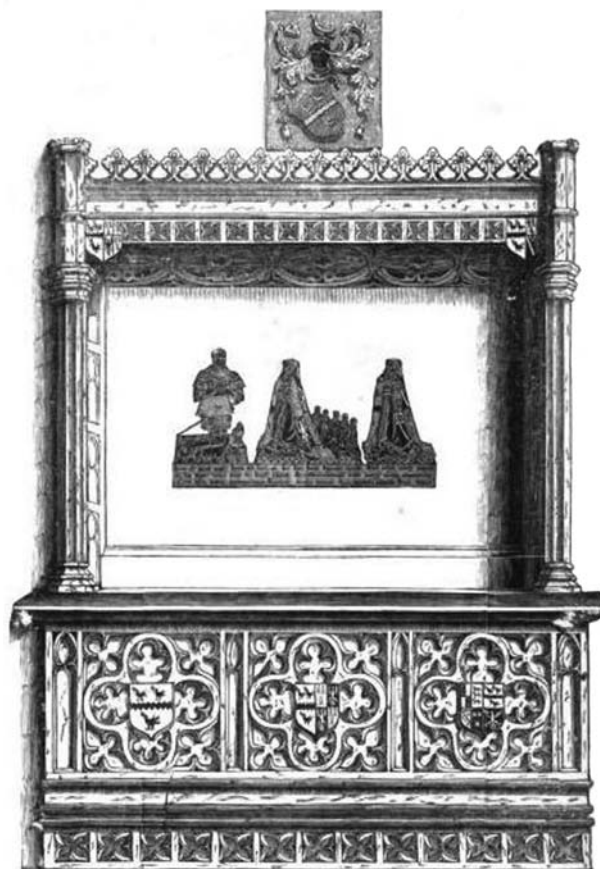


Fig3. Engraving of the tomb of Sir John Porte, d.1557,
Etwall, Derbyshire (LSW.II).
(engraving: © Alamy)

offspring arrived. I like to think of the beautiful ceremonial robes worn by both his wives, and I am sure that he went to his rest, albeit far too young (aged 42), as a beloved husband and father, duly mourned by the good people of Etwall who must have attended the funeral of such a public benefactor (Figs.3 and 4).

I am grateful to Stephen Freeth for the following transcript of the foot inscription beneath the effigies of Sir John and his two wives:

*Under thys Tombe lyeth buried the Boodye of
Syr John Porte Knyght sonne & heyre unto/
Syr John Porte one of the Justyces of ye Kinges
Benche at Westmynstur, Elsebeth and Dorothe
wyves/ to the same Sir John Porte the Sonne which
Sonne Dyed the syxt day of June Anno Domini
1557*

As a youngster growing up near Berkhamsted, I used to daydream through the sermons in the

old Norman church of Northchurch, reading the plaques and looking at the ancient engravings. Never did I imagine that something that took me back to my favourite period in history would become such an integral part of my life. Sir John has been with me for the past fifty years through thick and thin, and I am glad that now we are settled he once again graces our walls with dignity.

Thank you, Sir John. I hope you have enjoyed your travels despite having to pack a suit of armour, ceremonial clothes for two wives and outfits for five children. And thank you to my mother who must have spent a long time rubbing the original brass in St. Helen's church at Etwall. There is now an excellent reproduction which I believe can still be rubbed, and if you should find your way there, please pass along my warm greetings and may he rest in peace along with his wives.

Kate Fagalde

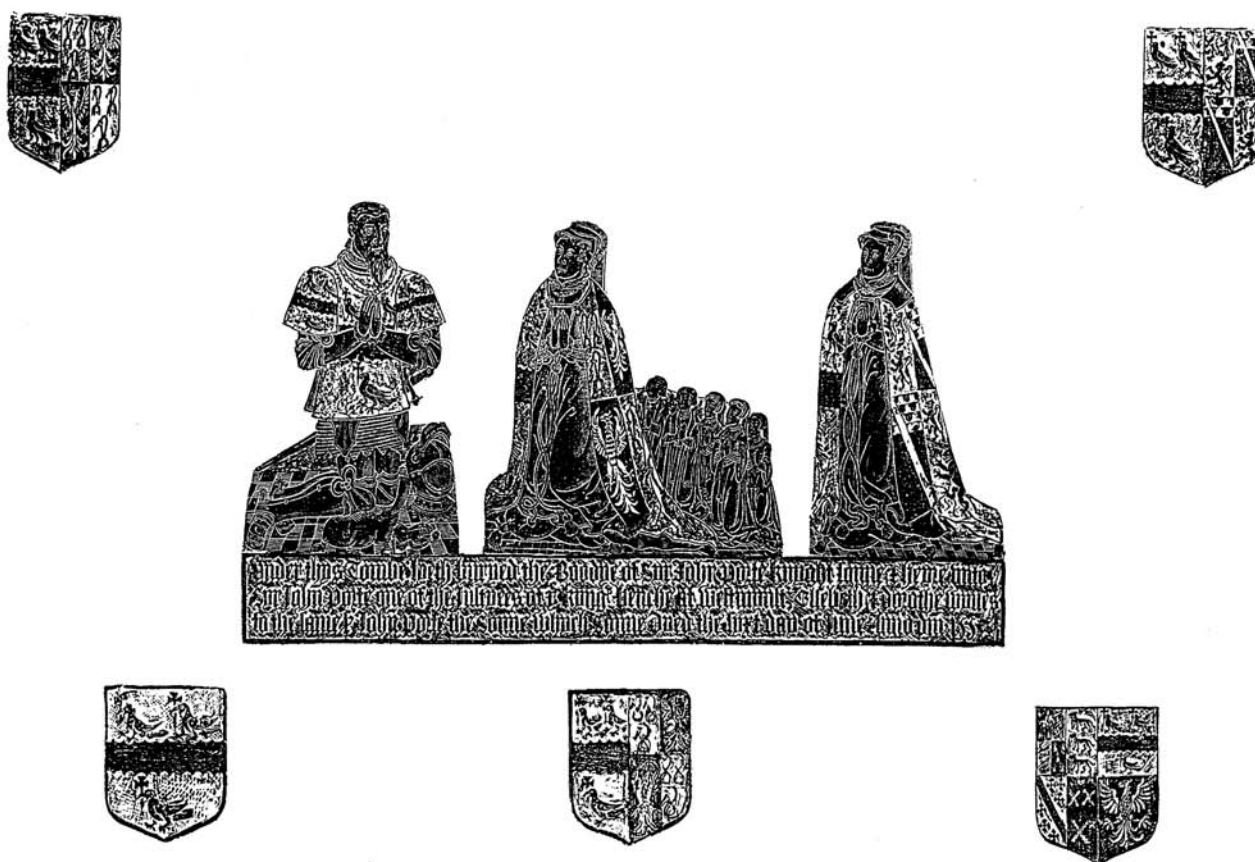


Fig 4. Sir John Porte, son and heir of Sir John Porte, Justice of the King's Bench, d.1557, and two wives,
(1) Elizabeth, [daughter of Sir Thomas Giffard of Chillington, Staffordshire], with two sons and three daughters,
(2) Dorothy, [daughter of Sir Anthony Fitzherbert of Norbury], Etwall, Derbyshire (LSW.II).
(rubbing: © Lack, Stuchfield and Whittemore, Derbyshire)

A 15th-century civilian brass at Baldock, Hertfordshire, and its 21st-century replica at St. Teilo's, St. Fagan's Museum of History, Cardiff

Part I – Baldock

In the floor of the north aisle of St. Mary the Virgin, Baldock, Hertfordshire, is a stone slab with a London D-style brass of c.1480 to a richly-dressed civilian couple, presumably husband and wife (LSW.III).¹ There are four shield-shaped indents in the corners and a foot inscription indent under the figures (Fig.1).

The male figure measures 713 x 209 mm. From his belt hangs a fancy gypcière with a wide bar and frame-ring at the top, and five baubles along the bottom edge. Also hanging from the belt, in front of the purse, is a tasselled loop of large prayer beads, suggesting piety as well as wealth. Between his feet is a single plant stem ending in three leaves, possibly a stylised clover. His garb is that of a wealthy merchant or administrator. The female effigy measures 689 x 248 mm. She wears a fashionable horned and veiled head-dress. Both figures have their hands folded in prayer.

The identity of the figures

In 1926, following earlier writers, Mill Stephenson provisionally identified the couple as William Crane, d.1483, and wife either Joan or Margaret, by matching the brass with a lost inscription transcribed in 1631 by John Weever.² However Crane's inscription mentioned both his wives by name, and a better fit is with a worn indent of c.1480 in the floor of the south aisle for a male civilian flanked by two women with an inscription panel at their feet (LSW.29).³ The identification of the pair on the brass thus remains open.

Until c.1757 the brass formed the top of an altar tomb against the north wall of the chancel.⁴ This was a much grander proposition than a floor brass in a side aisle, and an unusual choice for a civilian memorial. Raised monuments were favoured by the knightly classes rather than the third estate. They were more visible than those set into the floor, but significantly more expensive. The chancel of a parish church was a privileged, devotionally significant location



Fig.1. Civilian and wife, engraved c.1480,
Baldock, Hertfordshire (LSW.III).
(rubbing: © Lack, Stuchfield and Whittemore, Hertfordshire)



Fig.2. John Tame, d.1500, and wife Alice, d.1471,
Fairford, Gloucestershire (LSW.I).
(rubbing: © Lack, Stuchfield and Whittemore, Gloucestershire)

initially reserved for the monuments of clerics, patrons and benefactors, later becoming available to those of gentle rank permitted to sit in the chancel during Mass. The north side was the more honorific, and the flat top of an altar tomb in this location could be used to support the Easter sepulchre, both a spiritual advantage for

the deceased, putting them at the centre of the Easter rituals, and a benefit for the parish.

Manorial lords generally chose to be represented on their monuments in armour as a mark of status, whether or not they were actually knighted.⁵ However this was not a hard and fast rule. After the Black Death of 1349 the hierarchical divisions in society were breaking down. Some armigerous landlords chose civilian brasses, such as Nicholas Carew, d.1432, at Beddington, Surrey (M.S.III), who owned a string of manors across the county.⁶ The wool merchant John Tame, d.1500, broke with convention in the opposite direction and is shown in full armour on his brass on a chest tomb at Fairford, Gloucestershire (LSW.I) (Fig.2).⁷ At Baldock the lordship from the early 14th century until 1540 was held by the Hospitallers, while the Crown held the advowson of the church from 1359 to 1822.⁸ That a civilian and his wife who were neither lords of Baldock nor patrons of its church should commission a grand monument in such a prized position indicates a strong sense of self, perhaps the result of magnate service, and prominence in the community.⁹ There may have been a connection with the Hospitallers, or the couple may have been benefactors; much of the church is 15th century, indicating extensive alterations at that time.

The two figures wear similar clothing to the main figures on another brass of c.1480, to clothier John Jay and his wife Alice at St. Mary Redcliffe, Bristol, a London F-series product (LSW.VI).¹⁰ Jay was associated with the Bristol weavers' guild, and the shields on his brass depict his merchant's mark and clothmaking tools. Baldock was a long-established market town, trading with London merchants and deriving most of its income from wool and associated businesses.¹¹ It also had an influential guild, established before 1459.¹² The Baldock merchant may have dealt in cloth too, although evidence is missing. The 'clover leaf' between his feet may nod at the cloth trade.¹³ Similar trefoils occur underfoot on a handful of other brasses to cloth traders, notably John Taylour, d.1490, at Northleach (LSW.V) and Edward Haliday, d.1519, at Minchinhampton (LSW.III), both in Gloucestershire; and Richard Wenman, d.1534, at Witney, Oxfordshire (M.S.I). Wenman was a wool merchant and merchant of the staple at Calais. He was also a manorial lord, although not

of Witney itself, which was held by the bishop of Winchester.¹⁴ His brass, a larger, grander version of the brass at Baldock, lies on a large altar tomb which stood originally in the Wenman family chapel.

Alternatively, the ‘clover’ may relate to the Holy Trinity. Taylour’s brass once displayed a roundel of the Trinity.¹⁵ Wenman’s brass retains a rectangular panel of the Trinity and a prayer scroll ascending to it which reads *Sancta Trinitas unus deus miserere nobis*. At Baldock, the town guild worshipped at the altar of the Holy Trinity.¹⁶ Known as the Brotherhood of the Holy Name of Jhesu, the guild was a substantial foundation in which ‘all the principal men and women of the town were enrolled’.¹⁷

Could the brass relate to a leading member of this guild? Local manorial lords such as William Druell, d.1485, supported it in life and after death, but Druell’s will indicates that his main concern was his manor of Clothall, adjacent to Baldock, where he established a chantry.¹⁸ The guild’s founders are further possibilities. Five names appear on the licence. Two of them were clerics, John Edom and John Walyngton. Two were esquires, Peter Paule and John Martyn. Another man, John Broun, was ‘of the king’s household’. Peter Paule held the manor of Kingswood Bury within Clothall.¹⁹ In 1438 he and John Walyngton acquired land jointly in Weston, another neighbouring manor.²⁰ In 1472 John Broun, ‘alderman of London’ and John Martyn jointly acquired a string of manors and other assets in Buckinghamshire and Hertfordshire, the coincidence suggesting it was the same two men.²¹ If so, Broun had perhaps served in the king’s household earlier in his career. Another name on this same land deal is Sir George Irlond, alderman and sometime Master of the Grocers’ Company. Alderman Broun or Brown(e) was sometime Master of the Mercers’ Company. Both served as sheriff, Broun serving as mayor as well, and both were subsequently knighted.²² John Broun was buried in St. Mary Magdalene, Milk Street, London.²³ John Martyn’s association with Broun and Irlond suggests he too was a merchant, perhaps the wealthy London tailor and draper of that name, recorded in the 1450s.²⁴ If the Baldock brass does commemorate a guild member, John Martyn and Peter Paule are possible candidates.

While still unidentified, the brass is worth studying for the insight it offers into late-medieval urban society. As part of a small group of civilian brasses to wealthy merchants and/or administrators who were also manorial lords, it suggests pride in their role in society, while the use of an altar tomb may lay claim to gentility.

Nicola Lowe

[Part II of this article has been held over to the next *Bulletin*.]

- 1 W. Lack, H.M. Stuchfield and P. Whittemore, *The Monumental Brasses of Hertfordshire* (London, 2009), p.68.
- 2 M. Stephenson, *List of Monumental Brasses in the British Isles* (London, 1926), p.180; H. Haines, *Manual of Monumental Brasses*, 2 vols. (Oxford and London, 1861), II, p.79; W.F. Andrews, *Memorial Brasses in Hertfordshire Churches* (Hertford, 1886), p.10.
- 3 Lack, Stuchfield and Whittemore, *Hertfordshire*, p.74.
- 4 ‘By the north wall was an old altar tomb which with the Bishop’s leave, at his Confirmation last year, was pulled down and the grey stone at top laid flat on the floor in the same place,’ referenced by Lack, Stuchfield and Whittemore, *Hertfordshire*, p.68.
- 5 For a thorough discussion including exceptions, see N. Saul, *English Church Monuments in the Middle Ages: History and Representation* (Oxford, 2009), pp.231-7, p.241, p.262.
- 6 *Ibid.*, p.261.
- 7 C. Hobson, *The Tames of Fairford* (Fairford, 2014).
- 8 ‘Parishes: Baldock’, in *A History of the County of Hertford: Volume 3*, ed. William Page (London, 1912), British History Online, <https://www.british-history.ac.uk/vch/herts/vol3/pp65-73> [accessed 16th August 2025].
- 9 The choice of altar tomb with brass could signal a retainer’s allegiance to a magnate employer who had employed such a combination. See A. Adams, ‘Revealing/Concealing: Monumental Brasses on Tomb Chests – John I, Duke of Cleves, and Catherine of Bourbon, Duchess of Guelders’, *Revisiting the Monument: Fifty Years since Panofsky’s Tomb Sculpture*, pp.161-170, at pp.163-65. For the self-made patron see N. Saul, *Lordship and Faith: The English Gentry and the Parish Church in the Middle Ages* (Oxford, 2017), particularly pp.7-8.
- 10 See J. Lee, ‘Medieval Clothiers and their Brassers’, *M.B.S. Trans.*, XXV (2024), pp.26-55.
- 11 See for example TNA, C 241/242/4; also *Calendar of Patent Rolls 1476-85* (London, 1901), p.188; and I. Thompson, *Baldock Extensive Urban Survey Project Assessment Report* (Hertford, 2005), p.6.
- 12 *Calendar of Patent Rolls 1452-61* (London, 1910), p.511.
- 13 Lee, ‘Medieval Clothiers’, p.45.
- 14 http://wills.oxfordshirefhs.org.uk/az/wtext/wenman_008.html; *Oxfordshire Hundred Rolls of 1279* (Oxford, 1968), p.91.
- 15 Lack, Stuchfield and Whittemore, *The Monumental Brasses of Gloucestershire* (2005), pp.320-1.
- 16 *CPR 1452-61*, p.511.
- 17 ‘Parishes: Baldock’, <https://www.british-history.ac.uk/vch/herts/vol3/pp65-73> [accessed 16th August 2025].
- 18 Hertfordshire Archives, 72276, https://www.hertfordshirearchives.org.uk/collections/getrecord/GB46_CDZ154_3_2_1 [accessed 16th August 2025]; ‘Parishes: Clothall’, in Page, *op. cit.*, British History Online, <https://www.british-history.ac.uk/vch/herts/vol3/pp220-226> [accessed 17th August 2025].
- 19 ‘Parishes: Clothall’ [accessed 18th August 2025].
- 20 TNA, CP 25/1/91/113, nos.90-91.
- 21 TNA, CP 25/1/294/76, no.86.
- 22 *The Aldermen of the city of London, temp. Henry III-1908*, 2 vols. (London, 1908), II, p.12, p.14.
- 23 J. Stow, *Survey of London* (London, 1633 edn.), p.306.
- 24 *Calendar of Close Rolls 1454-1461* (London, 1947), p.119, p.383.

James Dearden and George Shaw: a 19th-century partnership

Some years ago the Rev. Austin Chadwick wrote an article in our *Transactions* about the 'Pseudo-Antique Brasses' of St. Chad's, Rochdale (*M.B.S. Trans.*, X, pt.4 (December 1966), pp.287-93). This extraordinary series of brasses was laid down by James Dearden (1798-1862) of The Orchard or Rochdale Manor. He had inherited the manor from his father.

Dearden was a member of the legal profession and a noted antiquarian, a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries of London and a collector of antiquities. He fancied himself as Lord of the Manor and purchased Holy Trinity Chapel, a chantry chapel attached to Rochdale parish church and first established in 1487. The Dearden family then altered the chapel extensively, replacing the roof, inserting stained glass commemorating Deardens, and erecting monuments.

Chadwick describes the series of pseudo-antique brasses which James Dearden caused to be erected in Holy Trinity Chapel, but says nothing about who made them. The recently-published diaries and correspondence of the architect and antiquary George Shaw (1810-76) reveal the answer. The book, published in 2024 for the Chetham Society and edited by Peter Lindfield, F.S.A., is entitled *The Intimacies of George Shaw (1810-76): Diaries and Letters of a Gothic Architect, Antiquary, and Forger*.

George Shaw was born into a family that operated woollen mills in northern England, based at Uppermill, a village in the parish of Saddleworth, near Oldham, Greater Manchester. He entered the business and travelled throughout Britain selling the family's wool. From an early age he took an interest in the churches and antiquities he saw in his travels. In time his focus shifted from selling wool to the creation, decoration and refurbishment of ecclesiastical and domestic buildings, applying his knowledge of medieval art and architecture to satisfying the appetite in Victorian England for Gothic design. He was a self-taught architect, a contemporary of A.W.N. Pugin, and was particularly interested in ancient woodwork,

heraldry, stained glass and monuments, including brasses.

He reconfigured the family home of St. Chad's Uppermill as an ancestral pile replete with romantic interiors, arms and armour and ancient-style furniture, taking his inspiration from Sir Walter Scott's Abbotsford. At the family mill he had a 100-strong workforce, skilled craftsmen who could turn their hands to creating bespoke items, modern Tudor-style furniture that was sometimes sold as genuinely ancient pieces from the 15th and 16th centuries. Shaw then offered to 'reunite' these bogus pieces of furniture with the descendants of the original 'owners'.

Shaw came to know James Dearden in the late 1820s through his friend and fellow antiquary Francis Raines (1805-78). He was soon calling at Dearden's house and suggesting antique furniture he might purchase. In a letter dated 17th November 1842 he writes:

Dear Dearden

... Now for the most important part of your note – 'The Trinity Aisle' at your Chapel in Rochdale Church – I should like above all things to undertake the doing up of that for you and will guarantee its equality with the Trinity Aisle at Mavesyn Ridware [a church in Staffordshire which received a similar makeover] with the same money.

If you are really in earnest let me commence with the perforated oak screen work and a cumbent stone figure in Chain Mail, and without slapping at the whole thing at once, proceed by degrees. I can engage to make your Chapel rival 'Ridware' – with armour – stained glass – open screen work – cumbent tombs – brasses – tiled (armorial) floor &c. &c.

I could set a clever mason here to work upon a monumental effigy this winter under my own eye, and proceed with him as I saw him succeed – you giving me the name and time of existance [sic].

There ought to be three or four cumbent effigies, and as many or more brasses...

Most of the carved effigies are now said to be buried beneath the floor of the chapel, but the brasses remain. In a letter to Francis Raines dated 25th January 1848, Shaw refers to one of the brasses he has had made for St. Chad's Rochdale, and includes a rubbing of the upper part of the brass:

On the opposite page you will find a rubbing from the head of Otiwelo Deurden de Whitfield which I have had made here, & a most successful imitation of an old Brass it is.

The inscription is now in progress, but the work is very tedious & slow.

I shall however be enabled to undertake those you once wanted me to get, & also [any] other commission you can get me.



Fig.1. Ottiwell Deurden of Whitfield, d.1523, erected c.1848, St. Chad's, Rochdale, Lancashire.
(rubbing: © M.B.S. Trans., X, pt.4 (December 1966))

Would not some of the old Newalls or Beswicks & Halliwells be likely subjects?

Chadwick in his article illustrated the brasses from rubbings, including Otiwell Deurden, who died in 1523 (Fig.1). The rubbing enclosed with Shaw's letter to Raines, illustrated on the dust jacket of Peter Lindfield's new edition (Fig.2), matches the full rubbing in Chadwick's article. This shows that George Shaw had the brasses made at the family works. The sources he or James Dearden used for the designs of the brasses remain obscure, although it is likely that George Shaw designed them himself.

Peter Lindfield's book gives a fascinating insight into the world of George Shaw, about whom little has been written. From his diaries and letters he emerges as a colourful and attractive character, a keen antiquary and collector with an insatiable passion for the past, but shamelessly blurring the boundary between fact and fiction with his historical forgeries. A new name has been added to the list of those who revived the use of memorial brasses in the mid 19th century.

David Meara

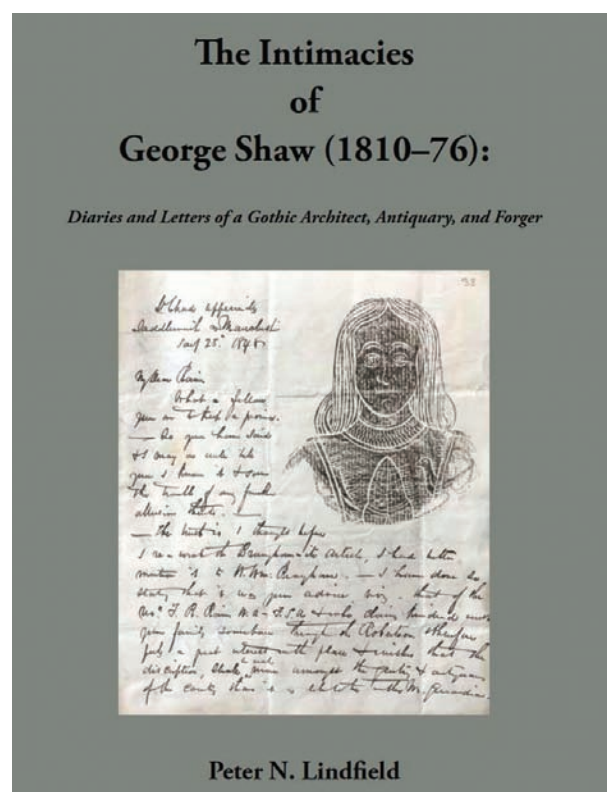


Fig.2. The dust jacket of the new edition of George Shaw's diaries and correspondence.
(photo: © Chetham Society)

The M.B.S. at Leeds International Medieval Congress, 2025

Bringing together nearly 3,000 international experts from more than sixty countries, the International Medieval Congress (I.M.C.) is the largest humanities research conference in Europe. Taking place over four days in early July, the conference is based at the University of Leeds. Highlighting the latest research into the Middle Ages from across academic disciplines, it features academic papers on subjects ranging from geography to modern gaming and genetics. It also welcomes the public onto campus to experience a glimpse of medieval life, with combat displays, music, falconry, craft activities, public lectures and the Historical and Archaeological Societies Fair.

The M.B.S. attended the Societies Fair along with other groups ranging from the Church Monuments Society to the Scottish Society (Fig.1). Attendees could obtain information about the work of the M.B.S. and about membership, and also browse back copies of our recent *Bulletins* and *Transactions*. They could also purchase books from the publisher Shaun Tyas written by M.B.S. members, such as *The Incised Effigial Slabs of the Pays de la Loire*, *The Monuments Man* and *Modern Memorial Brasses*.

Next year we are considering organising academic sessions at the Congress, as well as having a stall. Please contact a member of Council if you would be interested in presenting a conference paper or helping with the stall.

John Lee

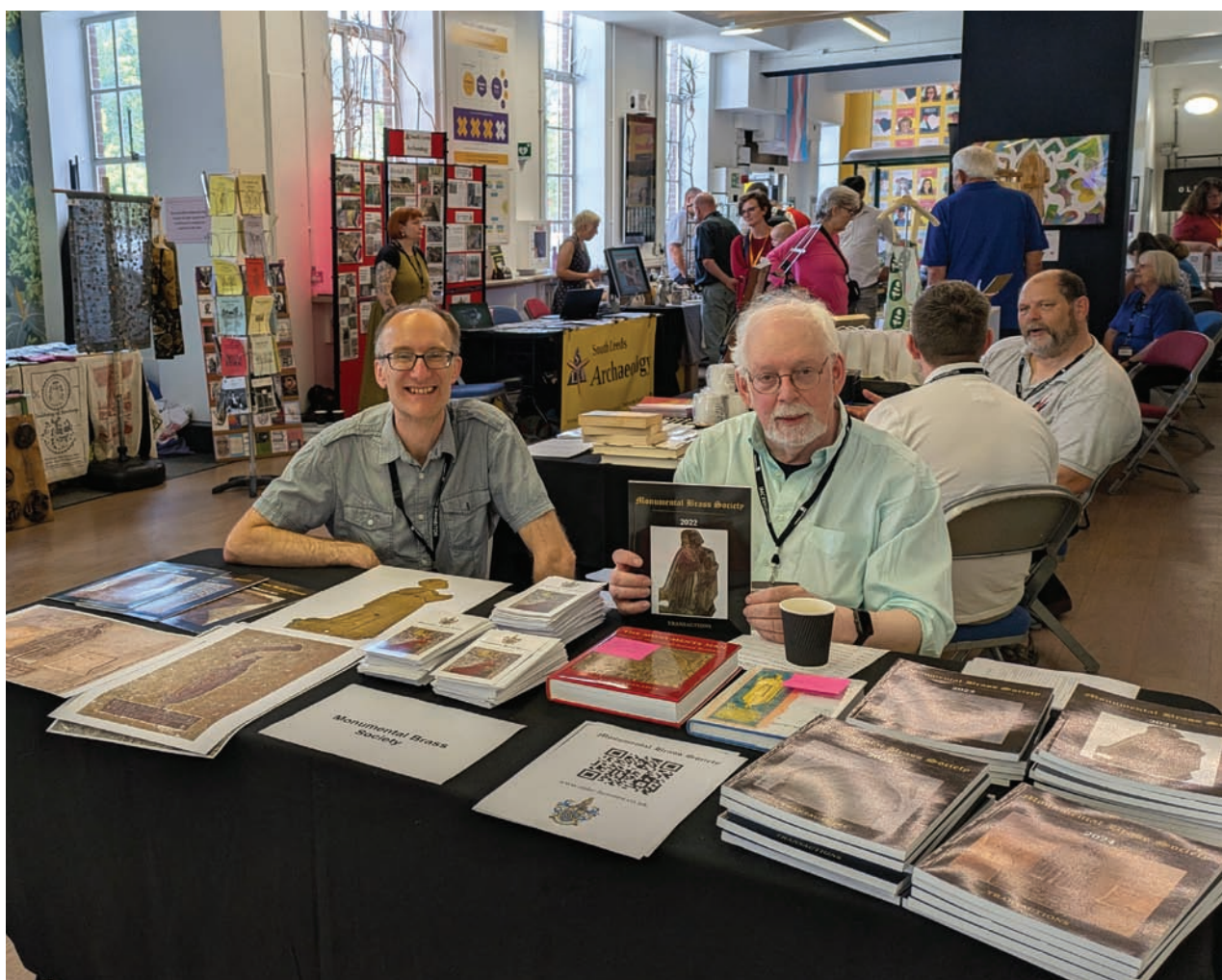


Fig 1. John Lee and Dirk Visser on the Society's stall at the Leeds International Medieval Congress, 2025.
(photo: © John Lee)