

MINSTER IN SHEPPEY: NOTES ON TWO
BRASSES IN THE CHURCH.

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THE brasses that lie side by side on the floor have been talked about as much, I think, as any brasses either in this country or elsewhere, and I am able unfortunately to accept but little of what has been said about them. The earliest representation of them, still one of the best, appears in Stothard's *Monumental Effigies*, and a note on it shews that it was published in June 1820. Mr. Stothard saw from his inspection of the male figure that it had lost a large piece out of the middle. But even so, it was much too large for the female effigy. The view taken by Mr. Waller then is probably the right one, that the two do not belong to one another and were in the beginning two separate memorials. In that case they should be dealt with separately, and it may be well to consider the lady first.

This effigy is quite perfect. Originally it was possibly under a canopy with a marginal inscription. One thing is quite certain, that it is French in execution and not English, and that it is a unique specimen so far as these islands are concerned. But figures in stone very like it are to be found in France. The artistic merit of this figure is high. The broad treatment of the lady's mantle and the flowing lines are just what is needed for effect, and no more. It is represented as gracefully gathered up on the dexter side under the elbow, and there are slits for the arms to pass through, edged with the same pattern as goes round the bottom of the gown. Through these slits appear the arms in the tight sleeves of the kirtle. The mantle is lined with a fur called vair, as seen just above the dog's head and also in the triangular lappets drawn over the shoulders. But the

striking feature of the lady's dress is the extraordinary stiffened wimple which covers her chin and surrounds her head, so as to retain the beautifully plaited hair. Notice the highly decorated cushion on which her head rests. It is different in pattern, and to some extent in shape, from that below the man's head. Her feet in their pointed boots are on a dog with a collar of bells, who looks up at his mistress as if he did not quite enjoy being trodden on. It has been suggested that a large piece has been cut out of the middle of the lady. I do not think this is so. I regard this effigy as practically perfect.

As to the male effigy, which I do not regard as belonging to the same monument, it gives rise, as will readily be seen, to many problems. When we first find any note of it a large piece had been cut out of or lost from the middle, and the gap had been filled by relaying in a new slab and bringing up the lower portion. Of course it was not a good fit, as appears from many rubbings of the brass made before 1881. It had the advantage, however, of making the effigies more equal in size, a result which was in part also attained by the new legs, which I take to have been put on when this relaying was done. They are clearly much shorter than the original ones (even if the latter were crossed, as I think they were); for if the original legs were straight, the feet would be even lower. But all this shews that originally the male effigy was so much larger than the female that they could not have belonged to the same monument. The original part of this effigy that remains is interesting as shewing a type of effigy not common in this country. On the head is the steel bascinet attached to the mail below by the lacing seen round the face. Above this the knight would fit on his great helm, which is not shewn, but the chain by which it is attached is seen over his left shoulder, the end being fixed in front to a large hook coming out of an ornamental rosette attached to the padded surcoat: this is confined by a belt at his waist and comes down behind below the knees, but is cut off in front of the thighs, thus shewing the mail over the thighs, the mail again shewing

above the padded under-garment, or pourpoint, with scalloped edges, studded with metal for adornment. The mail is notable, being as it is called "banded," that is, made of bands of rings, each band being united by rings to the next. It is a little strengthened at the shoulders and elbows by plates of steel shaped for strength to deflect a blow. The mail only comes a small distance up the forearm, where it hangs loose, and shews the interesting protection for the arm of laminated plate. The hands are bare. The shield hangs by a broad belt fixed over the right shoulder, and its position is unusual in England but usual in France. It covers the great sword, the handle of which, with its curious quillons, shews above the top of the shield. The shield is charged with the arms of Northwood, viz., *Ermine, a cross engrailed gules*. The ermine spots are in a form well known to persons acquainted with old rolls. Some ridiculous person supposed them to be chestnut leaves, and various others have since repeated the tale. His head is on a cushion. At one period it was the fashion in illustrations to omit this cushion. I have found such an illustration in Boutell, from whence it came into Haines. It was, perhaps, done to accentuate the resemblance of the bascinet to Sir John de Creke and Sir John Dabernoun the second. Such is the description of so much of the original memorials as is left.

I now pass to the question who are the persons these effigies probably represent. In the second volume of *Arch. Cant.* will be found printed a kind of roll, *circa* 1400, of biographical notes about the Northwoods, which, after stating that a Sir Roger de Northwode, called the Restorer of the Monastery, who died 1286, was buried with his wife Bona (Fitzbernard) before the altar in the Parish Church of Minster in Sheppey, goes on to give notices of his descendants. His great-grandson, another Sir Roger, married in 1331, as his second wife, Elizabeth de Segrave. She died 1335 and was buried nearly at the head of the Restorer, and the chronicle goes on to give the inscription on her stone at length. Now there is record of French monuments of exactly this date shewing effigies almost identical with this.

lady at Minster, and it seems to me very probable that this is the remains of the memorial mentioned in the chronicle.

We will now consider the male effigy, though I do not regard it as belonging to the lady now by his side. It does not of course follow that the male effigy had not beside it a female effigy now quite lost, unless the palimpsest portion, the man's legs—for they were found to be palimpsest at the last relaying in 1881, and had on the back portions of ladies' drapery—were cut out of it. The probability that the male effigy was part of a brass to Sir John de Northwode who died 1320 is great. The first relaying of it has been assigned to 1511, on the strength mainly of some entries in the visitations of that date at Lambeth. The churchwardens seem to have desired to get rid of effigies of a knight and his wife very sore worn and broken, so that they might make seats and pews where the memorial was. I cannot see any connection with this relaying. I should not describe the lady as very sore worn and broken, but in excellent condition. The description applies perhaps better to the knight, but even so is exaggerated. Moreover, the churchwardens would not have got rid of the brasses, they would have calmly put their seats over them. Further, these brasses were in the chancel, and churchwardens in 1511 would not have ventured to intrude seats and pews there. Mr. Waller cites a brass at Winwick as being very like in execution to these legs. It seems to me that the brass at Winwick is infinitely better executed, and I cannot but think that Mr. Waller's real view was more nearly expressed when he compares these new legs to restorations at Pluckley. Now these we know were due to Sir Edward Dering, who was manufacturing a pedigree for himself from before the Conquest and was out to connect himself with all the great families of Kent, including the Badlesmeres, into which family Sir John de Northwode had married. Moreover, 1511 is a very early date for a palimpsest. For these, which seem to me good and sufficient reasons, I am not prepared to accept any of this story, which is set out, not quite con-

sistently, in two volumes of *Arch. Cant.*, viz., Vol. IX. at page 151, and Vol. XXII. at page 160.

I may in passing remark that Mr. Waller's quotation from Philipot's *Church Notes* applies to Milton by Sittingbourne, and does not refer to Minster. His informant was in error, for Mr. Waller himself could not have so blundered if he had consulted, as I have, the manuscript.

Both Boutell and Haines state that the legs "were evidently not crossed in the original design." I think this statement has since been accepted without question, but it does not seem to me to be so clear. The knee of the dexter leg was in a position which shewed the ridge over it turned flat, which is a position it could not be in if the leg was straight. The other knee does not appear, being hidden by the shield. The only brass I have found which has the ridge plate shewn flat is Sir Robt. de Septvans, where the sinister knee is thus shewn and the legs are crossed. Here one knee shews clearly, but the other does not and is clearly at a higher level. This could not be so if the leg were straight.

My suggestion, then, is that we have here the remains of a brass to a man in armour, such as was worn in 1320, with crossed legs. He may have had by his side a lady, and may have been under a canopy with marginal inscription. All that was, in the seventeenth century, lost, as were his legs and a large piece from the centre. That he was then relaid, the hiatus in the centre being closed up and new legs put to him, these being cut in a piece of old metal, on the other side of which was part of the effigy of a lady of approximately the same date. He thereby became about the same size as the lady now at his side, who was relaid alongside him. So matters remained till 1881, when the figures were again relaid and the bit of the male figure in the centre was "restored."