

EARLY LANCASHIRE BRASSES

By Lionel M. Angus-Butterworth

“Il me paraît que le don de faire apparaître le passé est aussi étonnant et bien meilleur que le don de voir l’avenir.”

—Anatole France, *Le Livre de Mon Ami*

Introduction

The monumental brasses of this country are of long-descended continental ancestry, their immediate forebears being the beautiful Limoges enamels. Limoges, the capital of the French department of Haute-Vienne, was once celebrated for a special kind of enamel work. The process was to cut the figure or design in a sheet of copper, leaving a thin partition between the different colours so that in the subsequent firing they should not run into each other. The work became widely known as “Oeuvres de Limoges” or “Opus de Limogia”.

In the museum of the picturesque cathedral city of Le Mans is preserved the finest surviving example of Limoges enamel used as a sepulchral monument. It commemorates Geoffrey Plantagenet le Bel, who died in 1150, and consists of an enamelled effigy upon a diapered copper background.

Brasses came into use in place of enamelled plates because, while much less costly, they could withstand considerably more rough usage. Durability was naturally valued in a memorial, and the fragile nature of the enamels made them highly unsuitable for their most obvious position in the pavements of churches. Brasses quickly reached a degree of popularity unknown to their forerunners.

The direct connection between the Limoges work and brasses is shown in the cases where coats of arms appear on the latter. Many such shields are now missing or badly damaged: they are not of brass, but, like the ancient enamel memorials they represent in miniature, take the form of little copper trays inlaid in the brass. There are good examples on the brass to Sir Symon de Felbrigg, K.G., at Felbrigg in Norfolk, laid down in 1416.

There is cause for pride in that almost all the brasses in England were the work of native craftsmen.¹ Even the casual observer can see clearly the great difference in style between the English and the foreign brasses. The latter have a confusion of ornamentation about the figures which is distracting and contrasts unfavourably with the manner in which, in English examples, the principal subjects are thrown into relief against the plain background. In brasses of home workmanship, details like canopies and shields go to make up a more artistic whole than is usual on the Continent.

External as well as internal evidence of English making of brasses is provided by a certain number of records. One of the most curious contracts that has been preserved was made in 1395 by Nicholas Broker and Godfrey Prest, two "Citeins and Copersmythes de Londres", to make a brass for the wife of Richard II. The specification included:

"deux ymages de coper et laton endorrez . . . une table du dit metall endorre . . . ovesque une frette de Flour de Lys, Leons, Egles, Leopardes . . . Escoucheons . . . du dit metall endorre, gravez, et anamalez de diverses armes."²

Unfortunately the names of nearly all the craftsmen who gave us these fine works have been lost. We remark, on the other hand, that brasses in churches far away from each other often show close similarity, suggesting they are the work of the same hand. It is certain also, that the number required in a given district would be too small to keep anyone fully occupied. It is therefore highly probable that the number of engravers at any one time was very limited, and that brasses were not local products.

Warden Sir John Huntingdon, A.D. 1458, Manchester

The earliest brass in Lancashire is that to Sir John Huntingdon in the Manchester Cathedral. For purity of design and simple dignity it must be placed far above the others in the county. It was kept in the crypt of the church for many years in a defective state, but in 1907, after skilful restoration, was relaid on black Irish marble and placed in a more suitable position.

John Huntingdon was the first Keeper or Warden of the College of Manchester. He was appointed in 1422 upon the formation of the body corporate under the title of "The Guild or Company of the Blessed Virgin in Manchester". Previously he had been rector of Ashton-under-Lyne, where he was the founder of the church of St. Michael. The Warden was described as "a man of public spirit, attentive to the duties of his church, and anxious to adorn it" and "was allowed to possess a considerable share of the learning most in request during the times in which he lived".³

The first Warden had the heavy responsibility of carrying out the plans of Lord de la Warre, the munificent patron of the new foundation. These included not only the rebuilding of the church but considerable additions and alterations to the beautiful old fabric now known as Chetham's Hospital, Manchester. One important change was the replacing of the half-timbered walls of the old baron's hall, afterwards the great hall of Chetham's, with sandstone. Of the college as a whole it has been stated that this "solid edifice of stone, which was intended for the domestic accommodation of the warden and fellows, was probably completed, or nearly so, in the lifetime of the first warden",⁴ i.e. prior to 1458. The pleasant nature of the surroundings of the Cathedral five hundred years ago is shown by the fact that to ensure a supply of fish for the tables in Lent, Warden Huntingdon rented the fishing of the Irk, forming one of the boundaries of the College site, and long celebrated for the exquisite flavour of its eels.

In the absence of funds from other sources Sir John erected the chancel and its aisles from his own means. Carved on two spandrils of the chancel roof is the rebus of Huntington, a kind of pictorial allusion to the name. On the first is a shield charged with a huntsman and his dogs in pursuit of a stag, for "Hunting" and on the other a shield with a tun, or cask, for "ton". The device is repeated on each side of the arch leading into the Lady Chapel, but in this case dates only from the restoration by Dean Cowie.⁵ Sir John Huntington died in 1458, having held his sacred office for thirty-seven years, and was buried in the place of honour before the high altar.

The brass in its restored state shows the distinguished ecclesiastic in processional vestments in an attitude of prayer.

Above his cassock and surplice he wears a hood of grey fur with cape and pendants attached. The appearance of fur is very successfully obtained by the use of a zinc-like material inlaid in the brass.

The effigy is enclosed in a canopy of restrained design, and above the head is a semi-circular scroll bearing in Latin the words: "Lord I have loved the habitation of Thy House". Surrounding the whole is a riband of brass inscribed, also in Latin: "Here lies John Huntington, Bachelor of Divinity, first Master or Warden of this College, who rebuilt this chancel, and who died on the 11th of the month of November, A.D. 1458, on whose soul may God have mercy, Amen". The rondels at the corners, containing the emblems of the Evangelists, were new at the time of the general restoration.

The founder of the Collegiate Church, Thomas, Lord de la Warre, was a younger son who had himself entered the church. He inherited the family estates, including the manor of Manchester, late in life. He sold very largely of his possessions for the purposes he had in view, being enabled to do so the more readily by having no heirs in the direct line. According to the Rev. Mr. Hollingworth, he "resigned his sacred office as parson of St. Mary's Church, and Dean of Manchester, upon the foundation of the College".

Lady Margaret Byron, A.D. c. 1460, Manchester

The brass to Lady Margaret, itself incomplete, is in turn but a part of the former brass to Sir John Byron. It is preserved, together with a fragment of the effigy of the Knight, in the Chapter House of the Manchester Cathedral.

Sir John Byron, of Clayton and Butterworth, was almost certainly the builder of the Lady Chapel of the Cathedral, where the matrix of the brass to himself and Lady Margaret still lies. Sir John was Steward of the College of Manchester, being one of those who attested the collocation of the church. He was knighted by Henry V and died about the year 1460.

The design of the brass is simple yet pleasing, showing the Lady Margaret in a plain dress falling in folds about her feet. As in the case of the brass to Lady de Bothe at Wilmslow, a little lap-dog is shown in the folds of the mantle, wearing a collar of

bells. A light cloak and a wimple are part of the attire, the cloak being held across the shoulders by a tasselled cord.

The resemblance of this brass to the one at Wilmslow is perhaps explained by the close relationship of the two families commemorated. Lady Margaret, or Margery, was the daughter of Sir John Booth, of Barton and Salford, and therefore sister of the Sir Robert Booth depicted at Wilmslow.

An examination of the matrix of the brass proves that the figures were surmounted by rich pinnacled and crocketed canopies. In addition there were four coats of arms, two with the mermaid crest of the Booths, and on each side a group of children. Sir John Byron had three sons, Richard, Nicholas, and Ralph, and five daughters.

The Byrons were prominent in Lancashire at this time, holding extensive estates in the Rochdale district and being also owners of land in Manchester. They continued to have their chief seat here until Henry VIII gave a later Sir John Byron the lands of Newstead Abbey in Nottinghamshire at the dissolution. When in 1643 the peerage was created, the then head of the family took the title of Lord Byron of Rochdale, because he still held land there.

An Ecclesiastic, A.D. c. 1480, Eccleston

In the chancel of the Church of Eccleston near Chorley is a brass of which little is now known. Baines refers to it as an "effigy of a Bishop, in brass, fully enrobed", but his view is unsupported and probably incorrect. Two scrolls and the encompassing border of brass are missing and no means remain of even fixing the date of the brass. Thornely, after comparing it with other examples, is inclined to assign it to the year 1480.

The figure, which is somewhat heavily and clumsily drawn, represents the priest with hands joined in prayer. His head is tonsured and he wears processional vestments, including an ornamented cape, clasped by a brooch. The face is lacking in expression, but care has been given to the detail of the costume.

Piers Gerard, Esquire, A.D. 1485, Winwick

Piers Gerard was the son of Sir Thomas Gerard, of Kingsley and Bryn, Knight, by his wife Dulcia, daughter of Sir Thomas

Assheton of Assheton. He married Margaret, daughter of Sir William Stanley of Hooton, Knight, who was heiress to her mother, the daughter of Sir John Bromley of Badington, Knight.

A direct descendant of Piers Gerard, Sir Thomas Gerard was created a baronet in 1611 at the first institution of that honour by James I. It is said that the £1,000 which he was to have given for it was excused "in consideration of his father's great sufferings upon the Queen of Scots account, mother to the said king".⁶ The 13th baronet, Sir Robert Tolver Gerard, was in 1876 created Baron Gerard.

The brass to Piers Gerard lies in the Gerard chantry on the north side of St. Oswald's church at Winwick. It is large and boldly designed, but worn in places. The amount of wear has not been uniform over the whole plate, being greatest about the face. It is to be doubted, therefore, whether the brass was laid on a perfectly flat surface.

The Esquire wears armour, and carries sword and dagger. His hands are cased in gauntlets and it is to be noticed that the more sensible sabbatons have already taken the place of the earlier sollerets. Over the armour a tabard is worn emblazoned with the family arms, a lion rampant, crowned. The arms are repeated on shoulder flaps. The Esquire is shown in the usual reverent posture. Beneath the figure is the inscription: "Here lieth Piers Gerard Esquire, son and heire of Thomas Gerard Knyghte of the Bryne, who married Margaret daughter of William Stanley of Hoton Knyghte, which died the XIX day of June in the yere of our Lord MCCCCLXXXV on whose soule God have mercy. Amen." There are remains of a triple canopy of considerable merit, three shields of arms and the diminutive figure of a boy.

*Sir Ralph Assheton, Knight and Margaret, his wife,
A.D. c. 1485, Middleton*

Sir Ralph Assheton was the son and heir of Sir John de Assheton, K.B., who was returned one of the knights of the Shire for the County Palatine of Lancaster to the first Parliament of Henry V, being afterwards made Governor of Constance, in France. His mother was Jane, daughter of John Savile of Tankersley in Yorkshire.

Sir Ralph was Page of Honour to Henry VI, and became Knight Marshall of England and Lieutenant of the Tower of London. He was made a Knight Banneret at Hutton Field in 1442. His son Sir Richard, again a distinguished fighter, was knighted at Flodden; his Banner hangs in the church at Middelton.

The brass, which is a little clumsy in design, depicts Sir Ralph in plate armour, bare of any ornament. The parts of the body are slightly out of proportion to each other, and the whole figure is somewhat ungainly.

By the knight's side is represented the Lady Margaret, daughter and heiress of John Barton of Rydale, by whom the Assheton family became possessed of the estate of Middleton. She wears the usual costume of the period. Beneath the main figures are shown thirteen children, seven sons and six daughters.

The arrogance of Sir Ralph brought him much hatred in Ashton when alive, and from his death to within the last few years a custom was kept up in the town of riding the "Black Lad" through the streets once a year, afterwards using the figure as a shooting target.

James Scarisbrick, Esquire, A.D. c. 1500, Ormskirk

In the Scarisbrick chapel in Ormskirk Church is a much worn brass to James Scarisbrick, Esquire, who died about the year 1500. He is the supposed donor of a bell in the church, the Latin of which may be rendered thus: "J.S. of B. Esquire and his wife made me in honour of the Trinity R.B. 1497." The Esquire wears a surcoat over plate armour on which is emblazoned the Scarisbrick arms, *argent* 3 mullets of 6 points between 2 bendlets engrailed *gules*. He owned estates in Burscough and Bretherton.

The Scarisbricks were descended from Walter, lord of Scaresbrek in 1324. They resided at Scarisbrick Hall, which Baines remarks was "originally erected at a very early date". The hall was recased in stone in 1814, becoming "an astonishing exercise in the Gothic revival". The last male representative of the family was Charles Scarisbrick, reputed to be one of the wealthiest commoners in England, who died unmarried in 1861.

*James Stanley, Bishop of Ely, and Warden of Manchester,
A.D. 1515, Manchester*

James Stanley was the third son of the first Earl of Derby:

“His third sonne was James, a goodlye
man, a priest, Yet little priest’s
mettle was in him, by Christ

A goodlye tall man as was in all England
And spedd well all matters that he took in hand.”⁷

By temperament he does not appear to have been well-suited for the high position in the church to which he rose. His preferment probably resulted from his near relationship to Margaret, Countess of Richmond and Derby. Manchester, however, is greatly indebted to him. He gave the beautiful stalls on the south side of the choir of the cathedral, which were completed in 1508, and commenced the chapel on the north side. The building of the chapel was continued after his death by his natural son, Sir John Stanley. Other important additions were made to the church during his wardenship.

In his life of Erasmus, Dr. Knight supposes that James Stanley was the young and rich priest who was residing with Erasmus in his house in Paris in 1496, and who had “refused a bishopric from a consciousness of his insufficiency, but was to have possession of it the following year”. He was, in fact, promoted from the Wardenship of Manchester to the see of Ely, but not till the year 1506.

Dr. Knight also gives the correct arms of Bishop Stanley, about which there is often confusion. They are:

Quarterly of 4 pieces:

1 and 4 quarterly

1st and 4th argent, on a bend azure, 3 bucks heads carboshed, or, for Stanley 2nd and 3rd or, on a chief indented azure, 3 plates for Lathom

2 and 3

Gules, 3 human legs conjoined at the thighs and armed, in triangle, argent, spurs, or, for the Isle of Man.

The bishop died in 1515 and was buried just outside the walls of the Collegiate Church, as a liaison had caused his

excommunication. The Metrical History of the family above quoted says:

“He did end his life in merry Manchester
And right honourably lieth he buried there.”

The brass is not of large size and has in the course of its history been sadly mutilated, parts both at the bottom and top being missing. Bishop Stanley is shown in Eucharistic vestments, elaborately embroidered. His mitre is jewelled and there are gems in the rings he wears over his tasselled gloves. The effect of the richness of the costume is, however, partly lost by engraving less able than is evident in the Huntington brass near by. Beneath the brass is the inscription: “Off yor charite pray for the soule of James Stanley sūtyme Bushupe of Ely and Warden of this Colege of Manchestur which decessed out of this transitore world the XXII daye of March the yer of our Lord God M^oCCCCC & XV upon whos soule and all cristen soull’ Jhesu have mercy.”

Raffe or Ralph Catterall, Esquire, with Elizabeth his Wife, and their Children, A.D. 1515, Whalley

In the Mitton Chantry at Whalley Church is a brass of exceptional interest. It depicts Ralph Catterall, son and heir of Richard Catterall, and Elizabeth his wife, daughter of James Baker of Rawcliffe, together with their children. Ralph Catterall was a member of the ancient family of Catterall of Catterall in Amunderness.

Behind the Esquire, who is in armour, kneel nine sons, and behind the Dame Elizabeth eleven daughters. The children of each sex are dressed in a uniform costume, the sons in long-sleeved gowns, the daughters with pedimental head-dresses of the normal type. Between the figures is the matrix of a shield, no doubt at one time containing a coat of arms, and below is the inscription: “Of yor charyte pray for the sowllys of Raffe Catterall Esquyer and Elizabeth hys wyfe whyche bodies lyeth Before thys pillor and for all ther chyldeŕ sowlys, whych Rafe descesyd the XXVI day of decēber y yere of ō lord god MCCCCCXV. On whose sowlys Jhu have mercy, Amen.”

The main part of the township of Catterall lies between Garstang and Preston. It was at Garstang that the brass was discovered by Dr. Whitaker, after having been missing from Whalley for a long period. The return of the brass to its present position was therefore due to this good old antiquary.

The Catterall estates passed to the Sherburnes of Stonyhurst in the reign of Henry VIII, when Dorothy, daughter of Thomas Catterall, married Richard or Robert, third son of Thomas Sherbourne.

Edmund Assheton, Priest, A.D. 1522, Middleton

Edmund Assheton was son of the Sir Richard and grandson of the Sir Ralph Assheton already noticed. He was for many years rector of the old church of St. Leonard at Middleton, the gift of the living having passed into the hands of his family at the same time as the manor.

The priest is shown in Eucharistic vestments which fall in heavy folds about his person. He carries a chalice holding the sacramental wafer, on which appears the letters I.H.S. The Latin inscription on the brass runs as follows: "Here lies Master Edmund Assheton, Rector of this Church, who died on the 20th day of the month of August, in the year of Our Lord 1522, and the Dominical letter E. Upon whose soul may God have mercy. Amen."

*Henry Norris, Esquire, and Clemence, his wife
A.D. 1524, Childwall, Liverpool*

Henry Norris was a member of the family of Norris of Speke and was born about the year 1481. He married the daughter and co-heiress of Sir James Harrington, of Wolfage in Northamptonshire, and was father of the Sir William Norris, Knight, who took a prominent part in the Scottish wars. Henry Norris himself was present at the battle of Flodden.

The brass at Childwall shows the esquire in plate armour, with his head resting on his helmet, which is surmounted by an eagle, the Norris crest. Upon his tabard are the arms of Norris quartered with those of Erneys, and upon the mantle of his wife are the arms of Harrington and Radcliffe of Ordsall.

*Sir Piers Legh, Knight and Priest, and Ellen, his wife
A.D. 1527, Winwick*

The subject of this brass was among the most distinguished of the early members of the family of Legh of Lyme. He was born in 1455 and was married when twelve years old to Ellen, daughter of Sir John Savage. At the age of twenty-three he inherited from his grandfather the manor of Bradley. The Bradley estates had passed to the elder Sir Piers from his mother Joan, daughter and heiress of Sir Gilbert de Haydock, and during his lifetime he rebuilt the hall almost entirely. A description of the seat is preserved which is believed to be in his own hand:

“The aforesaid Piers Legh holds the manor of Bradley in the vill of Burtonwood within the parish of Werrington to himself and his heirs and assigns for ever, that is to say, a new hall with three new chambers and a fair dining room, with a new kitchen, bakehouse, and brewhouse, and also with a new tower built of stone with turrets, and a fair gateway, and above it a stone ‘bastille’ well defended, with a fair chapel, all the said Piers’s making, also one ancient chamber called the Knyghtes chamber, all which premises aforesaid, with the different houses, are surrounded by a moat with a draw-bridge, and outside the said moat are three great barns, namely, on the north part of the said manor house with a great shippon and stable, with a small house for the bailiff”.⁸

It was thus a much improved possession that was handed down to the grandson who was not long in showing himself a worthy owner. He served with the forces of the first Earl of Derby in Scotland and was made a knight banneret on Hutton Field for valour. Richard III also granted him an annuity of £10 and honoured him with a visit at Bradley. “The King’s Bed”, being that in which the king is supposed to have slept during his visit, is still proudly shown at Bradley. It is put together with wooden pegs, which were in use before nails.

Sir Piers was the builder of the parish church of Disley, but did not live to carry out his intention of endowing it. He also built the watch-tower known as “Lyme Cage”, which however, was altered in 1726 by Giacomo Leioni, the Italian architect.

After the death of his wife in 1491 Sir Piers entered the priesthood, probably under the influence of his brother-in-law Thomas Savage, then Archbishop of York. He died at Lyme in 1527 and was buried at Winwick.

His will is a very curious document and most quaintly worded. He bequeaths his soul to Almighty God, Our Lady, and all the Saints in Heaven. His body is to be laid "afore the myddst of the Altar" in the Trinity Chapel of Winwick church, so that the priest shall "always at the tyme of consecracion stand ever over and upon my harte . . ." In the event of his death taking place more than twenty miles from Winwick his remains are to be borne thither in a horse litter. His standard and complete armour are to be carried before his body "in such condicon as shalbe thought most convenient". The horses are to be covered and craped with black and his "Armes to be sett on every side of the litter" which is to be escorted by his servants and "other Christian people".

The brass stands against the east wall of the Trinity or Legh Chapel at Winwick. It is in a good state of preservation and is of a very rare type. It shows the knight in plate armour, spurred and armed, but wearing also a chasuble and having his crown tonsured. It is most unusual for a brass to have a double character in this way.

Between the raised hands of the knight appears his shield of six-quarterings, the colours of which seem once to have been enamelled:

1. *Argent*, a cross *sable*, in the first quarter a fleur-de-lys of the last, *Haydock*
2. *Gules*, a cross engrailed *argent*, *Legh*
3. A chevron between 3 crosses fleury, *Boydell*, ancient
4. *Argent*, a mullet *sable*, *Ashton*
5. *Molyneux*
6. A chevron between 3 covered cups, on a chief 3 lozenges, *Butler(?)*

The Lady Ellen lies by the side of her husband. She wears a pedimental head-dress and a mantle bearing the Danyers and Savage arms. From her waist hangs a loose girdle clasped with three roses, from which is suspended a pomander, which was used for carrying perfumed powder. At the feet of Sir Piers are

four sons and at those of the Lady Ellen three daughters. The brass has the inscription: "Pray for the souls of the excellent man Sir Piers Legh, Knight, here buried, and the Lady Ellen, his wife, daughter of John Savage, Knight, the body of which Ellen was buried at Bewgenett, 17 May, A.D. 1491. The same Piers, after the death of this Ellen, having been consecrated to the Priesthood, died at Lyme in Hanley, 11 August, 1527."

Conclusion

The term latten applied to the material of the ancient brasses has no very precise meaning. Its use was specially associated with brass in the form of sheets, but was applied also to sheet-iron and tinned iron-plate. It is derived simply from the French, *laiton*, brass, the name having been adopted when the plates were first imported from the continent.

Foreign examples of brasses are today much less numerous than their English descendants. The best known are, perhaps, the one in the cathedral of Amiens, and those in the church of Notre Dame and the cathedral of St. Sauveur at Bruges. The number in France was far greater prior to the Revolution.

So far as it is now possible to ascertain brass was first made in England in 1565. In that year Queen Elizabeth granted a patent to William Humfrey, assay master of the Mint, to make battery wares and wire of latten.

For some time after brasses came into favour as memorials the plate continued to be manufactured abroad, in factories already long established, but no work was put upon them until after their arrival on this side. These ancient imported brasses have qualities which it is found exceedingly difficult to reproduce today. They have a rich golden colour which is peculiarly attractive and have also remarkable wearing properties. In some of great age, the inscriptions are still perfectly clear, in contrast with mural plates put up a comparatively few years since from which the wording has almost disappeared.

EARLY LANCASHIRE BRASSES

1458	Warden Sir John Huntington	Manchester
c. 1460	Lady Margaret Byron	Manchester

c. 1480	An Ecclesiastic	Eccleston
1485	Piers Gerard, Esquire	Winwick
c. 1485	Sir Ralph Assheton, Knight and Margaret, his wife	Middleton
c. 1500	James Scarisbrick, Esquire	Ormskirk
1515	James Stanley, Bishop of Ely, and Warden of Manchester	Manchester
1515	Ralph Caterall, Esquire, and Elizabeth, his wife, and their children	Whalley
1522	Edmund Assheton, Priest	Middleton
1524	Henry Norris, Esquire, and Clemence, his wife	Childwall, Liverpool
1527	Sir Piers Legh, Knight and Priest, and Ellen, his wife	Winwick

Notes and references

¹ *Oxford Manual of Brasses*, 1848, p. 9.

² *Rymer's Foed*, 7, p. 797, given by Gough, 1, p. 168.

³ R. Hollingworth's *Mancuniensis, or an History of the Towne of Manchester*, 1654, Manchester, 1839.

⁴ S. Hibbert, *History of the College and Collegiate Church Manchester*, 1830.

⁵ E. F. Letts, *Warden Huntyngton*, 1884.

⁶ J. Foster, *Pedigrees of the County Families of Lancashire*, 1873.

⁷ T. Stanley, *Metrical History of the House of Stanley*, 1562.

⁸ Latin Ms. attributed to Sir Piers Legh, translated by W. Beaumont and quoted by him in *Warrington in 1465, 1849*.