

Scraps from Bury St Edmunds

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On 4 November 1539 the abbot and community of the abbey of St Edmund at Bury surrendered their house to the King's Commissioners. The shrine of St Edmund had already been 'defaced', and over 5000 marks in gold and silver plundered, the year before. The abbey was rapidly stripped of all materials capable of being reused. On 7 November the Commissioners reported that they had taken into custody for the king the plate and best ornaments, and sold the rest. Within a few weeks the lead had been stripped from both church and monastic buildings, and valued at £3302.¹ The windows were broken up for the sake of their lead, and the dressed stonework systematically removed from the building.² The latten from the monumental brasses was sold as scrap. Some passed into the hands of marblers, both in Bury and in London, who reused the metal, engraving on the reverse. The most spectacular of these palimpsest brasses (i.e. re-used by engraving on the original reverse) is an inscription at Frenze, Norfolk, commemorating George and Anne Duke. On the reverse is a scene which has been identified as the death of King Sweyn from the legend of St Edmund. It is likely that it formed part of a screen or door near the saint's shrine, and was made after the disastrous fire of 1466.³

Since 1843 it has been known that the brass of Margaret, wife of Edward Bulstrode at Hedgerley, Bucks., is palimpsest.⁴ The earliest portion to be dis-

¹ VCH, *Suffolk*, vol. 2, London 1907, p. 67. I wish to express my thanks to Sally Badham, and to the staff of Bury St Edmunds Record Office and the Map Room, Cambridge University Library, for their assistance.

² R. Gilyard-Beer, 'The eastern arm of the abbey church at Bury St. Edmunds', *PSLA*, vol. 31 (1969), p. 257.

³ N. Rogers, 'Brasses in their art-historical context', *Monumental Brasses as Art and History*, ed. J. Bertram, Stroud 1996, p. 153, fig. 104.

⁴ On M.S. II (= M. Stephenson, *List of Monumental Brasses*, see below) at Hedgerley see A. Way, 'Letter . . . on palimpsest sepulchral brasses; and on a remarkable instance at Hedgerley, Buckinghamshire', *Archaeologia*, vol. 30 (1844), pp. 121–24; 'Proceedings at the meetings of the Archaeological Institute', *Archaeological Journal*, vol. 10 (1853), p. 76; H. Haines, *A Manual of Monumental Brasses*, 2 vols, Oxford 1861, vol. 1, pp. xlv–xlvii, ciii, vol. 2, p. 24; M. Stephenson, 'A list of palimpsest brasses', *Transactions of the Monumental Brass Society* (hereafter *TMBs*), vol. 4, pt. 1 (1900), pp. 14–15; M. Stephenson, *A List of Monumental Brasses in the British Isles*, London 1926, repr. with Appendix, 1964, p. 43; H.F.O. E[vans], 'Hedgerley, Bucks.', *TMBs*, vol. 9, pt. 9 (1962), p. 528, fig. 2; H.F.O. Evans, 'The Resurrection on brasses', *TMBs*, vol. 11, pt. 2 (1970), pp. 93–94; J. Page-Phillips, *Palimpsests: The Backs of Monumental Brasses*, 2 vols, London 1980, vol. 1, p. 44 (103L1–5), vol. 2, pls 29–30; W. Lack, H.M. Stuchfield and P. Whittemore, *The Monumental Brasses of Buckinghamshire*, London 1994, pp. 113–15.

covered, on the back of Margaret's inscription, was a two-line Latin inscription commemorating Thomas Totyngton, abbot of Bury St Edmunds:



Fig. 1. Abbot Thomas Totyngton, palimpsest inscription, Hedgerley, Bucks.
Rubbing in Cambridge Collection.

Totyngton Thomas Edmu[n]di q[ui] fuit abbas
Hic iacet esto pia sibi duct[ri]x u[ir]go maria.

(Here lies Thomas Totyngton who was Edmund's abbot.
O loving Virgin Mary be to him a guide.)

Thomas Totyngton died in 1312 and was buried by the door in the north aisle of the nave leading into the cloister, in front of an image of the Blessed Virgin Mary.⁵ The location of his grave adds weight to the Marian invocation, though the inscription does not date from the first quarter of the fourteenth century, but the last quarter of the fifteenth.⁶ The explanation for this lies in the events of 20 January 1465/6.⁷ The fire began in the nave, consuming the whole roof of the church from the west end. It then spread to the transepts. Next the central spire collapsed, and in the presbytery the roof, apparently adorned with angels (*celicolarum formas extantes*), the stalls and a huge hanging crucifix near the shrine of St Edmund were destroyed. The Lady Chapel on the north side of the presbytery was burnt out, but the vestry survived. It is highly probable that Abbot Totyngton's original monument was destroyed or badly damaged in the fire, necessitating at the very least a replacement inscription.

On the reverse of the figure of Margaret Bulstrode, which measures 522 x 169 mm, are five lines of an inscription in rhyming couplets (fig. 2):

<Th>om[a]s Edone: by hys . . . e sto[n]ne/
No ma[n]ne more gentyll myght be: To Ryche and Pore Ful of bow[n]te/
Allmyghty god of hys grace: Proved hym leke golde in the Furnace/
Gladde he was here to be bette: lyeing lame seke & sore i[n] his cawet/
. . . be purgyd from synne: as a . . . of baptyme/

The reference in line 3 to being proved like gold in the furnace is a quotation from Wisdom 3: 6: 'As gold in the furnace he hath proved them', a text often

⁵ M.R. James, *On the abbey of S. Edmund at Bury*, Cambridge 1895, pp. 129, 181.

⁶ There are links with Norfolk 2 inscriptions, but I am not able to assign the inscription with certainty to a particular workshop.

⁷ The account is printed in James, *Abbey*, pp. 204–12.

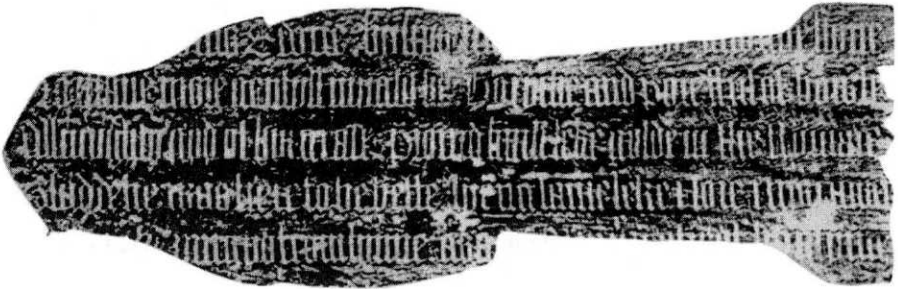


Fig. 2. Thomas Edon, palimpsest inscription, Hedgerley, Bucks.

cited in writings on Purgatory. However, it is clear that it is a purgatorial suffering during this life that is referred to here. Line 4, with its emphasis on 'here' suggests that he may have been treated in a hospital or infirmary. 'Bette' means to be relieved from need or suffering.⁸ The reading of 'cawet' (as suggested by Haines and John Page-Phillips) is uncertain. The word is not to be found in the *Middle English Dictionary*. The context seems to demand a word meaning a bed or sick-room. It may be derived from the Latin *cavea*.

Enough survives of the name to enable the person commemorated to be identified. Among the wills of the Commissary Court of Bury is that of Thomas Edon of Bury St Edmunds, made on 24 September 1495 and proved on 20 May 1496.⁹ After the conventional preamble, Edon began by requesting to be buried in the abbey church. An offering of 40s. for forgotten tithes was to be made to the sacrist. The building works at the abbey also benefited from Edon's will. Ten marks was to be given to the Lord Abbot's new work called *le vount*,¹⁰ and five pounds to the building of the new bell-tower. The secular clergy of Bury received various bequests: the parish chaplain of St James 6s. 8d.; each of the chaplains at St Mary 3s. 4d.; John Page 10s.;¹¹ George Wattoon 6s. 8d.;¹² and *magister* William Ottele 6s. 8d.¹³ John Page was also one of the witnesses to the will, together with John Sygo, who was a chantry priest attached to the Guild of the Holy Name.¹⁴ Various neighbouring religious houses were also mentioned in Edon's will: the Franciscan Friars of Babwell were to receive 40s., the Benedictine nuns of the priory of St George, Thetford

⁸ *Middle English Dictionary*, s.v. beten.

⁹ SROB, IC 500/2/4, f. 44r-v.

¹⁰ This is an erroneous form of 'vout', *Middle English Dictionary* s.v. vault(e). There were several donations towards a new fire-proof stone vault after 1466, A.B. Whittingham, 'Bury St. Edmunds Abbey', *Archaeological Journal*, vol. 108 (1951), pp. 175–76.

¹¹ Chaplain in the parish of St James, made his will 30 July 1496, SROB, Liber Pye, 77, proved 25 April 1499.

¹² George Watton, priest, died in 1504, SROB, Liber Pye, 161.

¹³ He is not recorded by Emden at either Oxford or Cambridge.

¹⁴ SROB, Liber Hoode, 20.

40s.,¹⁵ each of the houses of friars in Thetford 20s.,¹⁶ the Austin Friars of Clare 20s., the Dominican Friars of Sudbury 20s.

Thomas Edon is first mentioned in that survey of Bury society, the will of John Baret, made in 1463. Baret bequeathed him a tawny silk girdle with points of needlework.¹⁷ His name features alongside other prominent townsfolk in the wills of Jankyn Smith and Margaret Odeham (died 1492), the latter styling him gentleman.¹⁸ A clue to Edon's early associates is provided by his provision for masses for the souls of his parents and of Thomas Bret, Henry Purlond and Richard Buntynge. Richard Buntynge was a merchant of Bury who made his will in 1478; Thomas Bret of Bury made his will in 1474. Although Thomas Edon makes a bequest of 40d. to each of his children, only one, Thomas, is named in his will. It is to him that the house occupied by Agnes Edon is to revert on her death, and he is also bequeathed all his father's arable land lying in the fields of Bury and Westley. Thomas Edon the younger is presumably the Thomas Eden of Westgate ward, Bury, who was the wealthiest inhabitant of the town at the time of the 1523/24 Lay Subsidy, being assessed at £400. It is likely that Thomas Edon is the Thomas Eden of Bury St Edmunds from whom the Edens of Ballingdon Hall traced their descent.¹⁹ If so, then Henry Eden, merchant of London (died 1518) and Richard Eden, Archdeacon of Middlesex, Warden of St Gregory's, Sudbury, and Rector of Gestingthorpe, Essex (died between 1549 and 1551) were younger brothers of Thomas Edon the younger.

Agnes, Thomas's wife, whom he made his residuary legatee and co-executor, made her will on 24 July 1506.²⁰ In it she requested to be buried in the monastery of St Edmund. One of her bequests, of five marks towards the tabernacle or covering of the image of St Christopher in the monastery, provides a rare insight into the imagery in the abbey church after the 1466 fire.²¹ Her will was proved on 1 September 1506. However, certain features of the lettering of the Hedgerley palimpsest, such as the 'v' indentation on the capital *E* in line 1, the capital *P* in line 3 with its leading spur and infill of circles, and the zig-zag stroke at the bottom of the minuscule *r* next to the *P*, identify it as an early product of the Bury-based Suffolk 3 workshop, dating from *circa*

¹⁵ D. Knowles and R.N. Hadcock, *Medieval English Houses, England and Wales*, London 1971, pp. 266–67. By a scribal error they are located in 'Chestford'. This house replaced a cell of Bury St Edmunds and retained close links with the abbey.

¹⁶ Both the Augustinians and the Dominicans had houses in Thetford, Knowles and Hadcock, *Houses*, pp. 219, 244.

¹⁷ Tymms, *Wills*, p. 41. See also the contribution by Margaret Statham, elsewhere in this volume.

¹⁸ Tymms, *Wills*, pp. 65, 76, 79.

¹⁹ C.F.D. Sperling, 'Ballingdon Hall and the Eden family', *Transactions of the Essex Archaeological Society*, n.s., vol. 18, pt. 3 (1926), pedigree opp. p. 171.

²⁰ SROB, IC 500/2/4, ff. 178v–179.

²¹ Dr Henry Rudde, who made his will on 24 August 1506, asked to be buried before the image of St Christopher, Tymms, *Wills*, p. 106.



Fig. 3. Fragment of Resurrection, palimpsest, Hedgerley, Bucks.
Rubbing by H.F.O. Evans.

1515–1520.²² It would appear that Thomas Edon the younger was as dilatory as John Paston II in commissioning his father's monument.²³

Though it is not unknown for palimpsest brasses to be composed of material from more than one site,²⁴ there is a strong possibility that the other scraps used in the construction of the Bulstrode brass came from the Abbey of St Edmund. At the left-hand end of the Totyngton inscription a small piece from another inscription has been added to provide the requisite length for Margaret Bulstrode's epitaph (fig. 1). It reads *Thome B. . . / . . . ottiler mil*, and

²² *Ex inf.* Sally Badham. The Suffolk 3 workshop: S. Badham, 'The Suffolk school of brasses', *IMBS*, vol. 13, pt. 1 (1980), pp. 54–62, 65.

²³ The Paston case: R. Emmerson, 'Margaret Paston's Brass', *Monumental Brass Society Bulletin*, vol. 17 (1978), pp. 13–14. Discussion of when memorials were laid down: J.R. Greenwood, 'Wills and brasses: some conclusions from a Norfolk study', in Bertram, *Monumental Brasses*, pp. 92–96.

²⁴ E.g. M.S. II at Great Hampden, Bucks., which appears to be composed of material from St Faith below St Paul's, St Anthony Threadneedle Street and St Mary Aldermay, London, Page-Phillips, *Palimpsests*, pp. 53–54 (167L1–9).

presumably commemorates 'Thomas Bottler, the son of . . . Bottler, knight'.²⁵ The script suggests an early-fifteenth-century date. On the back of the shield (now mounted in a glazed frame on the wall so that both sides may be seen) is a Resurrection scene, with Christ stepping from the tomb, around which are three recumbent soldiers (fig. 3). Unusually, this was not an independent scene, of the type usually associated with Easter Sepulchres, but formed part of the decoration of an elaborate figured canopy. Above, in the apex of the canopy, was a *Gnadenstuhl* Trinity. A date *c.* 1500, and an origin in the London G workshop, are likely, though it is difficult to make a firm attribution. It has been suggested that the fragment of canopy work with the figure of St John the Evangelist, palimpsest on the reverse of M.S. VII at Cheam, Surrey, is part of the same brass.²⁶ If so, this would increase the range of material for which a Bury origin can be suspected, since Cheam is composed of fragments of six brasses.

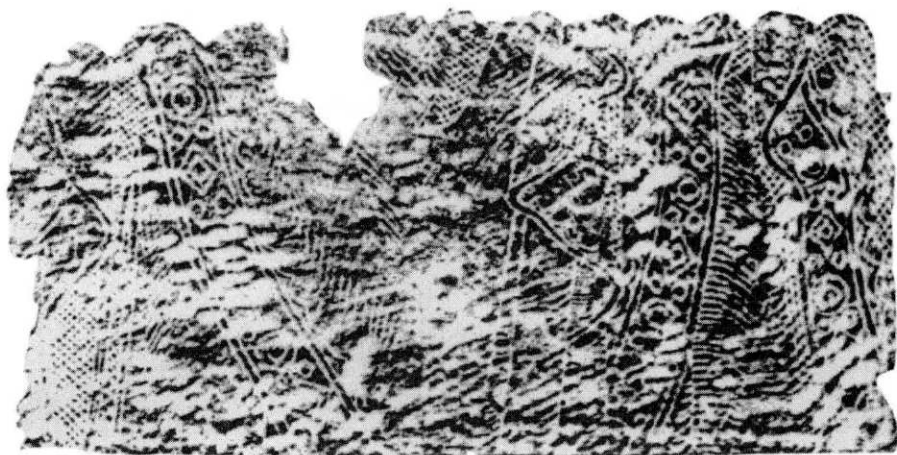


Fig. 4. Fragment of pontifical figure, palimpsest, Hedgerley, Bucks.

The most intriguing of the smaller fragments is the portion of a figure in pontifical vestments holding a crosier, on the reverse of the children (fig. 4). The engraving style and the heavy folds of the drapery point to a date in the early sixteenth century. Some idea of general appearance of the brass originally is given by that of John Yong, Warden of New College and Bishop of Gallipoli (d. 1526) at New College, Oxford.²⁷ However, the drapery folds are more sculptural, and are reminiscent of those on the Suffolk 2 brass of John Fynexs

²⁵ The surname is a common one, but it should be noted that there were Botelers in Suffolk, at Assington and elsewhere, J. Corder, *A Dictionary of Suffolk Arms*, Suffolk Records Society Publications, 7 (1965), p. 283.

²⁶ Page-Phillips, *Palimpsests*, p. 44 (104L1), pl. 30.

²⁷ Bertram, *Monumental Brasses*, fig. 30.

(d. 1514) at St Mary's, Bury.²⁸ If it is not a posthumous monument, part of the refurbishment of the abbey church after the 1466 fire, then there is one obvious candidate. The only abbot dying in the sixteenth century who would have been buried in the abbey church was William Cadenham (1497–1513).²⁹ If there were some delay in providing his predecessor's tomb, then Thomas Rattlesden (1479–97) is a possibility. Cadenham's successor John Reeve of Melford was not buried in the abbey church. Having surrendered the abbey, he retired to a house in Crown Street, but did not long survive the Dissolution, dying on 31 March 1540. He was buried in the chancel of St Mary's church, under a brass, which was torn away in 1643. In 1717 the grave-slab itself was broken up and the remains removed to make way for a ship's purser called Sutton.³⁰

Margaret Bulstrode died on 1 October 1540, and the style of her brass, the work of a London workshop known as London G, suggests that it was laid soon after her death. The inscription at Frenze, a product of the Suffolk 4 workshop based in Bury, commemorates someone who died in 1551, but the date of death seems to be a later addition.³¹ The scattering of these scraps of brass so soon after the Dissolution is an eloquent illustration of the destruction wrought upon the 'church surpassed by none' of Leland's *Cyanea Cantio*.

²⁸ *Monumental Brasses: The Portfolio Plates of the Monumental Brass Society, 1894–1984*, intr. M.W. Norris, Woodbridge 1988, pl. 286.

²⁹ VCH, *Suffolk*, vol. 2, London 1907, p. 72.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 67.

³¹ Badham, 'Suffolk school', p. 67 n. 5.