

PALIMPSEST BRASSES AT DINTON

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A FIND of palimpsest brasses was made at Dinton, near Aylesbury, in the spring of 1944. The church of SS. Peter and Paul had been restored almost a century ago by G. E. Street. In this restoration, which was a drastic one, nothing in the building had suffered more from his heavy hand than the brasses. To make room for encaustic tiling, they were ejected from the pavement of nave and chancel and cemented down in a damp corner of the vestry. The mischief did not end here, because in their new position the plates lay for years at the mercy of cupboards, chests, and table-legs. By 1944 some portions of them had worked loose, while others had been attacked by corrosion.

About this time, permission was obtained by the writer, then President of the Oxford University Archaeological Society, to make a thorough survey and report. His suspicions that the Dinton brasses might prove to be palimpsest were at once confirmed. Expert guidance was sought, and on 3rd April, 1944, twelve plates were taken up under the supervision of Mr. Reginald Pearson, F.S.A., of the Monumental Brass Society. The Rev. C. W. C. Drury, M.A., Vicar, and members of Dinton Parochial Church Council were also present on this occasion.

This discovery was briefly noted in *Records of Bucks*, vol. XIV, p. 240. A fuller account has since appeared in *Transactions of the Monumental Brass Society*, vol. VIII, pp. 270-88.

For their advice and encouragement in the preparation of this paper, the writer desires to thank the following, besides those mentioned in the text: the late Sir Charles Oman, Sir Charles Peers, the Rev. Canon R. F. Bale, R. H. D'Elboux, Esq., W. A. Pantin, Esq., Fellow of Oriel College and Keeper of the University Archives, and W. A. James, Esq., Librarian of Southwell Minster.

Four out of the nine brasses in the church are wholly or partly palimpsest. Of these four, only two remain in their original matrices. The rest have been hopelessly jumbled, and only with the help of descriptions given by the antiquaries Browne Willis¹ and Lipscomb² can they be sorted out and identified.

The numbering here follows that employed by Mill Stephenson in his summary *List of Monumental Brasses in the British Isles*, 1926, pp. 38, 39.

I. JOHN COMPTON, Esquire, in armour, 1424, and MARGERY his wife. Four sons and seven daughters, the children kneeling.

The inscription runs:

'Hic iacent Iohannes Compton et Margeria coniux (cius) filia Brian Harley quae quidam Margeria obiit die luna Quarto Die Augusti Anno Domini m cccc xxiv.'

¹ Browne Willis, 1682-1760, MSS. in the Bodleian Library.

² George Lipscomb, *History, etc. of Bucks.*, 4 vols., 1847.

The matrix shows indents above the figures for two shields which were missing when the church was visited by Willis in the mid-18th century. The brass is noted by him as lying 'in the south corner of the church in a seat belonging to Winwood Serjeant, Esquire,³ . . . under the upper window on the south side of the south aisle'.⁴ There is no mention of it in Lipscomb's *History*: perhaps the slab had already been concealed under a chest or cupboard. It is probably the only brass at Dinton remaining *in situ*.

Not palimpsest.

II. WILLIAM LEE, of Morton, 1486, and ALICE his wife (head lost).

The male figure has short hair and is dressed in a close doublet. The mutilation of the female figure had evidently taken place before Lipscomb's time.⁵

An inscription below the figure runs:

'Pray for the soule of William Lee of Morton in the p(ar)ishe of Dinton and Alice his wiffe, the whiche Will(ja)m decesied the ix day of October the yere of our lord A m cccc l xxxvi. And for the love of God and of our lady say a Pater and an Ave.'

Not palimpsest.

The matrix is perhaps original, though the whole composition has been moved to the vestry from 'the body of the church near the chancel'.⁶ It is described by Willis as being 'over against the reading-desk in the ile [*sic*]'.⁷

Not palimpsest.

III. JOHN LEE, of Morton, 1503. Inscription only (Fig. 1).

'Pray for the sowle of John Lee of Morton gentilman the whiche John lyethe buried in the parysch chirche of Seynt olyffe in Selver stret i(n) the Cite of London & he died the vj day of marche the yere of oure lord A M V^e and iij on whose sowle ihu have mercy Amen.'

The clumsiness of the engraving caused Willis, Lipscomb, and even Herbert Haines⁸ to read 'vj' for 'ij' as the final figures of the date; but the absence of the upward flourish from the first stroke in this group makes it unlikely that the figure five is intended. (Contrast the clear 'v' at the beginning of the same line.)

According to Willis, this inscription was formerly fixed upon the south wall of the church at Dinton, '. . . in another seat belonging to Simon Mayne'.⁹ At some later date it has been transferred to the large blue slab containing the brasses of Francis and Elizabeth Lee (no. VI below).

Palimpsest (Fig. 1). The reverse side, when cleaned of pitch and cement, was found to bear a highly interesting inscription in blackletter to Hugh Trotter, D.D.

'Qui thesaurarius Hugo Trotter fuit huius
Eccleie doctor celebris sancte q'e sophie
Qui Cambrigge dederat mun(er)a hiis mansura sup(er)stes
Hic iacet hic q(u)e beu'laco tunc p(re) fuit optans . . .'

³ MS. Willis, fo. XIII, p. 64.

⁴ *Ibid.*, fo. IV, p. 29.

⁵ Lipscomb, *op. cit.*, vol. II, p. 148.

⁶ MS. Willis, fo. IV, p. 26.

⁷ *Ibid.*, fo. XIII, p. 64.

⁸ H. Haines, *A Manual of Monumental Brasses*, 1861, vol. II, p. 22.

⁹ MS. Willis, fo. XIII, p. 64.

May for the soule of Johā Lee of Merton gentelman
 the whiche Johā by the hand in the parochie churchie
 of Sēpēt ohrte in Sēvier hēt ī the Citie of Loudon & hē
 died the vj day of Marche the yere of oure lord & m
 v^e and vi on whiche soule thu haue mercy Amen

OBVERSE

FIG. 1.—John Lee, 1503

Qui thelmarus Hugo Trotter fuit huius
 Sētie doctor celsus saute & sophie
 Qui Cambridge dederat multa tuis manibus huius
 huc tacet hic & beilam tunc pfuit opteus

REVERSE

FIG. 1.—Hugh Trotter, D.D., 1503

At this point the inscription has been cut off. The presence of a border on three sides indicates that the above lines were the beginning of what may have been a lengthy tribute to his abilities and his munificence.¹⁰

The identity of Hugh Trotter can be traced from collegiate and episcopal records.¹¹ An undergraduate, and from 1484–90, Fellow of Queens' College, Cambridge, he proceeded B.A. 1469, M.A. 1474, B.D. 1474–5, D.D. 1489. As ecclesiastic he secured the favour of Thomas Rotherham, archbishop of York. From this prelate he received rapid and valuable preferment. Between 1487 and 1503 he was successively rector of Wilford, Notts., 1487–94;¹² prebend of Dunnington in York Minster 1490–1; prebend of Norwell Palishall in Southwell Minster 1492–3. The provostship of Beverley and canonry of St. Michael in that church he held, together with the treasurership of York Minster, from 1493 till his death some time after 31st August, 1503. For the last six years of his life he had also been vicar-general of the York province.¹³

Trotter's will, dated 31st August, 1503, and proved on 2nd December following,

¹⁰ The lettering should be compared with that of the palimpsest Chapman inscription discovered at Little Missenden, Bucks., in 1941, by the Rev. W. H. Davis and the present writer (*Transactions of the Monumental Brass Society*, vol. VIII, pp. 34–6).

¹¹ The chief sources are as follows: Cooper, *Athenae Cantabrigienses*, vol. I, p. 7; G. Poulson, *Beverlac*, p. 653; T. Hearne, *Liber Niger Scaccarii*, vol. II, pp. 680, 681; MSS. Baker, fo. XXIV, p. 27; fo. XXXVI, p. 278; *University and college documents*, vol. I, p. 214; York Archives, *Register of Thomas Rotherham*, pp. 95b, 104–5, 105b, 177a; Torre MSS. in York Minster.

¹² This date, kindly communicated by the present rector of Wilford, the Rev. C. Elwell, M.A., corrects that given by Cooper and others.

¹³ Cooper has 'diocese', but this is obviously an error.

is preserved in the York registry.¹⁴ In it he expresses his desire to be buried in the Minster, near the tomb of Archbishop Rotherham. The inscription found at Dinton seems to confirm this, for it describes him as 'Treasurer of this Church', which can refer only to York Minster.

But here a difficulty arises. From his will it may be deduced that Trotter died between 31st August, 1503, and the proving of this document on 2nd December following. Yet John Lee, to whom the obverse of the inscription now refers, also died in the year 1503/4, on 6th March. How can this strange coincidence of dates be explained?

If Hugh Trotter ever had a brass to his memory in York Minster, one can only suppose that it was plundered, and afterwards found its way to engravers commissioned by the Lee family. This spoliation might have occurred:

(a) In 1503, the year of John Lee's burial at St. Olave's Church in London. But this would be a surprisingly early date for the practice of palimpsest re-engraving, even if one could be certain that the Lee brass was laid down at Dinton in 1503. Nor is it likely that Trotter's memorial would suffer desecration less than six months after his death. Dinton, moreover, is some 200 miles from York.

(b) In 1547, during the unrest which accompanied the suppression of chantries. Brasses especially suffered at this period.

(c) In 1558. About that time the Lee family placed in Dinton Church a brass to Francis and Elizabeth Lee (no. VI below). It is possible that they took this opportunity to indulge in a little brass 'ancestry', and to commemorate at Dinton their forbear John Lee who had been buried in London fifty-five years earlier. A glance at the capital letter *A's* on the obverse will suggest that from the point of view of style they belong to the mid-16th century rather than to the year 1503.

Alternatively, it could be argued that Trotter's brass was for some reason never used as a memorial, and became mere shop-waste.

IV. THOMAS GRENEWAY, Esquire, in armour, 1538, and his wife, ELIZABETH, 1539, with three daughters (lost) (fig. 2). Engraved at the same time as—

V. RICHARD GRENEWAY, Esquire, in armour, 1551, son and heir of no. IV, and his wife, JOAN, 1 shield (fig. 3).

The figure of Thomas Greneway is mutilated, the head and part of the extremities being broken off. Thomas is represented in armour, Elizabeth his wife in a close robe.

Two shields have been lost since they were thus described by Lipscomb:

- '1. On the dexter side: Within a bordure, barry of eight. Barry of four: on a chief three green parrots.
- '2. On the sinister side: The same arms impaling a fess charged with three lilies or fleur-de-lis.'¹⁵

The inscription beneath reads:

'Here under thys stone lyethe buried the Bodyes of Thomas Greneway Esq^rer whiche decessyd ye xxii day of Aprill A^o dñi M ccc^o xxxviiij, and

¹⁴ *Testamenta Eboracensia*, printed in Publications of the Surtees Society for 1869: vol. IV, no. 53, cxx, pp. 219-21.

¹⁵ Lipscomb; cf. MS. Willis, fo. IV, p. 27, fo. II, p. 150.



Here under this stone lyethe buried the Bodies of Thomas Grenewey Esq'r
 whiche decessed xxiiij day of April A dñi M ccccc xxxviii; and Elizabeth his wyffe
 whiche decessed the xxv day of maye A dñi M ccccc xxxix whose soull' ihu p'don

1 foot

Obverse

FIG. 2.—Thomas and Elizabeth Grenewey, 1538

Elizabeth hys wyff whiche decessyd the xxiiij day of maye A^o dñi M ccccc xxxix whose soull' ihu p(ar)don.¹⁶

Richard Grenewey, who lies below his parents, is shown in armour, bareheaded, the helmet appearing behind, and the point of the beard descending to the breast. The figure of his wife, Joan, is now headless.

The shield is charged thus: Two bars: in chief three green parrots within a bordure gobony.¹⁶ The inscription runs:

'Here under thys stone also lyethe buried the Body of Rychard Grenewey Esq'er sone and heyer of Thomas Grenewey Esquier whyche decessyd the xxi day of January in the yere of oure Lorde God M ccccc li, and Johne hys wyffe dough-ter and heyer on to John Tylney of Lekhamsted Esquier whose soule Jhu perdon.'

¹⁶ The shields are catalogued, with a misreading of the Grenewey arms, in *V.C.H. Bucks.*, vol. II, p. 280.

The Grenewey brasses were formerly set 'in a large black marble at the south door of the entrance into the chancel'.¹⁷ Lipscomb found them 'near the south wall of the chancel'.¹⁸ Here they remained till torn from their matrices by G. E. Street and banished to the vestry. During the move, the figures of Thomas and Richard Grenewey were somehow changed about, being relaid with the father beside his

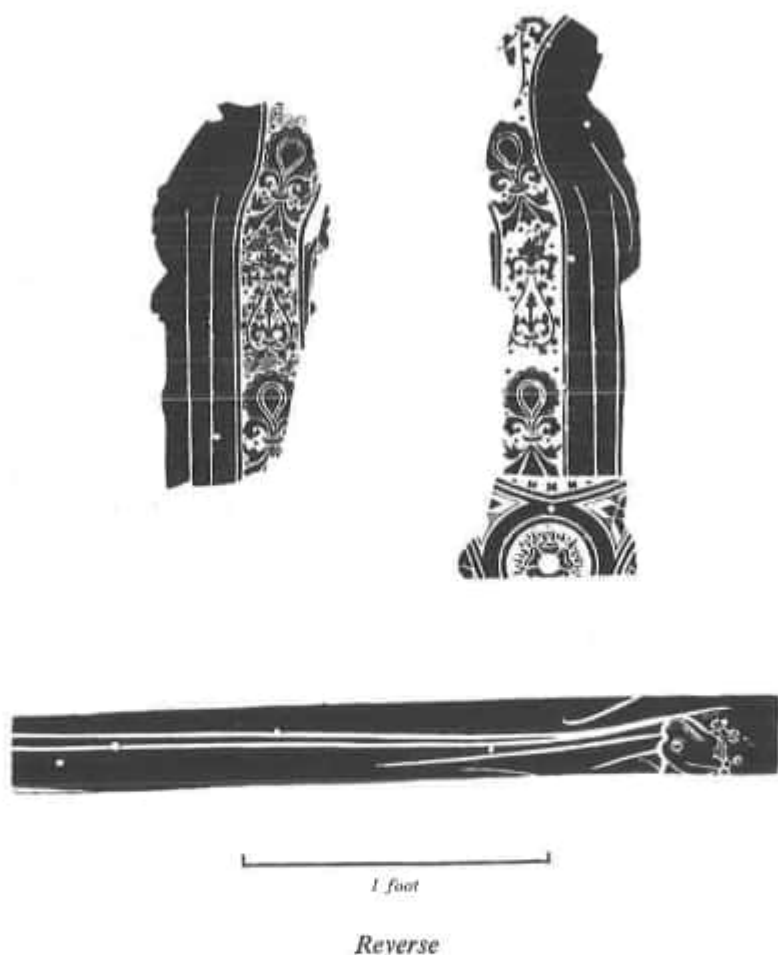


FIG. 2a.—Thomas and Elizabeth Grenewey, 1538

daughter-in-law, and the son beside his mother! With the help of a description given by Willis and Lipscomb¹⁹ it has been possible in figs. 2 and 3 to restore the original arrangement, though the mistake deceived Mill Stephenson.²⁰

Palimpsest (figs. 2a, 3a). Four figure-brasses of the Grenewey memorial, viz. Thomas, Richard, Joan, and the upper portion of Elizabeth, have been cut from the

¹⁷ MS. Willis, fo. IV, pp. 27, 28.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ Lipscomb, *loc. cit.*

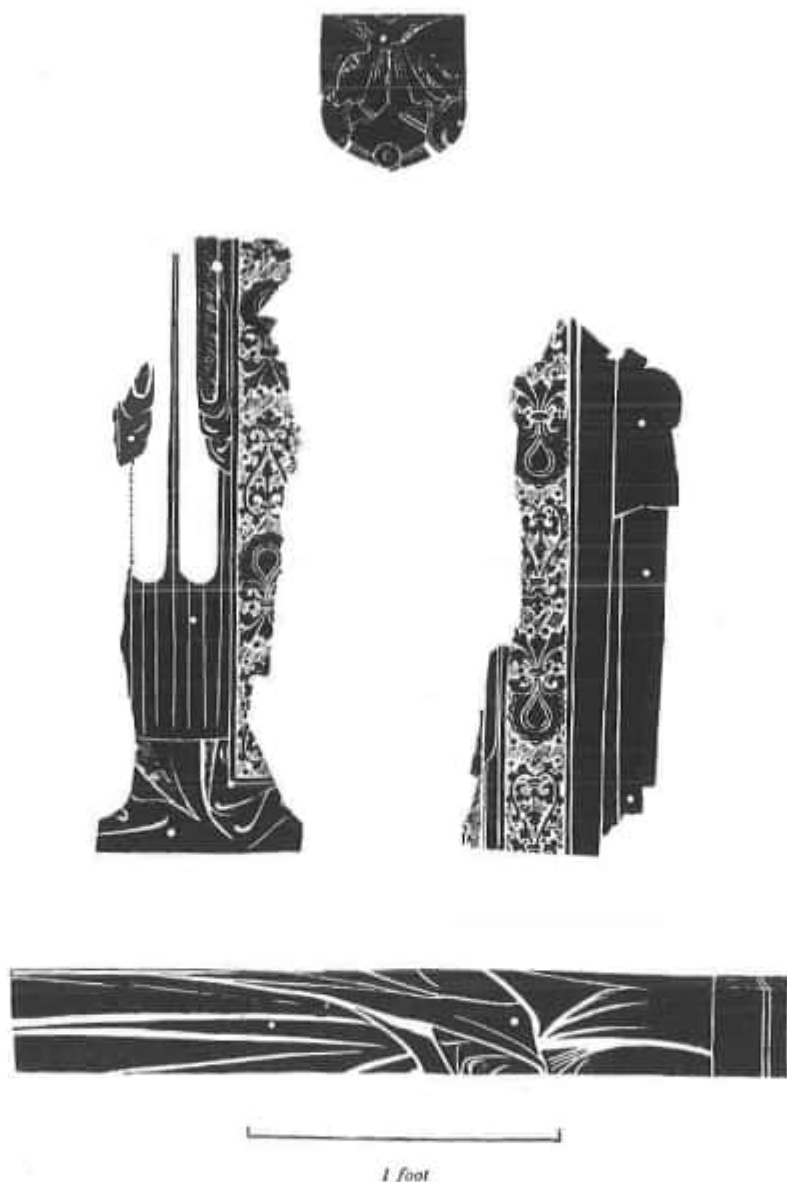
²⁰ *Op. cit.*, p. 39.

large figure of an ecclesiastic in cope and fur almuce. A conjectural reconstruction of the original is given in fig. 4. In general effect, this seems to have resembled the brass of Henry Sever, S.T.P., warden of Merton, 1471, which lies in the chapel of his college at Oxford.²¹



FIG. 3.—Richard and Joan Grenewey, 1551

²¹ Dr. Sever's brass is illustrated by M. H. Bloxam, *Monumental Architecture of Great Britain*, 1834, p. 203. The Merton orphreys are somewhat more elaborate than those at Dinton: they show a bishop (? the founder, Walter of Rochester) and 7 saints.



1 foot

Reverse

FIG. 3a.—Richard and Joan Grenewey, 1551

The Dinton orphreys should be compared with those of William Kyrkeby, 1458, at Theydon Garnon, Essex.²²

The lower part of the figure representing Elizabeth Grenewey, when reversed, exhibits a fragment of canopy-work, c. 1480. It is boldly engraved, and has for centre-

²² Illustrated in *Essex Review*, vol. IX, p. 82.

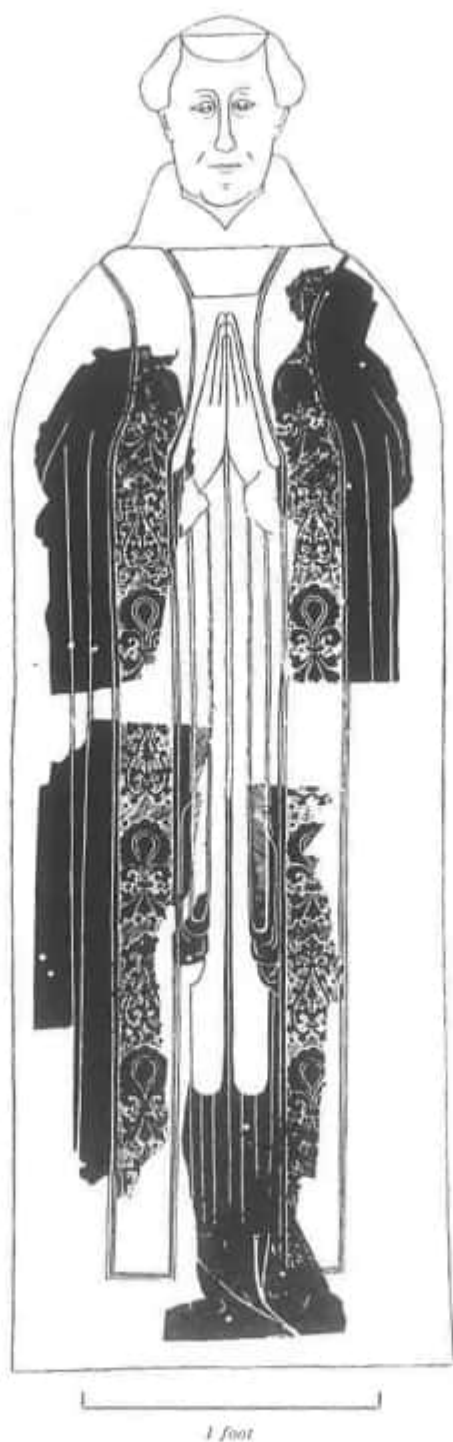


FIG. 4.—Conjectural Restoration of a Priest, from reverses at Dinton

piece the Yorkist badge, a white *rose-en-soleil*. In this badge the rose is traditionally supposed to be the emblem of Edmund Langley, from whom the Yorkist royal house descended in the female line, and the sun to be derived from the apparition of the three suns which became joined in one at the battle of Mortimer's Cross, 1461. Edward IV assumed the badge in memory of both circumstances. It is not likely, therefore, to have been used after Bosworth, 1485.²³ 'The person commemorated by the brass to which this fragment belonged would probably have been an adherent to the cause, if not an actual and active participant in the wars.'²⁴

On the reverse of the surviving Grenewey shield is the torso of an armoured figure, c. 1460-85. The exaggerated pauldrons and couters are characteristic of the late Yorkist period. The sword, to judge from what is visible of its pommel, appears to be hung in front of the body. The engraving is light, and gives the impression of being a rough sketch for some larger composition.

The two Grenewey inscriptions, 1538 and 1551, have been cut from what is possibly monastic spoil. The earlier one shows part of a lady, c. 1400, having at her feet a dog with collar and bells. The second is of remarkable weight and thickness. It exhibits the central portion of a female figure, c. 1420, whose style is reminiscent of the well-known brass to Margaret Felbrygge, 1416, at Felbrigg, Norfolk.²⁵ Joined to the extreme end of the plate can be seen a fragment of canopy-work, perhaps belonging to the same composition from which the shield was cut.

VI. FRANCIS LEE, gentleman, of Morton, 1558, and ELIZABETH his wife (fig. 5).

The male and female figures are shown in conventional civilian costume of the mid-16th century. The inscription (not shown in fig. 5) runs:

'Hic jacent Franciscus Lee de Morton, generosus, et Elizabeth uxor ejus, qui filios habuerunt vij act viij filiae. Predictus Franciscus obiit xxij die Augusti A.D. M ccccl viij, quorum animi propietur deus, Amen.'

This brass came to light in 1829 during repairs under a pew belonging to the Rev. Mr. Goodall, lord of the manor, opposite to his manor pew.²⁶ The freestone slab mentioned by Lipscomb has been filled with composition and the figures and inscription transferred, presumably by Street, to the large blue slab of John Lee, 1503 (no. III).

Palimpsest (fig. 5a). The figure of Francis Lee is made up of four pieces. The largest, which forms the reverse of the body, is an exquisite Flemish fragment, engraved c. 1380. Its central design is a garment (? a chasuble) embroidered along the edge, the folds falling to a point; the whole against a background of grotesques. The style of workmanship suggests affinity with the two palimpsest fragments at Pottesgrove, Beds.,²⁷ and Fivehead, Somerset.²⁸ It seems likely that they are all from the same foreign brass.

²³ The use of this badge has been described by Willement, *The Royal Heraldry of England*, 1821, p. 203. It is found on brasses at Lillingstone Lovell, Bucks., 1471; St. Albans, 1480; and Bury St. Edmunds, c. 1480.

²⁴ For this opinion the writer is indebted to Mr. P. S. Spokes.

²⁵ Illustrated by J. S. Cotman, *Engravings of Sepulchral Brasses in Norfolk and Suffolk*, 2nd ed., 1839, vol. I, p. 8.

²⁶ Lipscomb, vol. II, p. 147.

²⁷ Reverse of William Saunders, 1563. Illustrated in *Transactions of Cambridge University Association of Brass Collectors*, part XI, p. 6.

²⁸ Reverse of Jane, wife of Lord Edward Seymour, c. 1565. Illustrated in *Proceedings of Society of Antiquaries*, 2nd series, vol. XXI, pp. 335, 337.



Obverse

FIG. 5.—Francis and Elizabeth Lee, 1558

A smaller strip of border work, bearing some resemblance to the larger fragment, has been used for the ankles and feet of Francis Lee. To the neck and right side, plain strips of brass have been soldered.

On the reverse of Elizabeth Lee is the headless effigy of a civilian, *c.* 1475, with girdle and rosary. The engraving is bold, and the metal well preserved. The inscription is not palimpsest, and has been omitted from fig. 5a.

VII. SIMON MAYNE, Esquire, in armour, 1617, and his wife COLUBERY, sister of the first Lord Lovelace, 1628. Two of their children, Simon and Colubery, are also shown.

Simon the son, here shown in a short cloak, was one of the regicides. At the Restoration he was sentenced to death, but died in the Tower 1661, his body being granted to his widow for burial at Dinton. His servant John Bigg, who lived as a hermit in this village after his master's death, was wrongly believed to have been the masked man who executed the king.



Flemish, c. 1380

A civilian, c. 1475

FIG. 5a.—Reverse of Francis and Elizabeth Lee, 1558

An inscription beneath the larger figures runs:

'Here lye the bodies of Simon Mayne, Esq., and Colubery his wife who had issue Simon and Colubery which Simon ye father dyed the 13th day of July 1617, and Colubery the mother dyed ye 10th day of January An. O. DNI 1628.'

'On a large black marble slab at the entrance to the chancel', writes Willis, 'at the top thereof is a shield of arms thus:

'On a square plate, Mayne impaling quarterly one and four: on a chief (engrailed) indented three birds in fess: two and three a saltire engrailed, charged with five birds.

'Two crests: on the dexter side a hand coupéd at the wrist between two wings erect, on a wreath. On the sinister side an eagle displayed, standing on a ducal coronet.'²⁹

The Mayne vault is believed to be at the extreme eastern end of the nave, beneath the chancel arch. In Lipscomb's time the brasses were over the burial-place, 'at the feet of the brass to William Lee and his wife, 1486'³⁰ (no. II above). At the 19th-

²⁹ MS. Willis, fo. IV, p. 27.

³⁰ Lipscomb, vol. II, p. 148.

century restoration they joined the other displaced memorials in the vestry, being placed under a heavy chest where the slab still lies.

Not palimpsest.

VIII. ELINOR LEE, 1633. Inscription only.

'Heere lyeth the bodie of ye ladie Dame Elinor Lee, wife to S(i)r Thomas Lee of Morton, Kt. who had issue betwene them 24 children, & shee departed this life the 6th day of April 1633.

Her children lost a mother at her end,

The church a member, & ye poore a friend.'

This brass, now on a slab of its own below the earlier Lee memorials, was once 'within the communion rails,²¹ . . . upon the north side of the chancel'.²² It is omitted from Haines' catalogue.

Not palimpsest.

IX. JOHN KINGSBY, 1719. Inscription only.

'Here lieth the Body of John Kingsby, senr., *et mortus est* Decemb. ye 28, 1719, *aetatis suae* 66.

'"And I heard a voice from Heaven saying unto me, Write: Blessed are the dead that die (in) the Lord: even so saith the spirit, & their works do follow them".'

In 1824 this was lying loose 'in the vestry room'.²³ It is not palimpsest.

The palimpsest discovery provided an opportunity for the brasses to be cleaned and chemical action upon the metal arrested. By permission of the bishop and his chancellor, they were taken to Exeter College, Oxford, in the summer of 1944. Here careful treatment was given and rubbings made. The broken parts were afterwards sent to London for repair.

Through the courtesy of Major H. F. Owen Evans, F.S.A., it was also possible to analyse some solder taken from the figure of Francis Lee, 1558 (no. VI, fig. 5), with result as follows: lead, 61.10 per cent.; tin, 37.80 per cent.; copper, 0.43 per cent.; silver, under 0.10 per cent.; iron, trace. Plumber's solder had apparently been used by the 16th-century engraver. The type normally found is tinman's solder containing at least 60 per cent. tin.

Restoration and relaying of the brasses at Dinton began early in 1949 under the direction of Mr. Reginald Pearson, F.S.A. The completed work was dedicated by the Bishop of Oxford on Palm Sunday, 10th April, 1949, just five years after the palimpsest discovery. It includes the replacement of the brasses as nearly as possible over the original burying-places in the chancel. The Lee and Grenewey palimpsests are set in new slabs of Hornton stone on either side of the altar. By a grant from the William and Jane Morris fund of the Society of Antiquaries, an electrolytic cast has been made of the Flemish fragment (fig. 5a). This will be fixed to the wall near the brass of Francis Lee (fig. 5), whose reverse it forms.

In planning this admirable restoration, the Vicar and churchwardens have been supported throughout by the Diocesan Advisory Committee for the Care of Churches. They deserve the gratitude of all who value these memorials linking us with the benefactors of another age.

²¹ Lipscomb, vol. II, p. 150. ²² MS. Willis, fo. XIII, p. 62. ²³ Lipscomb, *op. cit.*, vol. II, p. 151.